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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

11 November 2025

Our Ref Cabinet Wednesday, 19 November 2025
Contact. Committee Services
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To: Members of the Cabinet:

Executive Members Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair) Val Bryant (Vice Chair) Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Laura Williams and Donna Wright.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE CABINET

to be held in the

COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF

on

WEDNESDAY, 19TH NOVEMBER, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz
Director – Governance

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda
Part I

Item **Page**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. MINUTES - 23 SEPTEMBER 2025 (Pages 5 - 18)

To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23 September 2025.

3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency.

The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.

4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Climate Emergency

The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to achieving a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 and helping local people and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions.

A Cabinet Panel on the Environment has been established to engage with local people on matters relating to the climate emergency and advise the council on how to achieve these climate change objectives. A Climate Change Implementation group of councillors and council officers meets regularly to produce plans and monitor progress. Actions taken or currently underway include switching to green energy, incentives for low emission taxis, expanding tree planting and working to cut food waste.

In addition the council is a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, working with other councils across Hertfordshire to reduce the county's carbon emissions and climate impact.

The Council's dedicated webpage on Climate Change includes details of the council's climate change strategy, the work of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment and a monthly briefing on progress.

Ecological Emergency

The Council has declared an ecological emergency and is committed to addressing the ecological emergency and nature recovery by identifying appropriate areas for habitat restoration and biodiversity net gain whilst ensuring that development limits impact on existing habitats in its process.

The Council has set out to do that by a) setting measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, in both species and quantities, seeking to increase community engagement, b) to work with our partners to establish a Local Nature Partnership for Hertfordshire and to develop Nature Recovery Networks and Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire and c) to investigate new approaches to nature recovery such as habitat banking that deliver biodiversity objectives and provide new investment opportunities.

Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

6. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Any Items referred from other committees will be circulated as soon as they are available.

7. UPDATED 3C'S POLICY (Pages 19 - 54)

REPORT OF THE CUSTOMER & DIGITAL SERVICES MANAGER

The 3C's Policy has been refreshed to comply with the LGO's complaint handling code.

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE - SUBMISSION OF FINAL PROPOSALS (Pages 55 - 508)

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

This report sets out the proposed submission to Government, developed by all eleven Hertfordshire local authorities and the Police and Crime Commissioner, for the future organisation of Local Government in Hertfordshire.

Given the importance of the issue this report is being presented to Full Council on the 13 November 2025 to facilitate a debate on the options, prior to Cabinet's meeting on 19 November 2025 at which the decision will be taken as to which option is preferred by the Council.

9. DRAFT NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY (Pages 509 - 638)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – PLACE

Draft North Herts Town Centres Strategy for public consultation.

10. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2025-2028 (Pages 639 - 648)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

For Cabinet to approve a new Procurement Strategy (Appendix A) that reflects the Procurement Act 2023 (the Act), our Contract Procurement Rules and our Council Plan.

11. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025-2030 (Pages 649 - 664)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – FINANCE

This report recommends the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2026/27 to 2029/30 to guide and inform the Council's Business Planning Process. The four year period of the MTFS reflects the timelines related to Local Government Reorganisation.

12. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To consider passing the following resolution: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

13. PART 2 MINUTES - 23 SEPTEMBER 2025 665 - 666

To take as read and approve as a true record the Part 2 minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23 September 2025.

14. SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE 667 - 682

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES AND DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To consider the allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant funding.

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF ON TUESDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Laura Williams and Donna Wright.*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Philip Doggett (Principal Estates Surveyor), Andrew Figgis (Economic Development Officer), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Chloe Gray (Enterprise Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Rachael Rooney (Planning Approver), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public.*

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 45 seconds

There were no apologies received from Members.

22 MINUTES - 24 JUNE 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 49 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 24 June 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

23 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 30 seconds

There was no other business notified.

24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 59 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.

(2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

(3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

(4) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

25 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 1 second

There was no public participation at the meeting.

26 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 8 seconds

The Chair advised that the items referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Finance Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective items on the Agenda.

27 DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT - DRAFT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document – Draft for Public Consultation' and advised that:

- Following the adoption of the Local Plan in November 2022, the Council adopted a Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to provide more details on contributions to developers and case officers.
- A review of the Developer Contributions SPD had been undertaken and updates had been made to reflect new requirements and guidelines.
- References to developer contributions requested by Hertfordshire County Council had been removed as they had published their own guidance in 2024.
- Additional detail on Biodiversity Net Gain provision had been included as this was now mandatory for developers.
- Open space standards had been revised to align with the Fields in Trust 2024 guidance which introduced target distances and a hierarchy of open spaces.
- The revised document was displayed at Appendix A to the report and showed updates as tracked changes.
- The Developer Contributions SPD was not subject to independent examination but required public consultation.
- The document should be endorsed and approved for public consultation.
- Results of the public consultation would be reported to Cabinet in early 2026.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, the Director – Place advised that:

- The Developer Contributions SPD set out general guidelines on contributions for all developments and projects including those in town centres.
- Specific town centre projects that would seek developer contributions were detailed in the North Herts Town Centres Strategy itself.

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that this document would also link with the North Herts Economic Development Strategy as this would help to realise the opportunities that developer contributions and the North Herts Town Centres Strategy would create.

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright advised that Parish Councils responding to the public consultation would be offered direct contact with the Council.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the draft Developer Contribution SPD, attached as Appendix A, be endorsed and approved for a period of public consultation.

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Developer Contributions SPD to be updated and be used in decisions on planning applications.

28 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

Audio recording – 12 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Strategic Planning Matters' and advised that:

- Two Government consultations were launched in May with the first on the "Speeding Up Building Out" paper which outlined measures to accelerate housing delivery.
- A joint response was submitted by the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP) which supported the measures but raised concerns on administrative burden, enforcement challenges, support and other matters.
- HIPP also submitted a response to the second consultation on Planning Committee Reforms which expressed concern over the removal of Member rights to call-in applications.
- In August, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued a letter which outlined several changes to Chief Planners including an update to the plan making system. However, there was a lack of detail on this and the Strategic Planning Project Board had agreed to send a letter to MHCLG in response to express their frustrations on the delays to Local Plan making guidance.
- A Judicial Review had been launched against the proposed Luton Airport expansion and a hearing was scheduled to take place in November.
- Paragraph 8.2 showed the progress of the six largest strategic sites in the Local Plan.
- Under the current schedule, the Council would adopt the new Local Plan by the end of 2027.
- An initial expression of interest for the Call of Sites had been conducted from June to September and a formal Call of Sites would take place from November to January.
- Progress on Local Plans from other local authorities was detailed within the report.
- Government funding for Neighbourhood Planning Groups would cease and may influence the number of Neighbourhood Plans created in the future.
- A report on the Vision and Growth Study for North East Central Herts was due this month.

- North Herts Town Centres Strategy had been delayed and would now be presented at the Cabinet meeting in November, however, its new timetable would allow for more scrutiny from within the Council and public consultation.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, the Director – Place advised that:

- Detailed guidance on beautiful development was not yet available but would be likely to follow the consultation.
- The Judicial Review on Luton Airport expansion had been launched by another party, therefore, there would be no workload implications for officers on this.

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright advised that:

- North Herts Town Centres Strategy would be discussed at Community Forums in December under the current timetable.
- The Health Places Framework had not been mentioned in the discussions on the new Local Plan but would be raised with Officers.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the report on strategic planning matters and appendices be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters

29 CODICOTE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - REFERENDUM

Audio recording – 25 minutes 52 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Codicote Neighbourhood Plan – Referendum' and advised that:

- The Referendum for the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan was held on 15 August.
- 534 voted "yes" and 57 voted "no" and 1 ballot paper was rejected.
- There was a 20.63% turnout and 94% voted in favour of the plan.
- Neighbourhood Plans were often made through delegated authority, however, as this covered two wards, it required consideration by Cabinet.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) To note the result of the Referendum for the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan.

(2) To approve that the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan 2024 – 2031 be "made" and become part of the statutory development plan for North Hertfordshire.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: As reported to Cabinet in June 2025, the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan has successfully been examined by an independent examiner and the subsequent Referendum, held in August was successful, with more than 50% of those voting in favour of the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan.

30 NORTH HERTS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2025-2030

Audio recording – 27 minutes 51 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'North Herts Economic Development Strategy 2025-2030' and advised that:

- An updated Economic Strategy supported by a fresh evidence base and consultation from Members, businesses and partners had been developed to replace the previous strategy.
- Tapping potential in the business community would be vital for the future growth of the district.
- The strategy set out how they would provide support to residents and unlock opportunities for them to provide greater economic resilience to the district.
- North Herts benefited from its location near towns such as Luton and Stevenage but also from its good links with cities like Cambridge and London.
- The district had a Gross Value Added (GVA) of £4.3 billion, working population of approximately 83,000, and over 6,000 enterprises operated within it.
- The strategy was built on two themes which were looking in to strengthen the local economy and building out to strengthen connections with nearby towns and cities with major growth which North Herts could support and capture.
- Five action areas had been identified from these themes and would inform a detailed Action Plan and Resourcing Model if the strategy was approved.
- The strategy underlined the Council priority of responsible growth and would help businesses to thrive, which would create opportunities for residents and enhance town centres and green spaces.
- A proposal to provision more resourcing towards the strategy was being worked on with consultants from SQW Limited.
- The Resourcing Model and Action Plan would be brought to Cabinet at a later stage once finalised.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that:

- Delays to the strategy were due to resourcing issues and the need to align it with the Economic Strategy of Hertfordshire County Council which had been altered since the change in Government administration.
- A workshop had been held with Shadow Executive Members and Senior Officers to scrutinise the strategy and its evidence base.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the adoption of the Economic Development Strategy (2025-2030).

REASONS FOR DECISION:

(1) The previous Economic Development Strategy was written and published in September 2015, based on historic evidence and not been updated since. The economic landscape of both the political environment, district and wider UK has changed dramatically due to several varying factors, resulting in the strategy becoming outdated.

(2) Therefore, to respond to these fundamental changes and environment, the team were tasked with analysing the district according to economic development and writing a new strategy that is aligned to the most recent Council priorities, and its long-term vision to benefit both businesses and the people who visit, work and live in the district.

31 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Audio recording – 36 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan' and advised that:

- The Corporate Peer Challenge took place in November 2024 and provided the Council with several recommendations.
- The Corporate Peer Team would revisit the Council in December to see how they were progressing on these.
- Staff conferences had been introduced and the first conference in Hitchin had been well attended and received positive feedback.
- Changes arising from Local Government Reorganisation had been accounted for in the Action Plan and one item had been altered to reflect this.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the updates to the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

32 POSITION STATEMENT IN RELATION TO FLOODING

Audio recording – 38 minutes 57 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Position Statement in Relation to Flooding' and advised that:

- Consideration needed to be given to the future impacts that climate change would bring through weather events.
- Intense rainfall caused flooding in Hitchin and other areas last year.
- The report detailed the response that was given to this event and they would commit to provide a similar response to future weather events.
- Sandbags were provided to residents as the Council did not have a position on supplying these at the time.
- The Council needed a defined position on flooding to be able to respond to any future events decisively.
- Providing a position statement would also allow residents in susceptible areas to plan how to protect their properties.

- As detailed at paragraph 8.4 of the report, sandbags or equivalent items would not be provided to protect individual properties but may still be used to protect key assets, such as sub-stations or for a general flood response to divert water.
- The report recommended that the Council should not provide specific support to residents recovering from flooding to encourage them to arrange suitable insurance that would cover them for emergency incidents.
- Support would be given to residents in other ways through emergency accommodation, homelessness support, and communication with outside organisations to speed up recovery after an event.
- Hertfordshire County Council would provide kits to areas that would be or had been subject to flooding.
- Working with other organisations would help to support the right response to flooding in the future.

Councillor Daniel Allen put on record his thanks to Officers, Members and other organisations for their work to respond to the flooding that took place last year.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Ian Albert advised that their Position Statement followed the recommendations of the Local Lead Flood Authority.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that the draft report had been checked against the flooding investigation report that had been published recently and the final report would also be checked against this.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Amy Allen advised that:

- The Environment Agency strongly recommended against the use of sandbags due to their one time use which also went against Council policies.
- Residents would receive more bespoke support through insurance providers.

As part of the debate, Councillor Donna Wright thanked Officers and Members for coordinating the response to the flooding last year and highlighted that sandbags were not effective in response to flooding that happened on Woolgrove Road in Hitchin.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Amy Allen proposed and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved that the Council does not provide flood defence items or funding to residents to protect or reinstate their property against or following flooding.

(2) Noted that the Council would provide support to residents which would include providing information and guidance (including online, in-person and by phone). This would include support for anyone who is made homeless.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) The report sets out various practical and financial reasons for not providing residents with flood defence items or funding to residents to protect or reinstate their property against or following flooding.

(2) The Council will fulfil its role as a Category 1 responder, as set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and provide support to communities affected by flooding.

33 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025/26 (QUARTER 1 UPDATE)

Audio recording – 47 minutes 16 seconds

The Chair advised that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not in attendance to present the referral on this item.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2025/26 (Quarter 1 Update)' and advised that:

- There was a good discussion on the report at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with questions mainly focused on the projects for Leisure Centre Decarbonisation, Careline and Churchgate.
- The Council Delivery Plan covered key projects, their milestones and risks to delivery as well as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the overarching risks that could affect those.
- In response to the Corporate Peer Review, the Council had been investigating how to extend their KPIs to cover the achievement of the outcomes in the Council Plan.
- These would be included in the Q2 report with the aim that these would be smart measures that would not increase pressure on workload.
- Projects on Digital Transformation and Leisure Centre Decarbonisation had an amber delivery status which meant that one or more milestones had been missed without there being a significant impact to their delivery.
- Appendix A to the report detailed changes to milestones and new milestones which were highlighted in blue and yellow respectively and required approval.
- Four projects had a red risk level status and these were present where projects scored highly on likelihood and impact and as a result, received a high level of monitoring and review.
- Three KPIs had a red status with two related to Careline Installations and the other to Customer Service Centre (CSC) calls answered within 45 seconds.
- Explanations and planned actions were detailed in paragraph 8.4 of the report.
- Executive Members should take note of the projects in amber delivery or red risk level status in their areas.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted progress against Council projects and performance indicators, as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A), and approved new milestones and changes to milestones.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities.

34 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2025/26

Audio recording – 51 minutes 58 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen informed the Cabinet that the Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Councillor Sean Nolan, was not in attendance having given apologies, however, had provided a written statement that was relayed to the Cabinet on his behalf, which highlighted the following:

- Consideration would be given to the risk that Princes Mews Car Park not being reopened would present.

- Increased Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) due to the installation of new parking machines had not led to an increase in forecast income.
- The decreased income from commercial waste collections was noted.
- Effects arising from leisure centre and garden waste collection income changes would be considered in Q2 when data was available on these.
- The increase in expenditure over the original budget position would impact future saving targets according to the Section 144 Officer.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2025/26' and advised that:

- The report summarised the revenue budget position at the end of Q1.
- Table 3 showed significant variances affecting this year and next year.
- The £314,000 increase referenced in the final column of table would impact the budget position for next year.
- Future funding would be subject to a Government Fair Funding Review which may be positive but was still dependent on consultation and announcements later in the year.
- Recommendation 2.4 to delegate authority had been included as Business Rate Pooling had been available in previous years but it was noted that it had not yet been offered by the Government this year.
- Recommendation 2.5 approved debt write-off related to housing benefits.

In response to a question from Councillor Mick Debenham, the Director – Resources advised that they had not yet come to a final agreement with Everyone Active over the loss of revenue during the closures as they only had an initial estimate for this.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ian Albert advised that they would work to refine the initial estimate on the loss of revenue to Everyone Active into a finalised figure.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the report.

(2) Approved the changes to the 2025/26 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £453k increase in net expenditure.

(3) Noted the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £689k increase in net expenditure. These would be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2026/27.

(4) Delegated authority to the Director – Resources (in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources) to enter into a Business Rate Pooling arrangement (if available) if it is estimated that it will be in the financial interests of the Council.

(5) Approve the write-off of a debt for £11,326.64, as detailed in paragraph 8.17.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

35 FIRST QUARTER TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26

Audio recording – 58 minutes 10 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen informed the Cabinet that the Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Councillor Sean Nolan, was not in attendance having given apologies, however, had provided a written statement that was relayed to the Cabinet on his behalf, which highlighted the following:

- Higher than anticipated interest rates had led to an income increase of £1 million.
- Internal borrowing for capital projects should be considered against the ability to raise investment revenue and other associated charges.
- Any investments in a local authority affected by Local Government Reorganisation would move to the successor unitary authority.
- Risks associated with Government and local authorities were lower than banks and building societies.
- Limits to where investments could be made based on changes to the agreed strategy.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Treasury Management Review 2025/26' and advised that:

- Reviews for the Capital Monitoring and Treasury Management had been split into separate reports to allow Members of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee to debate each part separately.
- The report confirmed that the treasury management was compliant within the quarter. Returns on investments were higher due to high balances generated by capital slippage and increased income from higher than anticipated interest rates.
- Paragraph 8.11 and 8.12 detailed the split of investments which were mainly placed in local authorities and the Government.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2025.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

36 FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL MONITORING REVIEW 2025/26

Audio recording – 1 hour 4 minutes 27 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen informed the Cabinet that the Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Councillor Sean Nolan was not in attendance having given his apologies, however, had provided a written statement that was relayed to the Cabinet on his behalf, which highlighted the following:

- Future spending on the capital programme would require internal borrowing and lead to a reduction in income from investments.
- It was requested that the Solar for Business scheme should be reviewed in the future if conditions and interest improved.

Council Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring Review 2025/26' and advised that:

- Internal borrowing against savings would be needed to fund the capital programme, which would affect the investment income the Council would receive, and create a need to set aside a minimum revenue provision.
- The report detailed the Council spend on capital and how it was funded.
- Table 2 detailed projects that would be delayed to future years and Table 3 showed projects where the spend would differ from previous forecasts.
- The Solar for Business scheme had ceased due to a lack of interest and demand from businesses, in order to prioritise other actions in the Sustainability Strategy.
- The request to review the scheme in the future was noted.
- Paragraph 8.5 asked Cabinet to recommend that Council approved capital spend on the Warm Homes Scheme which was a Government funded scheme aimed at low income households to reduce emissions and tackle fuel poverty.
- After a successful bid to the Warm Homes Grant Scheme, the Council had been awarded £1.5M to deliver energy performance upgrades and low carbon heating to low income households across the district.
- The Council should publicise this scheme to residents and track its demand to assess the need for further promotion.

As part of the debate, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that promotional literature on the scheme would be distributed to residents via councillor surgeries.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded, and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the forecast expenditure of £27.624M in 2025/26 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

(2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2026/27 onwards, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend in 2026/27 by £0.838M and £0.608M in 2027/28.

(3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That Council approve a capital budget of £1.275M (£0.319M in 25/26, £0.478M in 26/27 and £0.478M in 27/28) for the Government's new energy efficiency Warm Homes Scheme. This will be fully funded from Government grants, as paragraph 8.5 refers.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

(1) Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

(2) Paragraph 4.4.1 b) of the Council's Constitution details that Council will approve the budget. Any significant additions to the budget should be approved by Council and the decision to add the Warm Homes Scheme to the capital budget is therefore a referral to Council.

37 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 1 hour 10 minutes 59 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 20.52.

38 PART 2 MINUTES - 24 JUNE 2025

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 June 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

39 GRANT FOR AN OPTION AGREEMENT FOR THE SALE OF LAND TO FACILITATE ACCESS TO STRATEGIC HOUSING SITE GA2 - PART 2

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Grant of an option agreement for the sale of land to facilitate access to strategic housing site GA2'.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved the Council entering into an option agreement for the sale of the Council owned parcel of land edged red on the plan at Appendix B in accordance with the Heads of Terms attached at Appendix F of the Part 2 report.

(2) Delegated authority to the Director – Governance in conjunction with the Director – Resources to complete, sign and seal all documents to give effect to the recommendations.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that access is available to facilitate the development of GA2, a Strategic Housing site allocated in the Local Plan, which will assist in the delivery of circa 600 new homes and associated facilities including affordable homes. Completion of the sale is also expected to generate a capital receipt.

40 GRANT OF AN OPTION AGREEMENT FOR THE SALE OF LAND TO FACILITATE ACCESS TO STRATEGIC HOUSING SITE GA2 - PART 1

Audio recording – 1 hour 36 minutes 51 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Grant of an option agreement for the sale of land to facilitate access to strategic housing site GA2' and advised that:

- This report sought Cabinet approval to enter into an Option Agreement for the potential sale of Council owned land to facilitate an access road to the GA2 site allocated under Policy SP18 of the Local Plan.
- GA2 was a key development site located to the north-east of Great Ashby that would provide 600 homes and community infrastructure to the district.
- The Strategic Masterplan for the site was approved by Cabinet and ratified by Council in November 2024.
- Delivery of the site would require access from Mendip Way that would cross five parcels of land owned by five different landowners including the Council.
- The proposed Option Agreement was part of a wider collaboration with other landowners and would give Picture Estates Ltd the right to acquire the land subject to the approval of planning permission.
- Loss of open space and play area on the Council owned portion of land would be mitigated by provision on the development.
- Public consultation would be carried out on the sale of land subject to section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- The Option Agreement had been structured to ensure the Council would obtain best value through an external valuer and legal oversight.
- Upfront legal and professional costs would be initially covered by the developer and deducted from the final proceeds of sale which would be shared equally among the five landowners under a joint agreement.
- Entering into the Option Agreement would help to unlock a key housing site and associated infrastructure while securing future capital receipt which aligned with the Council priorities of Thriving Communities, Responsible Growth and Sustainability.
- The portion of Council owned land was edged in red at Appendix B to the report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Laura Williams

In response to questions, the Principal Estates Surveyor advised that:

- The other four landowners had signed their Heads of Terms already.
- The development value formula was industry standard and based on the ability of landowners to dispose of their land which was a set percentage of the gross development value, minus the costs which would be divided by the five parties.
- Open space and play area in the development would be larger, higher in quality, near to the existing site but north of the access road and delivered prior to the removal of the current facilities on Council land.
- The timing of this delivery would be answered in the future by planning officers.

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that:

- All five landowners would receive equal shares from the sale to reflect that each land parcel was essential to the development, and an external valuer would value the land independently at the point of sale to ensure best value for the Council.
- The Capital Receipt would be based on a formula that was tied to the development value of the land.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved the Council entering into an option agreement for the sale of the Council owned parcel of land edged red on the plan at Appendix B in accordance with the Heads of Terms attached to the Part 2 report.

(2) Delegated authority to the Director – Governance in conjunction with the Director – Resources to complete, sign and seal all documents to give effect to the recommendations.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that access is available to facilitate the development of GA2, a Strategic Housing site allocated in the Local Plan, which will assist in the delivery of circa 600 new homes and associated facilities including affordable homes. Completion of the sale is also expected to generate a capital receipt.

The meeting closed at 9.17 pm

Chair

CABINET

19 NOVEMBER 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: UPDATED 3C'S POLICY

REPORT OF: CUSTOMER & DIGITAL SERVICES MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR VAL BRYANT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The 3Cs Policy has been refreshed to comply with the LGO's complaint handling code, first introduced in February 2024. The code sets out the standards for resolving complaints promptly and using feedback to improve services. Most changes formalise practices the Council was already following, making procedures clearer and easier to understand. The code has been issued as "advice and guidance" for all local Councils in England and therefore one part of the code (section 6.14) is not being adopted, as the Council prefers to understand why a customer wants to escalate a complaint. The updated policy will be published on the website, and staff briefed on the changes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the updates to the policy be approved.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the updated 3Cs Policy, to align with the Local Government Ombudsman's complaint handling code. The revised policy formalises existing good practices, clarifies procedures for staff and customers, and ensures continued compliance with national standards. These updates will support a fair, transparent, and consistent approach to handling feedback and complaints, helping North Herts Council maintain high service standards and a positive complaint-handling culture.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The LGO's complaint handling code is issued under the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's powers to provide "guidance about good administrative practice" to organisations under section 23 (12A) of the local Government Act 1974.

4.2 The LGO expects local councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures.

4.3 The LGO may make a finding of maladministration where local councils' policies and procedures depart from the Code without sufficient explanation. They may also make a

finding of maladministration where a local council, without good reason, does not meet the standards in the Code when responding to an individual complaint.

4.4 Given the above, no other options have been considered as it is essential that the Council is compliant in dealing with complaints as effectively as possible.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Executive Member for Customer Experience, Cllr Val Bryant has been consulted on the changes.

5.2. Political Liaison Board considered the updates to the policy on 7th October 2025.

5.3. The report has also been circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 The Council has a well embedded policy and procedures for handling customer feedback; the 3C's Policy. We welcome feedback from our customers about our services so that we can continue to learn about how we can make improvements and what we do well.

7.2 The 3C's policy sets out clearly the definition of a comment, compliment, and complaint, as well as how to escalate a complaint either to stage 2 of the process or the LGO. Customers can give feedback in several ways and can do this directly to the Council or to the contractors who provide key services on our behalf.

7.3 The 3C's policy was updated and refreshed and was adopted by Cabinet in September 2022. The updated policy has ensured the Council and communities we serve know how to access help, and that a safe and compassionate system to deal with complaints is in place.

7.4 In February 2024, the LGO launched their 'complaint handling code'. The Complaint Handling Code ('the Code'), sets out a process for organisations that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The purpose of the Code is to enable organisations to resolve complaints raised by individuals promptly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It will also help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and individuals.

7.5 As the policy was due for review in September 2025, the 3C's policy has now been updated to be compliant with the code, alongside internal supporting documentation ('3C's Manager's Guide & Procedures'), ahead of the deadline of April 2026.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 To date, there have been no issues identified with our complaints policy. The LGO have appeared satisfied with how we manage and resolve complaints, which demonstrates the effectiveness of our current processes.

8.2 To ensure compliance with the code, the policy and procedures have been updated. Appendix B outlines all the additions.

8.3 Some of the new additions to the policy are things the Council have already been doing in practice and are now documented within the policy. By making these actions formal, it's now much clearer for staff and everyone using our services and keeps things consistent with the code.

8.4 The updates do not fundamentally change our approach. By officially documenting these procedures and aligning with the new code, we've made it easier for both staff and customers to understand how everything works. Our process for handling feedback and complaints remains the same; the main difference is around the explanations which are clearer and more consistent.

8.5 There is one part of the code that will not be adopted by the Council, as seen in Appendix B. Section 6.14 of the code states that "Individuals do not have to explain their reasons for wanting to escalate a complaint to stage 2 of the process, simply that they remain unhappy". The Council does not take this approach, as we want to understand the specific reason for an escalation and ensure that we are making the best use of our resources by only considering stage 2 complaints under specific circumstances as set out below. Complainants are provided with three options to choose from, introduced many years ago:

1. The complaint has not been fully understood or investigated thoroughly due to a misunderstanding of the original complaint.

2. That all points raised in the complaint have not been fully responded to.

3. You have not had a response to the Stage 1 complaint within the prescribed timescales and have not had an indication as to when a response can be expected.

These 3 options are sufficiently broad enough to not prejudice the complainant. Once the criteria has been selected by the customer, this then provides a basis for Customer Services to begin their review of the stage 1, to see if it should be escalated to a stage 2 complaint.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Council has a statutory duty to comply with the LGO's guidance and ensure its complaints handling processes are fit for purpose. Adoption of the revised policy will mitigate risks associated with non-compliance. Following the most recent changes, the Housing Ombudsman and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman have introduced a new Joint Complaint Handling Code for local authorities to use as the basis for their complaints policy. This report seeks to present a revised Complaints Policy for the Council that reflects the new Joint Complaint Handling Code.

9.2 This is an Executive function as set out in Cabinet's Terms of Reference include at 5.7.1 of the Constitution: 'to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council'.

9.3 There are no other legal implications arising from the report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no financial implications arising from this policy.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2 If we fail to review and update our policy we may be at risk of non-compliance with the LGO complaint handling code.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are no equalities implications arising from this policy.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this policy.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this policy.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There will be no Human Resource implications arising from the policy changes.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Updated 3C's policy

16.2 Appendix B – LGO codes that have been applied to the policy or procedures

16.3 Appendix C – LGO Complaint Handling Code

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Chris Jeffery
Customer & Digital Services Manager
Chris.Jeffery@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474505

17.2 Jo Dufficy
Service Director - Customers
Johanne.Dufficy@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474555

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure

November 2025
To be reviewed November 2028

SUMMARY

This policy sets out how the Council determines and deals with comments, compliments, and complaints (3C's). It also covers how the Council is very willing to receive feedback, which can help to improve services and highlight areas of good practice.

Submitting a comment, compliment or complaint can be simplified as follows: (or a helpful flow chart can be found at Appendix B)

A comment, compliment, or complaint can be made in writing (via the website e-form, email, hard copy complaint form or letter), by telephone, or in person. The Council encourages use of the website e-form as this will help to ensure that all the relevant information is captured. The policy itself can be found on our website, or a hard copy is available at the District Council Offices in reception. The contact details for the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) can also be found on our website or within this policy. (Appendix A - 3.5)

This stage 1 complaint will then be allocated to an investigating manager who will respond within ten working days. This will either be with a full response, or an explanation on why more time is required.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the stage 1 complaint, you can make a stage 2 complaint, which if accepted will be further investigated by a different member of staff or more senior manager, who has had no previous dealings with the complaint.

If dissatisfied following a stage 2 investigation, a further complaint can be made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

1. Introduction

1.1 At North Herts Council, we endeavour to provide high quality services to our customers, however, we recognise that on occasion, despite our best-efforts things can go wrong. By welcoming feedback through our 3C's process, we can try to remedy situations that have gone wrong and continue to improve our services. We can also learn from examples of positive feedback about things that have been done well.

1.2 We know that people make North Herts work. We value all our residents, businesses, staff, contractors, councillors, and other partners, and place them at the heart of everything we do. As part of our 'People First' commitment, the 3C's process welcomes and encourages feedback from all around us. In line with our customer service strategy, we will aim to respond to you quickly and courteously, within the timescales where possible, regardless of how you log your comment, compliment or complaint. As a co-operative Council, we value and build accountability, fairness, and responsibility into all that we do.

1.3 All Council employees receive training on the 3C's process as part of the corporate induction and have access to a range of information and guidance to support effective handling of 3C's. Whilst we welcome feedback on all aspects of 3C's, this policy and process is mainly focussed on complaint handling and shall apply to complaint handling for all services within North Herts Council unless it is overridden by the alternative processes set out in section 3.4.

2. Comments and Compliments

2.1 Comments and compliments are welcomed so that we can learn from examples of where things have worked well and to recognise when Council staff and contractors provide exceptional levels of service.

2.2 Compliments received are anonymised and then shared and celebrated with the Council through the monthly internal staff magazine.

2.3 Comments which may be identifying opportunities to make changes to services or processes can help us understand our customers views on matters and provide valuable customer insight into our services.

2.4 All customer feedback whether it is a comment, compliment or complaint is recorded on a central database (CRM system) and passed on to the relevant service manager for review and to deal with as appropriate.

2.5 Data relating to comments, compliments and complaints will be reported at high level without disclosing any personal details to senior management and Councillors. All data held within the CRM system will be kept in accordance with our data retention schedules.

3. Complaints

3.1 What is a complaint?

3.2 As a guide, we define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by North Herts Council, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals. (Appendix A – 1.2) The complaint will usually fall under one of the following categories:

1. We have failed to do something we should have
2. We have done something badly or in the wrong way
3. A customer feels they have been treated unfairly or discourteously

Complaints will be accepted unless there is a valid reason not to do so, in accordance with the above categories. (Appendix A - 2.1)

3.3 Occasionally something may be originally received as a complaint when it needs to be dealt with in a different way. A service request is defined as a request from an individual to North Herts Council requiring action to be taken to put something right. (Appendix A – 1.4) Some further examples are included below.

3.4 Examples of what is not covered by our Complaints Policy

The list below is not exhaustive but gives examples of things that are not dealt with as complaints.

- Disagreement with a policy decision. We still welcome this feedback but will record it as a comment and it will be dealt with outside of the complaints policy. You can also discuss this with your local Councillor.

- A missed bin would be processed as a request for service by our contractor. However, repeated (justified) missed bins or failure to deal with an issue correctly could lead to a complaint.

- The same or similar complaint that has already been logged by someone else who resides in the same household while the original complaint is open and being investigated.

- Council Tax bandings – if you disagree with the band of your property, you can appeal to the Listing Officer at the VOA. Council Tax valuation bands | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

- Challenging a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN). A procedure for challenging a PCN along with an external appeals process is already in place. Challenge a Penalty Charge Notice | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

- Planning objections. A separate process exists for planning objections to be submitted. View or comment on a planning application | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

- A complaint in relation to housing benefit for which there is a statutory appeals process. Appeal against a benefit decision | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

- Councillor complaints (District or local Council) are dealt with in the manner set out via this link and not via the 3C's route: Complain about a Councillor | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

- A complaint about an issue that was known about for than 12 months before the complaint was made to the Council, unless there is a good reason for the delay.

- Anything that falls under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Act. Complaints about an FOI request or SAR will not be accepted. These should be directed towards the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) Make a complaint | ICO

- The Community Trigger is separate from the Complaints Policy. Further details including the process for activating the Community Trigger can be found on our website.

- Hate crime reports not linked to the Council. These are facilitated through our responsibility as a Hate Crime reporting centre.

- A complaint relating to another organisation. We cannot consider these within our policy, however, we will signpost customers to contact organisations directly.

We do not exclude complaints about safeguarding, or health and safety issues. (Appendix A - 2.3)

4. How to make a complaint

4.1.1 A complaint can be made in writing (via the website e-form, by email (services@north-herts.gov.uk), hard copy complaint form (available online or at Council offices) or by letter) or by telephone (01464 474000) or in person with any member of staff (Appendix A - 3.2). We encourage complaints to be made in writing via the online form wherever possible so we can ensure we have a clear understanding of the complaint. It's important to us that we capture the injustice caused to you so that we get the chance to rectify this where possible. We will respond to complaints in writing wherever possible so there is a record of the outcome.

4.2.1 We can provide information on how to complain in different languages and formats and can provide assistance to people who need it.

4.3 To ensure that we capture all the relevant and correct information, we do not accept anonymous complaints. We also do not accept complaints from third parties except in circumstances where the customer has a disability and / or a representative acting on their behalf. In these circumstances, customer service staff will provide appropriate assistance. We will not usually handle letters in the local newspapers or messages on social media through our 3C's process, however if you have supplied contact details we may try and contact you directly to follow up on your comments if appropriate to do so.

4.4 Complaints regarding contractors who provide services on our behalf should, wherever possible, be directed to the contractors in the first instance. This allows the contractor the opportunity to resolve the matter quickly and avoids potential duplication. The customer may choose not to deal with the contractor directly. In which case, we will handle the matter through our own complaints process. Likewise, if the matter is not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor, then the customer may escalate the complaint to be handled through our process. Contractor feedback is monitored through regular contract management meetings.

4.5 The complaints process

We will always seek to resolve a complaint or an issue as quickly as possible. Sometimes issues are raised as complaints in the hope of getting an immediate response. If we know we will be able to resolve an issue quickly for you then we may deal with it as a service issue, so we can provide an earlier resolution. An example of this could be a missed bin which, if it is not an

ongoing problem, can be resolved quickly by using the relevant online form or with a phone call to our contractors.

Stage 1

- Once a formal complaint is received, it will be recorded on our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and an acknowledgment with a reference number will be sent to you within two working days.

- Details of your complaint will be sent to an appropriate officer to investigate. If your complaint concerns a member of staff, then that staff member would not be the investigating officer. There may be some exceptions to this rule, particularly where the officer mentioned is best placed to respond due to their level of knowledge or expertise on the subject matter. A complaint about a member of staff may be referred to Human Resources for a separate internal investigation if appropriate; details of any action resulting from an HR investigation would be confidential.

- Complaints regarding the Managing Director will be responded to by the Leader of the Council.

- We may need to contact you to discuss the complaint or obtain further information to ensure that we fully understand the complaint and can investigate it thoroughly.

- We aim to respond to 80% of complaints within 10 working days. This considers the fact that some complaints can be very complex and take longer to complete.

- If we cannot fully respond to your complaint within 10 working days, then we will contact you to provide you with an update and advise when we expect to provide a full response.

- If you are dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, you ***may*** have the right to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 of the process. We will review complaints under Stage 2 of the process only if one or more of the following circumstances is applicable:

    1. The complaint has not been fully understood or investigated thoroughly due to a misunderstanding of the original complaint.

    2. That all points raised in the complaint have not been fully responded to.

    3. You have not had a response to the Stage 1 complaint within the prescribed timescales and have not had an indication as to when a response can be expected.

  To request a review under Stage 2 you should contact the Customer Service Centre within 28 calendar days of our response to you, advising why you are dissatisfied with the complaint outcome. A complaint can only be escalated to Stage 2 if it has been through Stage 1 of the process and meets one or more of the criteria for escalation. Details of how to request this will also be included in your Stage 1 outcome letter. Requests for stage 2 will be acknowledged and logged within five working days of receipt. (Appendix A - 6.13) Stage 2 consideration is a review of the adequacy of the stage 1 response as well as any new and relevant information not previously considered. Stage 2 is not a more thorough, detailed investigation of the complaint. (Appendix A - 6.15)

  If your complaint does not meet the criteria to escalate to a Stage 2 but you are dissatisfied with our response, then you may wish to refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), details of which can be found in section 5 of this document.

4.6 Stage 2

Stage 2 follows the same process as stage 1 of our procedure. In most cases, your complaint will be reviewed by a Senior Manager who will not have investigated the complaint at Stage 1, unless it is not appropriate for them to do so, and in which case will be passed to the most suitable member of staff.

5. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

5.1 The LGO can investigate complaints about the Council, however in most cases before they will investigate a complaint, the Council must have had the chance to put things right first through the first and/or second stage of the complaints process. The Ombudsman will not usually consider complaints that are over 12 months old unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH
www.lgo.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 061 0614

6. Unreasonable Complainant (& Contact) Policy

6.1 We have a duty to make sure that public money is spent wisely and achieves value for complainants and the wider public. In a very small number of cases, despite exhausting our complaints policy and possibly that of the LGO, a complainant may continue to pursue a complaint unreasonably.

6.2 While we do not normally limit the contact complainants have with us or Councillors, in some cases it is necessary to do so because the nature or frequency of a complainant's contact hinders our ability to consider their and other customers' complaints. We refer to these as serial, persistent, or vexatious complainants. This can be defined as a complaint where it is readily apparent that the customer is pursuing a complaint which is entirely without merit and made with the intention of causing inconvenience, harassment, or expense to the organisation. Any restrictions placed on an individual's contact due to unacceptable behaviour are proportionate and have regard to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. (Appendix A - 5.13)

6.3 We have internal guidance in place which sets out how staff and Councillors should deal with unreasonable complainant behaviour. This includes that contact could be limited, restricted or in some cases stopped altogether. (More information can be found at Appendix A – Unreasonable Complainant (& Contact) Policy).

8 Complaints made to Councillors

Councillors cannot make formal complaints on your behalf as this would be considered a third-party complaint as covered in section 4. However, they can provide guidance on how a complaint can be made to the Council through the established 3C's process.

Councillors can refer matters on your behalf to officers of the Council to be investigated; however, it can only be treated as a formal complaint once the Council has:

- Discussed the matter with you directly
- Agreed the formal route with you
- Established that you wish the Councillor to act as an advocate for you

Councillors can also discuss matters of policy with you; however, policy matters are not usually covered by the complaints policy because policy decisions have been made through a democratic process.

8 Social media comments

We recognise that social media is a platform used by many of our customers, and as such have a separate policy covering this. We proactively use social media to engage with our residents and our Customer Services team respond to specific requests for service made via our own social media pages, including Facebook, Twitter & Nextdoor.

We also recognise that many comments made on social media are general expressions of opinion or public discussion and mostly informal in nature. For that reason, we will not usually handle them through our formal 3C's process. That is not to suggest that we do not take social media comments seriously, more that we understand that the users of social media do not usually expect their comments to be processed in a formal manner and often such comments are of a general nature and not about a specific incident that the Council can investigate. However, if a comment clearly fits within our 3C's criteria, we will contact you directly to follow up and handle the matter through our formal process as appropriate. Requests for service will be processed in the same way as if received via other channels. However, ongoing, or unresolved issues may be treated as a complaint.

We can report through our social media platform on the volumes, types, and sentiment of interactions on our social media pages, and this information may be used in conjunction with our standard 3C's reports.

10 Performance Monitoring and Reporting

Key complaints data specifically relating to volumes and performance is collated and analysed on an ongoing basis. This data is reported annually to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The reports are published on our website.

Appendix B – LGO Complaint Handling Code

Policy changes

Code section	Code requirement
1.2/1.4	Complaints are defined in line with the code, and we recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint.
2.1	Our policy clearly states that complaints will be accepted unless there is a valid reason not to do so.
2.3	We do not exclude complaints about safeguarding, or health and safety issues.
3.2	Individuals can raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff.
3.5	Our complaints policy explains how we will publicise details of the complaints policy.
5.13	Any restrictions placed on an individual's contact due to unacceptable behaviour are proportionate and have regard to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.
6.13	Requests for stage 2 are acknowledged and logged at stage 2 of the complaint's procedure within five working days of receipt.
6.15	Stage 2 consideration is a review of the adequacy of the stage 1 response as well as any new and relevant information not previously considered. Stage 2 is not a more thorough, detailed investigation of the complaint.

Process / Procedure changes

Code section	Code requirement
3.3	We do not view high volumes of complaints as a negative.
6.5	When we inform an individual about an extension to these timescales, we provide them with the contact details of the relevant ombudsman.
6.8	Where we have got something wrong, we record the complaint as "upheld" even if there are elements of the complaint which are not "upheld". We do not record complaints as being "partially upheld".
6.19	Extensions to the timescale for a response do not exceed 20 working days
6.20	When we inform an individual about an extension to stage 2 timescales, they are provided with the contact details of the relevant ombudsman
6.22	If a complaint is upheld at stage 1, and the stage 2 response agrees with those findings, we record the complaint as upheld. This is the case even if the stage 2 response finds no fault in the way the stage 1 complaint was handled.
7.2	Remedies offered reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified.
7.3	Remedies offered clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the individual where appropriate. Any remedy proposed is followed through to completion.
7.4	Remedies take account of the guidance on remedies issued by the relevant Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

Not implemented

Code section	Code requirement
6.14	Individuals do not have to explain their reasons for wanting a stage 2, simply that they remain unhappy

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Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

Complaint Handling Code

Date published: February 2024
Date applicable: April 2024

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Introduction

Good complaint handling requires effective procedures and well-trained staff alongside a positive complaints culture that enables those procedures to achieve maximum impact. This code sets out what an organisation should do procedurally to handle complaints.

Organisations should embrace complaints through increased transparency, accessibility, and complaint handling governance. Demonstrating that individuals are at the heart of its service delivery and good complaint handling is central to that.

Some organisations see complaints as a form of negative feedback. However, there are many benefits to be gained from having an effective and efficient complaints process:

- Good complaint handling promotes a positive relationship between an organisation and service users.
- Complaints allow an issue to be resolved before it becomes worse. Those issues not resolved promptly can take significant resource and time to remedy.
- Involvement in complaint resolution develops staff ownership, decision-making and engagement.
- Complaints provide senior staff with essential insight into day-to-day operations, allowing them to assess effectiveness and drive a positive complaint handling culture.
- Data collected about complaints can be analysed and used to inform key business decisions to drive improvement in service provision.

The Complaint Handling Code ('the Code'), sets out a process for organisations that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The purpose of the Code is to enable organisations to resolve complaints raised by individuals promptly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. It will also help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and individuals.

The Code will act as a guide for individuals setting out what they may expect from an organisation when they make a complaint. Organisations should seek feedback from individuals in relation to their complaint handling as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and learning culture.

Organisations should have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code.

The principles, process and timescales in this Code are aligned with the Complaint Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman. This means that organisations who fall under the jurisdiction of both Ombudsmen should be able to provide a co-ordinated complaint handling process across services covered by both Codes.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's powers and approach

The Code is issued under the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's powers to provide "guidance about good administrative practice" to organisations under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. For the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, this Code constitutes important advice and guidance to councils, rather than instructions.

We have issued the Code for local councils in England. Other organisations in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction may find the Code helpful in setting out good practice.

We can recommend an organisation takes action to improve services or provide a personal remedy where it finds fault causing injustice to an individual or group of individuals. Unlike the Housing Ombudsman, we have no specific responsibility for monitoring compliance with the Code in addition to our role investigating complaints of maladministration and service failure.

Using the Code

We expect local councils to carefully consider the Code when developing policies and procedures. Where an organisation decides that it will depart from the Code, it should ensure local decision-making processes have been properly followed.

We may make a finding of maladministration where local councils' policies and procedures depart from the Code without sufficient explanation. We may also make a finding of maladministration where a local council, without good reason, does not meet the standards in the Code when responding to an individual complaint.

Where an organisation is unable to comply with its policies and procedures when dealing with an individual complaint, the individual should be provided with a suitable explanation and signposted to the Ombudsman.

The Code should be considered along with other guidance issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Code does not replace any existing statutory complaint processes such as The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 or Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.

The Complaint Handling Code

1. Definition of a service request and complaint

1.1 Effective complaint handling enables individuals to be heard and understood. The starting point for this is a shared understanding of what constitutes a service request and what constitutes a complaint. In most cases organisations should be able to put things right through normal service delivery processes.

1.2 A service request may be defined as:

‘a request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision.’

1.3 This provides organisations with opportunities to resolve matters to an individual’s satisfaction before they become a complaint.

1.4 A complaint may be defined as:

‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals.’

1.5 An individual should not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative should still be handled in line with the organisation’s complaints policy.

1.6 Organisations should recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This should be set out in their complaints policy.

1.7 Service requests are not complaints but may contain expressions of dissatisfaction. Organisations should have the opportunity to deal with a service request before a complaint is made. A complaint may be raised when the individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing. An organisation should not stop its efforts to address the service request if the individual complains.

1.8 Service requests should be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.

2. Exclusions

2.1 An organisation should accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. If the organisation decides not to accept a complaint, it should be able to evidence its reasoning. Each complaint should be considered on its own merits.

2.2 Organisations should accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring, or the individual becoming aware of the issue. Organisations should consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

2.3 A complaints policy should set out the circumstances in which a matter might not be considered or escalated. Organisations should ensure that these are reasonable, and should not deny individuals access to redress.

2.4 If an organisation decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation should be provided to the individual setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

2.5 Organisations should not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they should consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.

3. Accessibility and awareness

3.1 Organisations should make it easy for individuals to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint. Organisations must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of individuals who may need to access the complaints process.

3.2 Individuals should be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff should be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the organisation.

3.3 High volumes of complaints should not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that individuals are unable to complain.

3.4 Organisations should make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all individuals. This should detail the process, what will happen at each stage, and the timeframes for responding. The policy should also be published on the organisation's website.

3.5 The policy should explain how the organisation will publicise details of the complaints policy, including information about the Ombudsman and this Code.

3.6 Organisations should give individuals the opportunity to have a suitable representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the organisation.

3.7 Organisations should provide individuals with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service and how the individual can engage with the Ombudsman about their complaint.

3.8 Where an organisation asks for feedback about its services through a survey, it should provide details of how individuals can complain so they can pursue any dissatisfaction if they so wish.

4. Complaint handling resources

4.1 Organisations should have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the relevant Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent).

4.2 Anyone responding to a complaint should have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They should also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.

4.3 Organisations are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff should be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and resourced accordingly

5. The complaint handling process

5.1 Organisations should have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code.

5.2 The early and local resolution of issues between organisations and individuals is key to effective complaint handling. Organisations should not have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.

5.3 When an individual expresses dissatisfaction that could meet the criteria for a complaint as set out in section 1 of the Code, they should be given the opportunity to make a complaint. Organisations should recognise that individuals may be reluctant to raise complaints out of fear it may impact services they receive in future. .

5.4 The person responding to the complaint should:

a. clarify with the individual any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about;
b. deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind;
c. give the individual a fair chance to set out their position;
d. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
e. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

5.5 Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code the organisation should inform the individual of when the response will be provided and the reason(s) for the delay.

5.6 Organisations must make reasonable adjustments for individuals where appropriate under the Equality Act 2010. Organisations should keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments should be kept under active review.

5.7 Organisations should not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless there are valid reasons to do so. Organisations should clearly set out these reasons, and they should align with the approach to exclusions set out in section 2 of the Code.

5.8 A full record should be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This should include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the individual, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports. This should be retained in line with the organisation's data retention policies.

5.9 Organisations should have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Organisations should ensure that appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage of the complaints process without the need for escalation to stage 2 or the Ombudsman.

5.10 Organisations should have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from individuals and/or their representatives. Organisations should be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and should keep an individual's restrictions under regular review.

5.11 Any restrictions placed on an individual's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

6. Complaints stages

Stage 1

6.1 Organisations should have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further consideration. Organisations should consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the individual is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the individual.

6.2 Complaints should be acknowledged, and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure **within five working days of the complaint being received**.

6.3 Organisations should provide a full response to stage 1 complaints **within 10 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.

6.4 Organisations should decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform individuals of the expected timescale for response. Any extension should be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual.

6.5 When an organisation informs an individual about an extension to these timescales, they should be provided with the details of the relevant Ombudsman.

6.6 A complaint response should be provided to the individual when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions should still be tracked and actioned promptly, with appropriate updates provided to the individual.

6.7 Organisations should address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. Organisations should be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.

6.8 At the conclusion of stage 1 organisations should provide details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.

6.9 Where individuals raise additional complaints during stage 1, these should be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been provided. Where the stage 1 response has been provided, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being considered, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues should be logged as a new complaint.

6.10 Organisations should have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Individuals should not have to escalate a complaint in order to get an appropriate remedy.

Stage 2

6.11 If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the individual's satisfaction at stage 1, it should be progressed to stage 2 of the organisation's procedure. Stage 2 is the organisation's final response..

6.12 Requests for stage 2 should be acknowledged and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within **five working days of the escalation request being received**. Within the acknowledgement, organisations should set out their understanding of any outstanding issues and the outcomes the individual is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the individual should be asked for clarification.

6.13 Individuals should not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Organisations should make reasonable efforts to understand why an individual remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.

6.14 The person considering the complaint at stage 2 should not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.

6.15 Organisations should issue a final response to the stage 2 **within 20 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.

6.16 Organisations should decide whether an extension to this timescale is needed when considering the complexity of the complaint and then inform individuals of the expected timescale for response. Any extension should be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual.

6.17 When an organisation informs an individual about an extension to these timescales they should be provided with the details of the relevant Ombudsman.

6.18 Organisations should confirm the following in writing to the individual at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language:

a. the complaint stage;
b. the organisation's understanding of the complaint;
c. the decision on the complaint;
d. the reasons for any decisions made;
e. the details of any remedy offered to put things right;
f. details of any outstanding actions; and
g. details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if the individual remains dissatisfied.

6.19 Stage 2 should be the organisation's final response and should involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.

6.20 A process with more than two stages will make the complaint process unduly long and delay access to the relevant Ombudsman. A process with a single stage means the organisation may lack the ability to check its response before an individual comes to the Ombudsman.

6.21 Where an organisation's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor) or independent adjudicator at any stage, it should form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Individuals should not be expected to go through two complaints processes.

6.22 Organisations are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.

7. Putting things right

7.1 Where something has gone wrong an organisation should acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right. These can include:

- Apologising;
- Acknowledging where things have gone wrong;
- Providing an explanation, assistance or reasons;
- Taking action if there has been delay;
- Reconsidering or changing a decision;
- Amending a record or adding a correction or addendum;
- Providing a financial remedy;
- Changing policies, procedures or practices.

7.2 Any remedy offered should reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified.

7.3 The remedy offer should clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the individual where appropriate. Any remedy proposed should be followed through to completion.

7.4 If a proposed remedy cannot be delivered, the individual should be informed of the reasons for this, provided with details of any alternative remedy and reminded of their right to complain to the Ombudsman,

7.5 Organisations should take account of the good practice guides issued by the Ombudsman when deciding on appropriate remedies.

8. Performance reporting and self-assessment

8.1 Organisations should produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge, which should include:

a. an annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure its complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.

b. a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance. This should also include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept;

c. any findings of non-compliance with this Code;

d. the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;

e. the annual letter about the organisation's performance from the Ombudsman; and

f. any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.

8.2 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report should be reported through the organisation's governance arrangements and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement should be published alongside this.

8.3 Organisations should also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.

9. Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement

9.1 Organisations should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.

9.2 A positive complaint handling culture is important to the effectiveness with which organisations resolve disputes. Organisations should use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.

9.3 Accountability and transparency are also integral to a positive organisational culture. Organisations should report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as citizens' panels, staff and relevant committees.

9.4 The organisation should appoint a suitably senior person to oversee its complaint handling performance. This person should assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.

9.5 In addition to this, organisations should assign lead responsibility for complaints in governance arrangements to support a positive complaint handling culture. We refer to this as the 'Member Responsible for Complaints"'(the Member). This role could be carried out by an individual or committee depending on the governance arrangements in place.

9.6 The Member should receive regular information on complaints that provides insight on the organisation's complaint handling performance. The Member should have access to suitable information and staff to perform this role and report on their findings.

9.7 As a minimum, the Member should receive:

a. regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance

b. regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; and

c. the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.

9.8 Organisations should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties that reflects the need to:

- have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments;
- take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints, rather than blaming others; and
- act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by any relevant professional body.

Appendix A: Self-assessment

A self-assessment should be completed and shared with the organisation's governance arrangements as part of the complaints performance and service improvement report.

Evidence should show how the organisation follows the Code and its own policies. It should also set out how well it is performing and provide information about service improvements which have been implemented following complaints.

For example, this could include records of quality assurance checks on complaint responses, exclusions and feedback from relevant staff. If the failure to meet an expectation only relates to one service area or department this should be made clear.

When completing the self-assessment, organisations should not focus on the number of complaints received. Recording a high number of complaints may be an indication that the organisation welcomes complaints and that individuals are able to access the complaints process easily. Organisations should focus on timescales for responding to complaints and complaint outcomes.

A suggested self-assessment format is included here, but organisations may adopt their own version to meet local needs and reporting requirements.

Example: Self-assessment against the requirements of the Code

Code section	Action	Do we follow the code Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
1: Definition of a service request and complaint	We recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint and these are defined in our policies and procedures.		
2: Exclusions	Our complaints policy sets out circumstances where we would not consider a complaint. These are reasonable and do not deny individuals access to redress.		
3: Accessibility and awareness	We provide different channels through which individuals can make complaints. These are accessible and we are able to make reasonable adjustments where necessary.		
4: Complaint handling resources	We have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling. Complaints are viewed as a core service and resourced accordingly.		

Code section	Action	Do we follow the code Yes/No	Explanations and Commentary
5: The complaint handling process	We have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code and individuals are given the option of raising a complaint where they express dissatisfaction that meets the definition of the complaint in our policy.		
6: Complaints stages (Stage 1)	We process stage 1 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.		
6: Complaints stages (Stage 2)	We process stage 2 complaints in line with timescales and processes set out in the Code.		
7: Putting things right	When something has gone wrong we take action to put things right.		
8: Performance reporting and self-assessment	We produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge which includes a self-assessment against the Code.		
9: Scrutiny & Oversight	We have appropriate senior leadership and governance oversight of the complaints process and performance.		

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CABINET

19 NOVEMBER 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE – SUBMISSION OF FINAL PROPOSALS

REPORT OF: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION/DEVOLUTION

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the proposed submission to Government, developed by all eleven Hertfordshire local authorities and the Police and Crime Commissioner, for the future organisation of Local Government in Hertfordshire. Given the importance of the issue this report is being presented to Full Council on the 13 November 2025 to facilitate a debate on the options, prior to Cabinet's meeting on 19 November 2025 at which the decision will be taken as to which option is preferred by the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet notes the content of the report, the draft Hertfordshire submission document at Appendix A which forms the proposed collective submission to Government on Local Government Reorganisation and the indicative non-binding view of Full Council at its meeting on 13 November 2025.

2.2. That Cabinet resolves one of the following options:-

Either:

a) Submit the proposal and identify the two unitary option as preferred;

b) Submit the proposal and identify the modified three unitary option as preferred and request that the Secretary of State formally modify the proposal by agreeing boundary changes, as set out in the proposal;

c) Submit the proposal and identify the modified four unitary option as preferred and request that the Secretary of State formally modify the proposal be agreeing boundary changes, as set out in the proposal;

d) Submit the proposal without identifying a preferred option.

2.3 That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council to agree any final minor amendments to the Hertfordshire submission document prior to submission to Government by 28 November 2025.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all leaders of two-tier councils to formally invite them to develop proposals for a single tier of local government in their counties. Cabinet is legally required to make the decision as to this Council's response to the Minister's request, but the report to Full Council on the 13 November 2025 allowed all councillors to consider and debate this important issue before an indicative non-binding vote, to be considered by Cabinet as part of its decision making on 19 November 2025.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The Hertfordshire authorities agreed at an early stage to work together on a single submission, with several options contained within it. An alternative approach, seen in many other areas of the country, could have been for different groups of authorities to develop competing proposals for submission to Government. This was felt to be a sub-optimal approach, with risk of duplicating work and expense and a risk of fragmenting relationships between authorities, which would then need to be repaired to make reorganisation a success.

4.2. A single unitary option was contained within the interim plan submitted to Government in March 2025, however all Hertfordshire Leaders agreed to discontinue working on this option as the single unitary would have been too large.

4.3. In theory Hertfordshire could have refused to submit a proposal for reorganisation, as under existing legislation local areas have to request that Government commence the reorganisation process. However this would have required all authorities to take that approach, as just one making a submission would have been enough to trigger the process (and the others would have lost the opportunity to influence the outcome). The Government's position is clear, they want reorganisation, and the English Devolution Bill contains a clause that would close this loophole and allow Government to impose reorganisation if necessary. Therefore this option was discounted.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. All Members received a briefing during the stakeholder engagement that took place during September 2025. Additionally Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation on the process at its meeting on 9 September 2025. The Area Forums all received a presentation on the emerging proposals at their meetings in September 2025. The same presentation was delivered by the Chief Executive to three Staff Conference sessions in September, followed by an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the options.

5.2. Public engagement also took place in September, promoted across social media and in person events by all eleven existing Hertfordshire Councils. Additionally we promoted it via the Council website, E:Newsletters, posters in council-owned buildings and the

Summer edition of Outlook magazine. Feedback was collated via a dedicated Hertfordshire website www.hertfordshire-lgr.co.uk

5.3. As part of the early stakeholder engagement, the Leader and Chief Executive met with key organisations including the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Business Improvement Districts and Veolia on 25 July 2025 to discuss the options being considered and ask that feedback be submitted to inform the developing proposals. The report setting out the findings from the stakeholder engagement can be seen at Appendix E of the Submission Document.

5.4. Regular updates on progress have been provided to the Political Liaison Board (the informal meeting of Cabinet and Leadership Team) and monthly briefings have been held with the Executive Member for Local Government Reorganisation/Devolution and the two opposition shadows. Regular updates have also been provided to staff and councillors via email updates and updates to a dedicated page on the Council's internal Hub, plus an update at every monthly staff briefing and the Staff Consultation Forum. The Council's website has also been updated at all key stages in order to keep the public informed – see Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation | North Herts Council.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 22 August 2025.

6.2 In accordance with paragraph 6.3.11(b)(i) of the Council's Constitution the Chair of the Council has agreed that this decision is urgent, noting that Council has had the opportunity to debate it on 13 November 2025, as any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's interests. Therefore the usual call in provisions will not apply to Cabinet's decision or any subsequent decision made in accordance with recommendation 2.3.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024, set out the government's plans to devolve greater power and funding to local areas and to deliver local government reorganisation in all 'two tier' areas.

7.2. On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all leaders of two-tier councils to formally invite them to develop proposals for a single tier of local government in their counties (see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-invitation-to-local-authorities-in-two-tier-areas/letter-hertfordshire).

7.3. A formal statutory invitation, included as an appendix to the letter, set out the government's expectations including the criteria against which proposals will be assessed:

a) Proposals should seek to establish a single tier of local government. 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) ***Proposed unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.*** New councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more (although it is recognised there may be certain scenarios where a lower figure could be considered).

c) ***Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens*****.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve service delivery and avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.

d) ***Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view*****.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance and include evidence of local engagement.

e) ***New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.***

f) ***New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.***

The Government has confirmed that there is no weighting attributed to any of the criteria and that they are all of equal importance.

7.4 The Minister indicated he expected 'local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area … rather than developing competing proposals'. This informed the approach taken in Hertfordshire.

7.5 Two tier areas were required to submit an interim plan by 21 March 2025, setting out progress on developing proposals. A joint interim submission on behalf of the 11 Hertfordshire councils, along with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, was submitted to Government on 20 March 2025 (see https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/Hertfordshire%20interim%20LGR%20Submission.pdf). At that stage the options of one, two, three and four unitary councils were being considered. Government feedback on this plan was received on 15 May 2025. This feedback did not seek to approve or discount any option put forward. Key areas covered included:

- Each council must commit to a clear single option and geography for Hertfordshire as a whole in its final proposal.
- Proposals must address the Government's criteria and be supported by data and evidence. Councils were encouraged to collaborate on a consistent evidence base and financial analysis.
- Having unitary councils of a population size of 500,000 or more was referred to as a guiding principle, not a hard target.
- Councils should prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens and communities above all other issues.
- Engagement with those who may be affected by the disaggregation of services is encouraged. Final proposals should demonstrate how local ideas and views have been incorporated.
- New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

7.6 On 12 June 2025, the Leaders of Hertfordshire's 11 councils agreed to rule out the option of a single unitary authority for the county. This reflected a shared view that a single

unitary council covering Hertfordshire's 1.2m residents would be too remote from the county's diverse communities.

7.7 Following the submission of the Interim Plan, a Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme team was established in Hertfordshire. Leads and support from across the County, District and Borough Councils have worked with the lead consultants, IMPOWER, to produce the required proposal for submission on 28 November.

7.8 It is anticipated that the Government will conduct a formal public consultation on reorganisation proposals for Hertfordshire in spring 2026, exact dates to be confirmed. The Secretary of State's decision on which option is to be implemented in Hertfordshire would then be expected in summer 2026, likely in July based upon Government's indications. The required legislation (the Structural Changes Order) would then be prepared and laid in parliament from autumn 2026, to facilitate elections to the new shadow unitary authorities in May 2027. The shadow unitaries would run in parallel to the existing Hertfordshire authorities and be tasked with taking initial decisions to allow the new authorities to operate safely and legally come 'go live' on Saturday 1 April 2028, such as adopting constitutions, budgets, appointing statutory officers etc. If members wish to understand what is contained in a Structural Changes Order, a recent example is The Cumbria (Structural Changes) Order 2022.

7.9 Members will be aware that local government reorganisation has, in part, been positioned by Government as a way to facilitate more devolution deals across the country. The Government has not committed to a timeline for devolution for areas, like Hertfordshire, that are outside the Devolution Priority Programme. Hertfordshire's ask for devolution, that a Hertfordshire Strategic Authority be created in parallel to the new unitary authorities, is set out within the submission document and is indifferent as to which unitary model is ultimately chosen by government. On 4 November 2025 a letter was sent on behalf of Hertfordshire Growth Board to the Secretary of State setting out Hertfordshire's ambition for a Mayoral Strategic Authority, to be vested on 1 April 2028 alongside the new unitary authorities.

7.10 As stated at paragraph 7.5 Government has set out that each Council can only choose one option to support. The submission document will summarise which Councils support which options. Ultimately Government will decide which model for reorganisation to implement and all Hertfordshire authorities have committed to working together to make that model a success.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Approach to the submission

8.1 As stated at paragraph 7.7 above, following the submission of the Interim Plan, a Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme team was established in Hertfordshire. This work has been led by the Hertfordshire Chief Executives Co-ordinating Group, with strategic oversight and political steer provided by the Hertfordshire Leaders Group (HLG). Leads and support from across the County, District and Borough councils have worked with the consultants, IMPOWER, to produce the required proposal document for submission to Government on 28 November. Significant work has been undertaken to develop a shared evidence base to enable a robust set of potential options for the county. Work on transition planning is also underway with a series of service design teams being set up to model proposals for disaggregation and merging of services as required.

8.2 Reflecting this work, a joint submission from the 11 Hertfordshire councils and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire has been prepared. This submission, which is at Appendix A, outlines the shared commitment to reshaping local government to deliver simpler, more accountable and more sustainable services for Hertfordshire's 1.2 million residents. The submission contains a spine setting out the shared evidence base and agreed elements that are in common to all the options.

8.3 Whilst there is a common ambition for change, different partners currently hold different views on the best delivery model. The final proposal outlines three unitary authority options that remain under consideration. These options are for two, three and four unitary councils for the county. When submitted, the proposal will indicate which options are supported by which councils in the county. It was agreed that these 'mini-proposals' would state the positive case for that model, without seeking to undermine the other options. The ambition set was to create three high-quality and compelling mini-proposals, so that whichever model is chosen by Government in due course can be viewed as positive for Hertfordshire residents, businesses, partners, councillors and staff.

Vision and Ambitions

8.4 Hertfordshire's proposal sets out an agreed strategic vision and ambitions for the county, recognising that local government reorganisation presents a once in a generation opportunity to rethink how services are delivered, making them more connected, more responsive and more focused on what matters most to people.

8.5 These ambitions are shaped by seven core principles:

- **Resident-first**: Services will be simple to access, responsive and built around the needs of people and businesses.
- **Prevention-led**: Councils will act early to tackle root causes, not just symptoms - reducing long-term demand and helping people to live more independently.
- **Inclusive and enabling**: Services will be fair, open and accessible to all, helping communities to thrive while respecting their differences.
- **Partnership-led**: Councils will work better together - across councils, the NHS, police, businesses and the voluntary sector - to deliver better outcomes.
- **Powered by data and technology**: Councils will use evidence, data and digital tools to improve and strengthen connections and work more efficiently.
- **Culturally ambitious**: Councils will empower their diverse and representative workforce, celebrate local identity and build innovation into everything they do.
- **Strategic and place-based**: Councils will act as strong local partners - investing in the right places with the right infrastructure to help communities thrive and enable neighbourhoods to shape their own future.

The options

8.6 The proposed submission document contains 'mini-proposals' separately setting out the case for a two unitary model, a three unitary model and a four unitary model. The submission sets out the proposed geographies and the case as to why each of the models should be chosen by Government. In simplistic terms the larger unitary footprints are more financially resilient (two is more resilient than three and three is more resilient than four) and the smaller unitary footprints are closer to the communities they serve. All

of the options have their strengths and relative weaknesses and different people will emphasise which elements they consider most important.

8.7 Both the three unitary model and four unitary model propose potential boundary changes for Government to consider. In the three unitary model it is suggested that Bushey could move from the Central unitary (where Hertsmere would be located) to the West unitary, due to Bushey's close links with Watford. In the four unitary model it is suggested that a number of current North Herts wards could move to the East unitary, for a combination of place based reasons and to better balance the population numbers. The full explanations are contained within the submission, which has been structured taking account of KC's advice on the Government mechanisms to implement these boundary modifications if they choose to.

Finance and Services

8.8 It is important to state that overall all of the three options require significant up-front costs reorganisation but will save money compared to the status quo and that all will payback those initial costs, albeit at different rates. In the four unitary proposal, using current estimates the Unitary Council covering the Central area appears to be unviable without increased funding. This is because the estimated share of County Council costs is greater than the share of funding. This gap is sufficiently large that it can't be covered by forecast savings. This area has higher deprivation, so the Fair Funding review may redirect funding to that Unitary Council. Chief Finance Offers tried to model the impact of the proposed Fair Funding Review, however there is currently too much uncertainty in the potential figures, pending further clarification from Government which is expected too late to be incorporated within the submission. Therefore the submission clearly sets out that these impacts have not been included.

8.9 The financial modelling has been undertaken based on the current Medium Term Financial Strategies of the 11 authorities. It looks at the impact of up-front costs to achieve reorganisation and the ongoing costs and savings from the new structures. It also considers future funding and Council Tax.

8.10 At the current time detailed modelling of how different services will be delivered has not been undertaken, due to the time pressure of the deadline for submission to Government. A lot of work has been undertaken, without yet coming to a definitive conclusion on the delivery models as in part these might depend on the number of unitaries chosen by Government. These will be explored further during the transition phase. For the purposes of the submission focus has been placed on the critical high risk service areas identified by Government and how these would be delivered initially.

8.11 The approach discussed has been to seek to identify the best of what each Council currently does and look to 'right-size' the service delivery models. In the two unitary model this might mean more localised place based services, in the four unitary model this might mean shared service arrangements where delivering at scale would be beneficial. The mini-proposals explore some of the options and thinking around this. The resultant models may result in changes in the ability to generate savings and changes in up-front costs.

Democratic representation

8.12 The two unitary and three unitary models are based on County divisions, with three members per division. The four unitary model is based upon district wards, with some proposed tweaks to councillor numbers. The numbers of councillors and ratio to electors are set out within the submission. Government will set out in the Structural Changes Order the basis on which the first election to the Shadow Unitary Councils will take place (ie wards/divisions, number of councillors, election date, electoral cycle etc). This structure will be in place for the first term of the new unitary council, during which it is expected that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England will carry out a review to address any anomalies that have been identified. Any changes would then be implemented at the next scheduled election.

Community engagement

8.13 The submission sets out a number of different options for how the new unitary councils could engage with their communities, accepting that the decision on this will be for the new unitary councils themselves to make. It is also recognised that the two unitary model may need to put more structures in place to compensate for its comparative remoteness to communities, whereas the four unitary model is naturally closer to the communities it serves.

Stakeholder feedback

8.14 During September, we asked stakeholders to share their views on proposed changes to local government in Hertfordshire. Around 7,600 people engaged with the survey across Hertfordshire, and it was clear from those who kindly gave us their thoughts that:

- There was no clear consensus on a preferred structure. While survey responses showed a slight plurality for four unitary councils, the two- and three-unitary models also received significant support. Each option attracted backing for distinct reasons:

  • **Two-unitary model:** favoured for efficiency, scale, and strategic coordination; viewed as simple and cost-effective.
  • **Three-unitary model:** seen by some as offering a balanced approach, avoiding both excessive scale and over-fragmentation. Attracted positive comments on the geography.
  • **Four-unitary model:** preferred by those emphasising local identity and representation, with smaller councils viewed as closer and more accountable to communities.

- These perspectives contrasted with the county wide stakeholder engagement, where the two-unitary option received the greatest number of supportive or cautiously favourable comments. The North Herts stakeholder meeting in July had a preference for smaller unitary councils, closer to the community.
- There is cautious optimism regarding LGR: People see real opportunity in more joined-up services, clearer accountability, and better coordination across the county, provided this does not come at the expense of local connection or community identity.
- Peoples' primary concerns are what LGR will mean for their top three priority services: Infrastructure, Waste and recycling and Parks and green spaces; plus,

the potential costs involved in reorganisation and whether they could impact council tax.

8.15 **North Herts resident feedback**

587 North Herts residents responded to the LGR survey and of those who selected a preferred option there was a slight preference for the four-unitary model over the two-unitary model with the three-unitary model clearly less favoured.

Four unitary model	151	38.81%
Two unitary model	144	37.01%
Three unitary model	94	24.16%

Resident feeling with regards to the potential impact of LGR was mixed with 50.73% of respondents feeling that reorganisation would improve things, 15.01% feeling it would have no impact and 34.24% feeling it would have a negative impact.

Improve a little	166	35.09%
Worsen a lot	87	18.39%
Worsen a little	75	15.85%
Improve a lot	74	15.64%
No impact	71	15.01%

The top three potential benefits of LGR highlighted by those North Herts residents who responded were aligned with the feedback from across Hertfordshire, namely:

More joined-up services that work better together	265	22.59%
More coordinated strategic planning and infrastructure decisions	214	18.24%
A clearer understanding of who is responsible for what	189	16.11%

The top three concerns responding North Herts residents had when considering the implications of LGR were:

The cost of making the change might be too high	264	15.77%
The council may be less connected to my community	242	14.45%
Loss of local representation	224	13.38%

8.16 As part of the ongoing work since the summer a transition workstream is already underway, looking at how best to navigate the path from the existing 11 authorities to the new unitary councils. An initial plan has been developed, which it has been agreed will be overseen by a central Programme Management Office (as opposed to a PMO for each unitary council). Information has been obtained from previous areas that have been through this process, with a view to learning lessons from their experience. Following completion of the submission document increased focus will be placed on the transition programme and in particular what we are able to progress prior to receiving the Government's decision on the future model for Hertfordshire. It is recognised that we cannot simply wait for the Government decision before progressing this work, as this would mean losing at least eight months of time from the programme (December 2025 to July 2026).

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Council's Constitution sets out at paragraph 5.7.28 that Cabinet's responsibility includes "To make decisions where a policy or strategy does not exist." Advice was obtained from King's Counsel on behalf of the Hertfordshire authorities that confirms that a decision about what, if any, full proposal to make to the Secretary of State is an executive decision, and not one for the full council to take. The essential basis for the advice is fundamental principle that all decisions are executive decisions, unless it is possible to point to some specific provision which makes them otherwise (which does not exist in this instance). Counsel has confirmed that Full Council's role is advisory and non-binding in this regard. The role of Full Council on the 13th November 2025 is to debate the options and provide a non-binding indicative view to inform Cabinet's decision on 19 November 2025.

9.2. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides the legislative framework for local government reorganisation. It is therefore important that any submission is compliant with the requirements of the legislation. Separate King's Counsel advice was obtained on behalf of the Hertfordshire authorities as to how the proposed boundary modifications within the three unitary and four unitary proposals should be presented. How this issue is addressed within the submission document reflects the advice received.

9.3. The Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007 provides that proposals for local government reorganisation should be based upon existing district council boundaries. A proposal that is not based on district council boundaries is likely to be non-compliant and may well be rejected by the Secretary of State on this basis. However, the Secretary of State has also made it clear in the invitation to local authorities to make proposals and associated guidance that they would welcome proposals for unitary government that suggest modified local authority boundaries. The best way to ensure that a proposal is compliant with both invitation and relevant legislation whilst also achieving the Councils' desire to make a proposal that involves boundary changes is to adopt a bifurcated approach. The proposal should first set out the base proposal based on existing district council boundaries and briefly explain why such a proposal would meet the various criteria set out in the Secretary of State's invitation and attached guidance. The proposal should then go on to set out a modified proposal that is not based on such boundaries and explain in detail why such a modified proposal is superior to the base proposal and why it better meets the various criteria. Such an approach is the best way to reduce the risk of either the proposal being rejected by the Secretary of State or, if adopted by the Secretary of State, such a decision being successfully challenged by way of judicial review.

9.4. The legislation sets out that it is for the Secretary of State to determine which proposal to implement, with or without modification. As with any decision of a public body, there is potential for legal challenge by way of judicial review.

9.5. The test for any new authority is that they must be 'safe and legal' on vesting day (in this case on 1 April 2028). That will be the responsibility of the shadow unitary authorities, working in conjunction with existing authorities. This will also be one of the areas of focus of the Governance workstream as part of the Hertfordshire wide programme.

9.6. Following Cabinet's decision on 19 November, the Hertfordshire Leaders Group will submit the final version to DLUHC by 28 November 2025. Should Government accept

any of the proposals for consultation, a statutory consultation period and Structural Change Order will follow.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. A summary of the financial modelling is contained within the main body of the report. The 11 Chief Finance Officers in Hertfordshire have been working closely together, alongside specialist consultants, to develop the financial model. The model is based on a number of assumptions and the best information available to us at the current time.

10.2. Hertfordshire received a grant of £378,077 from Government to support the development of the submission. Each Council has additionally committed £28,000 each to support the work. This has been spent on consultants to support the delivery of the programme and on specialist external advice when required. Further sums will be required to support the transition programme and this will be considered as part of the 2026/27 budget process. This would include the costs referenced in the HR implications section, as well as our contribution to cross-Hertfordshire work.

10.3 At this stage the financial modelling does not fully consider how up-front costs will be funded. Some of those costs would be best incurred when the new Councils are in their shadow year. There may be the opportunity to capitalise transition costs.

10.4 If Government proceeds to the next stage of the reorganisation process, it is expected to issue Section 24 Directions under the 2007 Act. These are national financial safeguards that temporarily require councils in affected areas to seek consent before making major new financial commitments, so that no decisions are taken which could prejudice the establishment of any new authorities. While no such Direction currently applies, officers are monitoring national guidance to ensure readiness should these controls come into effect.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. The Council's risk register contains an entry in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution, with the highest overall risk score available of 9, due to the high risk nature of the project. Risks identified include the ability to deliver the programme, the potential impact on staff, the significant scale of the implementation phase, potential impacts on decision making in the short term and the risk to some discretionary district services due to the need to meet rising social care costs. Mitigations include the ongoing commitment for council staff to support and shape the proposals, plus support being put in place for staff (see section 15 below).

11.3. In addition to the Council's own risk register entry, a separate risk register is being maintained by the central Programme Management Office (PMO). The Council's Chief Executive is one of four who sit on the Programme Board overseeing and guiding the work of the PMO.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. A joint Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed in relation to the submission and can be found at Appendix C of the submission document. Further assessments will need to be undertaken as changes to service delivery models are considered in due course.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. A joint Sustainability Impact Assessment has been completed in relation to the submission and can be found at Appendix D of the submission document.

14.2. Sustainability Impact Assessments will need to be undertaken as implementation plans are further developed and changes to service delivery models considered.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 Developing the submission document has had significant impact on the workload of staff, particularly our most senior officers. It is recognised that the work to support the transition to the new authorities, whilst also ensuring our community see no difference in business as usual and we deliver any legacy projects the Council wishes to prioritise will place significant strain on staff. This will be subject to ongoing monitoring and discussion between officers and councillors to try to ensure the right balance. It may be necessary to employ additional staff to deliver all of this work, including to backfill for any officers who are delivering the transition programme.

15.2 It is also recognised that the uncertainty caused by reorganisation will have an impact on staff, at different times. Training and support are already in place to assist with this and a programme will be delivered until April 2028. The Council is developing a new workforce strategy, to ensure that staff are supported and are put in the best possible position to thrive whilst at North Herts Council and in whatever role they undertake in the future. The Leadership Team are providing honest and open updates to staff on a regular basis to help understanding of the process.

15.3 There are of course significant workforce implications relating to reorganisation and there is a dedicated workforce workstream as part of the Hertfordshire programme. We need to have the resources to contribute to this process whilst also supporting our current staff. This workstream will consider issues such as (but not limited to) TUPE, equalisation of terms and conditions, HR policies and recruitment processes for the senior roles. The Chief Executive has committed to keeping staff updated on the timelines for when these issues will be addressed and there will be ongoing engagement with staff through the various available forums, as well as with union representatives.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Hertfordshire LGR Proposals Overview

16.2 Appendix B – Hertfordshire LGR Proposals – 2 Unitary Authorities

16.3 Appendix C – Hertfordshire LGR Proposals – 3 Unitary Authorities

16.4 Appendix D – Hertfordshire LGR Proposals – 4 Unitary Authorities

16.5 Appendix E – Hertfordshire LGR Proposals – Equality Impact Assessment

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 See links within report.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE

OVERALL PROPOSAL 'SPINE' DOCUMENT

V3 draft - last saved 6th November 2025

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Accompanying documents:

- Proposal for 2 Unitary Authorities
- Proposal for 3 Unitary Authorities
- Proposal for 4 Unitary Authorities
- Appendix C - Equalities Impact Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

All 11 Councils in Hertfordshire are committed to reshaping local government to deliver simpler, more accountable and more sustainable services for our 1.2 million residents and being effective delivery partners with a future Strategic Authority.

This suite of documents has been prepared by Hertfordshire Councils in response to the government's English Devolution White Paper and the formal statutory invitation from the Secretary of State on 5 February 2025, which sets out expectations for stronger, more strategic local leadership, simplified governance structures and greater alignment of public services. Our proposals respond directly to that agenda: we aim to unlock the benefits of devolution, ensure readiness for a future Hertfordshire Strategic Authority and Mayoral model, and provide a foundation for resilient and effective public services for the long term.

Partners in Hertfordshire share a common ambition for what can be achieved through devolution and reorganisation but currently hold different views on the best delivery model. We have collaboratively developed and tested three credible options using a wide range of evidence and information. We have also undertaken extensive consultation with our residents, partners and other stakeholders to understand their views.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">A single, shared ambition for what devolution and reorganisation could unlock for Hertfordshire's communities, places and services.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Rigorously tested options for the best Unitary Authority delivery model.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Two Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire</td><td>Three Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire</td><td>Four Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire</td></tr>
<tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>Three Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire (Modified)</td><td>Four Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire (Modified)</td></tr>
<tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">A commitment from all 11 Councils in Hertfordshire to work together to deliver whatever model is ultimately chosen by the Secretary of State</td></tr>
</table>

This 'spine' document sets out our common ambition and shared evidence base, summarises and appraises the options, and gives a clear indication of which Councils in Hertfordshire support each option, as required by the Secretary of State. It is accompanied by three distinct proposals, one for each of the identified unitary models. The three proposals are appended to this document.

Two of our proposals include a request for the Secretary of State to modify existing district and borough boundaries. Further information about these requests and the underlying base proposals is included, with the case being made for these changes in the relevant proposals.

Alongside our shared ambition and options appraisal, this document summarises:

- the financial context for Hertfordshire and the potential impact of LGR;
- our plan for empowering communities;
- the collaborative process we have undertaken to consult on proposals;
- our plans to mitigate the risks associated with disrupting critical services, and
- how we plan to deliver the transition to new Unitary Authorities.

Work across Hertfordshire is proceeding at pace beyond these proposals. Councils are working together to engage residents, staff and partners in shaping the future of services, exploring opportunities for prevention and integration and considering what we can do in the interim, alongside, planning carefully for the transition to new Unitary Authorities once our direction of travel is known following a decision by the Secretary of State.

Whatever decision is reached, all Councils in Hertfordshire will work together to deliver on it.

SCHEDULE OF SUPPORT

Guidance from MHCLG is clear that: “for the final proposal(s), each council can submit a single proposal for which there must be a clear single option and geography”.

For avoidance of doubt, whilst this document has been developed collaboratively by all 11 Councils within Hertfordshire, individual first preferences for a specific unitary option are recorded below.

The legislation which enables Local Government Reorganisation requires that proposals submitted by local authorities, for consideration by the Secretary of State, must be based on existing district council boundaries. In cases where it is considered that there is a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification and changes to the boundaries are considered to be an improvement on the base proposal it is possible to request the Secretary of State to exercise their power to modify the base proposal to include the desired boundary changes.

In this submission we set out three base proposals 2UA, 3UA and 4UA. The local authorities who support the 3UA and 4UA models consider that they would be significantly improved if their boundaries were altered and in accordance with the legislation, those local authorities have decided to request the Secretary of State to exercise their power to modify the 3UA and 4UA proposals to include the boundary changes.

In summary, the required modifications are thought to be necessary for the primary reasons of aligning boundaries to reflect the realities of the place; to align administrative boundaries with established communities, to position local economic and social areas, and for the financial sustainability of new councils. A fuller explanation of the justification for these modifications is set out within this document and the accompanying individual proposals.

The undersigned are agreed that whatever decision is ultimately made regarding a preferred model of unitary local government for Hertfordshire, following consultation with the Secretary of State, all Councils will work together to implement it positively, constructively and at pace, in pursuit of our shared ambition.

OPTION A -TWO UNITARY AUTHORITIES - IS SUPPORTED BY:

Authority	Signature
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]

OPTION B - THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES - IS SUPPORTED BY:

Authority	Signature
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]

OPTION C – FOUR UNITARY AUTHORITIES - IS SUPPORTED BY:

Authority	Signature
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]
Logo and name	.....
	[Name – position]

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This 'spine' document and the accompanying three proposals are a direct response to the government's stated assessment criteria for local government reorganisation. The table below shows how and where each criterion is addressed.

MHCLG criteria (summarised)	MHCLG sub-criteria (summarised)	This 'spine' document includes...	The accompanying three proposals include...
1. Establishing a single tier of local government	*a) Sensible economic areas and tax base.* *b) Sensible geography that meets housing supply and local needs.* *c) Robust evidence and analysis.* *d) Clear description of structures and intended outcomes.*	• A factual summary of each proposal, its structure, geography and key features. • A summary of analysis undertaken and evidence available.	• Further information and evidence on each option. • Key arguments from the supporters of each model on why theirs is the best option to deliver our shared ambition.
2. Size, efficiency, capacity	*a) & b) Guiding principles on population sizes.* *c) Efficiency and VFM.* *d) Managing transition costs.* *e) BV intervention / EFS – not relevant.* *f) Debt – not relevant.*	• Comparative analysis of population sizes. • A description of our approach to financial assessment and comparison of models and a summary of results.	• Key arguments from the supporters of each model on the appropriate scale of unitary organisations. • Accompanying narrative on financial resilience.
3. Quality, sustainable services	*a) Improving services.* *b) Public service reform.* *c) Impacts on critical services.*	• Our shared ambition for improving services to residents and the public. • How we plan to mitigate the risk of disaggregating critical services.	• Key arguments from the supporters of each model on service improvements, public service reform and the future shape of critical services.
4. Collaboration and local engagement	*a) Local collaboration.* *b) Local identity, culture, history.* *c) Local engagement.*	• The process we have followed to work together in response to the White Paper. • How we have engaged with the public, partners and other key stakeholders to consult on options for reorganisation.	• Key arguments from the supporters of each model on identity, culture and history. • A summary of relevant findings from the stakeholder engagement process and how these have shaped each proposal.
5. Unlocking devolution	*a) Existing case – not relevant.* *b) 'unlock devolution'.* *c) Population ratios and timelines.*	• A description of how all proposals will facilitate a future Strategic Authority and unlock devolution.	• Specific considerations for each model around working with a Strategic Authority and supporting devolution.
6. Community empowerment	*a) Community engagement.* *b) Building on existing arrangements.*	• Overview of strategy and approach to community empowerment.	• Specific considerations for each proposed model.

"BASE" PROPOSAL AND MODIFIED PROPOSAL

The "base" proposal for the 3 and 4 unitary options is detailed within the options appraisal chapter on page 30, along with the specific boundary changes that supporters are requesting the Secretary of State to enact in parallel. This chapter provides a side-by-side comparison of the "base" and modified proposals and sets out key differences between the two.

The rationale for specific boundary change requests is set out in more detail within the accompanying proposals for 3 and 4 unitary authorities.

For clarity, beyond the opening section of the options appraisal chapter, the remainder of the document focuses on evaluation of our modified proposals, as the preferred end point for the supporters of each model.

ASKS OF GOVERNMENT

To help us deliver the policy objectives for the Devolution White Paper at pace, we have the following asks of government:

1. PROCESS AND TIMETABLE

- A clear government process and timetable for decisions, Structural Change Orders, and transition, with confirmation that the LGR/devolution programme remains on track and to the original timescales despite recent ministerial changes.
- Further clarity on the process and timeline for establishment of Strategic Authorities, with commitment that this proceeds in parallel with the creation of Unitary Authorities.
- Confirmation of legislative interpretation: clarity that, under the current Bill, (I) any new Unitary Authorities must operate a Leader and Cabinet model (Clause 57 and Schedule 25, new Section 9B); (ii) all existing Councils operating a committee system must convert to Leader and Cabinet model within 12 months of commencement, except where reorganisation is under way, in which case the requirement is disapplied until dissolution (Schedule 25, new Section 9K).[1]

2. FINANCE AND RESOURCING

- Clarity on the treatment of General Fund balances, earmarked reserves, and outstanding debt during transition.
- Clarity on Fair Funding Review (FFR) impacts on the new Unitary Authorities and Strategic Authority.
- How Housing Revenue Accounts will be considered and managed both through transition and post transition.

[1]Our interpretation (to be confirmed) is that the bill, if enacted, will require that (i) any new authorities created through a reorganisation process must operate a leader/cabinet model (Clause 57 & Sched 25 new section 9B) (ii) all existing LA's operating a committee system must convert to L/C within 12 months of the commencement of the Act, except for the following (iii) a special provision has been included for those existing committee system LA's which are undergoing LGR, the effect of which is to disapply the requirement to convert to L/C in the run up to their dissolution. (sched 25 new section 9K)

- Funding and capacity support for transition and implementation, covering both unitary Councils and the Strategic Authority. We expect the one-off costs of implementation alone to be in the range of £90m to £100m[2]
- Support with the costs of establishing new Town and Parish Councils, and clear government support for the principle of undertaking Community Governance Reviews in parallel with LGR.
- Clarity on approaches to borrowing and the handling of capital expenditure, particularly between now and 2028 and in the early stages of the new Authorities where capital projects might overlap this process.

3. HOUSING AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNTS (HRAS)

- Clarity on how HRAs can continue to deliver urgent works and investment into stock within Business Plans, including refinancing, under the restrictions of section 24 of the 2007 Act.
- Consent on the timing of HRA aggregation across new Unitary Authorities, ensuring continuity of service and investment, and confirmation of how houses currently held by non-HRA authorities will be treated when combined with HRA authorities.

4. SECTION 24 DIRECTIONS

- A review of the thresholds for issuing directions under Section 24 of the 2007 Act once Structural Change Orders are made, to facilitate smooth service delivery and transition.
- Specifically, confirmation of whether the government will retain precedent thresholds (land disposals over £100,000; capital contracts over £1m; non-capital contracts over £100,000 whole-life cost), and whether greater local discretion could be provided.

5. BOUNDARIES AND CIVIC IDENTITY

- Support to enact boundary changes required under the three-unitary and four-unitary models, including confirmation of the statutory process that will be followed.
- Supporting the preservation of civic status and ceremonial continuity in areas affected by reorganisation.
- Specifically, ensuring that Local Government Reorganisation plans are supported by legislation and the establishment of a Trustee Committee, that explicitly preserves and maintains the historic City status for St Albans and its associated ceremonial Mayoralty, and market rights set out within Letters Patent and Royal Charters.
- Support to ensure that all existing appointed Honorary Aldermen, Alderwomen, Freemen and Honorary Recorders would continue to hold their positions within Successor Unitary Authorities.
- Confirmation that there will be no “continuing authority” following the establishment of the new Unitary Authorities.

6. CREATION OF STATUTORY JOINT WASTE DISPOSAL AUTHORITIES

- Preserving the contracting scale of the county council for waste disposal services across the geography of Hertfordshire would avoid duplication of resources, cost and competition for the same regional end-treatment capacity in any new Unitary arrangement. To effectively implement services and strategies that provide the optimum financial and environmental outcomes for residents, it is important that there

[2] Detailed assumptions are provided within the financial modelling sections of this document.

is sufficient flexibility to establish an appropriate framework for waste disposal that aligns, rather than competes with, geographical strategies, constraints and context.

- It is therefore requested that the provisions of the 1985 Local Government Act that created the original Statutory Joint Waste Disposal Authorities be reinstated in order that more can be created on the same basis, and/or reinstate the provisions for the creation of Voluntary Joint Waste Authorities (collection and/or disposal), that were consulted on and introduced by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and additional waste-specific regulations, noting that these were repealed by the Deregulation Act 2015. This would provide choice to enable service delivery to best meet local need.

STRATEGIC VISION AND AMBITION

ABOUT HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire's strength lies in the diversity of its places. Our county brings together assets and identities that are distinctive and complementary: from historic market towns to new towns and garden cities, from creative industries to bioscience clusters, and from chalk streams to commuter corridors. They all work together to form a County with a strong civic identity, a varied and high-performing economy, and communities that are proud of where they live.

Future local government structures will celebrate the distinctiveness of Hertfordshire's places, while creating a framework for simpler, more accountable leadership. The following themes illustrate how local identity, heritage and economic strengths combine to shape the county and support our proposals for change.

HERITAGE AND HISTORIC TOWNS

Hertfordshire is rooted in history. St Albans, with its Roman ruins and abbey, is a city of national significance. Market towns such as Berkhamsted, Tring, Hertford, Hoddesdon and Hitchin have shaped local identity for centuries, each with strong civic traditions and historic landmarks, from castles to paper mills. Cultural assets such as Hatfield House, Knebworth House and the Frogmore Paper Trail connect communities to their heritage, while museums, abbeys and market squares remain centres of civic life.

NEW TOWNS AND GARDEN CITIES

Hertfordshire's pioneering role in planned development made its mark in the 20th century. Letchworth was the world's first Garden City, followed by Welwyn Garden City, combining housing, green space and community infrastructure. Stevenage was the UK's first new town and remains a symbol of post-war ambition. Today, these towns are being reshaped through ambitious regeneration programmes, new bus interchanges, station gateway projects and cycle networks. Hemel Garden Communities and the Gilston area, which forms part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town located to the east of the county, add a new chapter with thousands of homes planned as part of sustainable growth strategies.

INNOVATION AND INDUSTRY

Hertfordshire is at the forefront of science and technology. Stevenage is home to one of the largest life sciences campuses in Europe, with companies such as Airbus, MBDA, GSK and Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult anchoring the UK's biomedical and aerospace sectors. In addition, GSK is developing a new 28-acre life sciences hub in Ware. Maylands Business Park in Hemel Hempstead and the Herts IQ Enterprise Zone reinforce this industrial strength, while the A10 corridor is attracting new technology and data infrastructure, including Google's investment in data centres. The University of Hertfordshire and teaching hospitals provide the talent pipeline to sustain this innovation, linking education and research directly to local industry.

CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

The county is also a hub for creativity. Hertsmere, home of Elstree Studios which hosts BBC and Sky, has become central to the UK's screen and film industries supported by a growing cluster of studios, suppliers and creative talent. Three Rivers District Council is home to Warner Bros Studios, the largest in Europe, and the world-famous Harry Potter Studio Tours on the shared

boundary with Watford. Planning permission has also just been given for new development at Langleybury to create a significant campus for support industries and new studio space.

Festivals, theatres and museums add to a vibrant cultural scene that combines local traditions with international reach. Diversity is celebrated and visible in community initiatives, cultural events and civic life, ensuring Hertfordshire remains a place where people feel a strong sense of belonging. In 2022, Watford was recognised as a 'rainbow town' by The Geographical Journal with its ethnic diversity increasing fourfold since 2001, fostering a welcoming and inclusive community.

NATURAL LANDSCAPES AND RURAL HERTFORDSHIRE

Beyond its towns, Hertfordshire is rich in natural assets. The Chilterns National Landscape and Ashridge Estate provide green space of national renown and significance, while the county's chalk streams are among some of the rarest habitats on the planet. Agricultural land and rural villages sustain a heritage of farming and food production and offer residents and visitors vital access to open landscapes. These natural features are part of Hertfordshire's identity and underpin its ambitions for sustainability, net zero and healthier communities.

CONNECTIVITY AND GROWTH CORRIDORS

Hertfordshire's location defines much of its character. With fast road and rail links to London via the M1, M25, A1, A10, Thameslink, Metropolitan Line, London Overground, West Coast Main Line and East Coast railway line, the county is closely integrated into the wider South East economy. It also sits on the Oxford-Cambridge-London innovation arc, with direct access to world-class research and global markets. Further major growth corridors are emerging, including Hemel Garden Communities and the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, where the UK Health Security Agency will be based just beyond East Hertfordshire's borders, as well as town centre renewal across Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City and public realm investment in Waltham Cross. These projects show how Hertfordshire is preparing for the future yet also focusing on retaining its local character.

DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

While the current two-tier system has served Hertfordshire for over fifty years, we recognise that the national context is changing and that direction of travel is towards reorganisation. We are proud of what we have achieved together, but we recognise that at times our existing structures can fragment service delivery and confuse residents.

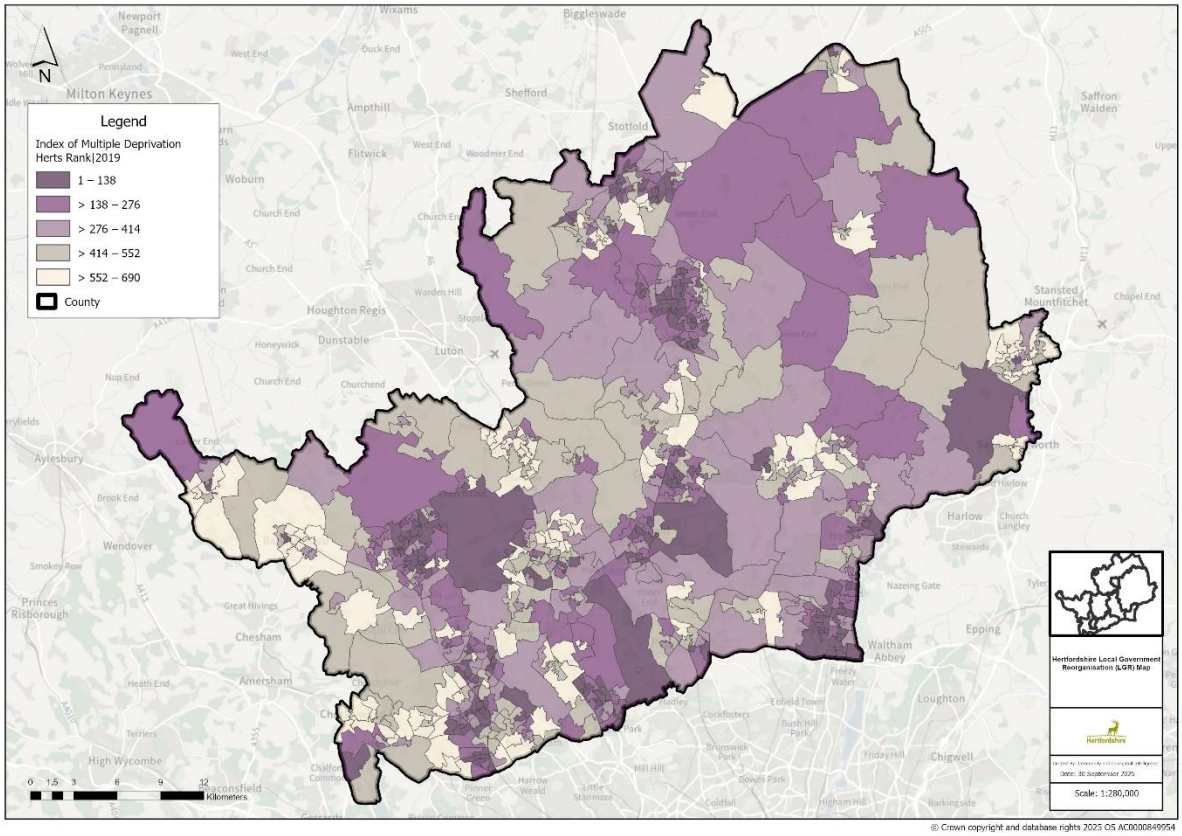
DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Hertfordshire has 1.2 million residents and is set to grow by 22% by 2045(internal projection), The bigger shift is that of our ageing population, with the 65+ age group set to grow by around 40% over the same period. At the same time, adopted and emerging local plans provide for around 120,000 new homes over the next 10–15 years, largely within urban areas that already accommodate almost 90% of people on one third of the county's land. This combination of a larger, older population alongside significant, town focused housing growth will increase demand for school places, Primary and Community Health, Adult Social Care, transport and utilities. It strengthens the case for public service reform and devolution to enable Hertfordshire to plan housing, infrastructure and care together at the right scale, align capital programmes, and invest earlier in prevention to manage long-term demand.

INEQUALITIES AND DEPRIVATION

Hertfordshire is a prosperous county on average, but the gaps within are stark. People in the most deprived areas die three to four years earlier and spend up to 18 additional years in poor health, compared with those in the least deprived. Deprivation is concentrated in specific neighbourhoods, with parts of Stevenage, Broxbourne, Hertsmere and Watford among the 10% most deprived nationally, a situation further compounded by recent cost-of-living pressures. Around 4,000 families, including 9,500 children, are affected by the benefit cap, leaving them on average £65 a week worse off than they would otherwise be if receiving Universal Credit.

MAP: DEPRIVATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE



These inequalities drive demand for local services: Councils collectively see more than 7,000 homelessness approaches a year, and 1,377 households (including 1,841 children) were living in temporary accommodation at the end of last year. Higher prevalence of long-term health conditions in deprived communities also adds pressure on Adult Social Care and NHS services. Tackling these entrenched inequalities requires stronger prevention, earlier intervention and more joined-up action across housing, health, skills and employment. Current fragmented governance makes this difficult to deliver at the scale required. Reorganisation creates the opportunity to simplify responsibilities, align investment with need, and target resources where they can have the greatest impact in reducing inequality.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES

Hertfordshire faces escalating climate risks: increased flooding, heatwaves in urban areas, water stress (local usage 15% above UK average), drought threatening agriculture, and wildfire

risk in heathlands. All councils in Hertfordshire are taking urgent action to reduce carbon emissions, with the County setting a 2030 carbon-neutral target. Meeting this ambition is challenging against a backdrop of rapid growth: adopted and emerging local plans allocate around 120,000 new homes over the next 10–15 years, while residents already drive 7.4 billion vehicle-miles annually across a network of 3,200 miles of roads.

These pressures demand a more coherent system of governance. Fragmentation between County, District and Borough councils makes it harder to align planning, transport, energy and nature recovery. Reorganisation presents opportunities to retrofit homes at scale, expand active and public transport, accelerate EV infrastructure, and protect and enhance biodiversity. Reorganisation provides a platform for joined-up leadership on net zero and sustainability, ensuring that environmental goals are embedded in housing, transport and economic planning, and that Hertfordshire's growth is managed in a way that supports both prosperity and climate resilience.

INCREASING STRAIN ON PUBLIC SERVICES

Organisations in Hertfordshire are in a relatively strong financial position in comparison to similar areas across the Country, with no Authorities under intervention or in receipt of exceptional financial support from the government and none of the serious debt issues that place serious constraints on reorganisation in other areas. Through collaboration and transformation, our partnership has delivered substantial savings and managed demand effectively (overall children in care rates are lower than England's, though need is uneven in places like Stevenage and parts of Broxbourne). Even so, rising costs, volume and complexity are stretching capacity:

- Requests for support to Adult Social Care in Hertfordshire have risen by 58% during the last decade in England, from 20,820 in 2015/16 to 32,795 in 2023/24.
- The number of referrals to children's social care in Hertfordshire have increased by 22% since 2019/20 from 5,377 to 6,536 in 2024/25.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation in Hertfordshire has increased by 25% over the past six years, from 1,157 at the start of FY 2019/20 to 1,450 at the start of FY 2025/26.
- The number of children and young people with a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has risen by 251% over the past decade in Hertfordshire compared to 166% nationally - from 3,682 in 2015 (the first comparable year after EHCPs were introduced) to 12,920 in January 2025 and over 15,000 in November 2025. At the same time, pupils with an identified special educational need or disability but without an EHCP in Hertfordshire schools has increased by 31% from 24,293 in 2015 to 31,966 in 2025.

These dynamics, driven in part by demographic change, demonstrate the need to build more resilience into the system: simpler, more integrated organisations with clearer accountability and devolved powers to shift investment into prevention, share scarce expertise, and manage risks effectively at both a strategic and local scale.

SIMPLIFICATION FOR RESIDENTS AND PARTNERS

Residents expect simplicity but are sometimes faced with overlapping responsibilities, duplicate contact points and varied experiences. Financial pressure, demand-led services, and complex governance structures have made this harder to sustain. Residents face a patchwork of responsibilities: waste collected by Districts, disposed of by the County; Housing run locally, but Children's Services run county-wide; meaning services are not always easy to navigate.

Key partners such as the NHS and police must also hold relationships with eleven different councils in the current system. Reorganisation offers a chance to reset governance, clarify accountability, give partners a clearer line of sight, and help Hertfordshire to speak with a louder voice on behalf of residents outside its boundaries.

OUR SHARED VISION

Hertfordshire is ambitious for its people and its places. With a population of 1.2 million and a dynamic economy worth nearly £50bn, we want every resident to reach their full potential and no one to be left behind.

As our communities grow and evolve, so too must the way we deliver public services. Advances in technology mean people are used to fast, personalised and easy-to-use services in other parts of their lives and they expect the same from public services. Public service reorganisation presents a once in a generation opportunity to rethink how services are delivered; a rare change to making them more connected, more responsive and more focused on what matters most to our residents, businesses and communities.

We want to build a system that supports people throughout their lives: one that gives children the best start; helps residents develop skills for life and live more sustainably; makes it easier to find work and housing; and supports people to live and age well in their local communities. To do this our services must align and work better together.

By transforming how public services are designed and delivered, we can better meet the needs of today while preparing for the challenges of tomorrow. That means unifying services around people and places, ensuring that services are integrated; focusing on resilience and prevention and using data and technology to deliver better outcomes and develop new models that wrap support around Hertfordshire's most vulnerable residents.

New unitary local government bodies for Hertfordshire will clarify accountability to residents, reduce duplication and generate financial savings that can be reinvested in local services.

WHAT DEVOLUTION AND A MAYORAL STRATEGIC AUTHORITY COULD UNLOCK FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

MHCLG Criterion 5: supporting devolution arrangements

This section describes the Hertfordshire Councils' ambition for devolution in the county. We recognise that devolution is achieved through a separate legislative process, and we have written to the Secretary of State in this regard. The references throughout this document are intended to signal our ambition and demonstrate how our strategic direction supports the government's potential opportunities for Hertfordshire.

Our ambition is to deliver devolution alongside Local Government Reorganisation to maximise benefits for residents and businesses in Hertfordshire and minimise disruption from reorganisation. This includes securing a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Hertfordshire at the earliest opportunity, launching in parallel to the new unitary authorities.

As a major economic engine for the UK, with a dynamic economy and a growing population in excess of 1.2 million, devolution gives us an important opportunity to take greater control of our future. The government's national devolution agenda is a chance for us to secure the powers and funding needed to address our specific challenges and build on our remarkable strengths.

Our economy is a powerhouse, generating a Gross Value Added (GVA) of £50bn - almost the same as Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire combined. Our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of over £40,500 would be among the highest of any Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) area in the country.

We are planning our devolution geography based on the County of Hertfordshire. We believe it is of sufficient scale to warrant devolution and would be larger than many existing and planned devolution arrangements. By forming an MSA for Hertfordshire, we can ensure that critical decisions about our economy, infrastructure, and public services are made here, closer to the communities we serve and therefore better for our residents.

MAYORAL AUTHORITY: A STRONGER, MORE COHESIVE STRUCTURE FOR THE COUNTY

A Mayoral Strategic Authority for Hertfordshire would help us to achieve:

- A stronger voice for Hertfordshire: a directly elected Mayor would sit on national bodies like the Council of Nations and Regions, advocating directly to the Prime Minister for our county's interests.
- Unified public services: the Mayor would assume strategic responsibilities of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Fire and Rescue Authority, creating services that are more efficient and coordinated.
- Integrated health and care: with representation on the Central East Integrated Care Board, the Mayor would be in a prime position to champion strategic alignment of health services with local government, designed around the needs of our communities.
- Economic growth: an MSA would manage this economic area as a single, strategic entity, potentially enabling us to leverage further investment from the private sector and deliver a joined-up Local Growth Plan.

This model would be underpinned by our plans for a streamlined local government structure of new Unitary Councils, ensuring services are both strategic and responsive to local communities.

A Mayoral Strategic Authority will help us go further and faster with:

Powering our world-class economy and investing in skills.	As we set out in more detail below, Hertfordshire is a unique economic powerhouse. An MSA would provide a single economic vision for the county. Building on the success of Hertfordshire's Local Enterprise Partnership, an MSA would have the devolved powers to direct investment to where it will have the greatest impact. With control over the Adult Skills Fund and a central role in the Local Skills Improvement Plan, we can ensure our workforce has the high-level skills needed for the jobs of the future, tackling skills gaps and supporting residents into better careers. This means aligning our excellent education providers directly with the needs of our innovative employers.

Building the right homes in the right places.	Our economic vibrancy creates intense pressure on housing, making it difficult for many local people to afford a home. With a housing affordability ratio of 10.15 (compared to the England average of 7.71), driven by a median house price of £449,950, strategic action is essential. An MSA provides the tools to tackle this head-on by: • Developing a county-wide Spatial Development Strategy, ensuring a more coherent and strategic approach to planning for new homes and employment sites. • Directing grant funding for housing and regeneration, allowing us to prioritise the delivery of genuinely affordable homes. • Using Compulsory Purchase Powers to unlock stalled sites and assemble land for key housing developments. This strategic oversight will build on our innovative work in developing Joint Strategic Plans in the county and ensure we go beyond simply building houses, to creating sustainable, well-connected communities.
Creating a modern, connected transport network.	Positioned at a national crossroads with the M1, A1(M), and M25 as well as national rail routes, Hertfordshire's transport network is vital to our economy but suffers from severe congestion. As the single Local Transport Authority, an MSA would have the power to manage this network strategically. This will enable us to create a truly integrated transport system – from east to west as well as north to south - linking rail, bus, and road travel more effectively as well as supporting active travel routes. Crucially, it will also allow us to accelerate the decarbonisation of our transport system, improving air quality and the health of our residents while meeting our climate goals.
A greener, healthier future for all.	Devolution offers a powerful opportunity to improve the quality of life for every resident. An MSA would take a leading role in tackling the climate crisis and enhancing our natural environment, delivering on our ambitions to be a net-zero county and implementing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Furthermore, an MSA can directly address deep-seated health inequalities. By focusing on the wider determinants of health, such as access to good jobs, quality housing, and a clean environment, the Mayor can champion a new, more ambitious approach. This integrated vision, combining economic, environmental, and social policy, is the key to ensuring that everyone in Hertfordshire can lead a long, healthy-, and prosperous life.

WHAT REORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT COULD UNLOCK FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

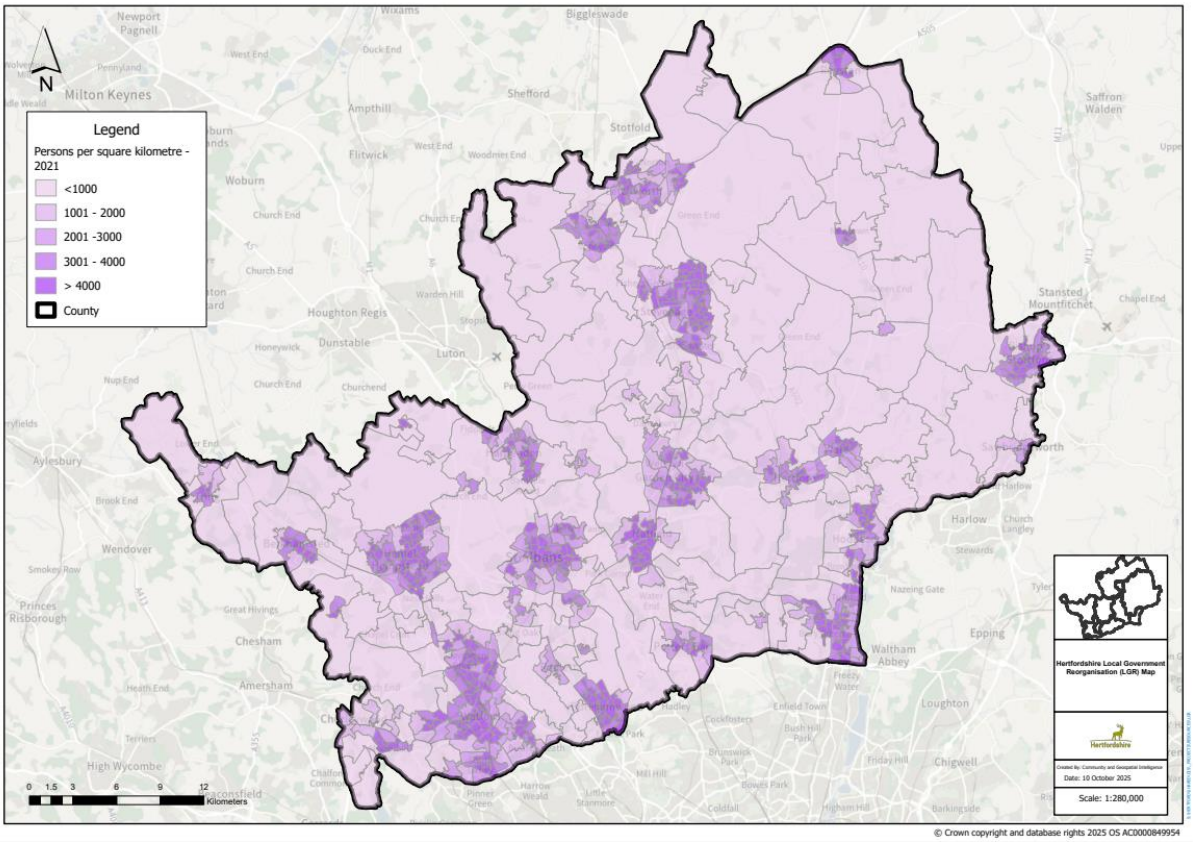
Our ambition for new unitary local government organisations in Hertfordshire extends far beyond simply being effective delivery partners for a Strategic Authority. The process of reorganising will be challenging, but it will also unleash huge energy and potential to accelerate delivery on behalf of our communities and place, and to transform and modernise local government institutions in Hertfordshire.

COMMUNITIES	PLACE	SERVICES
Empowered, connected and inclusive	Unlocking growth and opportunity	Integrated, efficient and people-centred

A STRONGER, SMARTER, MORE SUSTAINABLE HERTFORDSHIRE THROUGH DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

COMMUNITIES: EMPOWERED, CONNECTED AND INCLUSIVE

MAP: POPULATION DENSITY IN HERTFORDSHIRE



1.24m residents rising to 1.48[3]m by 2045	… of whom 20% aged under 15 and 18% over 65	28% of residents from an ethnic minority compared with 27% for England	490,000 households
1 city (St. Albans), 25 towns, 100s of villages and hamlets	124 town and parish councils	Over 400 places of worship and faith centres across the county	5,451 Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector organisations spending £856m within Hertfordshire

We want every resident to feel connected, valued and safe and for Hertfordshire to be a place that everyone is proud to call home.

Local government reorganisation brings a rare and important opportunity to reimagine the relationship between communities and local government, strengthening the connection with communities and delivering more effective public services. We are committed to building a county where every individual has the power to make a difference in tackling increasing challenges in society such as social cohesion and inequality.

Our vision is a thriving democracy where people shape their places and futures. We will build on what works, testing our approach with Town and Parish Councils and co-designing solutions with the voluntary and community sector.

Transparency and accountability will be at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to inclusive, open dialogue, reaching seldom heard voices and removing barriers to participation. We will invest in community capacity and build confidence, improving how we share information, creating opportunities for people to shape the decisions that affect their lives. Our communities will be empowered to connect, collaborate and flourish, supported by networks that share resources, ideas and assets.

Together, we will make Hertfordshire the place where community empowerment is not just policy, it is how we live, govern and build our shared future. Our approach creates practical mechanisms for individuals to exercise genuine power over the decisions that affect them, while building resilient communities capable of addressing complex challenges through collaborative action.

By creating inclusive, resilient and vibrant communities, supported by a thriving local business base, we will improve quality of life and sustainability outcomes for current residents and attract new people, skills and investment into our county.

We will work in partnership with residents, community groups, businesses and local leaders to co-design services and deliver lasting change. Our approach will be rooted in local identity, transparency and trust. We will also celebrate Hertfordshire's unique history and traditions, building civic pride and a strong sense of belonging.

[3] Internal projection based on delivery of new homes. ONS estimate is 1.32m based on July 2025 release.

CASE STUDY: CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

In 2023 the Connecting Three Rivers Board, formerly the Local Strategic Partnership, agreed the new Community Strategy for the district. This includes creation of a donations platform to generate income for a community fund that is used to support priorities within the area. The income generated has been used to support community-based organisations actively supporting the strategic priorities, and this has strengthened the creation of a shared vision and strategic approach to the area. Examples of funding used include:

Electric Umbrella breaking down barriers between mainstream and SEND schools. This project brought together two mainstream primary schools and two SEND schools for a powerful, creative collaboration rooted in music, representation and connection. The relationships were central to the project's impact of fostering understanding, empathy and friendship between pupils through shared musical experiences.

9 Lives: running an upcycling workroom course for individuals with health and wellbeing issues and learning disabilities. Students learnt to sand furniture, paint, repair, stencil and upholster items, which were then sold in the charity upcycle shop. The confidence and skills gained create significant opportunities for the individuals to develop further connections and live independently.

CASE STUDY: CO-OPERATIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS MODEL

Built on three core principles: coordination of services, clear accountability, and community empowerment, Stevenage Borough Council's Co-operative Neighbourhood's model integrates multi-disciplinary teams across council services and embeds Ward Councillors in local governance.

The model's governance structure, featuring Strategic Boards, operational leads, and councillor involvement, ensures alignment with borough-wide priorities and responsiveness to local needs.

A key initiative involved revitalising a struggling community centre on the edge of the town Facing declining attendance and funding risk, the centre was transformed through collaborative action involving council teams, Elected Members, residents, and external partners. This included physical improvements, inclusive engagement, and sustainability measures such as climate-focused enhancements and volunteer-led place-making.

CASE STUDY: BROXBOURNE'S COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Originally created to tackle the impacts of Covid, the Community Partnership, a network of local organisations that support welfare of residents, has developed and strengthened over the last few years. The partnership is made up of around 150 people from 65 organisations with representation from Broxbourne Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Housing Associations, NHS Integrated Care Board, social prescribers from three Primary Care Networks, local school partnerships, DWP and VCS partners including Citizens Advice, MIND, Churches Together and foodbanks.

Coming together every fortnight, the partnership shares information about what is happening in Broxbourne, making connections and working collaboratively to resolve local issues. Once a quarter the meeting is led by the County Councils Children's Services, focusing in on early help to support children and young people. The partnership is able to work both strategically, identifying trends and gaps across Broxbourne and also connect on individual cases, collaborating to support residents in a holistic way.

Most organisations in the network are members of Frontline, a publicly available online database of local sources of support. Frontline is used to refer clients, with their consent, to receive support from other local partner organisations; referrals comply with GDPR regulations and progress, and results of the referral can be tracked. Since its inception, the partnership has seen a significant increase in joint working to meet needs of individuals, by using the Frontline referral tool or building on relationships within the partnership to agree joint support for individuals.

In addition, the partnership is able to identify where local needs are not being met. Recently, the partnership identified a shortfall in the availability of benefits advice. A source of cost-effective, reliable training was identified and publicised around the partnership, with colleagues from across different organisations now being trained to enhance capacity and knowledge to give benefits advice to residents in the borough.

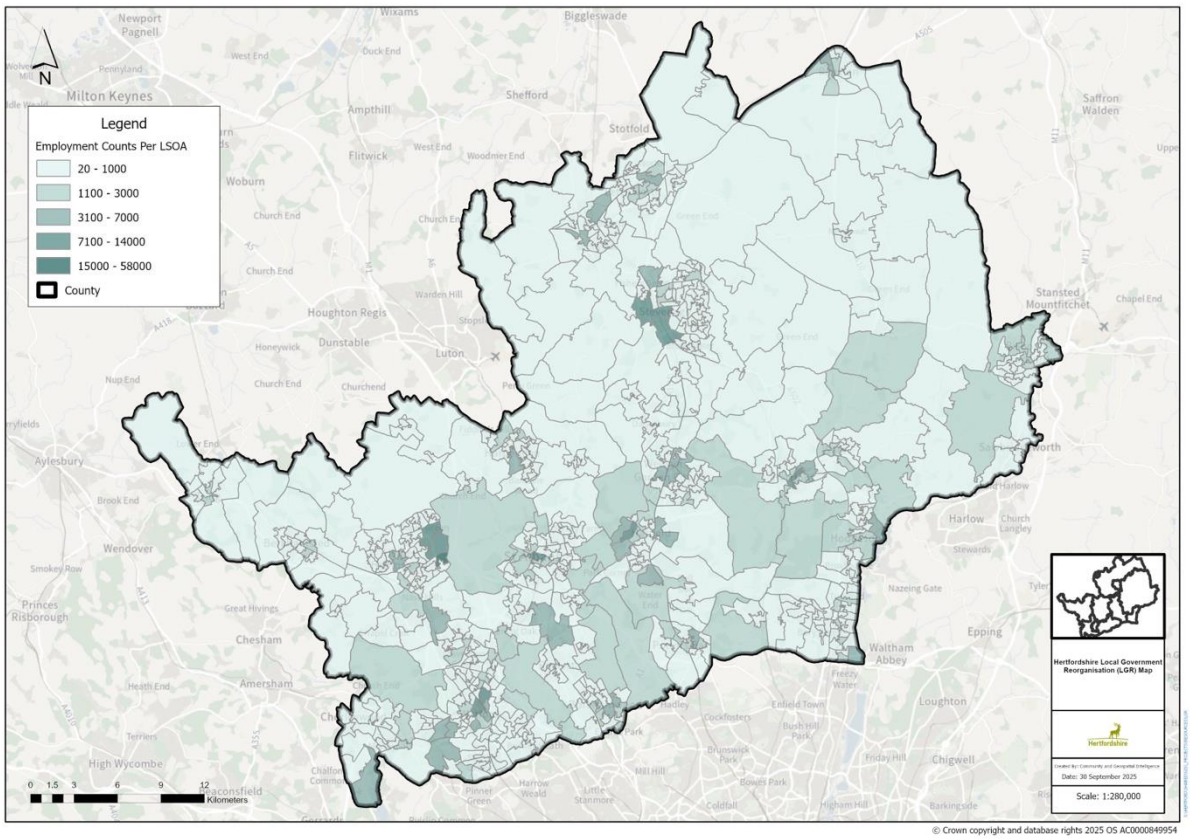
Our approach to empowering communities and protecting civic identity and heritage is set out in more detail on page 71 of this document.

OUR AMBITIONS FOR OUR communities

- **Democratic voice**: local Councillors will continue to play a vital role in representing communities, shaping services and holding decision makers to account. They will be enabled to play an expanded role within new Unitary Authorities.
- **Shared prosperity**: targeted investment and support for areas of deprivation, raising aspirations, especially among young people, and ensuring that growth is inclusive, with no communities left behind.
- **Community cohesion**: building cohesion by strengthening local identity, supporting a balanced mix of homes and jobs, and creating opportunities for people to come together through shared spaces, inclusive services and local events. By nurturing civic pride, social connection and a sense of belonging, we will help communities feel more united, resilient and confident in shaping their future.
- **Better quality of life**: improved access to public transport, leisure, high-quality and affordable homes, cultural and green spaces, actively promoting sustainability and climate resilience, delivering healthier homes, lower energy bills and thriving green spaces.
- **Shared decision making** putting the voice of the community at the centre of decision making and empowering residents and businesses to shape the services that affect them.
- **Stronger partnerships: w**orking closely with the voluntary and community sector to support grassroots initiatives, unlock local capacity-, and ensure services are responsive to the needs of all communities.

PLACE: UNLOCKING GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACROSS HERTFORDSHIRE

MAP: EMPLOYMENT DENSITY IN HERTFORDSHIRE



£46bn Gross Value Added – outperforming the East of England and UK average.	66,500 active businesses, including 40,000 in key UK growth sectors (life sciences, creative industries, defence and advanced manufacturing).	Nearly 5,000 businesses identified with high-growth potential.	4 international airports within an hour; strongly connected by road and rail to London and the OxCam Arc.
120,000 new homes allocated in adopted and emerging local plans over the next 10–15 years	Ambition for 100,000 new jobs linked to growth and regeneration programmes.	80.1% of the working aged population employed in either a full or part-time job, compared to 75.4% in England.	World-class life sciences, creative and screen, defence and aerospace, Agri-Tech and sustainable construction industries.

Hertfordshire is an economic powerhouse, generating nearly £50bn for the national economy and outpacing many major UK city regions. We also can demonstrate global capabilities across seven of the eight key sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy (IS-8), as evidenced by recent investment from Google, Airbus and Warner Bros., amongst others. Hertfordshire has 40,000 businesses in these sectors and nearly 5,000 with high growth potential. In the last quarter (April - June 2025), Hertfordshire Film Office created an estimated £6.5m economic impact –

higher than the annual average for many regions. Our sector strengths span cell and gene therapy, film and TV, precision engineering, AI and digital and space exploration, placing Hertfordshire at the heart of the UK's innovation economy.

Our economic strength is matched by the quality of our natural environment. Hertfordshire is home to one of the highest concentrations of chalk streams in the world - rare, ecologically rich rivers such as the Ver, Beane, Mimram and Lea that support unique wildlife and habitats. These globally significant natural assets, alongside the Chilterns National Landscape and our extensive green spaces, make Hertfordshire not only a place to do business, but a place where people want to live, raise families, and enjoy healthy, active lives. Protecting Hertfordshire's chalk rivers, green belt and landscapes will remain central to place identity, with natural capital recognised as critical infrastructure for climate resilience, health and wellbeing.

Strategically located between London and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, Hertfordshire offers unparalleled access to talent, investment and innovation - with half of the UK economy reachable within an hour and proximity to four international airports. The University of Hertfordshire and Royal Veterinary College are key drivers of research and skills development. Hertfordshire is home to world-class research centres, such as Rothamsted Research, advancing global agricultural science; - BRE, leading innovation in sustainable building and housing; and Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult, bringing cutting-edge therapies to market. Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter enterprise zone is providing 3 million ft^2 of sustainable commercial space, just 30 minutes from London.

The county is also modelling the future of sustainable development, with two new garden towns underway and plans to deliver 100,000 new homes and 100,000 new jobs over the next 15 - 20 years. Planned investment in the retrofitting of existing homes and buildings will also run alongside this new development, to improve energy efficiency, reduce emissions and support green jobs, ensuring that growth is both inclusive and environmentally responsible, and supports long-term community wellbeing. Our approach includes nature-based solutions that enhance climate resilience and protect our natural capital.

Investment in east-west connectivity, housing affordability, infrastructure improvements and water availability will unlock development and future growth. Focused on key transport corridors, this will create new opportunities for investment, housing, jobs and connectivity. The benefits will extend far beyond Hertfordshire, supporting regional and national prosperity while improving the everyday lives of our residents.

As we grow, we will also protect and enhance what makes Hertfordshire special, from our market towns and green spaces to our industrial heritage and strong community spirit. Our people feel proud of where they live, work and study and we want this to continue.

CASE STUDY: Autolus Case Study: Fast-Tracking Innovation in Stevenage

Stevenage is home to the UK's largest and the third largest cell and gene therapy cluster in the world, behind only Boston and San Francisco. It sits at the heart of the UK's Golden Triangle of life sciences – alongside London, Oxford, and Cambridge – and is a magnet for innovation, investment and talent.

Autolus is a leading biotech company developing advanced cell and gene therapies. When they chose Stevenage as the base for their manufacturing and research, they needed fast and flexible support to grow quickly. Stevenage Borough Council played a key role. They worked closely with Autolus and partners to speed up planning approvals and create a supportive environment for development. This meant Autolus could build and expand their facilities faster, helping them move from research to clinical production without delay.

The Council's proactive approach – alongside support from Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Futures (formerly LEP) – helped unlock investment and co-ordinate infrastructure thus enabling a high growth company to succeed and bring innovation into the town centre.

CASE STUDY: Space East: A Growing Hub for UK Space Innovation

Space East is the UK's newest and fastest-growing space cluster, based in the East of England. It brings together leaders from industry, academia, and government to unlock new opportunities in space technology and drive regional and national growth. At the heart of the cluster is Airbus, whose UK headquarters in Stevenage hosted the launch of the Community for Space Prosperity (CUSP). This initiative supports collaboration across the space ecosystem, including the Airbus Space Accelerator, which helps early-stage companies scale and connect with industry.

The University of Hertfordshire plays a key role in developing the talent pipeline, supported by a £100m investment in its new SPECTRA STEM building. The university works closely with industry to align education with workforce needs and contributes research in satellite communications, space law and sustainability. Hertfordshire Futures, alongside Airbus and North Herts College, also supports the STEM Discovery Centre – a £1m initiative inspires young people to pursue careers in space and engineering. With over 60 space-related companies in the region, Space East is now the third-largest contributor to the UK space economy. Its strength lies in the depth of its partnerships and its ability to connect research, industry and education. This ecosystem is helping deliver the UK's National Space Strategy – creating high-value jobs, attracting global investment and securing the UK's position as a leader in space-enabled technologies.

CASE STUDY: Hertfordshire's Healthy Placemaking Framework

Arising from the Hertfordshire Growth Board's 'Healthy and Safe Places for All' mission, the Hertfordshire Healthy Placemaking Framework (the 'Framework') guides the creation of healthier, safer, and more inclusive environments across the county. The framework was developed through extensive engagement with an office group from HCC, the districts and boroughs, the ICB, NHS and the voluntary sector. It embeds principles of health, wellbeing, and safety principles into planning policy – locally and strategically – ensuring that both new and existing communities support physical, mental and social health. The Framework is a key tool in improving health outcomes and tackling health inequalities, and enabling people to grow, live, move, connect, and thrive within the places they call home.

The Healthy Placemaking Framework provides guidance for Local Planning Authorities – and, in time, any Mayoral Strategic Authority – on how to embed health considerations in local plans and spatial development strategies. It sets out a joined-up and holistic approach to planning for and design of new housing developments and the regeneration of existing communities, providing a consistent approach for planning across Hertfordshire.

CASE STUDY: Delivery of 10,000 new homes and associated infrastructure

Located north of Harlow and across the River Stort in East Hertfordshire, the 'Gilston Area' will deliver 10,000 homes including 2,300 affordable homes and associated infrastructure across seven new villages. The development will benefit from over £1bn in new community infrastructure, such as schools, healthcare, and sports facilities, as well as job creation and improvements to transport links.

With outlined planning permission being given by East Herts Council in January 2025, delivery on new river crossings have started with work on the Central Stort Crossing.

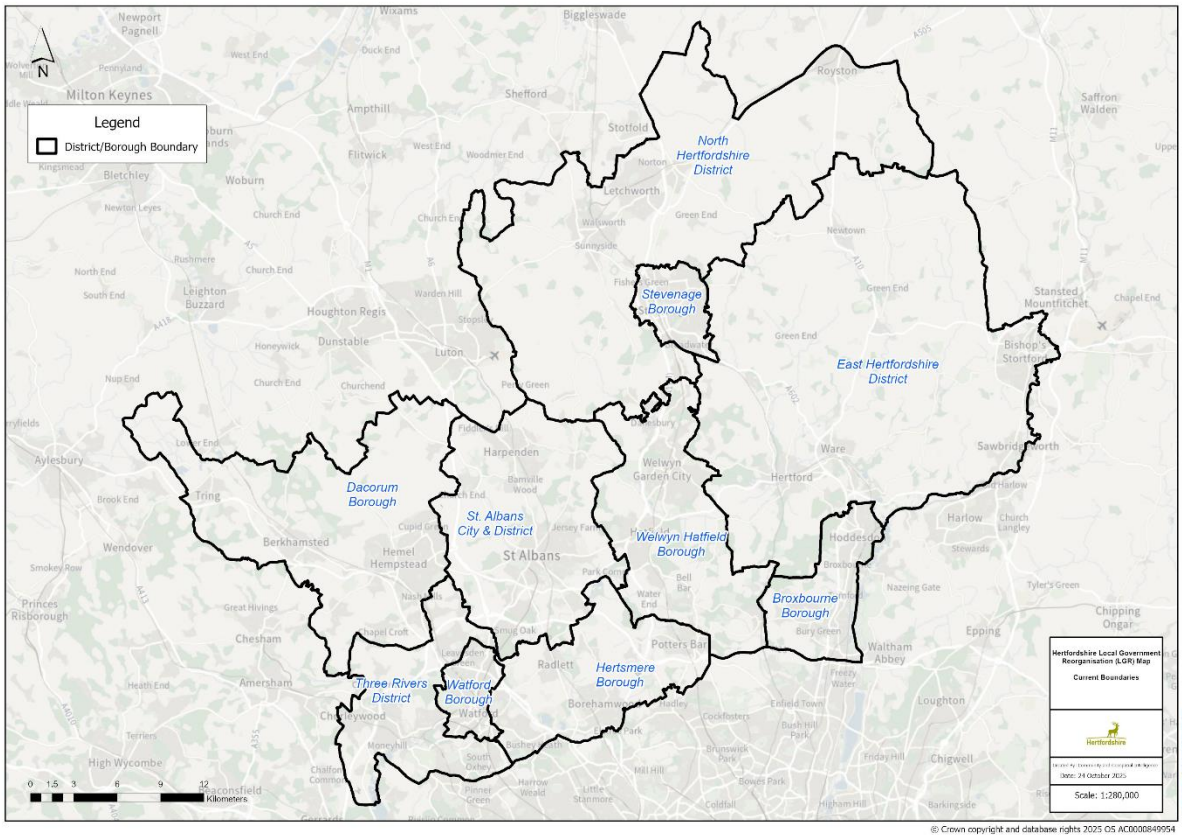
The Gilston Area forms part of Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) which was formally designated by the government in 2017. HGGT is a unique public sector partnership of five Local Authorities – East Herts District Council, Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council, Harlow District Council and Hertfordshire County Council, and collectively HGGT captures the New Town principles of bringing together the best of urban and rural, integrating green and open spaces with neighbourhoods and creating high-quality places that embrace and enable sustainable and healthy living.

OUR AMBITIONS FOR PLACE

- **Catalyst for growth**: position Hertfordshire as a powerhouse for innovation, green growth and sector excellence.
- **Accelerated housing delivery**: build quality, affordable and specialist homes, to reduce homelessness, ensure no child grows up in unsafe accommodation and adults can live independently in their own homes.
- **Sustainability**: improve east-west connectivity and promote active, low-carbon travel, making it easier to move around to access jobs and services. Embed sustainability into planning and growth, tackling climate risks, enhancing biodiversity and nature recovery, and supporting local delivery of net zero and resilience initiatives.
- **Infrastructure investment**: align housing and growth with schools, healthcare, policing and digital infrastructure supported by a streamlined, strategic planning process.
- **Integrated neighbourhood health and care services**: supporting the government's 10 Year Health Plan our vision is to deliver models of care that are preventative and better support those most in need.

SERVICES: INTEGRATED, EFFICIENT AND PEOPLE-CENTRED

MAP: HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITIES



1 County Council, 1 City and District Council, 4 Borough Councils, 5 District Councils.	Workforce of over 11,000 excluding schools (FTEs – March 2025) delivering services day to day	28,000 adults supported by adult social care (15,000 receiving long-term care). 5,876 children supported by children's social care (including 1,053 children looked after)	Estimated 120km^2 of public sector estate (7% of the county's land area).
520,000 tonnes of household waste managed annually, with recycling rates consistently above national average.	3,200 miles of roads, 116,000 streetlights, 179,000 gullies.	226,000 pupils in Hertfordshire schools; 15,000 children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan.	7,000+ approaches for help with homelessness each year; 1,377 households (including 1,841 children) living in temporary accommodation.

The current two-tier system has served Hertfordshire well for many years, but the time is right to consider how it can be strengthened for the future. At times, the overlapping responsibilities of our 11 organisations create friction when coordinating services around the varying needs of communities and places. Residents directly experience these overlapping responsibilities – housing managed locally, Children's Services county-wide, waste collected by Districts but disposed of by the County – leading to duplication, complexity and variable standards. Partners such as the NHS and police must engage across multiple footprints, slowing down joint planning and making it harder to deliver consistent outcomes.

Reorganisation gives us the chance to replace this patchwork with a simpler, more accountable model, simplify how public services are delivered, drive efficiency, reduce emissions and deliver better value for money through integrated, sustainable service models. New Unitary Authorities will provide a single point of responsibility for local services in the areas they serve, making them easier to navigate and more consistent across the county.

We will design services around people's lives, not organisational boundaries, and our workforce will help lead this transformation. This will include better coordination across services such as waste, health, supported living and housing to create cleaner, safer and more connected neighbourhoods. Services will be more responsive to local need, making them more joined up, locally relevant and focused on what matters most to residents and businesses.

OPERATIONAL BLUEPRINT FOR NEW UNITARY AUTHORITIES IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Professionals across Hertfordshire have worked together to develop a set of consistent design principles to inform the shape of new organisations. These are summarised below.

Leadership and governance	• 234–327 Councillors with appropriate levels of electoral representation. • Leader and Cabinet model with proportionate regulatory and scrutiny arrangements. • Full statutory accountability and officers within each Authority. • Inter-UA collaboration and mutual aid arrangements.
Service delivery	• Delivery and commissioning at Unitary level by default. • Shared/collaborative delivery where economies of scale are available without diluting accountability, or where markets are fragile. • HRAs and trading companies will be inherited 'as is' by new Authorities and reviewed over time.
Community empowerment	• Strong locality/neighbourhood infrastructure. • Councillors empowered to plan expanded roles within new unitary authorities. • Strong partnership with Parish and Town councils in the areas they serve.
Workforce	• c.-11,000 FTE staff transfer under TUPE into new UAs with a principle of minimal disruption to the front line. • Shared workforce planning and training in specialist and hard-to-recruit areas. • Agreement of shared values and leadership expectations and purposeful engagement with organisational culture.
Tech and data	• Cybersecurity - will be integrated into the design of all systems and services. • Technology - prioritise scalability, resilience, and sustainability in all technology solutions. Where feasible, utilise open standards to minimise the risk of vendor lock-in and enable collaboration. Adopt a strategy that considers cloud first for the deployment and management of technological assets. • Business - IT will follow the respective new authority's strategy and service goals. Digital services will be co-designed with users and customer focussed,

	facilitating self-service options. Business needs will inform technology choices. Technology will enable joined up, responsive services that can work better together, avoiding silos. • Data - will be treated as a strategic, accurate, secure, and accessible asset to inform decision making. Data sharing between services will be enabled while maintaining security and privacy. Data sharing with other public sector organisations will be facilitated. Application - duplication of applications and the accumulation of technical debt will be avoided. Preference will be given to applications that demonstrate interoperability and reusability.
Assets and estates	• Local service access points retained. • Planned rationalisation of civic offices/depots. • Partner co-location where it improves access and integration. • Use of public sector estate to deliver new housing. • Sequence disposals and regeneration opportunities against service needs and legal constraints (e.g. any HRA-linked assets) and market timing. • HRAs will cover a larger geographical area, giving opportunity for more social housing to be delivered by local government – building on existing partnerships with Homes England.
Commissioning, procurement and suppliers	• Shared frameworks for fragile/specialist markets and high-value categories when collaboration adds value. • Joint contract mapping and supplier engagement to manage novation and ensure continuity.

CASE STUDY: CONNECT AND PREVENT – TRANSFORMING SERVICES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES

The Connect and Prevent programme by Hertfordshire County Council is a leading example of how strategic community empowerment across a mixed urban-rural context is delivering measurable improvements to enable residents to lead independent lives. It combines AI-driven insight, joined-up data, and community-led delivery.

Providing better support to our community carers was identified as the biggest opportunity to delay the need for long-term care. This programme has identified over 58,000 carers and, using predictive analytics with 67% precision is forecasting breakdown events and enabling proactive intervention to prevent this. Through its Carers Hub, it will deliver personalised support via holistic conversations, local outreach and follow-ups to enable carers to feel empowered and supported. This approach has so far led to a 25% measurable improvement in wellbeing and resilience for carers, with 75% receiving community-based support and only one in eight people requiring formal assessment. It is anticipated this approach will generate £1.2m/annum financial benefit.

CASE STUDY: BUILDING RETROFIT AND HEALTHY HOMES IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire has invested significantly in creating healthier, more sustainable homes through a coordinated programme of retrofit, energy, and housing initiatives. This work demonstrates

how local government, and partnerships can de-silo planning, housing and sustainability functions to deliver system-wide benefits. Key strands of this programme include:

- Local Area Retrofit Accelerator (LARA): piloting new delivery models and supporting residents to navigate the retrofit process.
- Hertfordshire Retrofit Strategy: providing a shared framework for Councils, housing providers and partners to scale up retrofit activity across the county.
- Hertfordshire Retrofit Guide for Residents: offering clear, accessible information to households on how to improve the energy performance of their homes.
- Solar Together Hertfordshire: enabling residents to install solar panels and battery storage at scale through group buying, reducing costs and carbon emissions.
- Healthy Homes Agenda: integrating retrofit and housing quality improvements to deliver warmer, safer, more affordable homes that support public health outcomes.
- Alongside delivery projects, Hertfordshire has invested in skills and cross-disciplinary training. Planning Officers have been trained in sustainability principles, while sustainability Officers have gained training in planning processes. This joint approach is helping to embed climate action into housing, planning, and health services, breaking down silos and building shared capacity across disciplines.

Impact so far:

- Thousands of residents supported to access solar PV, retrofit and energy improvements.
- Multimillion pounds of private investment leveraged into local low-carbon housing.
- Improved officer knowledge and collaboration across planning, housing, and sustainability.
- A framework in place to scale up retrofit and healthy homes delivery county-wide.
- This integrated approach shows how local government can lead on both the strategic vision and the practical delivery of healthy, low-carbon homes, demonstrating the importance of partnership working, resident engagement and skills development.

CASE STUDY: HATFIELD RISE, HATFIELD

Hatfield Rise is a £47m regeneration programme that has transformed the heart of South Hatfield from an area that had fallen into disrepair into a thriving, modern development. The area previously comprised a dated neighbourhood shopping parade, low quality public realm, a garage block and vacant industrial units.

The regeneration programme was delivered using private funding over three phases as part of a development agreement between Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and Lovell Partnerships Ltd and was designed to ensure local businesses could continue to trade throughout the works.

The new development includes 146 new homes, with a mix of flats and houses, comprising affordable, shared ownership and privately owned units. Each apartment has a number of standout features including full height glazing to show off the spectacular views of the surrounding area from all floors as well as energy efficient design to reduce both utility costs and carbon emissions.

The new retail units have been retained by the Council and provides an income of circa £300K per annum. The majority of the units are occupied by local, independent businesses and they provide residents with a number of essential services including a post office, dentist,

pharmacy, convenience stores, butchers, plumbers, hairdressers, betting shop, takeaways. Terms have also been agreed with the NHS to provide a new GP surgery.

New public realm areas include a brand-new playground in the centre of the development, providing a safe, fun, and inclusive space for children to enjoy in the heart of the community. The new playground is designed not only as a space for play but also as a focal point for families and community members to meet, with seating and benches that offer a space to socialise and relax, while upgraded CCTV aids crime prevention and helps ensure that residents feel safe and secure. The public realm will be maintained to a high standard moving forward thanks to an estates charge made to the leasehold properties.

Existing bus routes have been maintained and improvements made to the local roadway to encourage walking and cycling.

The Council's focus on this area has gone beyond just the redevelopment of buildings and infrastructure. They have introduced a PSPO to fight antisocial behaviour and hold regular meetings with residents to ensure that their voices are heard and any concerns are addressed. This ongoing after care emphasises the Council's commitment to residents and local communities.

Historically, the previous Hill Top shopping parade was considered Hatfield's second town centre, being the biggest of the neighbourhood parades. The new development reinforces that view and it is a vibrant destination location which supports Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's ambitious plans to provide more quality new homes and facilities for local residents.

MANAGING TRANSITION

As a partnership we have been working at pace to plan for transitioning service to new unitary structures to balance the risk, cost and complexity of disruption against the long-term benefits of radical transformation. Page 84 of this document sets out our ambition for critical services and how we will ensure a safe and legal transition to the first day of new Authorities. Each of the three proposals that supports this document brings to life the vision for how services will evolve over time post-vesting.

OUR AMBITIONS FOR SERVICES

- **Efficient and accountable** – structures will minimise duplication and unnecessary complexity, delivering better value for money for taxpayers. Democratic responsibility for services must be clear and visible, ensuring accountability and transparency to residents.
- **Resident-first** – services will be simple to access, responsive and built around the needs of people and businesses.
- **Prevention-led** – investment will shift into early help and community capacity. We will act early to tackle root causes, rather than symptoms – reducing long-term demand and helping people to live more independently. Services will work with housing, the NHS, public health, education, policing, and community partners to tackle root causes, reduce demand for crisis services, and deliver more joined-up support.
- **Strategic and effective place-based partners** – we will act as strong local partners, investing in the right places with the right infrastructure to help communities thrive and enable neighbourhoods to shape their own future. We will work better together across Councils, the NHS, police, businesses and the voluntary sector to deliver better outcomes with neighbourhoods at the heart of our collaborative approach.

- **Empowering places to work** – staff will have the tools, autonomy and support to innovate, with career pathways and development opportunities that help attract and retain talent.
- **Culturally ambitious** – new organisations will foster a culture of collaboration, pride and local identity, celebrating diversity and encouraging continuous improvement.
- **Data- and technology-enabled** – evidence and digital tools will support proactive, personalised and efficient services.
- **Sustainability-led:** we will embed environmental sustainability and climate resilience into service design, delivery and governance.

CONCLUSION: A STRONGER, SMARTER, MORE SUSTAINABLE HERTFORDSHIRE

Through devolution and the creation of new Unitary Authorities, we have a once in a generation opportunity to build a new model of local government that is modern, forward looking and agile, accountable to communities and reflecting local identity.

This transformation will bring powers over housing, transport, skills and economic development closer to the people and places they affect. It will simplify how public services are delivered, strengthen local leadership, and unlock new opportunities for growth, inclusion and sustainability.

Hertfordshire is bold and ready for change. We are working with government to secure the powers, investment and long-term certainty our communities need. By speaking with a single, amplified voice and acting with shared purpose, we can build a system that works better for everyone, now and in the future.

Together, we will create a more responsive, efficient and sustainable future, delivering positive outcomes for our people, our places, and for generations to come.

OPTIONS APPRAISAL

MHCLG criterion 1: establishing a single tier of local government

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO DELIVER OUR SHARED VISION AND AMBITION?

Our shared ambition is to create simpler, more accountable and more sustainable local government that can deliver better outcomes for residents, strengthen our communities and support future devolution. That ambition is shared by all 11 Councils in Hertfordshire, but there are a range of views on the best structural model to deliver it effectively.

Through extensive joint work we have developed and tested three credible models for unitary local government in Hertfordshire, reflecting different balances of financial scale, efficiency and localism. This options appraisal sets out the evidence base we have developed together, highlighting the relative strengths, risks and trade-offs for each option. It provides government, partners and residents with a transparent account of the choices available, grounded in local data and analysis, and closely framed against the assessment criteria set out by MHCLG.

HOW HAVE WE IDENTIFIED OPTIONS?

Partners in Hertfordshire have been actively and collaboratively considering options for local government reorganisation over a number of years. Since 2020, several independent appraisals have been undertaken to test different structural models, assess financial resilience, and explore implications for service delivery and leadership of place. The current set of proposals builds on this substantial body of evidence and reflects the most up-to-date assessment of what Hertfordshire can unlock through reorganisation.

SYSTEMATIC IDENTIFICATION OF OPTIONS

Hertfordshire Leaders' Group and Chief Executives of each Authority have dedicated their regular meetings since the start of the year to identifying and shortlisting options for reorganisation, following a structured, inclusive, and evidence-led process. A comprehensive longlisting exercise was undertaken at the start of this year to identify all viable configurations for new Unitary Authorities using existing District and Borough boundaries as the starting point. This top-down analysis was complemented by engagement with individual Councils and a deeper dive into local evidence to identify any alternative configurations with a clear rationale that might not emerge through statistical modelling alone.

Building on the resulting longlist of options, the Hertfordshire Leaders Group has worked together to agree a final shortlist of three options for detailed appraisal and decision-making. These options were selected to enable comparative analysis of the relative strengths, weaknesses and trade-offs between different models. All Councils have contributed to this process and are committed to developing a shared understanding of the evidence, while recognising that different preferences remain at this stage for the best delivery model for our shared ambition.

Each option has been reviewed using a combination of local data, national benchmarks, and qualitative insight. The options are compared and evaluated in this document, and then individual detailed proposals for each of the options accompany this document.

WHY HERTFORDSHIRE HAS RULED OUT A SINGLE COUNTY UNITARY OPTION

Following the County Council elections in May 2025, the Leaders of all 11 Hertfordshire Councils jointly ruled out the option of a single Unitary Authority to cover the entire county. The shared rationale is that a single Authority governing approximately 1.2 million residents would

be too remote from communities across Hertfordshire's diverse and distinctive areas and that it would lack the local responsiveness and democratic accountability necessary to maintain high standards of local service and community engagement.

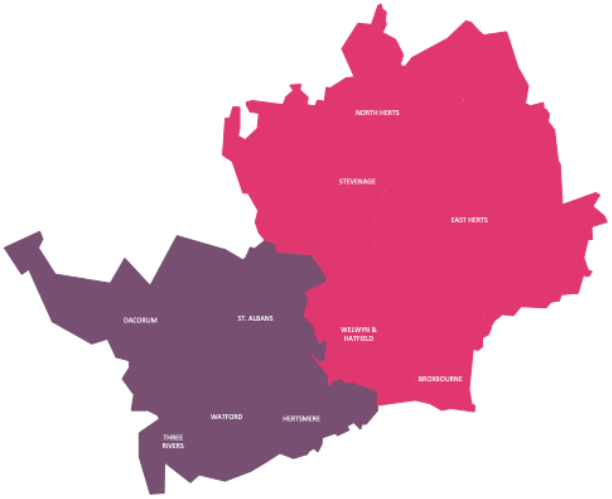
This position has now consolidated, given that we have more recently agreed to plan for a Mayoral Strategic authority on a Hertfordshire footprint. A 1:1 relationship between a Strategic Authority and a single Unitary local government body would not be a coherent model from the public, partners' or government's perspective.

MODIFICATION OF EXISTING BOUNDARIES

The legislation which enables Local Government Reorganisation requires that proposals submitted by local authorities, for consideration by the Secretary of State, must be based on existing district council boundaries. In cases where it is considered that there is a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification and changes to the boundaries are considered to be an improvement on the base proposal it is possible to request the Secretary of State to exercise their power to modify the base proposal to include the desired boundary changes.

In the following sections we set out three original proposals 2UA, 3UA and 4UA. The local authorities who support the 3UA and 4UA models consider that they would be significantly improved if their boundaries were altered and in accordance with the legislation, those local authorities have decided to request the Secretary of State to exercise their power to modify the 3UA and 4UA proposals to include the boundary changes. In summary, the required modifications are thought to be necessary for the primary reasons of aligning boundaries to reflect the realities of the place; to align administrative boundaries with established communities, to position local economic and social areas, and for the financial sustainability of new councils. A fuller explanation of the justification for these modifications this is set out within the accompanying individual proposals for these options.

OPTION A – TWO UNITARY AUTHORITIES FOR HERTFORDSHIRE



Note that the two Unitary proposal is based on District and Borough Council boundaries and does not include any requests for modifications to boundaries.

Please see accompanying notes on data sources.

GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION

Local Authority	Geography (existing Districts and Boroughs)	Population (mid-2024)	Population (2045)	Anticipated no. of Councillors on Vesting Day
2 WEST	Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford	625,622	722,000	117
2 EASTERN	Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield	610,569	758,000	117

CONTEXTUAL DATA

Unitary option	Communities		Place and economy			Services (selected measures)			
	% share of population	% share of most deprived areas	% share of tax base	% Gross Value Added	% total children looked after	% total EHCPs	% households on LA housing waiting list	% new requests for adult social care support	% adults in long term care
2 WEST	51%	43%	52%	55%	47%	46%	27%	50%	51%
2 EASTERN	49%	57%	48%	45%	53%	54%	73%	50%	49%

COSTS AND SAVINGS FROM LGR

Unitary option	One-off implementation costs (£m)	Annual recurring saving by year 5 (£m)	Total cumulative savings from LGR in the first 5 years (£m)	Total cumulative savings from LGR in the first 10 years (£m)	Payback for LGR costs and savings in (financial year)
2 WEST	£85 – £102	£25 - £28	£40 - £57	£184 - £210	30/31 - 31/32
2 EASTERN		£25 - £27	£39 - £56	£182 - £208	30/31 - 31/32
Total		£50 - £55	£79 - £113	£366 - £418	30/31 - 31/32

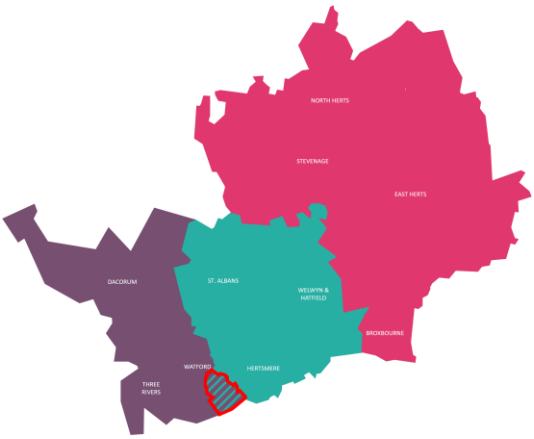
Note: ranges represent higher and lower cost scenarios – see Appendix A

OPTION B – THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Option B is built on a "base proposal" that reflects existing District and Borough boundaries. Supporters of this model wish to make a further request to the Secretary of State to use their powers to modify boundaries simultaneously to vesting day – see note in previous section.

BASE PROPOSAL

MODIFIED PROPOSAL



GEOGRAPHY

Unitary option	Base proposal (District and Borough boundaries as building blocks)	Modified proposal (Specific boundary changes requested)
3 WEST	Dacorum, Three Rivers, Watford	*Bushey North and Bushey South County Electoral Divisions, currently in Hertsmere BC, should be incorporated into the 3 West unitary authority.*
3 CENTRAL	Hertsmere, St Albans, Welwyn Hatfield	As above
3 EASTERN	Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage	No change

POPULATION AND ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION

Local Authority	Population (mid-2024)	Population (2045)	Anticipated no. of Councillors on Vesting Day
BASE PROPOSAL			
3 WEST	364,398	424,000	66
3 CENTRAL	384,043	453,000	75
3 EASTERN	487,750	603,000	93
MODIFIED PROPOSAL			
3 WEST	392,247	463,000	72
3 CENTRAL	356,193	414,000	69
3 EASTERN	487,750	603,000	93
CHANGE AS A RESULT OF MODIFICATION			
3 WEST	27,849	39,000	+6
3 CENTRAL	-27,850	-39,000	-6
3 EASTERN	0	0	0

CONTEXTUAL DATA (SELECTED MEASURES)

Theme	Communities		Place & economy		Services (selected measures)				
Unitary option	% share of population	% share of most deprived areas	% share of tax base	% Gross Value Added	% total children looked after	% total EHCPs	% house-holds on LA housing waiting list	% new requests for adult social care support	% adults in long term care
BASE PROPOSAL									
3 WEST	29%	28%	29%	34%	30%	29%	21%	32%	32%
3 CENTRAL	31%	26%	32%	34%	30%	29%	25%	29%	29%
3 EASTERN	39%	46%	39%	32%	39%	43%	54%	40%	38%
MODIFIED PROPOSAL									
3 WEST	32%	29%	32%	36%	31%	31%	22%	32%	32%
3 CENTRAL	29%	25%	30%	32%	29%	26%	24%	29%	29%
3 EASTERN	39%	46%	39%	32%	39%	43%	54%	40%	38%
CHANGE AS A RESULT OF MODIFICATION									
3 WEST	3%	1%	3%	2%	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%
3 CENTRAL	-2%	-1%	-2%	-2%	-1%	-3%	-1%	0%	0%
3 EASTERN	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

COSTS AND SAVINGS FROM LGR

Unitary option	One-off implementation costs (£m)	Annual recurring saving by year 5 (£m)	Total cumulative savings from LGR in the first 5 years (£m)	Total cumulative savings from LGR in the first 10 years (£m)	Payback for LGR costs and savings in (financial year)
BASE PROPOSAL					
3 WEST	£91 - £111	£9 - £11	(£7) - £9	£48 - £74	2032/33 - 2033/34
3 CENTRAL		£9 - £12	(£5) - £11	£52 - £78	2032/33 - 2033/34
3 EASTERN		£13 - £15	£6 - £22	£81 - £107	2031/32 – 2032/33
Total		£30 - £38	(£6) - £43	£181 - £258	2031/32 - 2033/34
MODIFIED PROPOSAL					
3 WEST	£91 - £111	£10 - £12	(£3) - £13	£58 - £83	2031/32 - 2033/34
3 CENTRAL		£8 - £10	(£9) - £7	£42 - £68	2032/33 - 2033/34
3 EASTERN		£13 - £15	£6 - £22	£81 - £107	2031/32 - 2032/33
Total		£30 - £38	(£6) - £43	£181 - £258	2031/32 - 2033/34
CHANGE AS A RESULT OF MODIFICATION					
3 WEST	No significant additional costs assumed	£1 - £1	£4 - £4	£10 - £9	-1yr – no change
3 CENTRAL		(£1) - (£2)	(£4) - (£4)	(£10) - (£10)	No change
3 EASTERN		No change	No change	No change	No change
Total		No change	No change	No change	No change

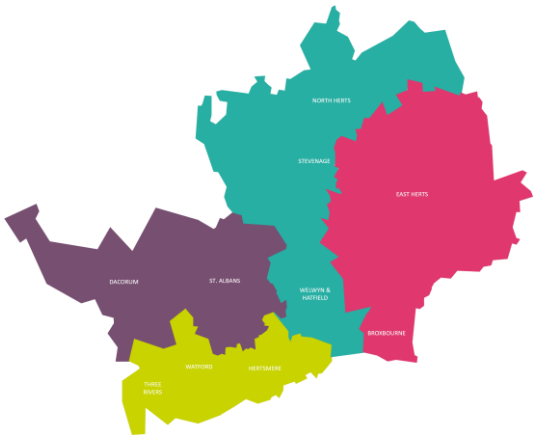
Note:

- **Ranges represent higher and lower cost scenarios** – see Appendix A
- **Cumulative savings** – negative numbers indicate a net cost position i.e. payback has not been achieved within specified timescale.

OPTION C – FOUR UNITARY AUTHORITIES FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Option C is built on a "base proposal" that reflects existing District and Borough boundaries. Supporters of this model wish to make a further request to the Secretary of State to use their powers to modify boundaries simultaneously to vesting day as indicated below – please see note preceding this section.

BASE PROPOSAL



MODIFIED PROPOSAL

GEOGRAPHY

Unitary option	Base proposal (District and Borough boundaries as building blocks)	Modified proposal (Specific boundary changes requested)
4 NORTH WEST	Dacorum, St Albans	*No change*
4 SOUTH WEST	Hertsmere, Three Rivers, Watford	*No change*
4 CENTRAL	North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield	• *Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, Weston and Sandon, Arbury wards move from NHDC to the Eastern unitary authority.* • *Northaw and Cuffley Ward move from WHDC to the Eastern unitary.*
4 EAST	Broxbourne, East Herts	*As above*

POPULATION AND ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION

Unitary option	Population (mid-2024)	Population (2045)	Anticipated no. of Councillors on Vesting Day
BASE PROPOSAL			
4 NORTH WEST	312,432	351,000	84
4 SOUTH WEST	313,190	371,000	79
4 CENTRAL	351,794	429,000	100
4 EAST	258,775	328,000	64
MODIFIED PROPOSAL			
4 NORTH WEST	312,432	351,000	84
4 SOUTH WEST	313,190	371,000	79
4 CENTRAL	320,795	391,000	89
4 EAST	289,774	366,000	75
CHANGE AS A RESULT OF MODIFICATION			
4 NORTH WEST	0	0	0
4 SOUTH WEST	0	0	0
4 CENTRAL	-30,999	-38,000	-11
4 EAST	30,999	38,000	+11

CONTEXTUAL DATA (SELECTED MEASURES)

Theme	Communities		Place & economy		Services (selected measures)				
Unitary option	% share of population	% share of most deprived areas	% share of tax base	% Gross Value Added	% total children looked after	% total EHCPs	% households on LA housing waiting list	% new requests for adult social care support	% adults in long term care
BASE PROPOSAL									
4 N WEST	25%	19%	27%	23%	24%	23%	10%	25%	26%
4 S WEST	25%	25%	25%	32%	23%	24%	16%	25%	26%
4 CENTRAL	28%	35%	26%	29%	39%	32%	53%	28%	29%
4 EAST	21%	22%	22%	16%	14%	21%	21%	21%	19%
MODIFIED PROPOSAL									
4 N WEST	25%	19%	27%	23%	24%	23%	10%	25%	26%
4 S WEST	25%	25%	25%	32%	23%	24%	16%	25%	26%
4 CENTRAL	26%	35%	24%	26%	37%	29%	49%	28%	29%
4 EAST	24%	22%	24%	19%	16%	24%	24%	21%	19%
CHANGE AS A RESULT OF MODIFICATION									
4 N WEST	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4 S WEST	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4 CENTRAL	-2%	0%	-2%	-3%	-2%	-3%	-4%	0%	0%
4 EAST	3%	0%	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	0%	0%

COSTS AND SAVINGS FROM LGR

Unitary option	One-off implementation costs (£m)	Annual recurring saving by year 5 (£m)	Total cumulative savings from LGR in the first 5 years (£m)	Total cumulative savings from LGR in the first 10 years (£m)	Payback for LGR costs and savings in (financial year)
BASE PROPOSAL					
4 N WEST	£97 -£120	£2 - £5	(£23) - (£5)	(£3) - £29	2033/34 - 2038/39
4 S WEST		£3 - £6	(£21) - (£3)	£3 - £34	2033/34 - 2037/38
4 CENTRAL		£5 - £8	(£16) - £3	£16 - £47	2032/33 - 2035/36
4 EASTERN		£1 - £4	(£29) - (£10)	(£17) - £14	2035/36 - unknown
Total		£11 - £23	(£89) - (£15)	(£1) - £124	2033/34 - 2038/39
MODIFIED PROPOSAL					
4 N WEST	£97 -£120	£2 - £5	(£23) - (£5)	(£3) - £29	2033/34 - 2038/39
4 S WEST		£3 - £6	(£21) - (£3)	£3 - £34	2033/34 - 2037/38
4 CENTRAL		£4 - £7	(£18) - £0	£10 - £41	2032/33 - 2036/37
4 EASTERN		£2 - £5	(£26) - (£8)	(£11) - £20	2034/35 - unknown
Total		£11 - £23	(£89) - (£15)	(£1) - £124	2033/34 - 2038/39
CHANGE AS A RESULT OF MODIFICATION					
4 N WEST	No significant additional costs assumed	No change	No change	No change	No change
4 S WEST		No change	No change	No change	No change
4 CENTRAL		(£1) – (£1)	(£2) – (£3)	(£6) – (£6)	No change - +1 yr
4 EASTERN		£1 - £1	£3 - £2	£6 - £6	-1yr – No change
Total		No change	No change	No change	No change

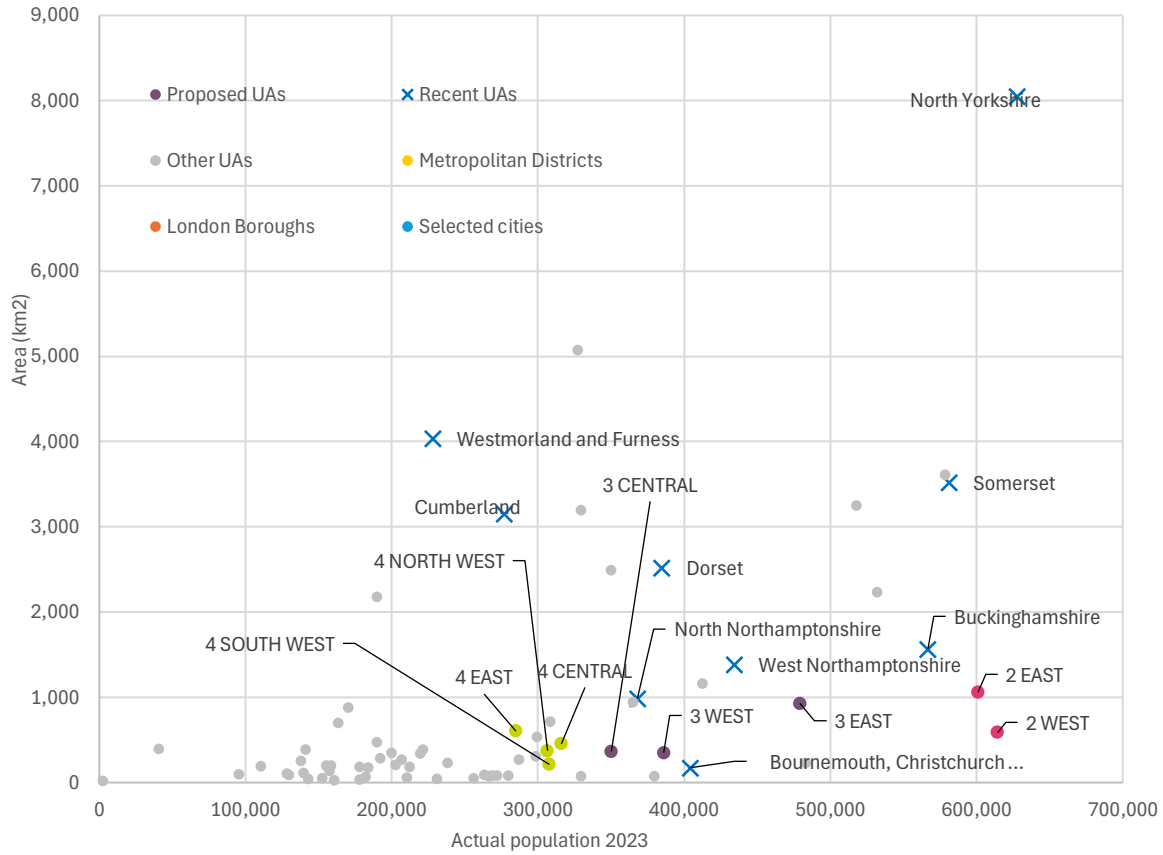
Note:

- **Ranges represent higher and lower cost scenarios** – see Appendix A

- **Cumulative savings** – negative numbers indicate a net cost position i.e. payback has not been achieved within specified timescale.
- **Payback year unknown** – payback occurs after the end of the model duration (2038/39)

COMPARING SCALE WITH RECENTLY CREATED UNITARY AUTHORITIES

GRAPH: POPULATION VS AREA FOR UNITARY OPTIONS COMPARED WITH RECENT NEW UNITARY AUTHORITIES



- **Option A** - two new unitary authorities would be amongst the largest non-metropolitan Authorities that exist today, with similar population sizes to Somerset and North Yorkshire but over a much more compact area on periphery of London.
- **Option B** - the West and Central Authorities within the modified three unitary proposal are of a similar scale to Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and North Northamptonshire, whereas the Eastern authority would be larger and of a similar scale to West Northamptonshire.
- **Option C** – all four Authorities will be of a similar size in the modified proposal and relatively small by comparison with recently created Unitary Authorities, although above average by comparison with all other pre-existing Unitary Authorities.

NOTES ON DATA SOURCE

GEOGRAPHY AND POPULATION

- **Population** – mid-year population estimates for England and Wales, ONS (2024) and HCC modelled figures for 2045 (see below).
- **Councillor numbers** – see Appendix B.

CONTEXTUAL DATA

- **Deprivation** – percentage share of the most deprived decile of LSOAs in Hertfordshire - English Indices of Deprivation, DLUHC (2019).
- **Tax base** – data collated from Hertfordshire Authorities.
- **GVA** – Gross Value Added across all industries - Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry, ONS (2023).
- **Services** – data collated from Hertfordshire Authorities.

SUMMARY FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- **Annual recurring saving by year 5** – the annual saving generated once all transitional costs have been incurred, all recurring costs have been phased in and all recurring benefits fully realised.
- **Cumulative savings** – the cumulative savings from LGR over time, net of one-off and recurring costs. A negative number means that up-front costs are still being 'paid off'.
- **Payback on LGR investment costs** – the year that cumulative savings become greater than cumulative costs (one-off and recurring).

POPULATION PROJECTIONS – TECHNICAL NOTE

A number of population projections are set out in this submission. below:

1. Internal projection: This projection takes into account ambitious plans across the County to significantly increase the rates of Net New Home Completions. It is based on published 5-year Housing and Land Strategies, where available, with an assumption that completion rates apply on a straight-line basis between 2024 and 2045.
2. Office for National Statistics (ONS) projection: This projection, published July-2025, is based on rolling forward trends in 'natural change' (rates of births and deaths) and net migration (both internal and international).

A summary of both projections is set out below:

Base proposal (without boundary changes):

	2 UNITARY		3 UNITARY			4 UNITARY				COUNTY
	WEST	EAST	WEST	CENTRAL	EAST	NORTH WEST	SOUTH WEST	CENTRAL	EAST	
2024 estimate (n.1)	625,622	610,569	364,398	384,043	487,750	312,432	313,190	351,794	258,775	1,236,191
2038 projection (n.2)										
Internal (n.3)	685,000	702,000	401,000	427,000	559,000	336,000	349,000	400,000	302,000	1,387,000
% vs. 2024	9%	15%	10%	11%	15%	8%	11%	14%	17%	12%
ONS (n.4)	643,000	642,000	373,000	408,000	505,000	322,000	322,000	372,000	271,000	1,286,000
% vs. 2024	3%	5%	2%	6%	4%	3%	3%	6%	5%	4%

2045 projection										
Internal (n.3)	722,000	758,000	424,000	453,000	603,000	351,000	371,000	429,000	328,000	1,479,000
% vs. 2024	15%	24%	16%	18%	24%	12%	18%	22%	27%	20%
ONS (n.4)	660,000	660,000	382,000	419,000	519,000	331,000	329,000	381,000	279,000	1,320,000
% vs. 2024	5%	8%	5%	9%	6%	6%	5%	8%	8%	7%

Modified proposal (with boundary changes):

	2 UNITARY		3 UNITARY			4 UNITARY				COUNTY
	WEST	EAST	WEST	CENTRAL	EAST	NORTH WEST	SOUTH WEST	CENTRAL	EAST	
2024 estimate (n.1)	625,622	610,569	392,247	356,193	487,750	312,432	313,190	320,795	289,774	1,236,191
2038 projection (n.2)										
Internal (n.3)	685,000	702,000	438,000	390,000	559,000	336,000	349,000	367,000	335,000	1,387,000
% vs. 2024	9%	15%	12%	9%	15%	8%	11%	14%	16%	12%
ONS (n.4)	643,000	642,000	407,000	374,000	505,000	322,000	322,000	336,000	307,000	1,286,000
% vs. 2024	3%	5%	4%	5%	4%	3%	3%	5%	6%	4%
2045 projection										
Internal (n.3)	722,000	758,000	463,000	414,000	603,000	351,000	371,000	391,000	366,000	1,479,000
% vs. 2024	15%	24%	18%	16%	24%	12%	18%	22%	26%	20%
ONS (n.4)	660,000	660,000	425,000	375,000	519,000	331,000	329,000	342,000	318,000	1,320,000
% vs. 2024	5%	8%	8%	5%	6%	6%	5%	7%	10%	7%

(n.1) ONS estimate for mid-2024; published Jul-2025

(n.2) Coterminous with MTFS

(n.3) Hertfordshire Local Authorities; based on projections of housing completions.

(n.4) ONS projection for mid-2028; published Jul-2025; based on 2022 population estimates.

EVALUATION OF OPTIONS AGAINST MHCLG CRITERIA

The purpose of this options appraisal is to provide all partners in Hertfordshire, and government, with a shared, objective and evidence-led comparison of the three shortlisted models for Unitary structures. The appraisal has been carried out against the criteria set out by MHCLG and is supported by a wide range of evidence as collaborative work across professional and technical leads within all 11 Hertfordshire Councils. The conclusions are agreed by all partners.

For clarity, the base and modified versions of the proposals are compliant with MHCLG criteria. This options appraisal focused on the modified proposals for the 3 and 4 unitary options as supporters of these believe they are superior in what they deliver as compared to the base proposals.

Further details for each model are provided in the accompanying proposals.

OPTIONS APPRAISAL – OVERVIEW

MHCLG criteria (summarised)	Option A – 2 Unitary Authorities	Option B – 3 Unitary Authorities	Option C – 4 Unitary Authorities
1. Sensible geography and economic area	BALANCED Aligns to existing planning and health partnership areas and uses current boundaries. Contains multiple economic areas.	BALANCED Has a more complex alignment to economic areas shaped by commuter patterns, sector clusters and strategic transport corridors.	BALANCED Aligns to (but subdivides) existing planning and health partnership areas. Requires two significant boundary changes.
2. Right size to generate efficiencies and absorb shocks	MORE ALIGNED Delivers organisations with larger financial scale, highest savings and fastest payback. Creates large authorities with populations above 500,000 on day one. All options will grow rapidly in line with ambitions for delivery of new homes.	BALANCED Delivers savings but still achieves organisations with enough scale to be resilient. Still creates authorities with large populations although comparable with some existing newer unitary authorities. All options will grow rapidly in line with ambitions for delivery of new homes.	LESS ALIGNED Delivers some savings and will require collaboration/support/sharing of resource to protect financial capacity. Creates smaller authorities although comparable with some existing UAs. All options will grow rapidly in line with ambitions for delivery of new homes.
3. Quality and sustainable services	MORE ALIGNED Single split of county services into east and west areas, requiring no realignment due to boundary review. Aligned to key partnership geographies. Services provided larger organisations will need flexibility to respond to local differences.	BALANCED More disaggregation creating higher risk and complexity than 2U. Requires a reset of some strategic partner collaboration geographies. Greater ease in differentiating services according to local needs and priorities within smaller areas.	BALANCED Highest disaggregation and associated risk but create two authorities within each established east and west area. Aligned as subsets of key partnership geographies. Smaller authorities can provide the greatest level of differentiation of services to reflect local need.
4. Meets local needs / local views	BALANCED Preferred by most strategic partners for simplicity, economies of scale, and alignment with existing partnership geographies. Residents had mixed views, with many recognising the potential for financial sustainability.	BALANCED Strategic partners and residents noted that the model could offer a balance between scale and connection to community. A number of residents commenting on this option said the proposed geography 'made sense'	BALANCED Mixed views, with strategic stakeholders concerned about fragmentation, while there was a plurality of support from business and VCS groups in some areas. Residents had mixed views. The main reason given by those expressing support was closeness to communities.
5. Supports devolution	BALANCED All options are capable of partnering effectively with a future Hertfordshire Strategic Authority.	BALANCED All options are capable of partnering effectively with a future Hertfordshire Strategic Authority.	BALANCED All options are capable of partnering effectively with a future Hertfordshire strategic authority. .
6. Stronger community engagement	LESS ALIGNED Risks being perceived as remote and needs strong locality working model but has greatest capacity to invest.	BALANCED Closer to residents but will still need strong locality working arrangements.	MORE ALIGNED Smallest areas: naturally closer to communities and potentially requiring less locality infrastructure.

OPTION A –

Two Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire

MHCLG criteria	Observations from review of evidence
Single tier of local government • Sensible economic area and geography • Robust analysis and evidence	• Each Authority is aligned to one of Hertfordshire's recognised planning and health partnership areas and transport corridors along the M1 and A1(M), although they cover more than one functional economic market area in each case. • Authorities are broadly balanced on population, tax base and economic strengths although the eastern area includes moderately higher deprivation and likely demand for key services, along with slightly lower taxbase. • This option uses existing District and Borough boundaries with no modification requested.
Right size to achieve efficiency and withstand shocks. • Guidance on population sizes • Generating efficiencies • Covering transition costs	• This option generates the highest level of savings (£366m - £418 over ten years) and will pay back on transition cost the fastest (within 2030-2032) without need for external support. New organisations will be of sufficient financial scale to absorb likely increases in demand and future financial shocks. • Each Authority would serve a population of over 600,000, growing to an estimated 720,000 to 760,000 residents by 2045. They would be amongst the largest non-metropolitan Unitary Authorities that exist today,
Quality and sustainable services • Improving services and avoiding 'unnecessary fragmentation' • Delivering reform • Managing impacts on 'crucial services'	• This model creates the lowest level of complexity in the transition of services currently delivered at county level, with critical services only needing to be split once alongside any retained shared arrangements. However, there is a degree of complexity in aggregating district services. • Each area aligns with one of Hertfordshire's two existing health and care partnerships, two acute hospitals, West Herts Hospitals NHS trust and North Hertfordshire NHS trust, and two operational areas for Hertfordshire Constabulary retaining simplicity and continuity in joint commissioning and service planning. • Financially, this model offers the greatest scope for reinvestment in service improvement and innovation, due to the higher level of projected savings. • There is a risk that the organisations would be perceived as remote from local communities, and additional investment would be needed in developing infrastructure for differentiating services according to the distinct needs of each locality.
Meets local needs and informs local views. • Collaboration between Councils • Local identity and heritage • Evidence of local engagement	• All 11 Councils in Hertfordshire have worked together to produce this submission as part of a single programme using a shared evidence base. We have engaged extensively with local stakeholders and the public, with a summary of views below. • Strategic partners and institutional stakeholders: Most overall support among strategic partners. Health bodies (ICB, NHS Trusts), large employers (e.g. Tarmac, Gascoyne Estates), and business networks generally favoured this model for its simplicity, alignment with existing east -west footprints, and reduced duplication. It was viewed as the most coherent option for cross-system collaboration and economic strategy. • Residents: This option had the second most expressions of support from residents. The main reasons given for support were the potential for efficiencies and financial sustainability. The main concerns expressed were that councils could be too large and remote. • All options will be capable of protecting, celebrating and enhancing local identity and heritage.
Supporting devolution arrangements • Sensible population ratios with an SA • Supportive timeline	• Two Authorities would form a compact and streamlined partnership with the Hertfordshire Strategic Authority. Two large, balanced Councils would each act as a clear delivery partner for county-wide priorities such as transport, skills and net zero. Shared east -west health, planning and police geographies offer strong alignment with likely Strategic Authority programmes. • With only two local partners alongside a Mayor, political diversity could be limited, and debate could risk becoming polarised along east -west lines. • The model is fully supportive of a smooth implementation timeline.
Stronger community engagement	• With each of the proposed Unitary Authorities serving around 600,000 residents, the new UAs would inevitably be perceived as more remote from residents and businesses and would require meaningful arrangements, effort and investment to ensure decisions remain close to

• Enabling strong community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	local communities and that services are visible, accessible and responsive. This could include joint working with Town and Parish Councils in the areas that they cover. • Larger Unitary Authorities would have greater internal capacity to support this kind of community engagement activity.

OPTION B –

Three Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire

MHCLG criteria	Observations from review of evidence
Single tier of local government • Sensible economic area and geography • Robust analysis and evidence	• This option creates three Unitary Authorities that are compliant with MHCLG criteria. • The remainder of this table reflects the base proposal, with details of the modified proposal including Bushey included in the 3 unitary sub-proposal • The three new Authorities would achieve a good balance of tax base, economic output, deprivation and demand proportionate to their resident population sizes. .
Right size to achieve efficiency and withstand shocks. • Guidance on population sizes • Generating efficiencies • Covering transition costs	• This option delivers £181m to £285m net savings over ten years and is likely to pay back on investment costs in 2031 and 2034. It offers lower economies of scale than the 2U model and increased costs from disaggregating county services three ways. • Modelling indicates that this option remains financially viable over the medium term, with efficiencies likely able to offset growth in demand for services and with sufficient capacity to absorb shocks. • Each of the proposed Authorities falls below the 500,000 population guiding principle set out in the White Paper and are comparable in scale with several recently established Unitary Councils. Population sizes are estimated to grow to between 410,000 and 600,000 by 2045, in line with anticipated housing growth, place identity and the principle that an MSA should have a population of 1.5m,
Quality and sustainable services • Improving services and avoiding 'unnecessary fragmentation' • Delivering reform • Managing impacts on 'crucial services'	• County services would be split three ways alongside any shared service delivery arrangements. This introduces greater complexity during the transition, particularly in areas such as Adult and Children's Social Care, SEND and Highways. • The model aligns with the PCN footprints, which will support the delivery of the NHS 10-year plan. However, none of the three proposed Authorities aligns fully with existing health and care partnership areas or Hertfordshire Constabulary operational footprints, meaning that a reset will be required for collaborative arrangements. However, the Chief Constable has indicated he will change structures post LGR if required. • Despite being large Authorities, they would be perceived as closer to communities than the two Unitary option and would be more able to easily differentiate services according to the different needs of each area.
Meets local needs and informs local views. • Collaboration between councils • Local identity and heritage • Evidence of local engagement	• All 11 Councils in Hertfordshire have worked together to produce this submission as part of a single programme and using a shared evidence base. We have engaged extensively with local stakeholders and the public, with a summary of views below. • Strategic partners: This option attracted limited explicit backing. A few organisations (e.g. Community Action Dacorum, some housing associations) mentioned it positively, describing it as a "balanced" model that reflected existing community linkages. Most public-sector partners were either neutral or inclined toward two Unitaries for operational simplicity. • Residents: While this option received fewer expressions of support than either 2 or 4 unitaries, it was the option viewed most positively for its proposed geographic footprint, with comments that it 'made sense.' Other residents expressed support for the model as a middle ground, large enough for efficiencies but not too remote. • All options will be capable of protecting, celebrating and enhancing local identity and heritage.
Supporting devolution arrangements • Sensible population ratios with a SA • Supportive timeline	• This option would broaden local democratic representation within a strategic authority while keeping the structure manageable. Three unitary leaders alongside a mayor would create a balanced and plural cabinet, avoiding concentration of power or excessive fragmentation and encouraging consensus-building and cross-party working. • Our understanding is that the request for limited boundary adjustment (involving Bushey) is unlikely to present a major timeline risk, although further discussions with government are required to confirm this.
Stronger community engagement • Enabling strong community engagement and	• With populations between 360,000 and 490,000, the three-unitary model brings councils somewhat closer to residents than the two-unitary alternative, while still retaining capacity to invest in community engagement. • This option would still need to invest in infrastructure for locality engagement and empowerment and would have the financial scale and capacity to do so.

neighbourhood empowerment	

OPTION C –

Four Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire

MHCLG criteria	Observations from review of evidence
Single tier of local government • Sensible economic area and geography • Robust analysis and evidence	• This option creates four new Unitary Authorities, each based on groupings of existing district boundaries, with boundary changes requested to balance population sizes and demand. For further information about requested boundary modifications see proposal for 4UA. The proposed Authorities are designed to reflect local settlement patterns, with two falling within the county's current health and policing operational areas. • The modified areas achieve an even balance of population sizes and tax base, but a disproportionate concentration of demand for key services within the 'central' Unitary Authority.
Right size to achieve efficiency and withstand shocks. • Guidance on population sizes • Generating efficiencies • Covering transition costs	• All four proposed Authorities fall below the 500,000 population guiding principle set out in the White Paper, with each serving between 290,000 and 320,000 people, although they would be larger than average compared with existing Unitary Authorities. By 2045, populations are estimated to grow to between 350,000 and 390,000, in line with ambition for delivery of new homes. • This option delivers lower net savings of up to £124m over ten years, but only just pays back within a ten-year period in the higher cost scenario. This reflects reduced economies of scale and higher costs associated with disaggregating countywide services four ways. • The uneven financial scale and concentrations of demand in this model mean that the central Authority in particular is unlikely to be viable without further redistribution of funding, noting that our analysis does not currently include any future impacts from the Fair Funding Review and the model does not provide a central assessment of transformation, efficiency or additional growth.
Quality and sustainable services • Improving services and avoiding 'unnecessary fragmentation' • Delivering reform • Managing impacts on 'crucial services'	• Four smaller Unitary Authorities will be able to offer more differentiated services to the areas they cover according to the specific needs of residents and businesses. • Smaller Authorities may have less capacity to manage complex demand or high-cost placements independently. Alternative delivery models such as shared service or collaborative models are likely to be required to preserve scale and stability in key services. Supporters of this model argue that smaller Authorities can be more agile and responsive in responding to demand locally and proactively. • This model involves the greatest level of disaggregation of county services, including four separate statutory functions for Adults and Children's Social Care. • Each of the existing police, health and care partnership footprints would contain two Unitary Authorities, avoiding cross-boundary working but potentially requiring partners to duplicate their existing partnership arrangements.
Meets local needs and informs local views. • Collaboration between councils • Local identity and heritage • Evidence of local engagement	• All 11 Councils in Hertfordshire have worked together to produce this submission as part of a single programme and using a shared evidence base. We have engaged extensively with local stakeholders and the public, with a summary of views below. • Strategic partners: This option had the least support amongst strategic partners, particularly public sector partners who mostly favoured larger councils. Some partners (e.g. Lee Valley Park Authority) expressed support, and there was support from some local civic and community organisations who favoured it for a stronger local focus. • Residents: This option received the highest number of positive comments from residents. Reasons given were primarily around valuing local representation and community identity. Supporters argued smaller Councils would be more accountable and 'closer to the people', even if less efficient. • All options will be capable of protecting, celebrating and enhancing local identity and heritage.
Supporting devolution arrangements • Sensible population ratios with an SA • Supportive timeline	• Four smaller Unitary Councils would sit within the Hertfordshire Strategic Authority, maximising political plurality but creating a more complex interface for strategic coordination by comparison to the other two models. • The Mayor would work with four leaders representing distinct and recognisable communities. This enhances legitimacy and local accountability but makes decision-making more deliberative. Achieving consensus could be slower and would require clear constitutional frameworks for voting, resource allocation and scrutiny to prevent duplication or gridlock.

	• The need for boundary review (e.g. Royston, Northaw and Cuffley) introduces greater complexity into the proposal and the support of government would be required to deliver this model of reorganisation to the most ambitious timelines. See Appendix E for more information on this request.
Stronger community engagement • Enabling strong community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	• This model brings principal Councils significantly closer to communities than the 2U or 3U alternatives. Smaller Authorities are less likely to need to invest in extensive locality working arrangements and can enter into more flexible and responsive local partnerships within their own footprints. • Although tighter financial constraints are expected, smaller Unitary Authorities may have more flexibility to pilot innovative approaches to neighbourhood involvement, including relating to prevention and managing demand.

EFFICIENCY AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

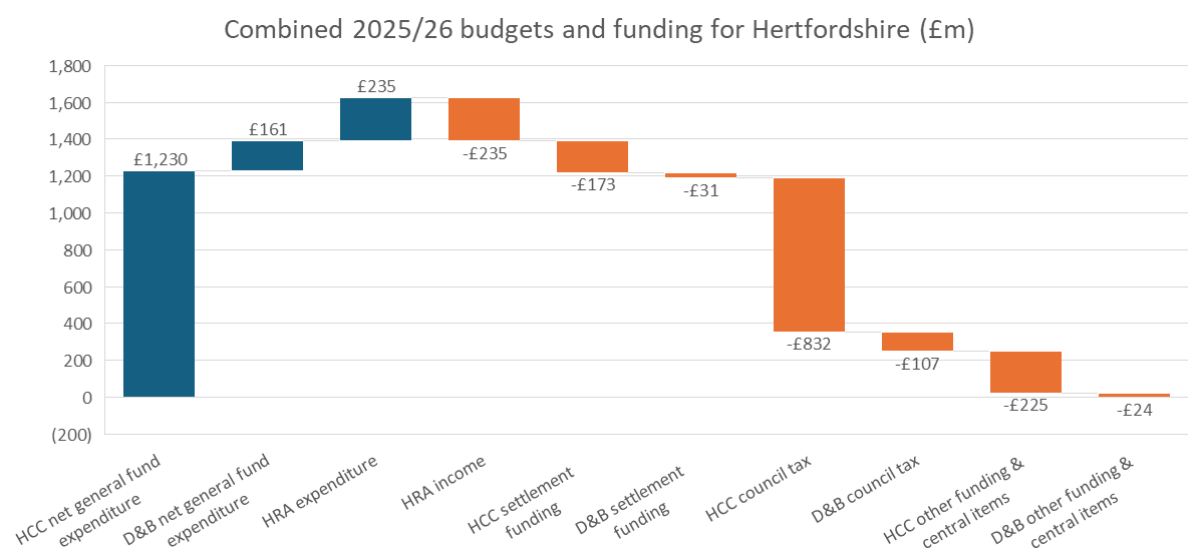
MHCLG criterion 2: scale, efficiency, capacity

HERTFORDSHIRE'S STARTING POSITION

Hertfordshire councils are in a better and more sustainable financial position than in many other areas with a consistent track record of good financial management, delivering savings, growing income through efficiency and innovation and of providing value for money. Unlike many other areas undergoing reorganisation, none of the eleven authorities in Hertfordshire is in receipt of exceptional financial support, under government intervention or requiring additional support linked to debt or capital practices.

However, Hertfordshire authorities do share the key challenges facing the local government sector of increasing demand and costs of providing local services rising at a faster rate than their incomes.

GRAPH: COMBINED 2025/26 BUDGET FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

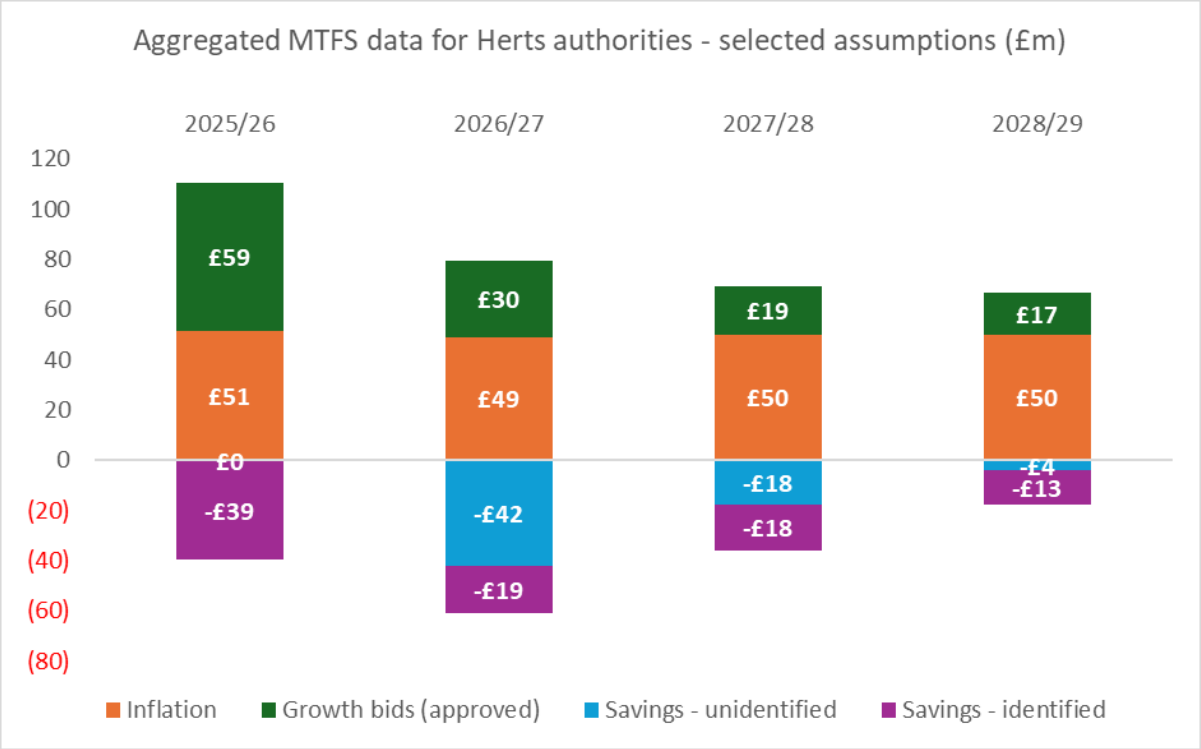


£1.4billion combined net revenue budget	£1.2billion net budget for HCC	£0.16bn combined net budget for Districts and Boroughs	£0.24bn in four Housing Revenue Accounts

MEDIUM-TERM POSITION PRIOR TO VESTING DAY

Our preferred implementation timeline is that new authorities are vested on 1 April 2028. We have aggregated medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) information for all Herts authorities to show the growth assumptions (including inflation) and savings requirements pre vesting day.

GRAPH: SELECTED MTFS ASSUMPTIONS PRE-VESTING DAY



To meet their statutory responsibilities for setting balanced budgets prior to LGR, £154m net savings will need to be delivered across Hertfordshire over the period to 2028/29. To date £90m of savings have been identified leaving a shortfall of £64m.

All councils are committed to deliver these savings required to achieve a balanced opening position for the new authorities in 2028/29, recognising the risk that if this is not achieved new unitary authorities will suffer from a more challenging opening position.

COLLABORATING TO ASSESS THE FINANCIAL IMPACTS OF LGR

The financial case and modelling approach has been developed collaboratively with Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) from all eleven councils with an external consultancy to develop a shared financial model and set of assumptions.

- All of our options have been developed using a single financial model developed as part of a collaborative process.
- All modelling assumptions, including higher and lower cost ranges in two key areas (detailed below) have been accepted by all CFOs and chief executives.

IMPORTANT CAVEATS AND LIMITATIONS

Model accuracy and reliability

Financial models have been prepared using information available and considered reliable at the time of preparation. This includes council budgets, performance and demand data alongside input from each of the Hertfordshire LGR programme workstreams and benchmarking information from other LGR cases. Best endeavours have been made to apply reasonable assumptions, data sources and analysis in the development of assumptions and estimates within the financial model, but these remain subject to high levels of inevitable uncertainty in key areas due to the inherent limitations of available information at this stage prior to the decision and shadow authorities being formed.

Throughout this process, a prudent approach has been applied to avoid potential overstatement of estimated benefits or understatement of estimated costs. Consideration has also been given to materiality, focusing on the assumptions and financial factors most likely to have a significant impact on the overall outcomes of the model.

The modelling assumptions detailed in appendix A, including higher and lower cost ranges in two key areas (detailed below) have been accepted by all CFOs and chief executives.

Future impact of Fair Funding Review

The potential impacts of the Fair Funding Review (FFR) have not been reflected in the financial model. The model also assumes no business rates growth or increases in core government grant funding beyond 2027/28.

Although CFOs conducted extensive due diligence and engaged a third-party organisation to assess likely effects, the findings were unreliable due to conflicting data and government indications that modelling assumptions will change before FFR is finalised. Initial analysis based on current assumptions suggests FFR will likely reduce overall revenue funding and alter its distribution across Hertfordshire over the medium term, potentially affecting the sustainability of future unitary authorities. Hertfordshire County Council have included £50M FFR savings prior to 2028/29.

Council Tax

For the purposes of the financial model, Council Tax increases are assumed to be at 4.99% (2.99% Council Tax + 2% adult social care precept) as per the current referendum limits and in line with the MHCLG approach to funding projections. The model assumes that the District & Borough element of Council Tax will be harmonised at a weighted average and implemented in 2028/29 in line with creation of new authorities. The taxbase is assumed to continue to grow at a rate that is consistent with the current 2025/26 to 2027/28 medium-term period.

In practice within their shadow year, new authorities will need to decide how to harmonise Council Tax across their areas and there are different options as to how this can be done. Future annual raises in Council Tax will then be a decision for new authorities themselves.

Uncertainties and unexpected shocks

Whilst prudent assumptions have been identified and accepted in all cases, the viability of all future unitary authorities will be subject to additional risks and uncertainties, including:

- The significant savings planned in the 25/26 to 27/28 period (pre-vesting day) is not delivered in full, contributing to a more challenging opening position for new authorities.
- Inflation or demand increases at a higher rate than is assumed in our modelling.
- There is any slippage in delivering the anticipated benefits from LGR.

- Further unanticipated local, national or international events causing economic or financial shocks.

Additional key financial risks and issues are included at the end of this section, and in more detail within appendix A.

SCOPE OF FINANCIAL MODEL

The financial case has been modelled from a 2025/26 baseline to 2028/29 as assumed year one for new authorities, then over a further 10-year period from vesting day in line with best practice recommended by CIPFA. The financial model combines three key sets of assumptions and calculations for each unitary authority option:

Medium-term assumptions	**(Dis)Aggregation assumptions**	**LGR impact assumptions**
The net budget requirement for each authority, the resources (including council tax, fees and charges and government grant) available to each area and how these will change over the next ten years.	An assessment of how the HCC and District and Borough budgets would be recombined into specific geographical areas, based on relevant local factors and taking account of potential boundary review for unitary authorities.	Costs and savings from LGR - LGR is an "invest to save" activity, this element estimates the costs of delivering LGR and the savings it delivers.
All assumptions are the same for all options	**All assumptions are the same for all options**	All but two assumptions are the same for all models – a range has been implemented in two key areas (see below).

USE OF RANGES FOR LGR IMPACT ASSUMPTIONS

Assumption area	**Upper end of the range**	**Lower end of the range**
Recurring costs from duplication of social care management teams within new authorities	A high scenario was created by the DASS and DCS undertaking an analysis of current management posts down to Head of Service level within the existing county structures to identify which posts are necessary in each council given the TOM approach. Some services within this have been assumed to be shared for the purposes of the modelling. It is assumed that all other front-line roles / costs below Head of Service level are split across the new authorities without duplication.	A low scenario was created by benchmarking the costs of social care management in existing unitary authorities that are of comparable scale to potential unitary authorities for Hertfordshire, using publicly available information. Further detail on the methodology used and limitations are included in appendix A.
One-off costs from disaggregation of HCC ICT estate and ongoing running costs	The high and low scenarios reflect the complexity and uncertainty in relation to future ERP/Finance and HR provision. The range of costs account for the solution/provider landscape, the options relating to the scale of migration and integration activity and the existing highly customised platforms and processes.	

Further detail on assumptions and the rationale for these is included in appendix A.

KEY FINDINGS

The following pages show these assumptions combined to estimate the likely medium-term position of future unitary authorities, focusing on:

- Position in year one (2028/29)
- Budget position after the first five years
- 10-year performance relative to the two-tier baseline

We then consider the specific impacts of LGR and associated costs and savings as a key component of the medium-term position.

Year one – 2028/29

The baseline for the financial modelling is the 2025/26 balanced budget for each individual authority, rolled forward to match existing medium-term financial plans for 2026/27 and 2027/28, leading to a start point for 2028/29 based on a common set of key assumptions agreed by CFOs. Budgets balance in overall terms at start of 2028/29 but opening deficits and surpluses exist as illustrated in the graph and table below.

For the reasons noted above, this illustration of the starting point does not reflect the potential redistribution impact of the Fair Funding Review. It also excludes Housing Revenue Accounts and additional costs and benefits from LGR, which are set out in the next section.

GRAPH: YEAR ONE BUDGETS

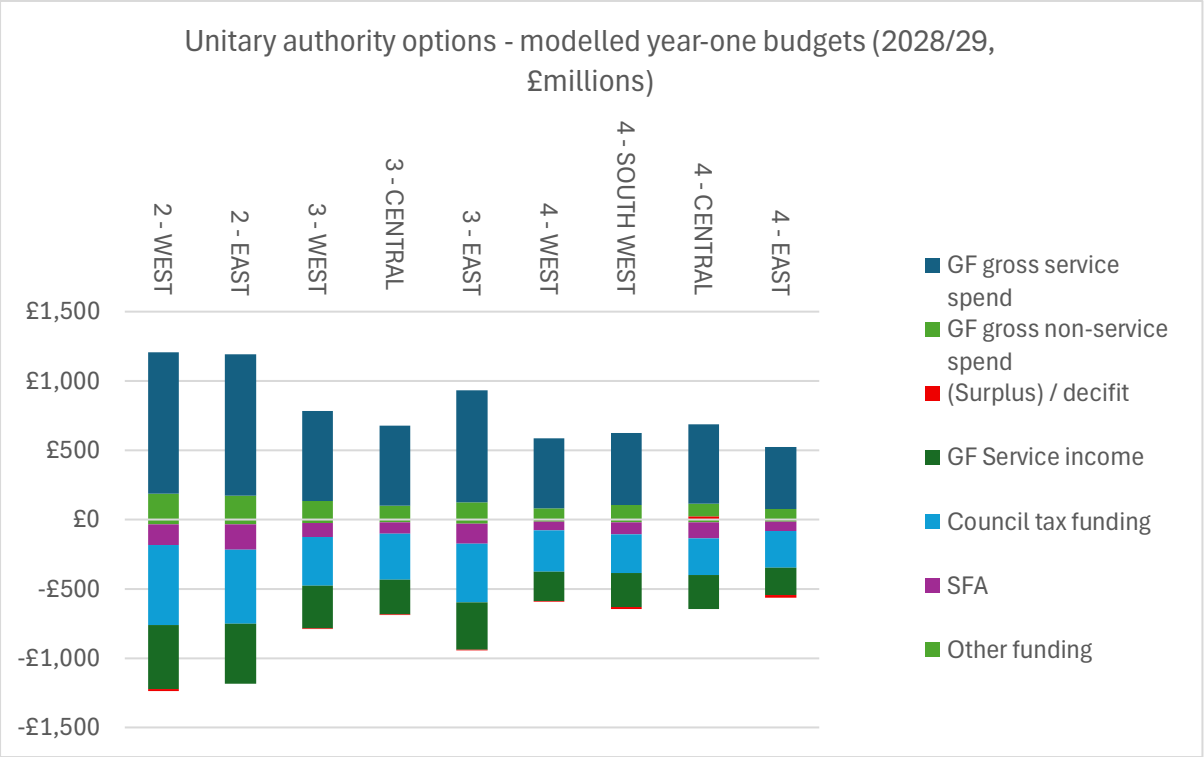


TABLE: YEAR ONE BUDGETS

	Net GF budget (£m)		Funding (£m)				(Surplus) / deficit
	GF gross service spend	GF gross non-service spend	GF Service income	Council tax funding	SFA	Other funding	
2 – WEST	1,019	188	(460)	(576)	(148)	(37)	(14)
2 – EAST	1,019	169	(437)	(531)	(184)	(34)	2
2 – TOTAL	2,039	357	(898)	(1,107)	(332)	(72)	(13)
3 – WEST	653	132	(308)	(352)	(103)	(24)	(1)
3 - CENTRAL	580	99	(250)	(329)	(85)	(19)	(4)
3 – EAST	805	126	(339)	(426)	(144)	(29)	(8)
3 – TOTAL	2,039	357	(898)	(1,107)	(332)	(72)	(13)
4 – WEST	503	82	(214)	(294)	(64)	(16)	(3)
4 - SOUTHWEST	516	106	(246)	(282)	(84)	(21)	(11)
4 – CENTRAL	573	94	(244)	(267)	(116)	(18)	22
4 – EAST	447	75	(194)	(264)	(68)	(17)	(20)
4 - TOTAL	2,039	357	(898)	(1,107)	(332)	(72)	(13)

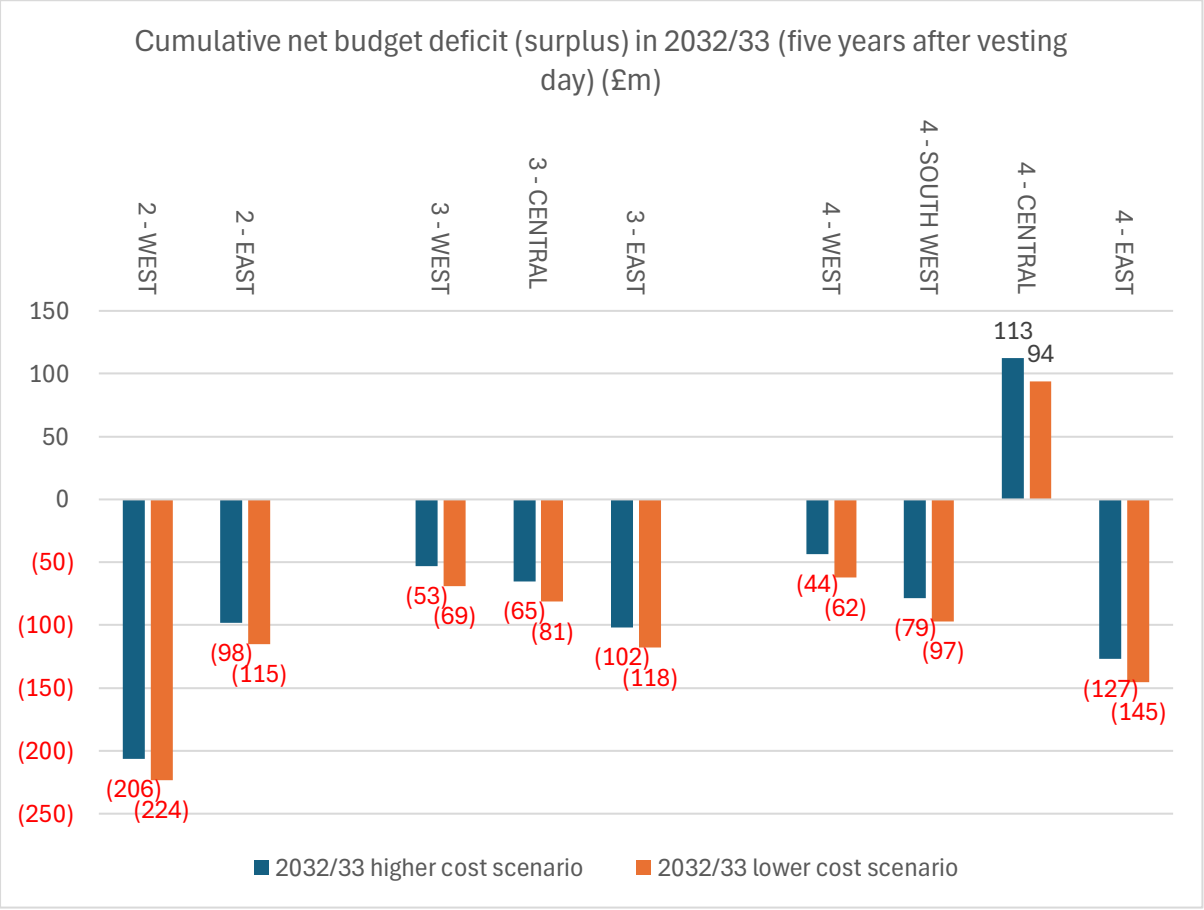
FIVE YEARS: MEDIUM-TERM POSITION FOR UNITARY AUTHORITY OPTIONS

From 2028/29 onwards (i.e. post-LGR), the baseline forecast is rolled forward using a set of annual indices developed and agreed by Hertfordshire CFOs for the 10-year period to 2037/38 (as detailed in the financial appendix). Estimates of inflation for pay and non-pay costs have been developed and applied differently to each main area of expenditure, linked to historical trends and known forecasts where possible. No additional contingency is built into these assumptions for unexpected shocks, any marked increase in the national rate of inflation, or any failure for authorities to deliver the required medium-term savings in full prior to vesting day for new authorities. To this baseline forecast we then apply:

- **Disaggregation and aggregation assumptions** reflecting underlying local differences between tax bases and budgets and how these drive different starting points for the alternative unitary footprints under consideration (the position for 2028/29 is show in the section above).
- **LGR assumptions** to estimate the costs and savings arising from LGR (as detailed in the next section) at the level of individual unitary authority options.

The combined effect of these assumptions, assuming a balanced budget starting point and the incremental savings delivered smoothly from LGR, is a recurring annual surplus for most authorities with total funding growing slightly faster than net budget requirement. The cumulative budget deficit / surplus is used below as a proxy measure for the overall financial performance of unitary options within the first five years.

GRAPH: BUDGET POSITION AFTER THE FIRST FIVE YEARS



This graph combines all baseline modelling assumptions including inflation, assumed council tax increases, assumed MTFS savings and the impacts of LGR to show the cumulative net budget position for each unitary authority after the first five years of LGR.

The set of baseline assumptions that we have used indicate that, to different extents, almost all unitary authorities will be in a surplus position after this period.

To the extent that options that generate surpluses using our baseline set of assumptions, these indicate a level of resilience for future authorities in the event that our baseline assumptions prove to be optimistic, or further unexpected shocks occur. Please note the further commentary on this under "important caveats and limitations" set out at the start of this chapter. Further sensitivities have been modelled to test this.

VIABILITY OF OPTION 4 CENTRAL

Option 4 CENTRAL would have 26% of Hertfordshire's population but 35% of Hertfordshire's most deprived decile of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). It also has a disproportionate level of demand for the most cost-intensive services, as identified in the earlier options appraisal chapter.

On current assumptions 4 CENTRAL would begin with a £22m budget deficit driven primarily by a combination of high demand for cost-intensive services which is not balanced by the ability of the area to raise revenue locally alongside the likely level of grant funding. With the additional implementation costs of LGR loaded on top, the net savings delivered by LGR for this authority, alongside assumed council tax raises, would not be sufficient to overcome this challenging opening position within the medium-term, and 4 CENTRAL would be unviable without further redistribution of funding. The proposal for the four unitary model explores what some of these interventions could be.

As noted above:

- This analysis does not estimate the impact of the fair funding review, which may change the distribution and quantum of resource in Hertfordshire and may affect the viability of future unitary authorities. On the hypothesis that FFR moves resources towards more deprived areas, the funding position for 4 CENTRAL may also improve relative to these assumptions.
- This area is also likely to experience significant business rate growth that is not fully reflected in our modelling, which would also support a more positive position over time. In 2025/26 there are £3.27m of expected gains in this area alone.
- In our model, other costs (such as debt financing costs) are allocated to areas based on their overall pro-rata spend, whereas these types of costs may be distributed differently in reality.

TEN YEARS: LONGER-TERM BENEFITS FROM UNITARY MODELS

Over the longer-term, the uncertainties referred to in the previous section are compounded. To test the likely long-term resilience of new unitary models we have applied our baseline and LGR assumptions over the full ten-year period (post-vesting day) of the model.

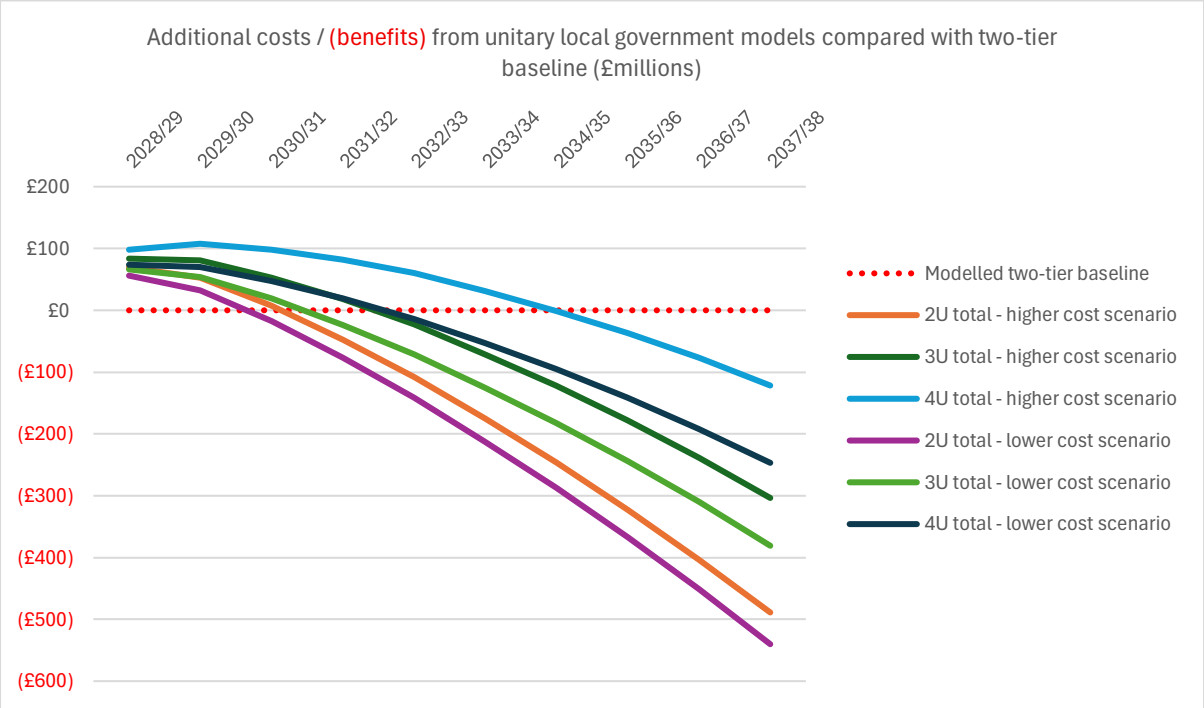
Relative to the two-tier baseline:

- Additional costs are created through the up-front investment required to deliver LGR and recurring additional costs of duplication in some areas (for example having multiple management teams for social care services).
- Additional benefits are created through the compounding effect of new authorities raising more revenue locally (if they choose to do so) through applying the 2% adult social care precept on a wider basis, in addition to the savings arising from LGR.

The key conclusions are:

- In overall terms and to different extents, all proposed options will eventually result in local government in Hertfordshire being "better off" than it would be in the existing system of local government as a result of delivering local government reorganisation.
- However, the totals for each option mask the distributional differences shown in the previous section, where some individual options may be unviable without further redistribution of funding, which is explored in the proposal for four unitary authorities.

GRAPH: 10-YEAR BENEFITS COMPARED WITH THE TWO-TIER BASELINE



This graph shows the cumulative difference from the two-tier baseline that is delivered by different LGR models. The modelled two-tier baseline is shown as zero, and the estimated costs (or benefits) of LGR are shown as increases or (decreases) from that baseline.

- 2 unitary option – outperforms the two-tier system between 2030/31 and 2031/32, which 2-3 years after LGR.
- 3 unitary option – outperforms the two-tier system between 2031/32 and 2032/33, which is 3-4 years after LGR.

- 4 unitary option – outperforms the two-tier system between 2032/33 and 2034/35, which is 4-6 years after LGR.

DIRECT IMPACTS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

This section focuses specifically on the direct costs and savings caused by local government reorganisation, as distinct from our baseline assumptions on areas like inflation and council tax, and budget aggregation / disaggregation, all of which are reflected in the section above.

IMPACTS OF LGR VERSUS TRANSFORMATION BY FUTURE AUTHORITIES

We have made a clear distinction between benefits achieved as a direct result of LGR, such as removal of duplicate roles, services and systems, versus benefits resulting from additional transformation that could be delivered by future authorities. There are two reasons for this:

- Firstly, decisions on additional transformation will be taken by future authorities themselves.
- Secondly, there are reasonable differences of opinion within our partnership on which of the proposed models is likely to be "more transformational".

As a result, our shared financial model does not estimate any additional financial benefits arising from transformation, although each of the individual proposals provides further information on opportunities relevant to each option.

HOW ARE LGR COSTS AND BENEFITS ASSESSED?

A detailed analysis of all transition costs and savings are attached as Appendix A.

LGR recurring annual savings

Savings in the financial model have been categorised into three key areas:

- **Staffing** - estimated savings in relation to the implementation of LGR predicated on consolidation and subsequent efficiencies resulting in a reduced capacity requirement.
- **Direct Costs** – estimated savings in relation to increased economies of scale and optimised use of resources.
- **Democratic and governance reorganisation** – estimated savings in relation to costs of elections, members allowances and staffing in relation to democratic services as result of fewer authorities in existence.

LGR recurring annual costs

LGR recurring annual costs have been split into two distinct categories:

- **Additional costs of scale** – these are recurring costs in relation to the anticipated additional resource requirement to service local democratic arrangements and support locality working and engagement because of aggregation.
- **Diseconomies of scale** - covers recurring costs created because of disaggregation in relation to HCC social care services and Information Technology (IT) estate.

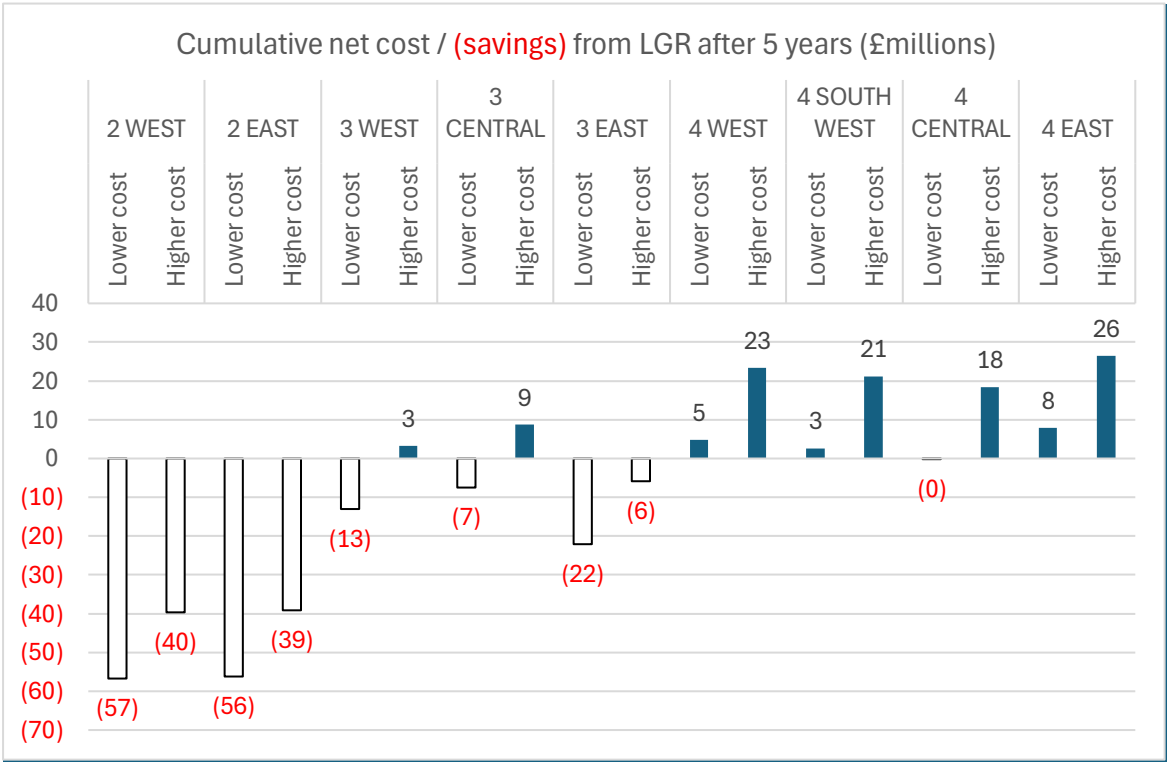
LGR one-off costs

- These are the estimated one-off costs that are incurred to support the creation of the new authorities.
- These primarily relate to the costs of IT, programme management, specialist advice and support and redundancy costs.
- A detailed analysis of all transition costs and savings are attached as Appendix A

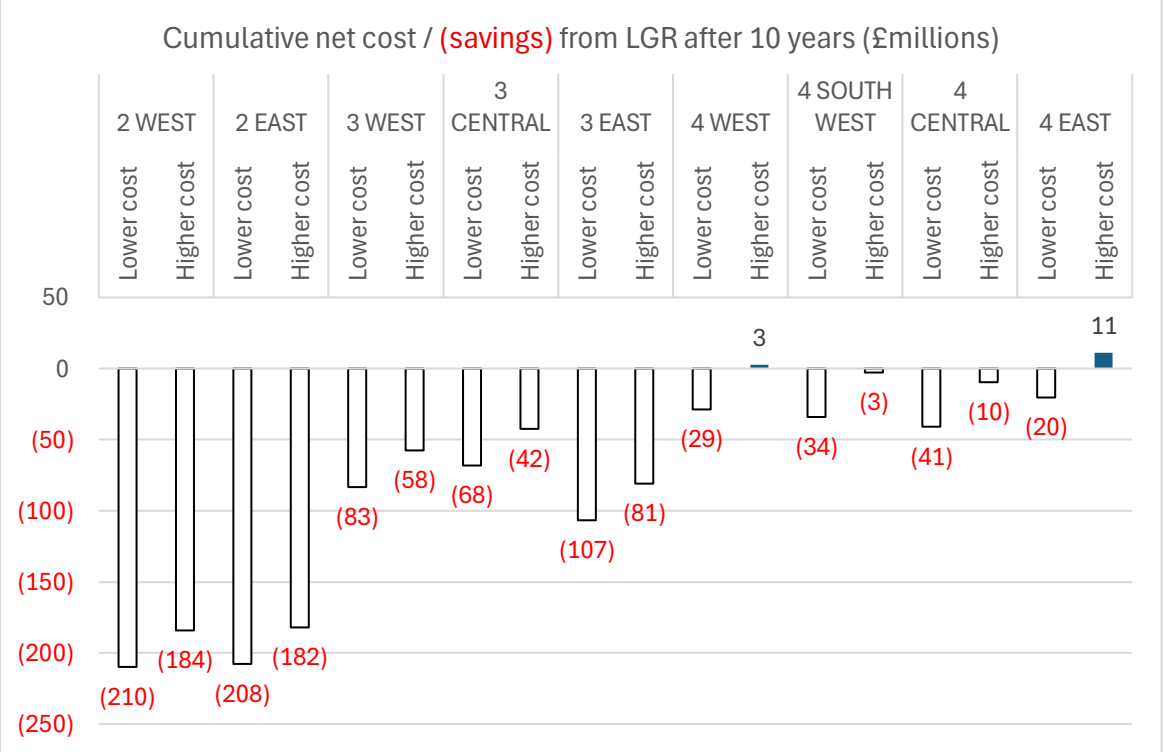
For each unitary proposal a higher cost and lower cost scenario has been developed which reflects different approaches and assumptions in relation to costs of IT and the disaggregation of the social care, as outlined earlier in this section.

The following two graphs show the cumulative delivery of net savings (i.e. adding up all one-off and recurring costs and all savings across multiple years) across five and ten years.

GRAPH: CUMULATIVE SAVINGS FROM LGR OVER 5 YEARS



GRAPH: CUMULATIVE SAVINGS FROM LGR OVER 10 YEARS



Note – negative numbers indicate that payback has been achieved and net cumulative savings are being delivered. Positive numbers indicate that payback has not yet been achieved.

For two unitary authority option:

- Annual recurring savings of £50-£55m (shared between two authorities) will be achieved by year five, once one-off costs have been met.
- After the first five years, total cumulative savings for the two authorities will be in the range of £79-113m.
- After ten years, total cumulative savings will reach £366-418m.

For the three unitary authority option:

- Annual recurring savings of £30-38m will be achieved by year five, shared between three authorities.
- After the first five years, this option would still have £6m of up-front costs to pay off in the higher-cost scenario but would have saved a total of £43m in the lower-cost scenario.
- After the first ten years, total cumulative savings would reach £181-258m, shared between three authorities.

For the four unitary authority option:

- Annual recurring costs by year 5 would be in the range of £11m - £23m, shared between four authorities.
- After the first five years this option would have between £89m and £15m of up-front investment costs still to pay off.
- After the first ten years, this option would save £124m in the lower-cost scenario or would only just be approaching the point of payback in the higher-cost scenario with £1m of investment costs remaining to be "paid off".

Option	Payback period	Annual recurring saving by year 5		Cumulative savings from LGR in the first 5 years		Cumulative savings from LGR in the first 10 years	
		Overall	Individual authorities	Overall	Individual authorities	Overall	Individual authorities
2U	3 - 4 yrs (30/31 - 31/32)	£50m - £55m	£25m - £28m	£79m - £113m	£39m - £57m	£366m - £418m	£182m - £210m
3U	4 - 6 yrs (31/32 - 33/34)	£30m - £38m	£8m - £15m	(£6m) - £43m	(£9m) - £22m	£181m - £258m	£42m - £107m
4U	6 - 11 yrs (33/34 -38/39)	£11m - £23m	£2m - £7m	(£89m) – (£15m)	(£26m) - £0m	(£1m) - £124m	(£11m) - £41m

These financial projections of transition costs, net savings and payback periods are sensitive to modelling assumptions and risk assessments. The full range of assumptions that relate to this overall summary are attached as Appendix A.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS \ KEY MODELLING ASSUMPTIONS

STRATEGIC AUTHORITY

Some existing costs and budgets will transfer to the Strategic Authority such as the Fire service. These have not been included in the financial model at this stage due to the complexities of splitting out budgets and resource. No additional running costs have been assumed for the Strategic Authority within the financial model.

EXISTING MTFS SAVINGS

Prior to vesting day, the existing authorities in Hertfordshire will continue to deliver planned MTFS savings. It is acknowledged that these savings could potentially duplicate or reduce the estimated savings in the financial case.

If the savings assumed to be achieved by vesting day are not delivered, this would reduce the projected baseline position and may require the new authorities to identify additional savings beyond those expected from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

MTFS FORECASTS

The financial models assumes that cost increases – especially in Social Care and SEND, are lower in the years after LGR than in the years preceding it. Council tax increases are also assumed at the 4.99% (2.99% council tax + 2% adult social care precept) level every year in line with government assumptions on funding.

SHARED SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

Hertfordshire has a track record of successful shared services. It has been assumed for the purposes of the financial case that shared service arrangements will be in place where long-term contractual commitments exist for county wide capabilities including Highways and Waste disposal. Without these, there is a risk that additional costs associated with disaggregation will significantly increase.

SAVINGS

While a prudent approach to savings has been adopted, it is not yet possible to fully determine which savings are cashable and which may be non-cashable—for example, where expenditure is funded by ring-fenced grants. Therefore, although expenditure may be reduced in some cases, there could be limitations on how those savings can be used.

DISAGGREGATION

There is limited recent evidence of unitarisation involving the disaggregation of county-level services at a scale equivalent to Hertfordshire, making it challenging to accurately estimate associated costs. As a result, the financial model's cost projections for IT and social care disaggregation carry a significant risk of variation, either upwards or downwards.

DSG DEFICIT / HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

The High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant funds education for children with SEND, including special schools, independent placements, and additional support in mainstream settings.

Rising demand for SEND provision has led many councils to overspend, as grant funding has not kept pace with costs. The government's 'statutory override' allows councils to exclude these deficits from their accounts, but the financial shortfall remains. The override has been extended to March 2028 while longer-term reforms are developed.

The County Council forecasts a cumulative DSG deficit of £255 million by March 2028, with annual overspends expected to continue at a rate of £130-£160m annually. The outcome of national reforms will be critical to the financial sustainability of all three structural options. Any remaining HNB deficit would need to be divided between the new authorities, creating a risk

that unless there is significant change in either DSG funding formula, an increase in the overall DSG settlement, Gov fund the deficits, or reform to the SEND system, then there will be a significant cumulative deficit by March 2028, and this would almost certainly be unfunded due to it being bigger than unitary reserves.

PAY HARMONISATION

No assumptions have been made in relation to pay harmonisation within the financial model although noting that any pay harmonisation could affect costs in the future.

BORROWING

If alternative funding sources are insufficient to cover transition costs, borrowing may be required. Borrowing costs have not been included in the financial model at this stage and could reduce projected savings and the baseline funding available.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA)

Housing Revenue Accounts sit outside of General Fund revenue expenditure. Although the four HRAs in Hertfordshire receive support services / cost of democracy from the General Fund the impact on HRAs for one-off, on-going costs and savings has not been included within the financial business case.

It is important to note that the HRA entails significant costs and scale that will require further consideration as the chosen option becomes clearer.

	Housing Stock	**Total Costs (£m)**
3 WEST configuration		
Dacorum	10,061	59,033
3 EASTERN configuration		
Stevenage	7.911	37,209
3 CENTRAL configuration		
St Albans	4,899	17,538
Welwyn Hatfield	8,847	48,588
Total	**13,746**	**66,126**
2 WEST / 4 NORTH WEST unitary configuration		
Dacorum	10,061	59,033
St Albans	4,899	17,538
Total	**14,960**	**76,571**
2 EASTERN/ 4 CENTRAL configuration		
Stevenage	**7,911**	**37,209**
Welwyn Hatfield	8,847	48,588
Total	**16,758**	**85,797**

ASSETS DISAGGREGATION

This has not been accounted for within the financial model but this poses risks at a later stage in terms of ensuring the transfer of assets and their corresponding revenue streams and or

liabilities does not inadvertently worsen the financial position and sustainability of the new authorities. Disposal of surplus assets may help to defray the costs of reorganisation.

PRE-EXISTING SHARED SERVICES

Whilst some shared services are already in existence across for example Internal Audit, Fraud, Procurement and Building Control, across Hertfordshire, these may no longer align geographically with the new authority boundaries. This may pose additional costs in relation to disaggregating shared systems or contracts that are no longer aligned geographically, potential duplication of effort or investment if new, separate services are required, and loss of economies of scale once shared arrangements end. Alternatively, these could also be widened to align with new geographies, to create greater economies of scale.

However, in other cases existing shared services will not require disaggregation and there may be opportunities to expand these and create greater economies of scale.

COMPANIES AND OTHER ENTITIES

Where these exist, they may cause additional complexity in aggregating and disaggregating balance sheets and asset valuation or else amending governance and ownership arrangements. As a result, additional specialist support may be required. This is assumed to be covered by the existing allocation of specialist support within the one-off costs.

SHADOW AUTHORITY COSTS

It has been assumed that the costs of the shadow authority can be covered by existing budgets and the contingency allocated to the one-off costs where required. These are unlikely to have a material impact on the financial assessment of alternative unitary options being considered, nor on their ongoing financial sustainability.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

MHCLG criterion 4: collaboration and local engagement

APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

Hertfordshire's 11 Councils undertook a coordinated programme of engagement to inform the development of future options for local government. The purpose was to listen and learn – to understand residents' priorities, gather insights from our partners, and test the principles that should guide reorganisation, rather than to promote any specific structural model.

Starting in July 2025, engagement activity combined targeted discussions with strategic partners, followed by a wider public survey in September 2025. Across the county, participants included senior representatives from health, education, police/emergency services, housing, business, and the voluntary sector, who took part in one-to-one meetings and small roundtables convened by Councils. These sessions provided opportunities to explore how reorganisation could support stronger collaboration, improve outcomes and ensure local government is responsive to the needs of Hertfordshire's communities.

Alongside this work, a county-wide engagement exercise involved targeted roundtables with key stakeholders, and engagement events for residents, to learn about LGR and share their views through a mix of in-person and online activities. 37 local events were held across Hertfordshire, supported by an online survey, coordinated communications, and local promotion through Council and community networks.

The approach emphasised clarity, consistency and inclusion. All 11 Councils worked together to provide balanced information and accessible opportunities for people to take part. The focus was on building understanding, encouraging informed debate, and developing an evidence base grounded in residents' and partners' real experiences of local services and governance, and understanding their aspirations for the future of local governance.

By the end of the engagement period, around 7,600 people had engaged with the survey (4,906 completed the survey in full, with partial feedback still collected) alongside 37 engagement events, which included targeted stakeholder roundtables, public engagement events, and a briefing for MPs. This is comparable to other areas, like Greater Essex, which has a larger population and received 4,070 responses on their survey. Every Council – Broxbourne, Dacorum, East Hertfordshire, Hertsmere, North Herts, St Albans, Stevenage, Three Rivers, Watford, Welwyn Hatfield, and Hertfordshire County Council – hosted engagement events, ensuring perspectives were gathered from across the county, as well as staff and Councillors being encouraged to provide feedback through relevant communication channels.

This process has established a strong foundation for future collaboration and coproduction. It reflects a shared commitment across Hertfordshire's Councils to shape reorganisation through open dialogue, which is rooted in local identity and focused on creating simpler, more joined-up, and accountable local government.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with strategic stakeholders across Hertfordshire provided valuable insight into how LGR could best support improved outcomes for residents, communities and businesses. The purpose was to listen to partners who play a direct role in local delivery, understand their priorities, and identify both the opportunities and the risks that reorganisation might create.

Participants included senior representatives from health and care organisations, education and skills providers, emergency services, business and employer networks, housing associations, voluntary and community groups, and regional and delivery partners. Their contributions helped

to shape early thinking about how new governance arrangements could strengthen collaboration and align services around people and places.

BREADTH OF STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

Engagement activity also drew on a wide range of institutional and civic partners, including:

- Members of Parliament: all 12 MPs were invited to an online briefing; 10 MPs, or their representatives, attended.
- Health and care: Hertfordshire & West Essex Integrated Care Board, NHS Trust Executives, and Adult Social Care Providers.
- Education and skills: University of Hertfordshire, Step2Skills, local colleges, local schools and education leaders.
- Police and community safety: emergency services, community safety partnerships and other local agencies.
- Voluntary and community sector: Resolve, Citizens Advice, community groups, charities, and a range of local associations and panels.
- Business and economy: Chambers of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts, major employers and investors, including Gascoyne Estates and Tarmac, and sector representatives from film, creative industries and life sciences.
- Other partners: housing associations such as B3Living and Hightown Housing Association, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, and service delivery contractors, including Everyone Active and Veolia.

TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

Town and Parish Councils were recognised as an essential part of local democracy and a key link between communities and principal Councils. To ensure their voices were fully represented, a Parish and Town Council Task and Finish Group was established under the Community Empowerment workstream. This group brought together Officers from County and District Councils alongside Clerks representing the full range of Town and Parish Councils across Hertfordshire.

- Its remit was to develop practical options for how the future structure of local government could work more effectively with Parish and Town Councils and to act as a consultative forum for emerging neighbourhood engagement proposals. This collaborative approach reflected a shared commitment to localism and to ensuring that Smaller Councils are genuine partners in shaping LGR.
- The group produced a set of recommendations that are being considered as part of ongoing design work. These included:
- Establishing clear governance frameworks and partnership charters.
- Enhancing communication and information-sharing through named contacts within new Unitary Councils.
- Setting out transparent arrangements for asset transfers and service agreements.
- Supporting capacity-building and shared service models, particularly for smaller Councils.
- Enabling flexibility for Parishes ready to deliver additional services.
- Protecting local identity and community connection.
- Engagement also took place with Parishes directly by the District/Borough Councils, where applicable, during the wider engagement process.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

PROTECTING LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS AND PLACE-BASED DELIVERY

Stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of maintaining the strong local partnerships that underpin early intervention, community trust, and effective service delivery. There was a clear view that larger Councils must retain a local presence and embed place-based working within new structures.

MINIMISING DISRUPTION TO WHAT WORKS

Many partners expressed support in principle for reorganisation, provided that it builds on existing strengths. They pointed to successful joint commissioning, co-location, and integrated service models that should be preserved and scaled, rather than replaced.

SIMPLIFYING PATHWAYS AND IMPROVING ACCESS

Partners described the current landscape as fragmented and difficult for residents to navigate. Reorganisation was viewed as an opportunity to create more consistent, outcome-focused service journeys through clearer triage routes, shared referral systems and streamlined governance.

MAINTAINING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND VISIBILITY

Respondents stressed the importance of visible, accessible local government and clarity over who is responsible for decisions and delivery.

SCALING WHAT WORKS THROUGH INNOVATION AND INTEGRATION

Many organisations encouraged Councils to expand on tested models such as local hubs, shared digital platforms, and outcome-based commissioning. Digital integration, in particular, was highlighted as key to delivering both efficiency and responsiveness.

INCLUSIVE AND PHASED TRANSITION PLANNING

There was consensus that successful reorganisation depends on early, inclusive planning. Stakeholders emphasised the need to protect voluntary sector roles, ensure funding continuity, and phase transition activity to allow time for systems and relationships to embed.

ILLUSTRATIVE STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

"Tarmac believes that the move to a single tier of local government, as has happened in many other places, is a positive move that reduces complexity." ***- Tarmac***

"We welcome the opportunity to work with a wider network of partners as a result of local government reorganisation and are enthusiastic about the potential for increased collaboration and shared learning." ***- Resolve representative***

"The present two-tier system has stymied strategic vision across Hertfordshire. The lack of a coherent strategic vision means the county risks losing its competitive position when compared to other counties and regions." ***- Gascoyne Estates representative***

"More consistency and standardisation across housing, employment and community assets such as leisure services. Working at scale doesn't negate the local. Opportunity for NHS to develop our offer as part of our ongoing reforms." – NHS Foundation Trust representative

"There is also potential for more unified and efficient service delivery, as well as opportunities to take on community asset management and develop new digital services." – Community Action Dacorum

WIDER ENGAGEMENT

Resident engagement used a mix of in-person and digital methods to maximise reach and participation with the process. Local Authorities organised public events across Hertfordshire, creating opportunities for residents to learn about LGR through an informative PowerPoint, ask questions, share views in a face-to-face setting and fill in the survey in person. These events were promoted across various channels and numerous graphics were used to promote each event.

The online survey was launched and promoted through social media, email, posters and Council staff communication channels, to ensure a broad audience. A coordinated press release further amplified awareness. Together, these activities extended the conversation and ensured the voices of local people from across Hertfordshire were heard.

Some additional targeted engagement was also undertaken, including feedback received from the annual meeting of Hertfordshire Parish, Town and Community Councils and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), as well as focus groups conducted by HCC with a Citizens Panel and Youth Council, and a Youth Panel conducted by Watford. Several stock-holding Councils also undertook tailored engagement with housing tenants, which will continue through the planning and implementation process, including in the development of future management models.

It was positive to see the engagement from residents and key stakeholders in Hertfordshire, with residents making up 89% of respondents to the online survey. It was also encouraging to see that 5% were staff members, and the remainder consisted of Councillors, businesses, charities, community groups or other organisations. The respondent profile was skewed towards an older demographic, with 54% aged 55 or over, however, this was expected from a poll on this topic. 19% of respondents reported having a disability or a long-term illness or health condition, demonstrating that perspectives from people with health challenges were captured in the survey.

Awareness of LGR was also high amongst participants: 83% had heard about it, and 2/3 (67%) said they understood it at least a little. Although this result will be skewed due to more engaged residents completing the survey, it is encouraging that the poll reached 17% of people who had never heard of LGR, showing residents who had no prior knowledge of LGR were also captured through extensive promotion of the survey.

RESIDENTS' FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

The residents' survey and local engagement events provided valuable insight into public attitudes towards Local Government Reorganisation. While views were mixed, residents engaged thoughtfully with the principles of change, identifying clear priorities for local services, accountability, representation and hopes for greater value, accountability, and coordination.

Overall, the views expressed by residents present a clear and consistent picture. People want local government that delivers the basics well, spends public money wisely, and makes it easy to understand who is responsible for what. They see real opportunity in more joined-up

services, clearer accountability, and better coordination across the county, provided this does not come at the expense of local connection or community identity. These insights provide a strong foundation for shaping the next phase of work, ensuring that any future proposals reflect residents' priorities and the values they most associate with effective local government.

DAY-TO-DAY SERVICES DOMINATE PUBLIC PRIORITIES

Residents were primarily concerned with the core local services they interact with most frequently. The top priorities identified were:

- Infrastructure: local road repairs, pavement and footpath maintenance, streetlighting (57%)
- Waste and recycling services (46%)
- Parks and green spaces (42%)

Comments repeatedly referenced potholes, waste collection, and visible maintenance as the benchmarks by which Council performance is judged.

MIXED EXPECTATIONS ON IMPACT – CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM OVERALL

Views were divided on the likely outcomes of LGR. A plurality (45%) anticipated improvements in services and value for money, compared with 42% who expected a negative impact and 13% who predicted no change. The tone of open responses reflected cautious optimism: residents recognised the potential for simplification and efficiency but remained alert to risks around disruption or reduced local connection.

EFFICIENCY, CLARITY, AND VALUE FOR MONEY

Many residents viewed reorganisation as an opportunity to cut duplication and simplify local government.

"Clarity that one council is responsible for everything rather than buck-passing between tiers." ***- Three Rivers resident***

"less overlap on service provision, more local responsiveness on services that were previously on a county wide level" – District Council staff member.

"easier to know who to contact for each service." – North Herts resident

Common themes included calls for eliminating duplication, better use of council taxes, and more joined up services. Financial efficiency featured heavily, with residents expecting tangible savings, improved coordination and better use of resources.

STRATEGIC COORDINATION AND PLANNING VALUED

Respondents identified strong potential benefits from improved coordination and long-term planning. The most frequently selected expected benefits were:

- More joined-up services (55%)
- More coordinated strategic planning and infrastructure decisions (43%)
- Better quality services for residents (41%)
- Clearer understanding of who is responsible for what (40%)

Residents linked these benefits to joined-up approaches to transport, housing and infrastructure, with repeated references to the need for more joined-up thinking between departments and a single point of contact.

DIVERGENT VIEWS ON COUNCIL STRUCTURE – NO CONSENSUS MODEL

There was no clear consensus on a preferred structure. While survey responses showed a slight plurality for four Unitary Councils, the two- and three-unitary models also received significant support.

Each option attracted backing for distinct reasons:

- Two-unitary model: favoured for efficiency, scale and strategic coordination; viewed as simple and cost-effective.
- Three-unitary model: seen by some as offering a balanced approach, avoiding both excessive scale and over-fragmentation. Attracted positive comments on the geography.
- Four-unitary model: preferred by those emphasising local identity and representation, with smaller councils viewed as closer and more accountable to communities.

These perspectives contrasted with stakeholder engagement, where the two-unitary option received the greatest number of supportive or cautiously favourable comments.

CONCERNS ABOUT COST, CONNECTION, AND REPRESENTATION

While many residents saw opportunities in LGR, 57% were concerned that Councils could become less connected to their communities. Other frequently cited concerns included:

- Cost of reorganisation (53%)
- Loss of local representation (52%)
- Loss of services (52%)
- Impact on Council Tax (47%)

PROTECTING COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND LOCAL VOICE

A recurring theme was the need to safeguard community identity and ensure that local voices remain heard. Some respondents opposed reorganisation outright on this basis, while others proposed measures such as stronger roles for Parish and Town Councils and clearer communication on how local identity would be protected.

COMMUNICATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND TRUST

Residents consistently linked good governance with clear communication and transparency. Many expressed a desire for a system where they know who is responsible, how decisions are made, and how to contact their Council. Better communication was one of the most common phrases in open responses, reflecting expectations of openness between Councils and with residents themselves.

HOW FEEDBACK WILL SHAPE OUR APPROACH

The insights gathered through this engagement will directly inform the next phase of work on Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire. Residents and partners have helped to define the key tests for success, highlighting what must be protected and what must change.

1. Focusing on outcomes, not structures
Engagement confirmed that what matters most to residents and partners is the quality and accessibility of local services, rather than the specific form of Council boundaries. Future work will therefore continue to emphasise improved outcomes, such as better coordination, stronger accountability, and value for money, as the measure of success.

2. Protecting what already works
Stakeholders were clear that effective local partnerships, particularly those supporting vulnerable residents, must not be disrupted. This feedback underpins a commitment to maintain local delivery relationships and build any future design around tested, place-based models, to protect what works, and improve what doesn't.

3. Strengthening local identity and community voice
Concerns about local connection and representation have reinforced the importance of subsidiarity – ensuring decisions are made as close as possible to the communities they affect. Parish and Town Councils and other community partners will have a role in shaping future engagement structures.

4. Prioritising transparency and communication
Residents and organisations repeatedly emphasised the need for clear communication about roles, responsibilities and accountability. Future engagement will adopt this principle, with open reporting and accessible information about how feedback continues to inform development.

5. Embedding co-production and collaboration
The engagement programme has built a foundation for joint working between the 11 Councils and their partners. As proposals evolve, ongoing collaboration will ensure that reorganisation is designed with – not just for – residents, businesses and institutions across Hertfordshire.

Together, these commitments form a clear framework for the next stage of the process. The approach to Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire will remain evidence-led, inclusive, and grounded in the voices of the people and organisations who make the county work.

CONCLUSION

The depth and quality of insights offered by stakeholders and residents reflect the value of the approach taken – deliberate, collaborative and grounded in open dialogue. By prioritising informed discussion at an early stage, all 11 Councils created space for partners and communities to engage seriously with the principles and practicalities of reorganisation.

Feedback gathered shows broad alignment on several key points. Stakeholders value the strong partnerships and place-based working that currently underpin service delivery and are clear that reorganisation must protect what already works. There is also consensus around the opportunities to simplify pathways, enhance integration and modernise services through digital innovation and co-location. These views offer a compelling case for LGR that is not just structural, but outcome led.

While preferences varied on the number and geography of future Councils, it was clear that success will depend as much on delivery as design. Stakeholders and residents alike want a system that preserves local insight, creates efficiencies and unlocks long-term strategic benefits. Across sectors, there was both realism about the risks and a strong willingness to continue engaging in shaping how change is delivered.

Taken together, this feedback provides a robust and balanced evidence base for the next stage of work. It shows that across Hertfordshire there is shared commitment to improving local services, strengthening local accountability and building a model of local government that reflects both the county's diversity and its shared ambitions for the future.

LOCALISM AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AT THE HEART OF HERTFORDSHIRE'S TRANSFORMATION

MHCLG criterion 6: community empowerment

OUR AMBITION FOR COMMUNITIES: EMPOWERED, CONNECTED AND INCLUSIVE

Our goal is for all Hertfordshire residents to feel connected, valued and safe. Local government reorganisation provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine and renew relationships between local government and residents, to innovate new approaches to participatory decision-making, expanded community governance and direct resident involvement in the matters that are most important to them. By strengthening connections with communities, we will deliver more effective and responsive public services that reflect local priorities.

We are committed to empowering every person to make a real difference, where communities can actively shape solutions to Hertfordshire's most pressing challenges, including strengthening cohesion and improving quality of life. We aim to reorganise local government to strengthen communities and promote empowerment throughout all levels of governance.

Hertfordshire's unique characteristics position us perfectly for this transformation. Our strategic assets include:

GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

With 88% urban and 12% rural population, we can develop empowerment models across different community types. Our polycentric settlement pattern, with distinct town identities and rural areas, provides natural boundaries for neighbourhood governance, and whilst our strong commuter economy connects local communities to wider economic opportunities.

ECONOMIC STRENGTHS

With specialisms in life sciences, creative industries, defence and advanced manufacturing, a £50 bn GVA economy and strategic location between London and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, our communities are uniquely placed to shape and benefit from inclusive growth. Despite this economic success, notable pockets of deprivation underscore the importance of equal access to opportunity and inclusive growth that benefits everybody.

DEMOCRATIC INFRASTRUCTURE

We start from a position of strength. Our 124 Town and Parish Councils provide an established foundation for local democracy, whilst significant unparished areas create opportunities for democratic innovation. The £856.4m Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector represents a sophisticated civil society, ready for enhanced partnership working.

CIVIC IDENTITY

Our strong civic identity lays firm foundations for the future. This sense of community pride and belonging creates opportunity to further enhance local engagement and participation. Research consistently finds that communities with a strong sense of local identity benefit from

higher levels of social capital, greater economic resilience and improved health outcomes[4]. Various reports from the UK Parliament and Local Government Association confirm that strong identification with one's local community leads to increased civic activity and higher trust in local institutions[5]. Conversely, findings from the *Local Trust: Left Behind* research[6]. reveal that communities with weak civic identities and poor social infrastructure face significantly worse outcomes in employment, health and overall wellbeing.

Place-based identity plays a critical role in attracting investment and talent. According to Centre for Cities research, it is the ability of places to attract and grow innovative, cutting-edge businesses that influences wider prosperity[7]. Areas with distinctive local identities tend to perform better economically, as they are more appealing to businesses, investors and skilled professionals.

PARTNERSHIP READINESS

Mature strategic partnerships already exist across health, business, education, voluntary community and faith organisations. In many areas, co-locating councils with partners has improved access to services and enhanced strategic collaboration. These partnerships offer diversity of thought and experience, promote innovation and enable sharing of resources and expertise. The maturity of relationships allows for honest conversations around risks and opportunities. These partnerships will complement and strengthen the new unitary arrangements, and their proven outcomes provide a blueprint for our future model.

Case study: One Watford Place Board

The One Watford Place Board demonstrates mature cross-sector collaboration in action. Uniting senior leaders from health, housing, education, emergency services, business and the voluntary sector, the Board operates through voluntary collaboration to deliver a bold vision for Watford's future by 2040. At its heart lies a co-created commitment: that a child born today will grow up in a welcoming, vibrant town championing healthier, greener living. The Board's seven missions empower residents and businesses to shape their community whilst celebrating Watford's caring, optimistic character. Its influence extends beyond governance—the 'Watford Actually' place brand, embedded across partner communications, has reshaped the town's identity, attracting investment, talent and visitors, whilst demonstrating how strategic alignment can amplify civic ambition.

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[4] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) & Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). (2022). *Rapid evidence review of community initiatives*. This review synthesizes over 100 pieces of evidence to explore how community infrastructure and social capital contribute to wellbeing, resilience, and economic outcomes. It was commissioned to inform government policy on community-led initiatives and value-for-money interventions

[5] Local Government Association (LGA). 2025. *English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill: LGA policy summary*. This publication advocates for place-based approaches to public services, arguing that local identity and trust in communities are essential for effective service delivery and economic resilience.

[6] Local Trust and Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (2019). *Left Behind? Understanding Communities on the Edge*. Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge/

[7] Centre for Cities, *Cities Outlook 2025*. This annual report provides a comprehensive health check of urban Britain's economic performance.

PROTECTING CIVIC HERITAGE THROUGH REORGANISATION

Hertfordshire's boroughs are defined by a rich civic heritage, rooted in centuries-old Royal Charters and Letters Patent that confer unique constitutional status and democratic identity.

These traditions are far more than symbolic; they embody the enduring civic character of our communities. This legacy is preserved through ceremonial practices, historic regalia, Mayoral offices and Rolls of Honorary Freedom, all of which serve as tangible links between present-day residents and their democratic inheritance.

Civic regalia, historic buildings and traditional ceremonies are not only cultural assets, but they are also vital expressions of local identity and pride. Protecting these elements through Charter Trustees ensures that any future reorganisation strengthens, rather than diminishes, the cultural foundations of civic engagement and democratic continuity.

BOROUGH STATUS AND CIVIC HERITAGE

Broxbourne Borough Council holds Borough status, granted by Royal Charter in 1974, with a ceremonial Mayor and Deputy Mayor maintaining strong community connections.

Dacorum Borough Council, formed in 1974, proudly carries the name of the ancient Hundred of Dacorum, a medieval administrative division that unites the historic towns of Hemel Hempstead (granted Municipal Borough status in 1898), Berkhamsted and Tring.

Hertsmere Borough Council achieved Borough status by Royal Charter on 15 April 1977, recognising its importance as a distinct community with a ceremonial Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

Stevenage Borough Council received Borough status on 1 April 1974, honouring both its new town heritage and historic roots dating back to King Edward I's 13th-century charter granting market rights to the Manor of Stevenage.

Watford Borough Council traces its market rights back to the 12th century, formally confirmed by King James I in 1609 with exclusive control over market activities. King George V elevated Watford to Borough status by Letters Patent on 18 October 1922, cementing its civic importance.

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Borough status was only gained relatively recently in comparison to the other Boroughs. A Privy Council order was issued on 15 November 2005 and entitled the Borough to appoint a Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

St Albans City and District Council exemplifies this legacy, with its Mayoralty and market rights granted in 1553, elevated to full City status in 1877, and extended borough-wide in 1974. This marks nearly five centuries of continuous civic governance, reflecting the fundamental democratic identity that continues to shape local leadership and public life.

Case study: Royal Charters and letters patent

St Albans Charter Market demonstrates how historic civic identity continues to shape contemporary community life. Founded in 860AD to generate income for the Abbey, the market became Crown property during the dissolution of the monasteries before Edward VI granted both market rights and Borough status to local merchants through letters patent in 1553. Nearly five centuries later, St Albans Charter Market remains at the heart of the bustling city, winning Best Large Outdoor Market in Britain at the 2024 Great British Markets Awards. Judges praised its commitment to supporting new traders, modernising infrastructure and active collaboration with local partners – demonstrating how centuries of

civic governance translate into vibrant, responsive community assets that have the required agility to adapt whilst maintaining deep-rooted identity.

PROTECTING CIVIC IDENTITY

Local government reorganisation presents a unique opportunity, not merely to preserve civic heritage, but to strengthen it for generations to come. We are committed to ensuring that every community's distinctive civic identity, earned through centuries of history and service, remains vibrant, relevant and empowering in our new unitary structure.

St Albans City and District Council are undertaking a Community Governance Review to seek resident feedback on establishing a Town Council to receive City status. In other areas, the establishment of Charter Trustees provides a robust mechanism to uphold these traditions. Both approaches ensure the transfer from Borough Councils to bodies that maintain legal continuity of all historic and ceremonial functions of the new Unitary Authorities from Vesting Day.

Dacorum Borough Council, Stevenage Borough Council, Watford Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield Council propose Charter Trustees, comprising Elected Councillors with deep local knowledge, to carry forward the ceremonial authority of predecessor Councils. Our proposal to government therefore requests that Charter Trustees be established by order of the Secretary of State under Section 7 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 for these areas.

This approach provides both immediate protection during the transitional period and flexibility for future Unitary Councils to evolve, whilst still maintaining the civic character and identity that defines our communities.

Broxbourne and Hertsmere are still considering their position at the time of preparing this proposal.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Building on our rich network and existing success, we are driven by an ambition to achieve even more through our Five-point Strategic Plan:

ENHANCED DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We are committed to strengthening local democracy by creating more opportunities for residents to shape the decisions that affect their lives. Our approach will ensure that all voices are heard, especially those from marginalised communities, young people, ethnic minorities and those facing socioeconomic disadvantage. We will build on existing forms of civic participation, such as resident assemblies and participatory budgeting, to ensure communities have a meaningful role in setting priorities and deciding how resources are used.

PREVENTION-FOCUSED, INTEGRATED PUBLIC SERVICES

We will equip communities with the necessary data and tools to identify and address issues before they escalate and require costly crisis interventions. Technology will support better outcomes, whilst integrated teams across health, housing, skills, the voluntary sector and social services will respond holistically to complex needs. Local insight will drive innovation that formal services might miss, particularly for culturally specific or place-based challenges.

Case study: Healthy Homes

The Hertfordshire Healthy Homes programme showcases the power of cross-sector collaboration addressing health-related risks of poor housing and fuel poverty. Developed with

all ten District and Borough Councils, Hertfordshire County Council, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Integrated Care Board, the programme has established a county-wide response to housing-related health inequalities. It has successfully established a damp and mould referral pathway, which streamlines identification of needs and access to support from all sectors and a fuel poverty map identifying hotspots for targeted intervention has also been created. We launched the first Healthy Homes webpage providing resources for residents and professionals and the first year of the free *Healthier Homes for Healthier Lives* training upskilled 226 professionals.

Building on these achievements, training continues and ten further *Healthy Homes for Healthier Lives* sessions are scheduled for autumn and winter 2025/26 aiming to train at least 400 professionals. GP referral pathways are being updated and work to embed and improve integration across the public and voluntary support sector continues. These continued efforts reflect the programme's ongoing commitment to improving housing conditions and tackling health inequalities through sustained, strategic partnership working.

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

We will harness the strengths, resources and passions in our communities to drive positive change and build solutions that reflect aspirations. We will have a catalysing role, focusing on enabling our communities to work together to make the changes that matter most.

Community empowerment will also drive environmental sustainability through initiatives such as biodiversity enhancement, climate adaptation projects and codesign of low-carbon infrastructure. This will help ensure that environmental action is inclusive, locally driven and firmly rooted in civic pride.

REDUCED HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND ENHANCED WELLBEING

We will tackle the social determinants of health – housing quality, economic opportunity, social connection and environmental factors – to improve outcomes. We will support residents to become health advocates and peer supporters, using social spaces, green environments and community activities to promote mental and physical wellbeing. Finally, we will also prioritise areas with poorer health outcomes, building confidence to improve individual outcomes and support system-wide challenges, such as workforce stability in care services.

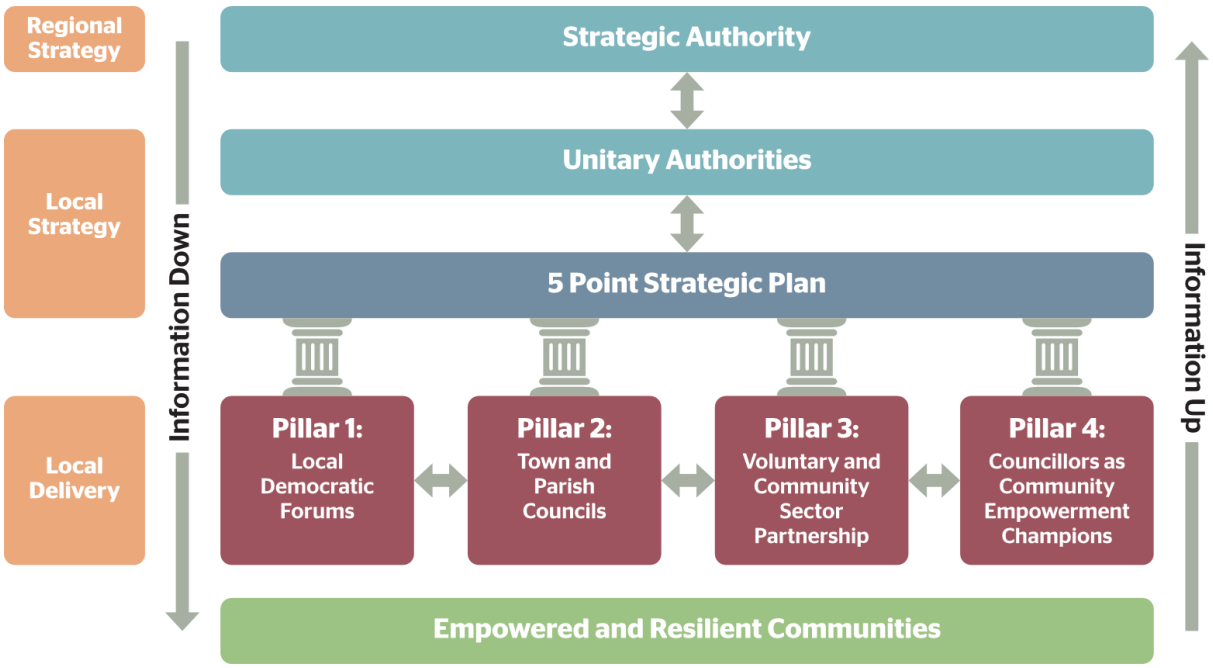
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND LOCAL PROSPERITY

We will champion local businesses, social enterprises and cooperatives that create jobs and retain economic value within the community. Community-led businesses and social enterprises will be empowered to address local needs and generate sustainable income. Our employment support will be tailored to match local opportunities with residents' aspirations. Financial literacy and long-term economic resilience will be strengthened and supported through community-led initiatives.

DELIVERING OUR AMBITION: FOUR PILLARS OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

To bring this vision to life, our approach is built around four connected pillars that support communities at every level. The three sub-proposals provide further information on the choices available for community engagement in each different approach. In principle, these pillars work together to ensure the plan is delivered in a joined-up way, with local voices helping shape local

decisions. They will build stronger local leadership, encourage participation and support communities to take action together. Every neighbourhood can speak up, work together and access the tools and support needed to shape its own future.



PILLAR 1: LOCAL DEMOCRATIC FORUMS

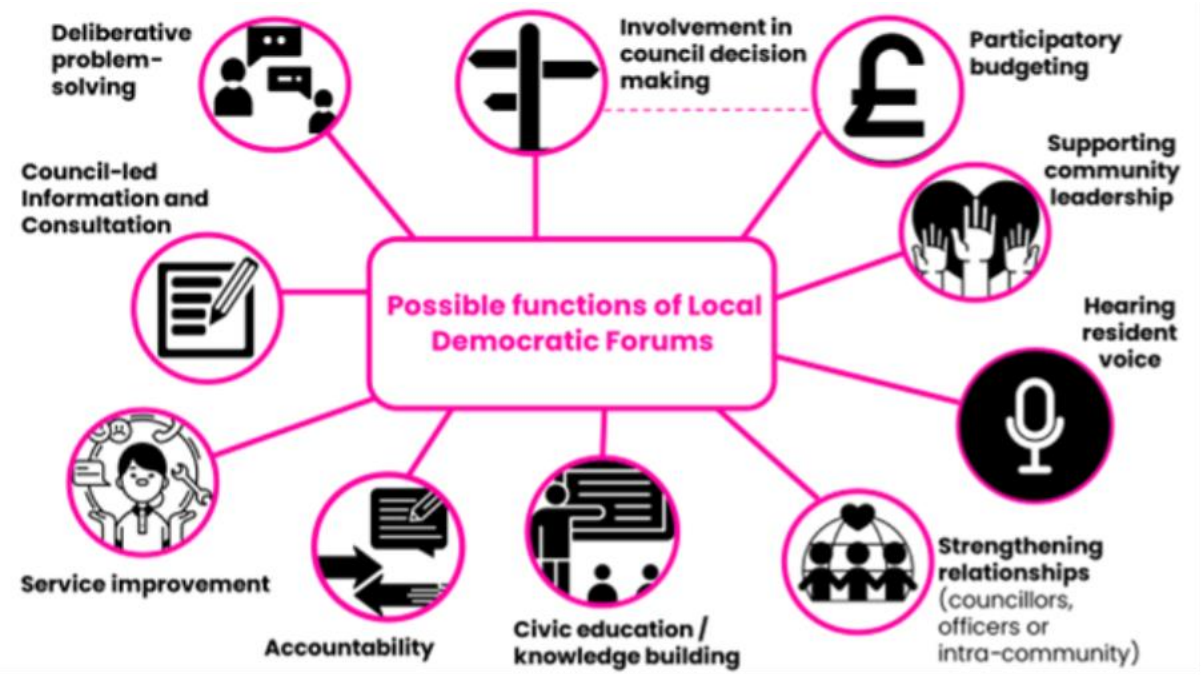
Drawing on practices from Hertfordshire and other areas, local democratic forums may serve to enhance community involvement in decision-making on local matters. The approach evolves from the traditional area committees and allows communities to influence Council and public sector service delivery. Together with Town and Parish Councils, these forums are designed to structure community engagement within local governance and services. Forums may include members from relevant public sector organisations, such as health, the police, local business leaders, as well as the VCFSE. The approach is intended to support neighbourhood governance and increase democratic participation across communities.

These forums will operate within the framework established by the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, which sets out a new legal basis for neighbourhood governance and community empowerment across England.

The forums will use integrated data to identify and address emerging issues early, aligning with the bill's emphasis on locally driven decision making and public service reform.

They will ensure inclusive representation from voluntary and community organisations, public sector partners and local business and education networks, reflecting the government's commitment to strengthening local accountability. Through structured, cross-sector collaboration, the forums will empower communities to lead on decisions that affect their areas.

Under the new legislation the forums will also be able to manage budgets and services delegated by Unitary Authorities, aligning with the ambition to formalise neighbourhood governance and devolve authority closer to residents. New Local have identified several functions local democratic forums can perform.



Due to its polycentric geography, there is no universal solution for Hertfordshire. Our approach recognises that communities differ fundamentally in their characteristics, needs and existing democratic infrastructure. A framework appropriate for a historic market town with an active Parish Council will differ from what works in an unparished suburban area, or a rural cluster of small villages. This flexibility is not a weakness, but a strength. It acknowledges the reality that effective community empowerment cannot be imposed through uniformed structures but must emerge from authentic engagement with the specific character and aspiration of each individual area.

Our transition work will identify common elements that should apply across all local democratic forums whilst also creating space for local adaptation and innovation.

PILLAR 2: TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Hertfordshire's civic landscape is enriched by a diverse range of Town and Parish Councils. Each local Council offers a unique blend of local knowledge, adaptability and community connections, bringing value to the people and places they serve. Where they exist, these local Councils are embedded within Hertfordshire's communities, providing direct insight into local priorities and needs.

The government has confirmed that reorganisation will not alter the structure or functions of existing Town and Parish Councils. This continuity means that local Councils will remain part of Hertfordshire's governance framework.

The extent of Town and Parish Council coverage, and their influence differs significantly across the county. In areas where they are well established, these local Councils have the potential to support and contribute to emerging governance arrangements.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S CONTEXT

Hertfordshire's 124 Town and Parish Councils form one element of local democracy. Covering 85% of the county's land, but serving under half its population, they collectively raise £20.7m in precept for 2025/26.

The distribution varies considerably: whilst some districts are fully parished, others are only partially parished, and some, such as Watford and Stevenage, have no Town or Parish Councils at all, highlighting the diversity in local governance structures. Councils range in scale from those serving just 79 residents to Bishop's Stortford Town Council with over 31,000, allowing tailored local approaches that reflect strong community identities.

These local Councils deliver a range of services, from allotments and public conveniences to events and markets. They also provide community representation, support local projects with grants and manage assets, such as community buildings and street lighting, all contributing to local life in their areas. Engaging with Town and Parish Councils supports our commitment to community empowerment, recognising them as one of several ways to ensure our communities are engaged and our neighbourhoods empowered.

Case study: Kimpton Parish Council

Kimpton Parish Council exemplifies how local Councils foster connection, wellbeing and pride. Serving the village for nearly 120 years, the Council actively maintains local areas whilst also taking care to preserve rural character. Through volunteer dedication, the Council supports regular community events. The hand-delivered Welcome Pack – a decade-long partnership with Kimpton Parish Church – helps newcomers settle in and helps build and reflect strong village ties. The Council's purchase and maintenance of 56 public benches across public land and rights of way demonstrates thoughtful enhancement of everyday life for residents and visitors. This proactive approach, grounded in deep understanding of community needs, makes Kimpton not just a place to live, but a place to truly belong.

CODESIGNING OUR APPROACH

We have taken a structured approach to engaging with Town and Parish Councils, establishing a task and finish group with local Council Clerks to consider the opportunities reorganisation offers Hertfordshire. This has resulted in a series of recommendations, designed to support effective local governance and robust community engagement.

Theme	Recommendation
Governance	New Unitary Authorities may wish to adopt charters or frameworks to provide a foundation for collaboration and transparency with Town and Parish Councils. These frameworks would establish clear roles and shared objectives. Where devolution is being considered, Unitary Authorities would, in accordance with best practice, seek assurance on governance arrangements, including evidence of qualified staff, a strong electoral mandate and comprehensive training programmes for both Members and Officers.
Decision-making	As part of the Unitary Authorities' commitment to community empowerment, they would explore mechanisms to ensure that Town and

Theme	Recommendation
	Parish Councils can be appropriately involved in decision-making processes that affect their communities, particularly where services or assets may be devolved in future.
Communication	Protocols for information sharing and designation of key contacts within each Authority to enhance communication, transparency and responsiveness with Town and Parish Councils.
Asset transfers	If asset transfers to Town and Parish Councils are pursued, ensure a transparent approach supported by clear service agreements to guarantee continuity and accountability in service provision. Unitary Authorities should seek financial assurance through detailed business cases, adequate precept levels for ongoing service delivery and robust risk management arrangements.
Capacity and shared services	Where appropriate, invest in capacity building, particularly focusing on technology, systems and the development of relevant skills, to enable local Councils to work more effectively with Unitary Authorities in collaborative arrangements for mutual benefit.
Service delivery and devolved assets	Where devolution to Town and Parish Councils is being considered, explore flexible models of service delivery, ensuring that any devolved responsibilities are matched by adequate funding and resources. The new Unitary Authorities would seek appropriate assurance, such as a demonstrable track record of successfully managing existing responsibilities, clear service continuity plans and a commitment to quality standards that deliver genuine value for money and improved outcomes for local residents.

We will consider these recommendations and refine our approach during transition, but it will be for the new Unitary Authorities to implement changes as part of their community empowerment plans. They will also determine whether to conduct community governance reviews under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

PILLAR 3: VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Hertfordshire's voluntary and community sector (VCFSE) is a vital force in shaping an inclusive and empowered county. From established charities to grassroots groups, these organisations bring support, connection and creativity in responding to community needs. We are committed to unlocking the full potential of their skills, knowledge and lived experience, creating the conditions for every organisation to thrive and contribute to Hertfordshire's shared future.

Strategic engagement with public sector partners, alongside key representatives from the VCFSE has been central to shaping our proposals for local governance and community empowerment. All partners involved share a unified ambition to support and expand the capacity and influence of the voluntary and community sector. There is a strong consensus that delivering services at the neighbourhood level, in ways that empower and actively engage community members, will deliver better outcomes.

This collective commitment is grounded in the belief that by strengthening the voluntary and community sector, partners can build more resilient, connected and empowered communities. By focusing on neighbourhood-level service delivery and placing emphasis on empowerment

and active community participation, the approach aims to ensure that services are not only effective but also aligned with the unique needs and aspirations of local residents.

Partners are committed to reinforcing the role of the voluntary and community sector, recognising the crucial role it plays in driving positive social change within local communities. The central aim through the process of reorganisation of local government is to harness the sector's resources, skills and established community connections to secure improved outcomes for residents. By leveraging the unique strengths of voluntary and community organisations, partners seek to ensure that future service delivery is both impactful and tailored to the specific needs of each area.

To maintain effectiveness, there is a clear focus on preserving local expertise and sustaining the trust that communities have placed in these organisations. As new frameworks and approaches are developed, they will be carefully constructed to build on existing partnerships and proven services. This ensures that service delivery continues to be efficient, responsive and closely aligned with the priorities of local people.

Case study: VCFSE Alliance

Hertfordshire is home to the VCFSE Alliance, made up of a range of organisations across Herts and West Essex and funded through the ICB. This established group coordinates, improves and shares the wealth of experience and expertise within the health, care and wellbeing sector. Steering group representatives often form part of other partnership structures to ensure communication and opportunities flow between and within these structures.

CODESIGNING OUR APPROACH

Our engagement with the VCFSE has resulted in a series of recommendations for the new Unitary Authorities, which are designed to support effective local governance and robust community engagement.

Theme	Recommendation
Strengthening and resourcing partnerships	To enable success, new Unitary Authorities should invest in the capacity of the VCFSE sector and existing partnerships, ensuring new governance arrangements build on current successful networks. Provide practical support including training opportunities and dedicated liaison roles.
Clarifying roles and accountability	Clarity and guidance on roles, responsibilities and decision-making powers from the new Authorities, to avoid confusion and overlap. Establish transparent frameworks for accountability and reporting.
Embedding prevention and co-production	Make prevention and coproduction fundamental to all locality governance plans, with defined milestones and success measures. Encourage the sharing of best practices and learning across localities, including the VCS and public services.
Maintaining local knowledge and expertise	Map and value existing relationships and expertise at the neighbourhood level. Ensure these assets are preserved during reorganisation through robust transition plans that minimise disruption and support continuity.
Monitoring impact and adapting	During reorganisation establish mechanisms for regular feedback and evaluation, enabling the approach to be refined based on what works well. Engage communities in reviewing progress and shaping future developments.

We will review these recommendations and refine our strategy during transition. The new Unitary Authorities will be responsible for implementing changes in their community empowerment plans. With support from the new Unitary Authorities the VCFSE sector will have stable funding and long-term planning support, helping organisations in the future achieve greater impact in support of our communities.

PILLAR 4: COUNCILLORS – BEYOND REPRESENTATION TO TRANSFORMATION

Elected Members are the foundation of local democracy. With local government reform, there is a significant opportunity for Councillors to champion change, build capacity and empower residents to shape their own futures. Their deep local knowledge and ability to facilitate local problem solving will be instrumental in enabling communities to influence decision making and connect with wider opportunities.

Hertfordshire's Councillors will:

Role	Description
Community engagement and facilitation	Spend time in neighbourhoods attending events, hosting conversations and creating dialogue opportunities. They will convene diverse voices to identify priorities, facilitate discussions and support communities to develop their own solutions, whilst building relationships with residents, organisations and schools.
Leadership within local democratic forums	Ensure community voices are present in structured governance, work collaboratively with partners to address challenges and help communities understand decision-making processes, whilst holding services accountable for delivering local priorities.
Managing resources for community impact	Manage delegated budgets for local projects, work with neighbourhood teams to align Council resources with community priorities and make transparent decisions about funding, whilst being honest about constraints and trade-offs.
Building bridges and enabling collaboration	Connect communities with the resources, expertise and networks they need. Link residents with opportunities, help groups access support, facilitate partnerships and translate community needs into policy priorities whilst explaining strategic decisions in accessible terms.
Prevention and early intervention	Work with neighbourhood teams to identify emerging issues before escalation. Support community-led prevention initiatives, ensure data informs early action and champion investment in preventative approaches that build resilience, rather than simply managing crises.
Advocacy and accountability	Advocate for communities within strategic governance, challenge decisions that overlook local needs and champion investment. Maintain transparency about deliverability, explain difficult decisions honestly and ensure communities can hold Councillors and services to account.
Supporting skills and capacity development	Nurture community leadership by helping residents develop skills in organising, advocacy, project management and governance. Support community groups, encourage young people's engagement and build pathways for residents to progress to leadership roles.

The new Unitary Authorities will support and enable all Councillors to play critical roles in enabling communities to do things for themselves, sharing power and celebrating community achievements. This will support communities to be more resilient and connected.

OUR TRANSITION COMMITMENT: FROM VISION TO OPERATIONAL REALITY

OUR COMMITMENT TO DELIVERY

Transforming community empowerment from vision to reality requires structured transition work that establishes the foundations for effective local democratic forums. Between 2026 and 2028, we will develop the frameworks, funding mechanisms, capacity-building programmes, and accountability systems that enable our four pillars to deliver meaningful change from Vesting Day.

Notwithstanding that decisions will be taken by the new Unitary Authorities, we are proposing that during 2026 – 27, we will work with our key partners and communities to define forum boundaries and governance models, map services suitable for local management; develop business cases for sustainable funding, including a Community Investment Fund; design training and support programmes; and establish data and evaluation frameworks. In 2027 – 28, we will roll out Councillor training and test approaches with pilot areas to refine our model before wider implementation.

This transition work will be shaped by working groups, bringing together Councillors, Parish representatives, VCFSE leaders and residents. Regular community consultation through multiple channels will ensure broader input beyond these working groups. Pilots will test what works in practice, generating learning that improves the county-wide model.

By committing to this approach, we ensure that in April 2028 our approach to community empowerment has clarity of purpose, genuine authority, skilled people and robust accountability – delivering empowerment residents can see and experience from day one.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire's approach represents a practical evolution of democracy – placing genuine power in community hands yet also maintaining accountability. This creates the right conditions for transformation, where community members become co-creators of their local environment, developing skills, connections, capacity and agency that improve both individual and collective outcomes. Communities build resilience, celebrate identity and address challenges through collaborative action, supported by professional expertise and adequate resources.

Critically, public services shift from deficit-based intervention to asset-based partnership, improving outcomes and reducing long-term costs through prevention and community ownership.

Councillors, along with Town and Parish Councils, play a vital role in helping communities realise their ambitions. Alongside them, the voluntary and community sector offers independent, agile support – responding quickly to emerging needs and building trust through deep community connections that encourage participation and amplify the voices of those who might otherwise go unheard.

Local democratic forums provide the innovation needed to connect Unitary Authorities with hyper-local democracy, supporting government reorganisation and community empowerment in a practical and inclusive way.

This is not just local government reorganisation. It is democratic renewal that puts residents at the heart of the decisions that affect their lives, building the foundation for thriving, self-determining communities.

QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE SERVICES

MHCLG criterion 3: quality, sustainable services

THE STARTING POINT

Hertfordshire's 11 councils deliver a very wide range of services day to day - from social care, housing and planning, to environmental health, waste, leisure, culture, transport, and support functions such as finance and governance. Each organisation has naturally developed its own mix of structures, systems and partnerships to meet local needs. This diversity is one of Hertfordshire's strengths, but it also means services have evolved in different ways, with varied policies, contracts and delivery models. To develop our proposal and increase our readiness to deliver local government reorganisation in practice, all Councils have worked together to make sense of this landscape. We have created a single 'service catalogue' and shared datasets around existing demand, delivery models and performance levels. Using this common framework, professional leads across all Councils have identified key risks, issues and opportunities associated with re-shaping services, drawing on learning from other areas that have undergone reorganisation and disaggregation of services previously provided at County Council scale. For each major service area, partners have worked together to describe:

- What needs to be in place on Vesting Day to ensure continuity and compliance.
- Where there are opportunities for collaboration, sharing or alternative delivery models.
- How services could evolve over time to improve outcomes and efficiency.

Through this collaborative approach we have built a robust baseline position, enabling us to set out our proposals with confidence and make a fast start on delivering reorganisation in practice. We are clear on what work we can undertake prior to a decision from the Secretary of State, and we are ready to step up delivery in practice once a decision on a preferred option is made.

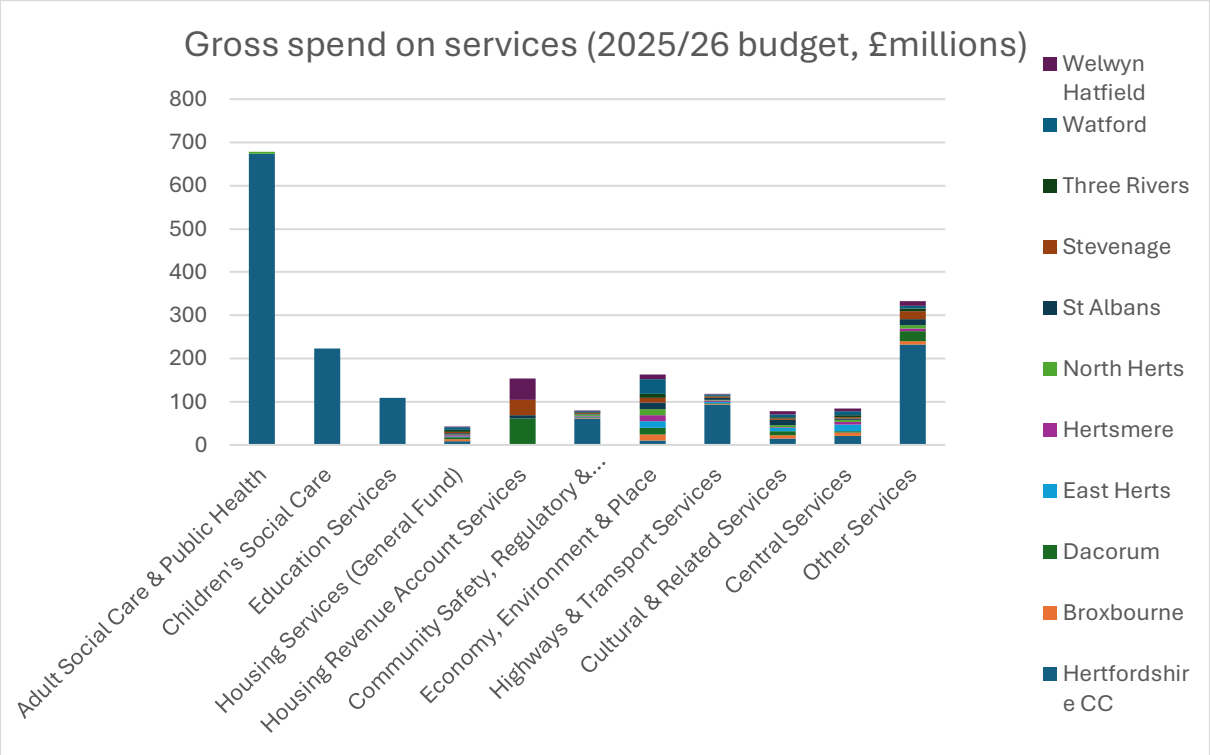
DELIVERING OUR AMBITION FOR COMMUNITIES AND SERVICES

Earlier in this document we set out our shared ambition for services that are integrated, efficient and people-centred, simple to access, focused on prevention, and designed around the needs of residents and communities. The service design process has been the mechanism for turning that ambition into practical plans and moving swiftly into delivery in practice.

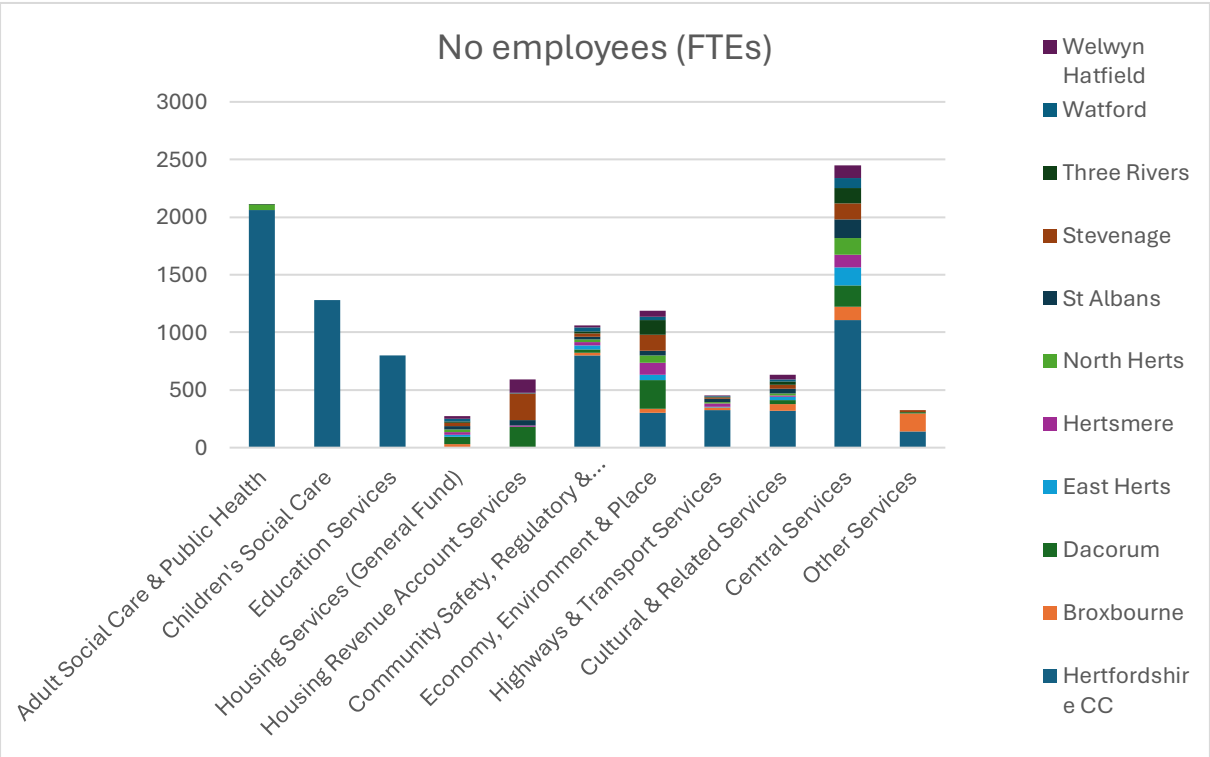
Through joint work across all 11 councils, we have brought together professional leads, managers and specialists to start the process of determining how existing services could be reshaped within new Unitary Authorities and begin preparing for the complex work involved.

This has included mapping how statutory functions would transfer safely, identifying opportunities to integrate related services, and testing alternative delivery models that could help to manage the risks, cost and complexity of transition or improve quality and resilience.

GROSS SERVICE EXPENDITURE (2025/2026 BUDGET)



WORKFORCE - FULL TIME EQUIVALENTS (APRIL 2024)



CRITICAL ENABLING FUNCTIONS

We have convened groups of professional leads from across all eleven councils to examine the systems and infrastructure that will enable safe transition and long-term improvement. These critical enablers—workforce, assets and property, digital and technology, and contracts and suppliers—are summarised below.

Enabler	Our starting point	Transformational opportunities for new authorities
Workforce	Around 11,000 FTE staff (excluding schools) employed across 11 Councils under separate pay, grading and policy frameworks. TUPE and HR systems vary; cultures and structures differ between county and district tiers. Recruitment pressures in key professions (social care, planning, procurement, ICT).	• Establish a shared workforce vision and consistent people policies across new Councils. • Work towards alignment of HR and payroll systems. • Invest in leadership, digital skills and workforce wellbeing. • Consider collaborative approaches to recruitment, retention and organisational development. • Design a new inclusive Workforce Strategy to ensure we have the right skills aligning talent with business objectives.
Assets and property	11 Councils hold substantial and varied estates portfolios, including investment properties, 22 civic offices, 32 waste depots/transfer centres, 31 leisure centres and 181 car parks. Asset records and information systems are inconsistent with some duplication and under-utilisation across sites.	• Rationalise and modernise the estate to improve efficiency and service access. • Ensure accurate shared data on our collective asset base. • Consolidate office accommodation and co-locate frontline services. • Embed sustainability and net-zero standards in asset management.
Digital and technology	Councils operate multiple legacy systems, with duplication in case management, CRM, finance and HR platforms. Across the 11 organisations c.1300 applications are currently used. There are varying levels of cloud adoption and digital maturity; separate cybersecurity and network arrangements.	• Implementation of single CRM and case management systems to streamline all customer interactions and provide seamless access to services. • Integration of finance, HR, and procurement systems featuring real-time reporting to inform strategic decisions. • Development of a unified data platform equipped with advanced analytics and AI capabilities to support ongoing improvement initiatives. • Utilisation of AI and automation to enhance productivity and support service delivery • Adoption of a cloud-first infrastructure designed to ensure scalability, security, and environmental sustainability. • Incorporation of digital inclusion principles into service design, ensuring equitable access for all customers. • Enhancement of workforce digital skills through collaborative tools and agile delivery models. • Establishment of governance structures comprising digital leadership roles and cross-functional transformation boards.
Contracts and suppliers	c.400 live £1m+ contracts worth more than £1bn collectively, managed under differing rules and cycles. Fragmented procurement and limited aggregation of spend. Overlaps in facilities management, IT and professional services contracts, many expiring around 2027–28.	• Map and rationalise contracts ahead of transition. • Develop a unified Procurement Strategy and contract management framework. • Increase use of joint frameworks to secure better value and consistency. • Embed social value, sustainability and local supply-chain priorities. • Modernise procurement processes through e-systems and spend analytics.

MANAGING TRANSITION AND DISAGGREGATION FOR CRITICAL SERVICES

Transition to new Unitary Councils will be the largest public sector organisational change programme undertaken in Hertfordshire since 1972. It will be challenging to deliver and will require sustained effort and investment from a very large group of professionals.

Our shared goal is to deliver a transition to new authorities in a way that ensures continuity of vital services, safeguards residents and staff and creates the conditions for longer-term transformation.

The 11 councils have worked together to begin detailed planning for service areas identified by MHCLG as bringing the highest risk, cost and complexity in disaggregation:

- Adult Social Care
- Children's Social Care
- SEND and education
- Housing and homelessness
- Transportation and highways (not specified as a high-risk service by MHCLG but added to the list at the request of the 11 leaders).

These areas reflect approximately 50% of the collective budgeted expenditure of Hertfordshire authorities in 2025/26 and around 40% of the workforce; but they are also likely to cause the most significant financial risks to future authorities.

Whilst recognising that key decisions will be made by future Unitary Authorities in shadow form, for each of these critical areas, cross-council professional teams have developed initial transition blueprints describing how we foresee a day one position for new authorities in a way that manages risk, minimises disruption and ensures continuity for users of services. These have been informed by lessons from other areas that have undergone LGR, and specifically disaggregation of services provided at county scale, but have also been shaped by the professional and technical judgement of experienced leaders across the partnership.

TRANSITION BLUEPRINTS FOR CRITICAL SERVICES

These plans recognise that while reorganisation brings opportunities to simplify and integrate, it also carries risk. The disaggregation of county-wide services, the aggregation of District and Borough functions, and the need to migrate data, systems and contracts all create complexity. Transition costs will need to be carefully managed and phased to avoid disruption to frontline delivery.

The following sections detail our transition blueprints for each area. The blueprints for day one are illustrative planning tools, developed to show what safe and legal service delivery could look like at the point of vesting. They are not final operating models. Their purpose is to minimise risk during transition, provide assurance that statutory functions can continue without interruption, and create a stable platform for new Councils to review and evolve services once established.

Each of the day-one blueprints has been developed to a common set of principles that ensure consistency, safety and flexibility across all critical service areas.

Shared or collaborative delivery on a transitional basis	Where it is not practical or cost-effective to disaggregate specialist or county-wide functions immediately, Councils are anticipating shared or collaborative service arrangements at least on a transitional basis. These will provide resilience through transition while allowing future

	Authorities to review and decide their long-term operating models once stable.
Statutory separation and clear accountability at the level of new Unitary Authorities	Every new Unitary Authority must be able to discharge its own statutory duties from Vesting Day. The blueprints therefore set out the minimum structures, roles and systems required for safe and legal operation within each authority, ensuring clarity of accountability and responsibility.
Maintenance and integration of local provision	At the same time, continuity for residents and staff is paramount. Services that already operate on District or neighbourhood footprints will remain locally delivered, with an intention to integrate with housing, health and community partners to preserve existing relationships and local knowledge.

Further due diligence will be required on these proposals as detailed design progresses during our transition phase. As that work continues, specific arrangements may change to reflect emerging evidence, local priorities and national guidance, while the underlying principles of safety, continuity and service improvement will remain constant.

NOTE ON TECHNOLOGY, SYSTEMS AND TRANSFORMATION

The technology and systems design principles set out in the "ambition" chapter for the new unitary authorities are intended to guide a comprehensive transformation; however, it is important to recognise that the critical actions such as ensuring operational continuity, legal compliance, and baseline cybersecurity will be prioritised for vesting day, the broader transformation, subject to funded business cases, will be phased over time.

The service blueprints that follow, set out clear and ambitious direction for future technology and systems integration which will be achieved over time building on the strong technological foundations set in place for a safe and legal vesting day.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

Adult Social Care services in Hertfordshire have a budgeted gross expenditure of £679m for 2025/26 and directly employ over 2,100 people, as well as relying on and part funding a much larger care provider external workforce. There were almost 34,000 new requests for support in 2024/25, a significant 20% rise from pre-COVID levels. Nearly 14,000 Needs Assessments for Adults were completed together with a further 2,500 new Carers Needs Assessments. Over 27,800 adults were supported with services in 2024/25 with 15,210 of those adults receiving long-term care. 8,800 safeguarding concerns were received with 2300 progressing to formal enquiry. 10,300 financial assessments were carried out. Demand is rising with demographic change.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE: WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE THROUGH LGR

Our ambition for Adult Social Care, through LGR reorganisation, is to place people at the heart of care, ensuring that every individual is supported to live a safe, healthy and independent life with genuine choice and control over the care and support they receive.

We aim to build on a preventative, place-based care model that is proactive, personalised and firmly based in the strengths of our local communities.

We will achieve this through stronger integration and partnership with health, housing, voluntary and community services, and supported by excellent practice and robust quality assurance.

New unitary structures will allow Adult Social Care, Housing, Public Health and Community Wellbeing to be managed within one organisation for the first time. The two key opportunities are:

- **Stronger prevention and early help models**, using data and community insight to identify and support people before crisis.
- **Closer alignment of housing and care**, ensuring that supported housing, adaptations and homelessness prevention are planned jointly with social care and public health teams.

Under all options, each new Authority will deliver its own statutory Adult Social Care functions, ensuring compliance with the Care Act, with clear political and officer leadership within each organisation.

We anticipate that at least on a transitional basis new authorities will coordinate and share some elements of service provision on day one through an “alliance model” as described below. To begin with, the purpose of this alliance model will be as a shared vehicle for managing the risks, costs and complexity of disaggregation, with the model subject to progressive review by new authorities over time, with services eventually evolving to a steady state in different ways depending upon the unitary model ultimately selected and the decisions of the new authorities themselves.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE – DAY ONE BLUEPRINT

ADULT SOCIAL CARE – MANAGING TRANSITION

Operational planning for Adult Social Care will be phased in three stages:

- During the **shadow period**, councils will prepare the groundwork – confirming statutory roles, mapping systems and determining how these will be delivered on day one, creating the shared service models and cataloguing contracts. Workforce instability is a key risk, and it will be vital to support teams with early information about the changes they can expect to minimise the risk of loss of staff. Stakeholders including people who draw on care and support services, care providers and VCSFE partners will need to be engaged.
- On **day one**, the priority is to be safe and legal: governance and safeguarding structures will be live, people who need care and support or information and advice will be able to contact us, and we will be able to take and progress referrals. Case management and payment systems will be functioning, and staff and provider contracts transferred under clear accountability.
- Over the **longer term**, the new Authorities will use this stable platform to consolidate systems, harmonise or differentiate policies, and embed integrated, prevention-led models of care with partners.

Operational component	Key activities during transition period	Day one milestones
Leadership and governance	• Appoint statutory Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and Principal Social Worker for each future Authority. • Establish a joint Adults Transition Board with ICB, HPFT and co-production and provider representation. • Map existing safeguarding, quality assurance and decision-making frameworks.	• Each new Authority has a functioning leadership team, DASS and governance structure in place. • Local Safeguarding Adults Boards re-constituted and operational on a shared basis as a transitional arrangement. • Clear scheme of delegation and accountability for Care Act duties.

Operational component	Key activities during transition period	Day one milestones
	• Determine shared functions and define governance arrangements for these • Begin workforce engagement and communications.	• Shared framework and Care Act operational practice standards maintained across Hertfordshire. • Shared functions operational.
Workforce	• Complete workforce profiling (roles, grades, skills, retirement and turnover risk). • Identify critical posts and interim capacity requirements. • TUPE mapping and consultation. • Early confirmation to staff of which organisation they will work for as far as possible. • Staff communications and well-being support.	• All staff transferred under TUPE with business-as-usual rotas. • Line management and HR systems operational. • Continuity plans in place for key teams (e.g. hospital discharge, safeguarding). • Clear signposting for staff and residents on service contacts.
Systems and data	• Catalogue all systems (case management, finance, payments, BI). • Define cloning/hosting approach to minimise disruption. • Establish GDPR-compliant data-sharing agreements between new Authorities. • Test data migration pathways for provider payments.	• Continuity of operational case management and finance systems for each Authority. • Functioning 'front door' and advice portals. • Tested payment mechanisms for care providers and direct payments. • Shared reporting to ensure statutory returns continue. • Statutory returns and reporting continue without break.
Contracts and commissioning	• Map and review all care contracts, frameworks and SLAs. • Identify contracts due for renewal near Vesting Day and agree continuity plan. • Engage providers on transitional arrangements.	• All contracts novated or extended to ensure continuity of care. • Central register of providers and spend in place. • Business-as-usual commissioning and payments maintained. • Joint escalation process for market or safeguarding issues.
Finance and charging	• Model service budgets and apportion funding to new Authority footprints. • Review and align charging and financial-assessment policies. • Set up interim finance processes and controls. • Understand and define approach for Ordinary Residence.	• Live budget and accounting structures in place. • Tested processes for provider payments, client contributions and debt management. • Consistent charging policy applied to all residents.
Operations and service delivery	• Define operating model for information, advice, assessment, reablement, safeguarding and community teams. • Confirm pathways with ICBs for hospital discharge and prevention hubs. • Map local offices and estate dependencies.	• Each Authority has an operational 'front door' for advice, assessment and safeguarding. • Core services – assessment, reviews, safeguarding, brokerage, direct care services (day Services and Supported Living), finance teams – fully staffed and functioning.

Operational component	Key activities during transition period	Day one milestones
		• Business continuity plans activated.
People, Provider and market engagement	• People who can draw on care and support services have the opportunity to understand any impact of LGR to how we communicate with them or are assured that they will not experience any change. • Communicate regularly with co-production groups, providers and care associations. • Confirm financial assurance and contact routes during transition. • Establish shared quality-monitoring process across new UAs.	• People continue to access ACS support with no disruption. • Providers have single, clear points of contact. • Market oversight and quality assurance processes functioning. • Joint risk management arrangements across Authorities and ICBs.

LONGER-TERM DIRECTION

Once safe and legal operation is achieved, each new Authority will have the space to review and refine its Adult Social Care arrangements as it moves towards a steady state. Whilst design and delivery model may vary in the individual sub-proposals for the 2, 3 and 4 unitary options, there are several common priorities are already emerging.

Over the longer term, Authorities are expected to:

- **Consolidate systems and processes**, moving from interim hosting arrangements to their own preferred case management, finance and business intelligence platforms.
- **Develop integrated support with housing and health**, aligning Adult Social Care more closely with housing, public health, alongside community partners to create multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams focused on prevention and wellbeing.
- **Strengthen joint commissioning and market management**, working with Integrated Care Boards to shape a sustainable, diverse provider market and expand community-based options for care and support.
- **Review workforce and practice models** in ways that best support their own staff and enable effective recruitment and retention of professionals.
- **Embed prevention and technology**, scaling initiatives such as telecare, digital monitoring and the Connect and Prevent programme to reduce demand for long-term care.
- **Review and differentiate policies**, including charging, eligibility and direct payment arrangements, to ensure relevance, fairness and transparency for residents across each new Authority.

FOCUS ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Public Health is a statutory responsibility of upper-tier and Unitary Authorities. It will therefore transfer to the new Councils on Vesting Day, together with the Public Health Grant and associated contracts. To inform this, the Director of Public Health (DPH) has led an options appraisal setting out how statutory and specialist functions could be configured across the new Authorities.

Four broad models have been tested:

- **Option 1 – Disaggregated:** each Unitary Council has its own Public Health team and Director of Public Health.
- **Option 2 – Shared/hosted:** a single county-wide Public Health team led by one DPH, hosted by a unitary authority and accountable to all.
- **Option 3 – Hybrid (single DPH):** Deputy DsPH embedded in each council, reporting to a single DPH, with shared specialist functions.
- **Option 4 – Hybrid (separate DsPH):** separate DsPH in each Council supported by a joint specialist service.

Each model has been evaluated for its ability to:

- Maintain statutory compliance and national professional standards.
- Sustain specialist capacity and training functions.
- Align with local leadership, place-based prevention and health inequality priorities.
- Secure efficient commissioning and equitable service coverage.

This exercise has concluded that:

- Options 1 and 4 (disaggregated or separate DsPH) are most suitable for a two-unitary model but would be costly and hard to staff if there were 3–4 Councils.
- Options 2 and 3 (shared or hybrid models) are more viable for 3–4 unitary structures, because they preserve specialist capacity and reduce duplication.
- The DPH sees integration with related services (such as Housing, Environmental Health, Community Safety) as beneficial under any model.
- A final recommendation will depend on which LGR structure government selects and how the Public Health Grant is handled.

Further work will continue through the transition period to refine governance and funding arrangements once a preferred local government structure is confirmed. The assessment will inform the 'safe and legal' day-one plan and longer-term integration of Public Health with related services such as Housing, Community Safety and Environmental Health.

Case study: Herts Careline

Herts Careline is a longstanding service area of North Herts Council, proudly celebrated its 40th anniversary in July 2022. Renowned for its award-winning assistive technology and telecare solutions, Careline empowers individuals both locally and nationwide to live independently with confidence. Since 2014, Careline has partnered with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to deliver an extensive suite of services including community alarms, GPS pendants for outdoor safety, advanced telecare for complex needs, and automated welfare calls. These offerings currently support over 16,000 people.

Each year, Careline responds to more than 7,400 medical emergencies, alongside thousands of calls addressing physical and mental health concerns, safeguarding, domestic violence, care breakdowns, housing repairs, out-of-hours support, and homelessness. By collaborating with HCC and organisations such as The British Red Cross, a first responder service, Careline makes a meaningful difference to health and social care across Hertfordshire. The latest customer satisfaction survey reflects this impact, with 100% of respondents feeling reassured and 99% willing to recommend Careline to a friend.

Case study: Hertsmere Cancer Screening Uptake Project

Hertsmere's award nominated Cancer Screening Uptake Project brought together local Primary Care Networks and wider system partners to collectively target the health inequalities in cancer screening uptake and diagnosis which was very low. With funding from Hertfordshire County Council's Public Health team, the project tackled the low rates of breast, cervical and prostate cancer screening. Hertsmere has the lowest rates in Hertfordshire and a lower uptake than the England average.

The project adopted the principles behind the NHS's Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, bringing together the wider system to build a culture of collaboration, pride and the time and space needed within the partnership to problem solve, build relationships and trust between primary care, other system partners and our local communities.

The project identified patients who have not responded to screening invites and those with increased cancer risk. Proactively contacting these patients has allowed the team to fully address any concerns that the individual might have, whilst also offering the option of booking in for an appointment while on the call. This approach builds on the vaccination tracing work during the pandemic and has been extremely well received by both partners and patients.

Increase in screening rates has been seen across all parts of the project, with

- The cervical screening rate for the borough increasing from 63.45% to 76.16%, since March 2023. The project has booked over 3000 cervical screening appointments.
- The breast cancer screening rate increasing from 63.62% to 75%, with over 450 appointments booked. Outcome data shows that 2% of women who took up screening after contact with our project, received an 'other than normal' result and of these 11% have received a breast cancer diagnosis. These women may not have been experiencing symptoms but contact with our project has meant that they have been able to access treatment at the earliest possible opportunity.
- The prostate cancer screening rate increasing from 18.5% to 66.22% for Black men over 45 who are at a greater risk of developing prostate cancer. Outcome data shows that 17% of men who engaged with this strand of the project have been referred to hospital for further investigation and of these 26% have received a prostate cancer diagnosis. It's important to note that these men were not experiencing any symptoms and therefore have been able to access treatment earlier, a potentially life-saving measure.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: SOCIAL CARE, SEND AND EDUCATION

CONTEXT

Children's Services in Hertfordshire have a budgeted gross expenditure of £335m for 2025/26 and employ around 2,100 full-time equivalent staff.

Within this, Children's Social Care services budgeted gross expenditure of £223m with 1,280 full-time equivalent staff. These services span safeguarding, statutory assessments, support for looked-after children, fostering and adoption, and youth justice. Demand pressures are increasing, particularly in relation to complex needs, out-of-area placements, and growth in Education, Health and Care Plans. While Hertfordshire overall has relatively low numbers of children in care compared with England as a whole, need is unevenly distributed – with higher demand concentrated in areas such as Stevenage, Watford and Hatfield.

Education and SEND services in Hertfordshire have budgeted gross expenditure of £109m, and around 800 full-time equivalent staff. The services oversee a school population of around 226,000 pupils. Demand for specialist support has risen sharply: there were 14,473 children and young people supported with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) by July 2025, with annual growth between 12% – 15%. Meeting the ongoing increases in requests for EHC Needs Assessment is challenging and, although performance is above comparators and national performance, 56% were completed within the statutory 20-week period in 2024. Demand for SEND provision is growing, complex and misaligned with current capacity creating an unsustainable system: there are 3,114 special school places currently in Hertfordshire including the 10% of additional places created in the last academic year. Work continues to manage and mitigate these pressures through programmes to increase provision capacity, recognising that current demand outstrips potential capacity. Pressures on the High Needs Block continue, with a forecast spend of £263m in 2025/26, £52m above available funding and increasing the overall cumulative DSG deficit to c£80m. Home-to-school transport costs are also a major Authority budget driver, supporting more than 3,100 pupils at a total annual cost of nearly £40m.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE THROUGH LGR

Our ambition for **Children's Social Care** through reorganisation is to create safe, stable systems with clear local accountability and sufficient scale to invest in prevention and early help so that more children stay safely cared for by their families. The aim is to support more children and families earlier, reducing escalation to statutory intervention. For children who need to be in our care and care leavers, our ambition as corporate parents is to ensure they have homes and trusted relationships that offer love, care, protection and stability. The aim is that children in care and care leavers receive the help they need to address experiences of adversity and trauma and develop the foundations for a healthy, happy life.

Integrating Children's Social Care more closely with housing, health and community services supports these prevention and corporate parenting ambitions and aligns with our wider goals of tackling health inequalities, supporting family resilience, and ensuring every child has the best start in life.

At the same time, our ambition for **Education and SEND through** reorganisation is to build a more inclusive system that identifies and meets need earlier, reduces reliance on out-of-area placements, and ensures children with SEND can thrive in local schools and communities. The goal is to strengthen place-based support, integrate better with health and social care, and provide parents with simpler, more transparent processes. We also aim to grow local specialist provision, modernise systems and case management, and maintain Hertfordshire's strong track record in traded school support.

Reorganisation provides a chance to reset relationships between education, social care and health partners around new localities that reflect natural communities and school catchments. This will enable:

- **Integrated early-help and family hub models**, combining youth, education and community services in multidisciplinary teams.
- **A single accountability framework for safeguarding and SEND**, into the new unitary authorities.

- **More coherent engagement with schools**, especially through locality-based SEND and inclusion partnerships that strengthen early identification and reduce reliance on out-of-area placements.
- **Improve coordination of home-to-school transport, admissions and SEND provision**, supporting inclusion and improving efficiency.

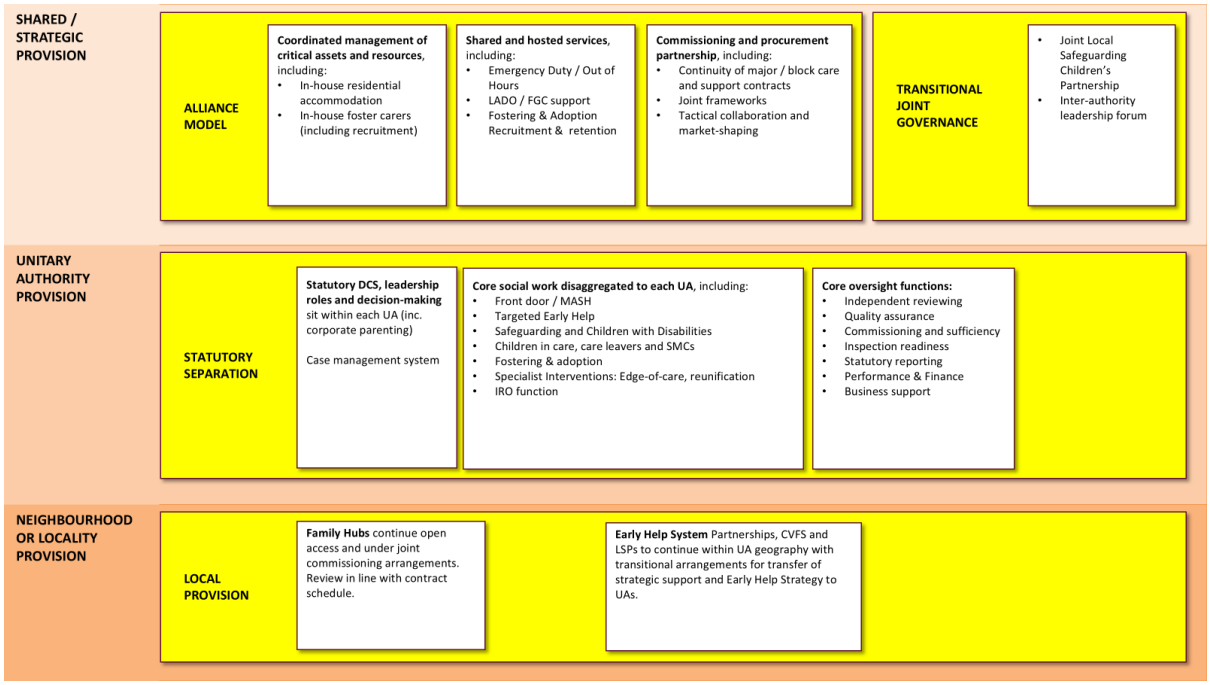
Reorganisation will not in itself resolve financial pressures in education and SEND, but it offers the opportunity to align policy, simplify access, and design services around families and communities.

Under all options, each new Authority will deliver its own statutory Children's Social Care functions, led by a Director of Children's Services and supported by local safeguarding and corporate parenting arrangements.

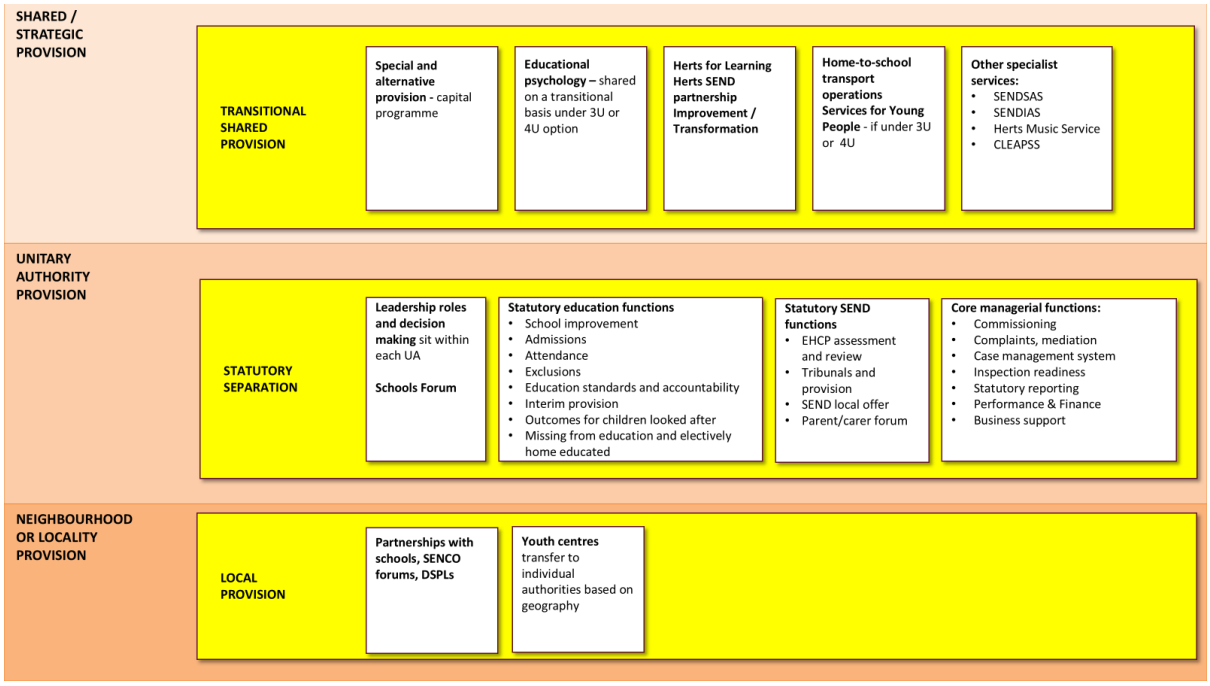
We anticipate that at least on a transitional basis new authorities will coordinate and share some elements of service provision on day one through an “alliance model” as described below. To begin with, the purpose of this alliance model will be as a shared vehicle for managing the risks, costs and complexity of disaggregation, with the model subject to ongoing review by new authorities over time, and services eventually differentiating to a steady state in different ways depending upon the unitary model selected and the decisions of the new authorities themselves.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES – DAY ONE BLUEPRINT

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE



SEND AND EDUCATION



CHILDREN'S SERVICES – MANAGING TRANSITION

Operational planning for Children's Services is being phased in three stages:

- During the **shadow period**, Councils will prepare the groundwork – confirming statutory roles, mapping systems, cataloguing contracts and engaging the workforce.

- On **day one**, the priority is to be safe and legal: governance and safeguarding structures will be live, case management and payment systems functioning, and staff and providers transferred under clear accountability.
- Over the **longer-term**, the new Authorities will decide how to use this stable platform to review and either maintain shared provision, or else differentiate systems, policies, and practice models.

Operational component	Key activities during transition period	Day one milestones
Leadership and governance	• Appoint statutory Director of Children's Services (DCS) and supporting senior management for each future Authority. • Establish joint Children's Services Transition Board with ICB, schools and police representation. • Map existing governance for safeguarding, corporate parenting, and SEND improvement to avoid gaps. • Draft new Terms of Reference for Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Youth Justice Boards.	• Each new Authority has a functioning DCS, statutory roles and capable senior leadership team in place. • Corporate parenting and safeguarding boards reconstituted in transitional shared form and operational. • Clear decision-making and accountability for statutory Children and Education Act duties. • Single reporting lines and localised arrangements for performance and inspection readiness.
Workforce and culture	• Undertake workforce profiling by team and role in order to allocate core social work to new areas. • Identify and mitigate risks in relation to critical roles and hard-to-recruit areas (e.g. social workers, educational psychologists). • Agree TUPE and ring-fencing arrangements. • Develop staff briefings and wellbeing support. • Create joint training and induction plans for new leaders and front-line teams.	• All staff transferred safely with continuity of supervision and management. • Caseload allocations stabilised and held intact during the transition. • HR and payroll systems live and staff communications channels operational. • New Authorities continue core practice model (e.g. Family Safeguarding).
Systems and data	• Identify and develop transition plans for all critical case management and line-of-business systems (Liquidlogic, EHM, EYES) and education platforms in partnership with suppliers. • Agree data sharing protocols with ICB and police.	• Continuity of case management and education systems for each authority with tested access and reporting. • Statutory returns and Ofsted reporting capabilities in place. • Provider payments and SEND funding processed accurately
Contracts and commissioning	• Map and review all contracts (fostering, residential, SEND transport, therapy services). • Engage providers and regional frameworks on transition plans. • Identify contracts needing novation or extension near Vesting Day and develop strategies in collaboration with suppliers. • Assess market capacity and risk of cost inflation and develop market management approach through alliance model.	• All active contracts novated or extended; payment systems tested. • Shared procurement arrangements for high-cost placements and adoption services in place. • Single market oversight and provider escalation routes operational.
Finance and resources	• Apportion Children's Services budgets and High Needs Block funding by agreed formula.	• Budgets live within each new authority's finance system. • Payment mechanisms for providers, schools and care leavers operational.

Operational component	Key activities during transition period	Day one milestones
	• Review and align grants and school funding streams. • Set up interim financial controls and reporting.	• Consistent financial delegations and controls in place.
Operations and service delivery	• Define differentiated operating model for front door, MASH, Early Help and Family Hub networks for each UA. • Map SEND assessment and EHCP workflows. • Confirm continuity plans for Youth Justice and Virtual School functions.	• Each Authority has a live front door for referrals and safeguarding concerns. • Statutory services – assessment, children in care, SEND and Early Help – fully operational. • Family Hubs and commissioned Early Help services functioning under transition agreements.
Partnerships and market relationships	• Maintain joint working arrangements with health, police and schools through the transition and put in place transitional joint governance. • Engage schools on future locality governance and SEND planning.	• ICB and police partnership arrangements continue seamlessly. • School engagement structures in place within each Authority (e.g. education partnership boards). • Clear communication with voluntary sector and providers on service continuity.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: LONGER-TERM TRANSFORMATION

Once stable day-one arrangements are in place, each new Authority will have the opportunity to progressively review, and re-shape shared and localised services over time.

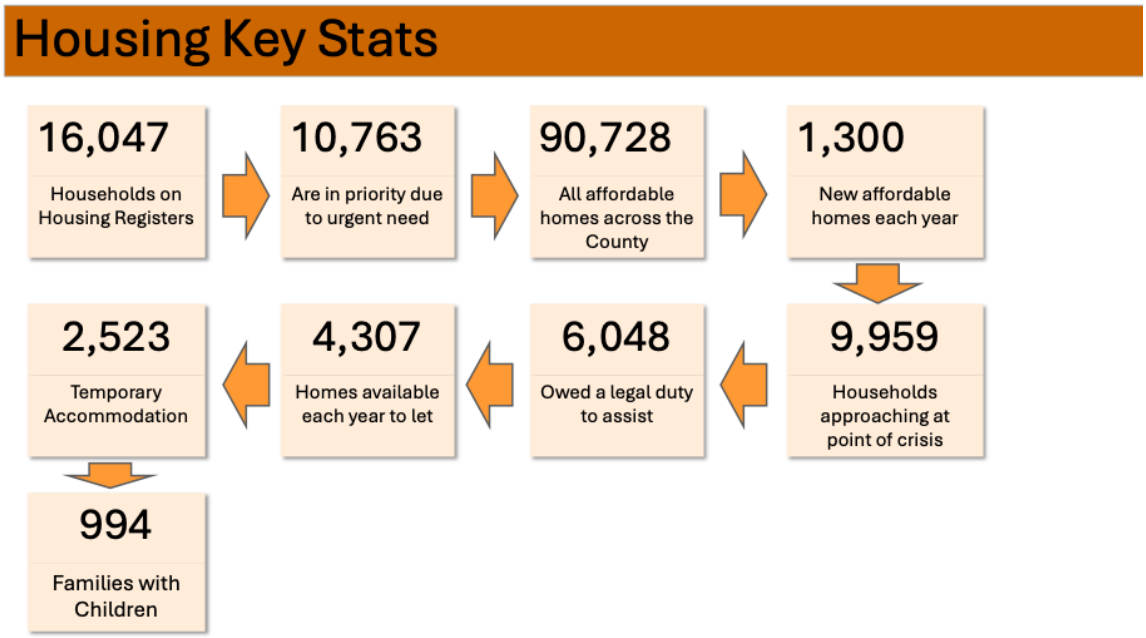
Over the transformation period, new Councils can be expected to:

- **Embed a locality-based model of support.** Family Hubs, Early Help teams, SEND services and youth provision are expected to operate as integrated neighbourhood networks, aligned with hosing services, schools, Primary Care and community partners. Local teams will share data and intelligence to identify need earlier and provide joined-up help to families. Co-located locality teams will focus on the wider determinants of health, tackling inequalities and supporting children with complex needs.
- **Re-set the relationship with schools and education settings.** Education and SEND services will work with redefined clusters of schools to codesign inclusive practices, build local sufficiency of specialist places, and ensure children with additional needs can thrive in mainstream settings wherever possible. The Virtual School will continue to champion the attainment and wellbeing of children in care across the new Authorities.
- **Strengthen prevention and Early Help pathways.** Using a 'whole-family' approach, new Councils will build on the existing track record of Early Help access through Family Hubs, community outreach and digital tools. This will continue to reduce escalation to statutory intervention and allow investment to shift from crisis management to prevention.
- **Stabilise and diversify placement provision.** Through joint commissioning and regional collaboration, Authorities will expand local residential, fostering and supported-lodgings options, reducing reliance on external and distant placements and improving continuity for children.
- **Continue the SEND improvement journey.** Building on progress since the 2023 inspection, Councils will implement the SEND Strategy with consistent standards, streamlined processes for EHCP assessment, and transparent co-production with families.

- **Invest in workforce capacity and culture.** Differentiated People Strategies will underpin professional development, recruitment and retention within each new authority. Leaders will build a confident, learning culture where practitioners are empowered, supported and connected across disciplines.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing Services provided through the General Fund relate to the provision of statutory and mandatory services that enable some of the most vulnerable members of our communities to access safe, secure and habitable accommodation. In Hertfordshire this means working with more than 150 partners to coordinate, plan, deliver and monitor a range of services, support and provision. Each year, around 4,200 vulnerable households are provided with new homes. Alongside this, over 18,000 households remain on Housing Registers, requiring ongoing assessment, monitoring and support to ensure that those in greatest need are prioritised for the new homes that become available. More than 7,000 households approach the council each year at a point of homeless and crisis – a number that continues to rise. Councils have a duty to assist more than 90% of these cases. At the end of last year, 1,377 vulnerable households were living in temporary accommodation, including 1,841 children.



The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a ring-fenced account for the management and development of social housing that a Council may own. Within Hertfordshire specifically, Dacorum, St Albans, Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield have this provision and together they provide more than 32,000 homes to approximately 65,000 people. This brings a total annual income of £215m but carries debts of £1.13 bn.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES – WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE THROUGH LGR

Our ambition for housing and homelessness through reorganisation, is to deliver a consistent, prevention-first approach across Hertfordshire. New Unitary Authorities will be able to

strengthen links between Housing, Social Care and Public Health, reduce variation in local policies, and better manage demand pressures.

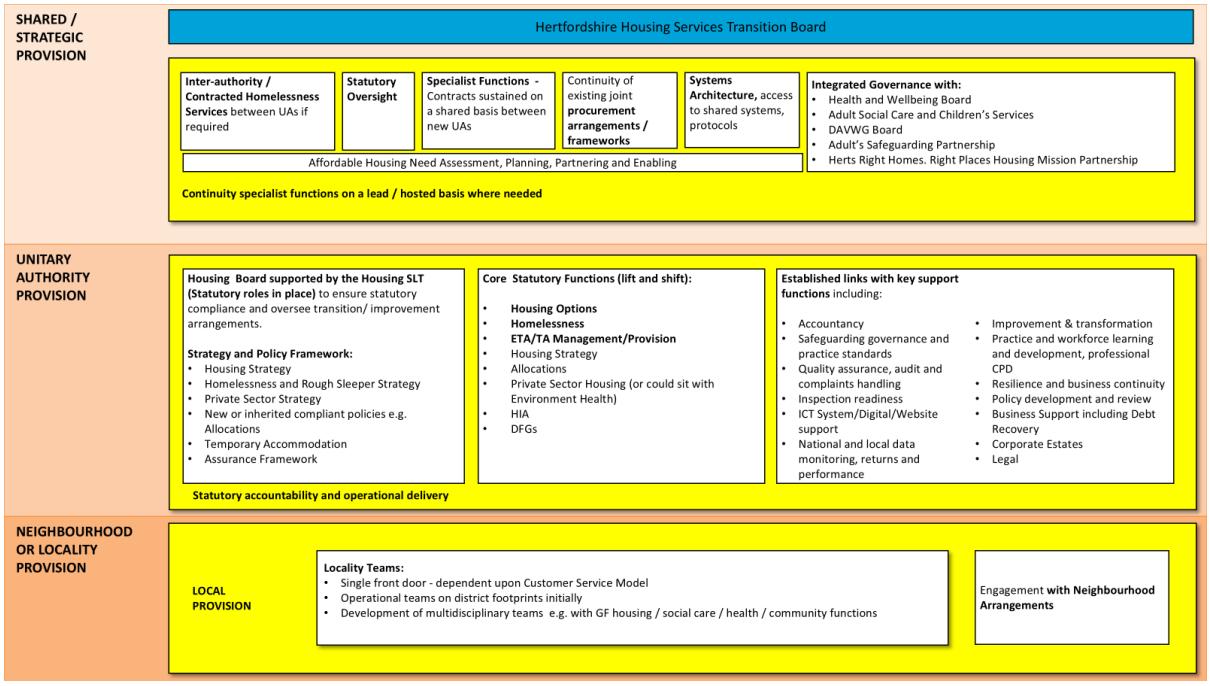
The goal is to prevent homelessness earlier, make better use of temporary accommodation, sustain and support all households and achieve this through our partnerships with the private rented sector, Housing Associations and the voluntary sector, whilst aligning our Housing Strategy more closely with growth, planning and regeneration.

Stronger joint commissioning, procurement and development of temporary accommodation (TA) and other housing, combined with place-based housing and wellbeing services, will improve outcomes for families and reduce costs.

At present, homelessness, temporary accommodation and private sector regulation sit with Districts and the County oversees Adult Social Care and Public Health. Unitary Councils will be able to join them up, achieving:

- **Prevention-led, multi-agency housing support**, aligning housing options, welfare advice and social care.
- **Consistent homelessness and allocations policies** across wider areas, reducing inequity and cross-boundary competition for temporary accommodation.
- **Unified commissioning of supported and specialist housing**, ensuring provision matches care and health needs.
- **Integrated landlord services for HRA councils**, combining tenancy management, repairs and community wellbeing in a single accountable structure.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES – DAY ONE BLUEPRINT



HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES – HOW WE INTEND TO DELIVER TRANSITION

New Unitary Authorities must be legally ready to deliver housing and homelessness services from Vesting Day, this includes:

- Ensuring compliance with regulatory standards and requirements, including statutory reporting.
- Establishing robust governance structures and statutory leadership to oversee Part 7 homelessness duties, allocations, enforcement, and temporary accommodation.
- Avoiding premature fragmentation of complex statutory functions before new local delivery models are fully designed and operational.

Operational component	Key activities during transition period	Day one milestones
Leadership and governance	• Appoint Senior Housing Lead within each future UA. • Create Housing Transition Board with representation from ASC, Public Health and the VCS. • Map statutory duties (Housing Act 1996 Parts 6 and 7, Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) and identify inter-dependencies with Social Care and Community Safety.	• Statutory accountability and leadership in place. • Housing Board and Senior Officer oversight established. • Clear governance for allocations, homelessness and private-sector enforcement.
Workforce	• Profile staff and caseloads across all ten districts. • Identify roles to transfer under TUPE and confirm interim structures. • Joint workforce briefings and training on new policies.	• All staff transferred safely. • Contact points for housing options and homelessness queries live in each UA. • Continuity of rotas and case ownership for open homelessness cases.
Systems and data	• Catalogue IT systems (e.g. Jigsaw, Locata, Civica). • Agree approach for shared hosting to avoid service disruption. • Data-sharing protocols for cross-boundary placements.	• Continuity of case-management systems with tested data and payments functions. • Case management and statutory return capabilities maintained.
Policies and processes	• Compare and align allocations, TA and private-sector enforcement policies. • Prepare interim standard operating procedures for Officers.	• Compliant homelessness and allocations policies in place. • Consistent approach to duty assessment and TA placement decisions.
Contracts and partnerships	• Map temporary accommodation and support contracts. • Engage providers on continuity arrangements and payment processes.	• All TA and support contracts novated or extended. • Provider payments and void management continuing seamlessly.
Integration with social care and health	• Align planning with ASC and Public Health on prevention and move-on pathways. • Identify opportunities for joint assessment and commissioning.	• Operational links between housing, ASC and Public Health in place (e.g. hospital discharge and supported housing pathways).

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES – LONGER-TERM TRANSFORMATION

As new Unitary Authorities move beyond transition, they will implement a medium-term integration plan to consolidate and modernise housing and homelessness services. This plan

will focus on achieving consistency, strengthening partnerships, and embedding prevention as the organising principle of future delivery.

As part of this medium-term integration plan there will be a need to:

- **Agree a transitional operating model** with appropriate oversight to manage continuity while enabling local adaptation and improvement.
- **Align allocations, homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment policies** within each new Authority, creating a fair, transparent and consistent offer for residents.
- **Improve data sharing** to identify cross-border demand, inform targeted joint commissioning, and assess opportunities to rationalise services and assets.

In parallel, longer-term transformation will:

- **Integrate housing, social care and public health** functions to deliver prevention-first approaches, reducing crisis homelessness and supporting independence.
- **Create a single homelessness prevention system**, combining welfare advice, private-rented access, and targeted support within one coordinated pathway.
- **Strengthen strategic housing leadership**, aligning housing strategy with local plans, growth and infrastructure programmes.
- **Consolidate temporary accommodation and supported housing procurement**, achieving better value and improved outcomes through joint commissioning.
- **Invest in digital tools and analytics** to monitor trends, predict demand and target resources more effectively.
- **Work with voluntary, faith and community partners** to build local capacity, expand early intervention and strengthen place-based responses.

FOCUS ON HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT SERVICES

Four District Councils in Hertfordshire currently operate Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs): **Dacorum**, **St Albans**, **Stevenage** and **Welwyn Hatfield**. Together they manage more than **32,000 homes**, providing affordable rented housing to around **65,000 residents**. The combined annual HRA income is approximately **£215m**, supporting ongoing investment in stock management, repairs, tenant services and new-build development.

The collective debt across these accounts is around **£1.13bn**, with each council maintaining its own business plan, borrowing strategy and reserves to meet regulatory requirements.

Regulatory context

Under national regulations, each stock-holding Authority must maintain a **ring-fenced HRA**, ensuring that income and expenditure on council housing are accounted for separately from the General Fund. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) oversees compliance, consumer standards, and inspection every four years.

Following reorganisation, **each new stock-holding Unitary Council** will automatically become a registered provider of social housing in its own right. The RSH will not recognise predecessor Councils, meaning new registrations, governance frameworks and compliance systems must be in place from day one.

Transitional and day one arrangements

During the shadow period, Councils will:

- Confirm which of the new Unitary Authorities will inherit housing stock and therefore operate HRAs.
- Review existing **business plans, borrowing and reserves** to identify the baseline financial position and any need for debt restructuring.
- Establish an **HRA Transition Board** including housing, finance and tenant representatives to oversee readiness.
- Support the Hertfordshire Shadow Authorities to appoint Chief Housing Officers who will be tasked with making preparations for the safe transition of housing services to the new unitary authorities.
- Map key contracts (repairs, maintenance, compliance, housing management) and plan for novation or extension.
- Begin engagement with tenants to explain governance changes and continuity of service.

On Vesting Day:

- Each new stock-holding Authority will hold a unified HRA covering all inherited housing assets and liabilities.
- All active landlord and compliance functions – tenancy management, rent collection, repairs, and safety checks – will continue under a **'lift-and-shift' operating model** to guarantee safety and regulatory compliance.
- Existing policies (rent setting, tenant engagement, complaints) will remain in force until reviewed and harmonised post-vesting.
- Business-critical IT systems for housing management and finance will be live and tested.
- Early assurance reporting will be provided to the Regulator confirming that governance, financial viability and health-and-safety requirements are met.

Longer-term direction

- Once the new HRAs are stabilised, authorities will develop unified **30-year business plans** aligned to corporate priorities and local housing strategies. The focus will be on:
- Modernising landlord services and digitalising repairs, tenancy and engagement functions.
- Achieving full regulatory compliance under the new Consumer Standards and Building Safety Regulator regime.
- Expanding **affordable and specialist housing delivery** through new-build, acquisition and partnership schemes.
- Aligning HRA investment with the wider regeneration and net-zero programmes of each Authority.
- Taking opportunities created by having a larger footprint to work in.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

Hertfordshire manages a highway network of around 3,200 miles of roads, alongside 116,000 streetlights and 179,000 gullies. Traffic volumes are among the highest in the East of England, with 7.4 billion vehicle-miles driven on Hertfordshire's roads in 2024. The Council spends around £120m annually on highways maintenance and transport operations, supported by a directly employed workforce and extensive contracted services. Hertfordshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan has resulted in a 3 million increase in residents travelling by bus since 2023, with data from the DfT showing 23.3 million passenger trips annually. Home-to-school transport now accounts for £39m of annual spend.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION – WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

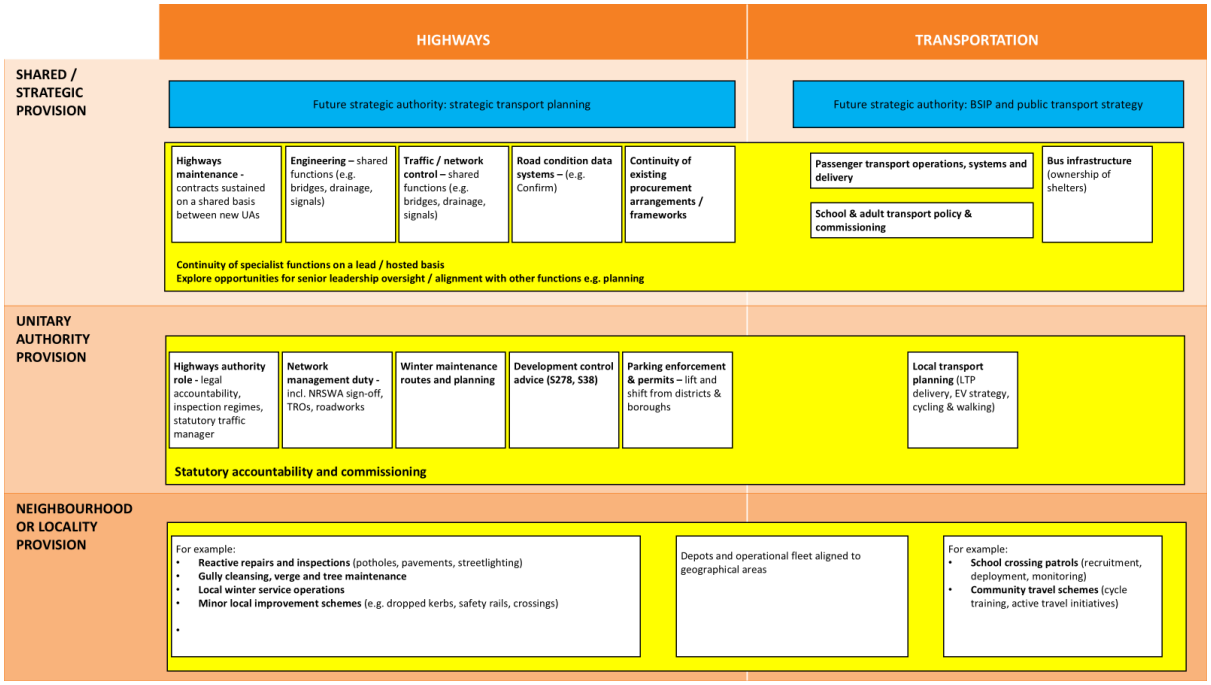
Our ambition for Transport and Highways through reorganisation is to create a safe, reliable and sustainable network that is better aligned to local priorities. New Unitary Authorities will have the opportunity to bring transport decisions closer to communities, strengthen accountability and embed innovation.

Key ambitions include; reducing congestion and improving road safety; delivering on climate and net-zero goals through active travel and electric vehicle infrastructure; modernising asset management and maintenance with digital tools; and reshaping bus services through Enhanced Partnerships and demand-responsive transport.

Reorganisation will remove long-standing fragmentation between County-level highways and District-level planning. This opens up opportunities to:

- **Integrate transport planning with local growth and regeneration**, enabling housing, infrastructure and active-travel schemes to be designed together.
- **Align highways maintenance, parking and enforcement under one Authority**, simplifying customer contact and improving local responsiveness.
- **Create a consistent approach to climate, EV and modal-shift programmes**, linking to the emerging Strategic Authority for large-scale transport planning.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION – DAY ONE BLUEPRINT



HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION – HOW WE WILL MANAGE TRANSITION

Operational component	Key activities during transition period	Day one milestones
Leadership and governance	• Appoint a lead Director for Highways and Transport in each future Unitary Authority. • Establish a single Transition Board with representatives from Engineering, Transport, and Planning. • Map statutory functions of the existing County Council as Highway Authority and confirm which elements (e.g. strategic transport planning) may move to a future Strategic Authority.	• Each new Authority formally designated as Highway Authority under the Highways Act 1980. • Statutory responsibilities for network management, inspections and enforcement transferred safely. • Continuity of senior leadership, delegated powers and emergency response arrangements.
Workforce and operations	• Map current operational teams, depots and contractor arrangements. • TUPE planning for staff in County, District and Borough Authorities, currently working in highways and transport related roles• • Confirm which depot assets transfer to each new Authority.	• To ensure operational continuity the highways contractor workforce remains as a shared service. • Local operational depots active and equipped. • Emergency call-out and winter-maintenance teams in place.
Contracts and assets	• Catalogue all contracts (term maintenance, professional services, transport operations). • Identify renewal points clustered and options for joint reprocurement. • • Review ownership of plant, fleet and depots.	• Existing contracts and frameworks novated or extended to ensure service continuity. • Appropriate asset and contract management capabilities and data in place.
Systems and data	• Audit Confirm and related road-condition and inspection systems.	• Operational systems for asset inspection, fault reporting and permitting live in each Authority.

	• Develop approach for shared hosting to minimise disruption.	• Data flows for network management and performance reporting functioning.
Passenger transport and school travel	• Map responsibilities for home-to-school transport, SEN transport and local bus operations. • Engage bus operators and community-transport providers.	• All statutory transport services operating with tested payment and scheduling systems. • Transitional arrangements for shared commissioning with the Strategic Authority for BSIP delivery.
Integration with place and planning	• Identify interfaces with Planning, Housing growth and Climate teams. • Prepare protocols for handling Section 278/38 agreements and planning consultations.	• Local development control and transport-planning functions aligned; continued coordination with Planning and Housing teams.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION - LONGER-TERM DIRECTION

In the longer term, new Unitary Councils will have the opportunity to modernise how transport and infrastructure are planned, funded and maintained. The direction of travel will vary by geography, but key priorities are expected to include:

- **Integrated planning of transport, housing and growth**, linking major developments with active-travel, EV and public-transport investment.
- **Stronger local accountability**, enabling residents to influence local highways priorities and capital programmes directly through Elected Members.
- **Shared procurement and specialist services**, such as traffic control, bridge and drainage engineering, and intelligent transport systems, to maintain resilience and value for money.
- **Digital transformation**, using asset-management data and predictive analytics to improve efficiency and target maintenance.
- **Decarbonisation and modal shift**, expanding active-travel infrastructure, EV charging, and demand-responsive transport to meet local net-zero targets.
- **Alignment with the future Strategic Authority**, which will lead county-wide transport strategy, the Bus Service Improvement Plan and major capital programmes.

OTHER SERVICES

The five critical services detailed above reflect approximately 50% of the collective budgeted expenditure of Hertfordshire authorities in 2025/26 and around 40% of the workforce, but do not fully reflect the wide variety of other services provided by all 11 organisations, with partners, that underpin community wellbeing, economic growth, environmental quality and civic life. Many of these are already delivered collaboratively through shared services, joint committees and county-wide partnerships.

Through our collaborative review of service provision, Councils have reviewed this wider portfolio using a single service catalogue to map current delivery, identify dependencies and consider future governance. The shared ambition is to preserve what works, transfer statutory functions safely, and use reorganisation to simplify structures and strengthen collaboration. In

some areas, responsibilities are expected to align with a future Strategic Authority, ensuring coherence on county-wide or regional issues such as infrastructure, climate, and waste.

Service area	**What it includes**	**Existing examples of shared or collaborative delivery**
Community Safety, Regulatory and Public Protection	Environmental Health, Licensing, Trading Standards, Community Safety partnerships, Emergency Planning, Resilience, Building Control.	• *Herts Building Control* (shared between several districts). • *Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum* for emergency planning.
Economy, Environment and Place	Planning and Development Control, North and East Herts Shared Service, Waste Collection and Disposal, Street Cleansing, Economic Development, Environmental Management, Sustainability and Climate Change.	• *Hertfordshire Waste Partnership* coordinating waste policy. • *Hertfordshire Growth Board* linking economic development and infrastructure planning. • *Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP)* aligning local climate action.
Culture and Related Services	Museums, libraries, leisure and sports facilities, parks, cultural events, tourism and heritage.	• *Creative Hertfordshire* network. • Joint leisure-management contracts such as *Everyone Active* and *Herts Sports Partnership*.
Central and Enabling Services	Finance, HR, ICT, legal, democratic services, procurement, audit, fraud, communications, customer contact.	• *Herts Legal* shared legal service between Hertfordshire and Stevenage. • *SIAS* (Shared Internal Audit Service). • *SAFS* (Shared Anti-Fraud Service). • *Hertfordshire Public Sector Network* providing shared ICT infrastructure.
Public Health and Wellbeing	Health improvement, prevention and protection programmes, drug and alcohol services, Healthy Hubs, community wellbeing initiatives.	• *Healthy Hubs Hertfordshire* partnership model. • *Herts Sports Partnership* promoting physical activity.

All of these service areas will be worked through systematically as part of our forthcoming transition programme, as set out within the next chapter. For each area, Councils will:

- Document existing arrangements and contractual commitments.
- Engage professional leads and staff to identify dependencies and opportunities.
- Assess where collaboration or shared delivery already adds value and where existing arrangements can be built on.
- Consider whether future delivery is best organised at local, shared or strategic scale, guided by statutory duties, cost, and the needs of residents.

In all of this work, a critical guiding principle will be to ensure that the professionals leading services and those closest to the front line have a guiding voice in determining how our services will evolve for the benefit of residents.

This process will ensure that no service is overlooked, that existing collaboration is preserved where it works, and that new Unitary Authorities inherit a complete, safe and well-understood operating model.

The readiness plans outlined here form the operational foundation for implementation. The final chapter sets out how the partnership will manage transition, governance and programme delivery to ensure these blueprints are realised on Vesting Day.

CASE STUDY: Dacorum's strategy and advocacy on domestic abuse and violence against women and girls

Dacorum Borough Council are currently working to achieve accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance: a framework that is nationally recognised as the 'gold standard' of Housing domestic abuse response. The framework is based on a victim-centre approach that prioritises seeking opportunities to empower and encourage participation and collaboration with those who have lived experience of domestic abuse.

Dacorum work collaboratively with the local Community Safety Partnership and Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse and VAWG Partnership to deliver engagement and awareness raising activity across the borough to increase visibility of the services. This includes hosting events in local libraries and engaging with residents and tenants during other engagement events such as Housing Open Days, and community events like the Grovehill Community Day.

Dacorum's domestic abuse policies were developed in collaboration with victims and survivors of domestic abuse. This included, during the 16 Days of Activism 2024, arranging a 'Feelings of safety' walkabout and invited local women to attend. Attendees welcomed the opportunity and were candid in providing suggestions and feedback.

Based on this engagement Dacorum Borough Council have;

Increased security camera presence in the areas identified; Secured funding to set up 'Safe Community Spaces' in Dacorum:

Safe Community Spaces will be provided by local businesses where visitors can seek refuge and contact emergency or support services.

Providers will be given domestic abuse and VAWG training and hold up-to-date information about the support services that are available in the local area. Presence at broader Council engagement events – Providing access to specialist domestic abuse services at our events has created increased opportunities for disclosure and support. As a result of this presence at Housing Open Days, we have been able to provide risk assessment and support for two victims that were at that time, at high risk of harm.

CASE STUDY: HERTFORDSHIRE MENTAL HEALTH, LEARNING DISABILITY AND NEURODIVERSITY HEALTH AND CARE PARTNERSHIP

The Hertfordshire Mental Health, Learning Disability and Neurodiversity Health and Care Partnership is our inclusive partnership established to improve the lives of people with mental

illness, people with learning disabilities and neurodivergent. It convenes statutory and non-statutory organisations, including NHS, local government and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VSCFSE) sectors.

The partnership builds on 16 years of integrated working between local government and the NHS and ensures that services and support for these residents are joined up, effective and commissioned effectively.

Recognising the specific needs of this cohort, the partnership will work with the new Unitary Authorities to continue to coordinate and deliver activity across Hertfordshire to meet their needs.

SUSTAINABILITY

MHCLG criterion 3: quality, sustainable services

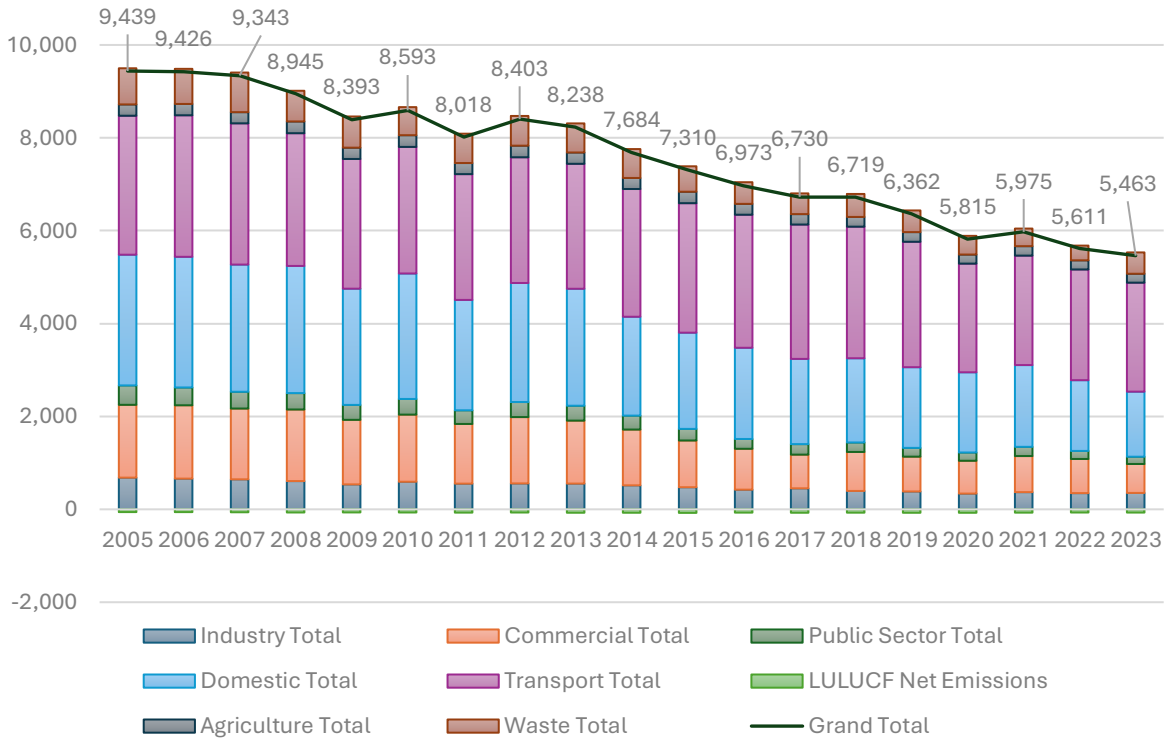
A DEFINING MOMENT FOR HERTFORDSHIRE'S FUTURE

This is a defining moment for Hertfordshire to reimagine how we live, move, build and grow. By embedding sustainability into local government functions and decisions, we can create a county that is resilient, inclusive and regenerative, a place where prosperity and environmental wellbeing can advance together. This reorganisation creates the conditions for transformative change. Every community could benefit from cleaner air, greener neighbourhoods and stronger local economies.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AS CATALYST

All Hertfordshire Councils have declared climate emergencies and have collaborated effectively to make progress. However, the two-tier structure has created challenges in coordinating action at the scale and pace required Reorganisation can remove duplication across Councils, better integrate planning and delivery, and enable more strategic investment. This creates the opportunity for sustainability to develop as a shared endeavour, with each Authority accountable to its communities, while benefiting from coordinated support.

The county's emissions graph shows strong progress, but we need accelerated action.



Hertfordshire's territorial greenhouse gas emissions estimate 2005 – 2023 (kt CO_2e).

Building on these foundations, and working with unified metrics across fewer Authorities, will enable Hertfordshire to act more decisively and achieve the step change needed to meet climate, nature and green growth targets.

ENABLING SUSTAINABILITY AT SCALE

Environment and climate change are areas of competence for the Strategic Authority, putting sustainability on a firmer footing. The Strategic Authority will provide regional leadership, co-developing a climate strategy for Hertfordshire, managing strategic natural capital, coordinating major infrastructure decarbonisation, aligning data and monitoring, and securing strategic funding.

Understanding that Unitary Authorities will determine their own approach, reorganisation brings opportunities to deliver sustainability interventions tailored to distinctive geographies, economies and communities. The single-tier structure eliminates coordination challenges, integrating planning, housing, transport, economic development, waste and environmental services.

CASE STUDY: Established collaborative foundations – Hertfordshire Climate Change & Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP)

Formed in 2020, HCCSP is jointly funded by Hertfordshire's 11 Local Authorities and Hertfordshire Futures. It delivers exceptional value: securing consultancy support, funding for Retrofit Strategy delivery and has delivered savings per Council through shared training. Key achievements include Solar Together (£17m investment, 29,900 tonnes CO_2e savings),

biodiversity baseline work, Healthy Homes integration, and transport decarbonisation alignment. A Gold Award winner at the 2025 iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards, HCCSP demonstrates what aligned governance can achieve and is a vital part of our shared future.

DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Embedding sustainability represents a strategic economic opportunity. Our life sciences sector can pioneer sustainable biotech; our creative industries can lead low-carbon production; and local data centres can boost energy efficiency. Advanced manufacturing in Hertfordshire can adopt circular economy principles, while our universities and colleges support green skills development. This focus on sustainable development also improves health outcomes, reducing public service pressure through energy-efficient homes, active travel, green spaces, cleaner air and urban greening.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Building on strong foundations, we can deliver sustainable growth through our six-point strategic plan:

NET-ZERO HOUSING AND RETROFIT AT SCALE

The domestic built environment emits 35% of the county's CO_2e emissions with the opportunity to implement a 'retrofit-first, green new-build second' approach as standard practice.

CASE STUDY: Retrofit Hubs

A pilot in Three Rivers supported 24 homeowners to install 53 energy-efficiency measures in 18 months. The hub provided tailored advice, grant navigation, vetted contractors and ensured quality assurance for all income levels. Savings vary by measure type, from £70/year for floor insulation to £580/year for boiler upgrades. This award-winning model will be scaled countywide by 2028, with every Unitary Authority able to operate a Retrofit Hub, providing a consistent, trusted service.

For new developments, Unitary Authorities can set energy standards above national minimums, requiring renewable energy, battery storage, sustainable drainage, biodiversity net gain and active travel access from the outset.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

With transport accounting for 36% of emissions, measures that the Unitary Authorities could take include; expanding cycle lanes and walking routes; enhancing bus services and demand-responsive transport; integrating ticketing; electrifying fleets; managing car use through parking policies and EV charging infrastructure; and reducing car dependency in planning.

The Strategic Authority will coordinate strategic corridor investment; lead national rail engagement; develop behaviour change programmes delivered at unitary level; and monitor modal shift progress.

CLEAN ENERGY AND DECARBONISATION

Unitary Authorities will have the ability to develop Local Area Energy Plans; accelerate renewable energy through streamlined planning and community schemes; and address fuel poverty through targeted retrofit and advice services.

The Strategic Authority will coordinate county-scale energy planning; lead county-wide grant funding bids; engage network operators; procure renewable energy for public estates; and develop heat network frameworks.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

The Strategic Authority will lead development of a countywide adaptation plan, providing a blueprint for integrating climate resilience into infrastructure and policy. Unitary Authorities can audit and manage operational preparedness collaboratively, through shared approaches, protecting people and infrastructure.

Sustainable drainage, catchment-scale water planning and chalk river protection will address flooding, water stress and ecosystem health.

NATURE RECOVERY AND BIODIVERSITY

Unitary Authorities could prioritise enhancing biodiversity through rigorous biodiversity net gain; managing public land for nature; supporting nature-friendly farming; prioritising urban greening and improving rights of way access.

The Strategic Authority will lead the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership, coordinate environmental partnerships and develop project pipelines.

CASE STUDY: Chalk River Restoration

85% of the world's chalk streams are in southern England, making Hertfordshire's chalk rivers, the Ver, Chess, Beane, Lea, Mimram and Colne, which support unique wildlife, some of the rarest ecosystems in the world. But decades of over-abstraction and degradation have left reaches running dry. Local Authorities, water companies and community groups have delivered transformative results: abstraction reduction has restored year-round flow in the river Ver; habitat restoration in the river Chess has increased brown trout populations; and improved water quality in the river Beane saw the return of water voles in 2022, after being extinct from the area since the 1980s. These globally important ecosystems will be enhanced through reorganisation, enabling strategic, catchment-wide coordination for funding bids, and facilitating strategic prioritisation.

GREEN JOBS AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

With forecast housing and employment growth, the green transition must create inclusive opportunities. Unitary Authorities can enable development of green-skills pathways; support transition from carbon-intensive sectors; link employment support with retrofit and renewable programmes; and ensure youth access to green sectors. The Strategic Authority will coordinate skills planning, engage employers and secure funding.

SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Reorganisation enables aligned procurement policies, using economies of scale to embed sustainability into contracts and supply chains. Adoption of circular economy models helps

reduce waste and retain value at a local level. Coordinated approaches improve standards, signal unified markets which both drives innovation and creates leverage for competitive prices. It also gives suppliers a consistent set of requirements that they can invest in to meet.

DELIVERING OUR AMBITION: COORDINATED GOVERNANCE

Our approach is built around clear responsibilities across governance levels. Strategic coordination by the Strategic Authority and place-based delivery by Unitary Authorities work in harmony, ensuring sustainability moves from ambition to action.

COMMUNITY-LED SUSTAINABILITY

CASE STUDY: St Albans Greener Together

Building on behaviour-change research and Innovate UK funding, this community-focused campaign brought residents together to co-create solutions, including: The Green House community eco-hub; the Share St Albans library of things; community panels on energy and rewilding; business support through the Net Zero Fund; and a sustainability festival. The project engaged hundreds of residents across multiple touchpoints. This model will be scaled countywide through Unitary Community Sustainability Forums using shared toolkits, training and national funding, with the Strategic Authority coordinating the sharing of best practice. Environmental action will be co-created with communities, not delivered to them.

Community sustainability forums will be able to link to Local Democratic Forums, ensuring sustainability is woven into community governance from day one. Trusted local messengers, voluntary networks and Town and Parish Councils are ideally positioned to engage residents, shape behaviour change and ensure fairness of access.

CODESIGNING OUR APPROACH

Strategic engagement with HCCSP partners has underscored the ambition to embed environmental action and empower communities. These partners will continue to inform delivery through recommendations across key themes:

- **Mainstreaming sustainability:** sustainability embedded in all Council functions through training, impact assessments and dedicated officers with environmental considerations integrated across services.
- **Empowering community-led action:** Community Sustainability Forums to link to Local Democratic Forums, scaling successful models countywide. Partnerships with the voluntary sector and local Councils will ensure broad reach.
- **Treating nature as infrastructure:** nature can be systematically planned and funded. Each Council will be able to develop Nature Recovery Plans, enforce biodiversity net gain, and prioritise urban greening in deprived areas.
- **Scaling retrofit and tackling fuel poverty:** Retrofit Hubs are planned to operate in every Authority by 2028, targeting 10,000 homes by 2030 and prioritising fuel-poor households.
- **Creating alternatives to car dependency:** protected cycle lanes, improved bus services, and demand-responsive transport are all key opportunities for delivery. EV charging points will be rolled out with campaigns supporting modal shift.
- **Building green skills and opportunities:** a Green Skills Partnership could support workers and create apprenticeships in retrofit, renewables and nature recovery. Social

value in procurement will support local jobs, and a Youth Green Jobs Programme could link education with green employers.

- **Ensuring transparency and accountability:** a unified carbon accounting system would enable annual public reporting and an open data portal for shared learning.
- **Prioritising climate justice:** climate risk mapping could guide targeted interventions for vulnerable communities. Urban greening and active travel could be prioritised in deprived areas, integrated with Public Health.

OUR TRANSITION COMMITMENT

HCCSP is well placed to work as strategic convenor, supporting the transition to vesting structures. It is committed to facilitating the development of a Climate Change Strategy, grounded in community needs, to defining success metrics, building carbon literacy and establishing data-sharing protocols. This strategy will provide the golden thread of sustainability woven through all services from day one of the new Authorities.

Having a Climate Change Strategy ready will position Unitary Authorities and the Strategic Authority to maximise inward investment, delivering significant projects at scale and supporting housing and growth targets.

TIMELINE AND GOVERNANCE

During 2026–27, it is envisaged that we will identify the priority projects central to reorganisation projects that span transition, pilot projects and future projects enabled by reorganisation.

During transition, we are planning to develop thematic working groups, pilot communities of practice and a single shared evidence base integrating carbon, nature and resilience metrics. This ensures sustainability governance is fully operational from Vesting Day, enabling other teams to focus on statutory duties.

CONCLUSION

The joining together of Hertfordshire's geography, growth pressures and climate risks through reorganisation makes the county ideal for integrated sustainability. This restructure of local government will create the scale, capacity and integration essential for ambitious delivery through our six-point strategic plan, led by the new Unitary Authorities, whilst the Strategic Authority will ensure coherence, without constraining innovation.

By fully embedding sustainability, we will demonstrate that environmental ambition and economic growth are mutually reinforcing, and that place-based delivery and county-wide coordination can work in harmony.

Through strategic coordination and place-based delivery, sustainability will move from ambition to action, delivering cleaner air, greener neighbourhoods, stronger local economies and resilient communities. The tools at our disposal, including unified strategic planning, integrated service delivery, concentrated capacity and enhanced funding leverage, will enable Hertfordshire to lead nationally on environmental action at scale and pace, delivering for our communities, economy and environment, and for generations to come.

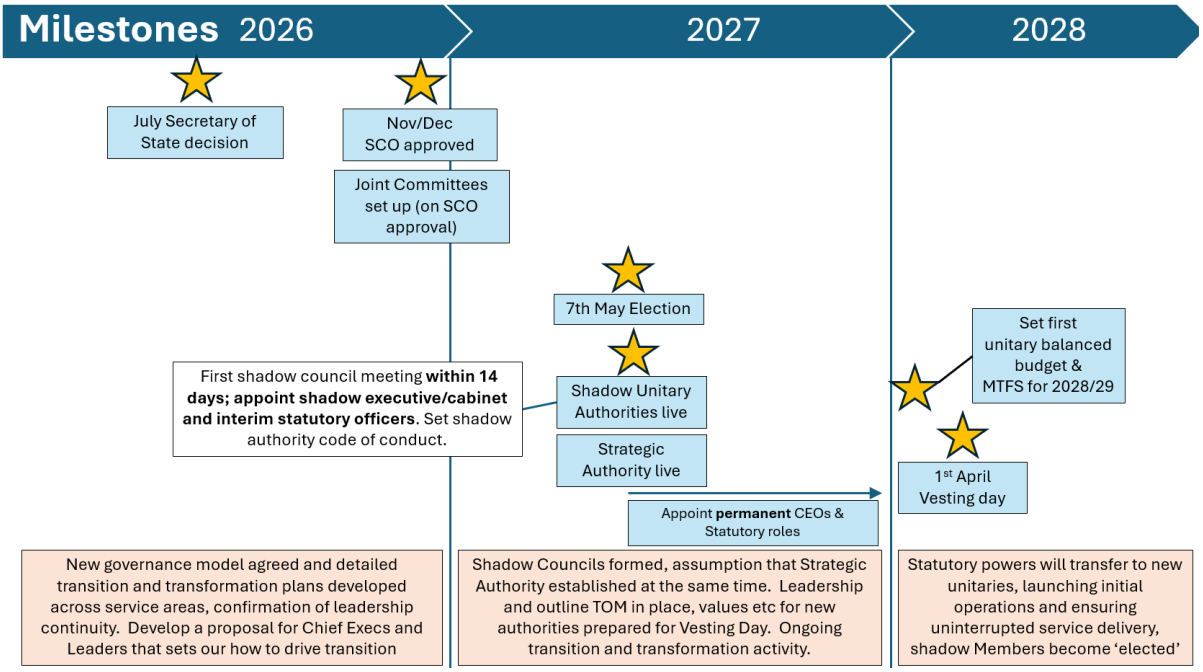
IMPLEMENTATION

A detailed implementation plan to secure Vesting Day will be critical to safeguarding statutory service delivery and laying the foundations for ambitious future transformation.

We are carefully considering the governance arrangements, as well as the programme planning required to deliver a successful transition by Vesting Day. This is underpinned by our commitment to minimise disruption to service delivery. While we recognise the new Councils will need to take their own decisions about the pace and scale of change, the plans set out here provide a clear indication of our commitment to accelerate implementation and lay the foundations for future benefits.

TIMELINE

We envisage the programme will take place in line with the milestones for the decision by MHCLG, subsequent establishment of Shadow Authorities, and then establishment of a Strategic Authority and Vesting Day itself on 1st April 2028, as set out below.



PHASING

We anticipate delivering the new Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire through three phases of activity. The Preparation Phase will ensure a smooth step up of activity into the Transition Phase in early 2026.

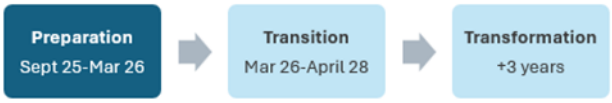
Transition will incorporate opportunities to improve where possible, but this will not get in the way of developing safe and legal new Councils that are able to deliver good business-as-usual services. It will also manage the impact of the decision on which option to implement and the introduction of shadow authorities.

After Vesting Day some Transition Phase activities will continue to integrate services and teams and more wide-reaching Transformation Phase steps will be mobilised.

Preparation (Sept 25–Mar 26)	Transition (Mar 26–April 28)	Transformation (+3 years)
During this stage, we will continue to engage widely with	Successful transition to the future Authorities will be	We will review and optimise our services, so that we realise the

our communities and partners, establish robust programme management and set up a Transition governance structure in order to progress implementation quickly and confidently.	critical to protecting Hertfordshire's most vulnerable residents, safeguarding statutory service delivery and laying the foundations for ambitious future transformation. We will establish governance, skills, processes and workstreams to ensure leadership, teams and infrastructure are in place, before formal go live.	full benefits of transformation, to modernise our approach and improve outcomes for our residents.

PREPARATION PHASE

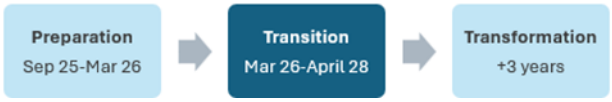


Based on learnings from other Local Authorities that have gone through LGR, we are of the view that starting the Preparation Phase work as soon as possible is key to success and as such this phase is already underway. We are focusing on getting the right programme structure, teams and resourcing and ensuring appropriate governance is in place to enable efficient decision making. This phase lays the foundations for a successful Transition Phase by establishing clarity, building readiness and ensuring that the programme is positioned to 'hit the ground running' from early 2026.

KEY ACTIVITIES IN THE PREPARATION PHASE:

- Agree programme governance and delivery approach for transition (including phasing, decision making, etc.).
- Scope transition resourcing, capability and funding requirements and own decisions to recruit expertise.
- Develop transition staff / stakeholder strategy supporting engagement and change readiness.
- Complete risk and organisational readiness assessments.
- Develop transition data strategy and approach.
- Identify initial workstream transition priorities to support more detailed delivery planning.
- Agree programme roles and responsibilities and appoint to those positions.

TRANSITION PHASE



The anticipated Transition Phase approach is to deliver new Unitary Councils through a number of key workstreams which are likely to include Finance, Workforce, Legal and Governance, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement. These will be refined during the Preparation Phase to ensure the structure is optimal and aligned to delivery). This phase will also require us to adapt to the decision about which option is being taken forward and managing the shift to shadow authorities.

Critically, we will be required to work to a shared set of values and principles through the Transition Phase with strong leadership, clear and effective decision making, careful planning, investment in capacity, and with an emphasis on proactive change management. We will retain a strong focus on day-one activities to mitigate the risk of cost and time overrun and negative impact on service delivery. Our suggested principles for a successful transition to the new model are shown below, though these will be refined over the coming months.

PRINCIPLES FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

- A shared commitment to work together to deliver a successful transition to a new Unitary Council model, regardless of the final decision from MHCLG.
- A recognition that we will be working in an ambiguous environment until the final decision from MHCLG is received the Transition Implementation Plan will be refined over time to enable resources to be deployed flexibly. Agreement that transition will need to be a shared priority and will require the skills, experience, and dedication from colleagues across all Councils in order to succeed.
- Agreement that there is distinction between Transition Phase and post-Vesting Day activities, enabling focused delivery during the transition process while preparing for longer-term transformation with the new Council's leadership (i.e. safe and legal focus).
- A shared responsibility to maintain service continuity and public confidence, ensuring that residents and communities continue to receive high-quality services throughout the transition.
- An understanding that some transition activity may require detailed discussion and different perspectives will be heard to support final decision making.

TRANSITION PHASE PRIORITIES

As part of the Preparation Phase the 11 Councils have collectively identified a set of pre-vesting day priority areas. These will be subject to further analysis and discussion but provide an indication of the early activity within the Transition Phase. These include;

1. Where possible, aligning policies and processes to ease the transition across service areas pre-vesting day.
2. Establishing a shared vision and set of values for the workforce, to effectively support staff through transition.
3. Where possible, aligning technology and data, establishing shared data and analytics protocols across organisations and with other public services.

4. Establishing a shared approach to customer experience, emphasising the importance of the day one interface with customers.

TRANSITION PHASE GOVERNANCE

We will approach the transition to new Unitary Councils with clear, decisive leadership, disciplined programme management, and a strong focus on collaboration and risk management. Our implementation programme is supported by a governance framework that ensures strategic direction, coordinated operations, and effective delivery at every stage of the transition.

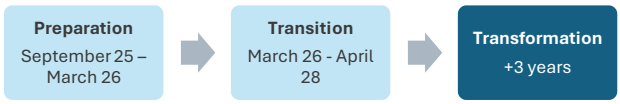
Options being considered include a Member-led Board at the top of the governance structure, with representatives from each Authority, ensuring political leadership and inclusive decision making throughout. This would mirror the collaborative foundation laid during the development of the business case, could provide collective political challenge, direction and assurance on the programme's overall objectives.

We note that whilst we need decisive leadership and representation from across all existing Authorities to begin the process of transition, we are guardians of this process to the point at which Shadow Authorities are established and take up the decision-making powers on the future of these new Authorities.

We are also considering a central Programme Management Office (PMO) to lead the delivery, working alongside dedicated workstreams to develop a detailed transition implementation plan. The PMO would also be responsible for ensuring that the overall progress is met on the agreed timescale, as set out in the plan.

Finally, we are considering a Programme Board made up of all Chief Executives, to oversee the work of the PMO as well as provide strategic direction and manage cross-organisational risks. The Programme Board would also oversee and agree the resources required to deliver the implementation plan.

TRANSFORMATION PHASE



Whilst the Transformation Phase will follow Vesting Day of the new Unitary Authorities and will ultimately be designed by the new administrations, the benefits of unitarisation and transformation opportunities to improve services and outcomes for residents across Hertfordshire are already being identified. Reorganisation presents the opportunity to take the best of what we already do across Hertfordshire's 11 Councils and learn from our peers across the country to rethink how we work with system partners and with communities to transform the way we work and deliver services. As detailed throughout our submission, professionals and communities have shared their ideas on how reorganisation can drive transformation. This includes opportunities; to align and integrate key functions to deliver place-based preventative services that help people live healthy, happy and independent lives; design our cultural and community offers in a way that drives community wellbeing, economic growth and strengthens local identity; and develop modern, digital-first support services, reducing duplication, unlocking shared value, and improving efficiency.

These are ambitious areas for transformation, and we will work with the Shadow Authorities to take a pragmatic approach to developing their plans for transformation post-vesting day, recognising that priorities will need to be identified.

KEY RISKS AND MITIGATIONS

A full and detailed risk assessment has been undertaken and is being reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis as work is planned and delivered. Strategic transition risks have been summarised as follows:

Risk	Mitigation
Stakeholder support: The proposals have an impact on staff, leaders, residents, partners and other stakeholders. If these stakeholders are not effectively informed and engaged in the transition and transformation process, then the new Authorities may lack support and be hindered in their ambition.	We have a strong commitment to widen engagement across our communities, workforce, partners and other stakeholders throughout the transition process. We will establish a detailed Communications Strategy to keep all stakeholders informed and involved as we plan, design and implement changes.
Effective leadership: if there is a lack of clarity and efficiency on the leadership and decision-making arrangements during the transition process, this may delay implementation activities, increase costs and prevent effective oversight.	We will move swiftly to establish a transition structure, capacity and decision-making process to oversee and direct the implementation stage. Early appointment of Interim Chief Executives, statutory roles and senior teams to the UAs will provide clear leadership and allow for new organisation cultures and values to be developed.
Service continuity: the existing Authorities deliver many vital services, often to vulnerable people. If transition and transformation do not minimise disruption, it may prevent the effective delivery of services and harm public confidence in the new Authorities.	We aim to minimise disruption to service delivery by early and ongoing engagement with staff and the community. We will focus on critical day-one requirements, ensuring the technology and systems required for a smooth transition are maintained to minimise impact and reduce risk. To help maintain focus on the delivery of this significant programme, alongside the delivery of business as usual services, Transformation will be delivered after Vesting Day
Complexity and pace of change: lessons learnt from other similar programmes show that it is critical to start early, plan effectively and demonstrate strong leadership. Failure to do so will lead to time delays, cost overrun and an impact on service quality.	Our proposal establishes clear foundations for us to accelerate into transition as soon as the full proposal is submitted in readiness for the Secretary of State decision. We will establish robust programme management arrangements, informed by our existing good practice, to deliver in a timely and cost-efficient manner.

Risk	Mitigation
Workforce capacity and morale: the proposal will lead to significant changes for people across the existing organisations. While we believe the future offers significant opportunities, we recognise that if change is not managed effectively and the workforce not sufficiently engaged – this may damage staff morale, disrupt services and limit retention of the relevant skills and roles for the new organisation.	The workforce across all existing organisations will be kept informed and engaged in future designs where possible through a dedicated Workforce workstream. While recognising our differences, it is critical that all our people contribute to shaping the purpose, identity and culture of the new organisation. While some uncertainty for staff is unavoidable, the dedicated workstream will ensure all concerns and issues are proactively addressed.
Financial Risk: changes in the financial context either through wider economic changes, or specific changes in areas such as council tax base or transition costs result in the cost of LGR being higher than planned.	We will continue to track the local and national factors that will impact the cost of LGR on a regular basis. This will inform programme decision making an enable us to adjust plans, wherever possible, to mitigate financial risks.

APPENDIX A – FINANCIAL MODELLING ASSUMPTIONS

OVERALL APPROACH

The financial case and modelling approach has been developed collaboratively with s151 statutory officers (Chief Financial Officers) from HCC and all Districts and Boroughs with an external consultancy to develop a shared financial model and set of assumptions.

These have been prepared using information available and considered reliable at the time of preparation. This includes Council budgets, performance and demand data, alongside input from each of the Hertfordshire LGR workstreams and benchmarking information from other LGR cases. Best endeavours have been made to apply reasonable assumptions, data sources, and analysis in the development of assumptions and estimates within the financial model, but these remain subject to high levels of inevitable uncertainty in key areas due to the inherent limitations of available information at this stage prior to the decision and shadow authorities being formed.

Throughout this process, a prudent approach has been applied to avoid potential overstatement of estimated benefits or understatement of estimated costs. Consideration has also been given to materiality, focusing on the assumptions and financial factors most likely to have a significant impact on the overall outcomes of the model.

The modelling assumptions detailed below have been accepted by all eleven organisations, including the use of ranges in key areas.

The financial model considers three key areas for each unitary authority option:

- Medium-term financial assumptions-the net budget requirement for each authority, the resources (including council tax, fees and charges and government grant) available to each area and how these will change over the next ten years.
- Budget aggregation and disaggregation - an assessment of how the HCC budget would be split into specific geographical areas, recognising local demand and tax base, and how district and borough budgets would be aggregated “up” to new unitary footprints, taking account of areas in which boundaries have been reviewed.
- Costs and savings from LGR - LGR is designed to be an “invest to save” activity, this element estimates the costs of delivering LGR and the savings it delivers. It excludes transformational savings and costs that may arise because of LGR, except in relation to managing social care cost pressures, as these are deemed to be a decision for the new authorities.

The financial case has been modelled over a 10-year period from vesting day in line with best practice recommended by CIPFA. However, it is recognised that costs will be incurred pre-vesting day but for the purposes of the model and ensuring the full cost of LGR is being considered within the payback period these are assumed to be incurred post vesting day. Two scenarios have been modelled for two key areas of costs, one-off IT disaggregation costs and ongoing social care management costs resulting from disaggregation. The financial model has been applied to higher and lower end.’ costs in relation to IT and social care.

FUNDING

FAIR FUNDING REVIEW (FFR)

A consultation has been conducted on the proposed approach to reforming local authority funding through the Local Government Finance Settlement starting in 2026–27. This covers key

areas that may impact the financial case, including funding allocations for local authorities and long-term plans for business rates retention.

The potential impacts of the Fair Funding Review (FFR) have not been reflected in the financial model. The model also assumes no business rates growth or increases in core government grant funding beyond 2027/28.

Although CFOs conducted extensive due diligence and engaged a third-party organisation to assess likely effects, the findings were unreliable due to conflicting data and government indications that modelling assumptions will change before FFR is finalised. Initial analysis based on current assumptions suggests FFR will likely reduce overall revenue funding and alter its distribution across Hertfordshire over the medium term, potentially affecting the sustainability of future unitary authorities.

LOCAL TAXATION

For the purposes of the financial model, Council Tax increases are assumed to be at 4.99% (2.99% Council Tax + 2% adult social care precept) as per the current referendum limits and in line with the MHCLG approach to funding projections. The model assumes that the District & Borough element of Council Tax will be harmonised at a weighted average and implemented in 2028/29 in line with creation of new authorities. The taxbase is assumed to continue to grow at a rate that is consistent with the current 2025/26 to 2027/28 medium-term period.

In practice within their shadow year, new authorities will need to decide how to harmonise Council Tax across their areas and there are different options as to how this can be done. National rules apply to these options, including remaining within the 2.99% CTAX + 2% ASC referendum limit for the area in line with government assumptions for increases which link into the overall funding position.

UNCERTAINTIES AND UNEXPECTED SHOCKS

Whilst prudent assumptions have been identified and accepted in all cases, the viability of all future unitary authorities will be subject to additional risks and uncertainties, including:

- The significant savings planned in the 25/26 to 27/28 period (pre-vesting day) are not delivered in full, contributing to a more challenging opening position for new authorities.
- Inflation or demand increases at a higher rate than is assumed in our modelling.
- There is any slippage in delivering the anticipated benefits from LGR.
- Further unanticipated local, national or international events causing economic or financial shocks.
-

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL ASSUMPTIONS

APPROACH

The baseline for the financial modelling is the 2025/26 balanced budget for each individual authority, rolled forward to match existing medium-term financial plans for 2026/27 and 2027/28, leading to a start point for 2028/29 on a common set of key assumptions. Budgets balance in overall terms at start of 2028/29 but opening deficits and surpluses exist.

From 2028/29 onwards (i.e. post-LGR), the baseline forecast is driven by a set of annual growth indices (detailed below).

The following key assumptions were made in relation to the baseline:

- 2025/26 original budget data was taken from each authority and split by individual service areas and then further by:
- Employee costs, direct costs (non-staffing) and income for each authority
- Expenditure outside service area including for example but not limited to capital financing, housing benefit payments
- Funding split by streams e.g. Business rates, grants and Council Tax

This has then been scaled for the first three years based on three sets of scaling factors defined for each authority to cover:

- Net budget.
- Council Tax; and
- all other funding sources

These are used to scale the 25/26 budget data to make the future MTFS values so that the total net budget in the financial model matches the total in the original 2025/26 MTFS for each authority

Proportions of various service areas remain same for first three years – service areas are scaled in proportion

POST LGR BASELINE ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions below drive the baseline forecast post LGR from 2028/29

Item	Assumptions	
Pay inflation	2.00%	Based on current government targets and consistent with existing MTFS assumptions across authorities.
Non pay inflation	2.00%	Based on current government targets and consistent with existing MTFS assumptions across authorities.
Service Income	2.00%	Based on current government targets and consistent with existing MTFS assumptions across authorities.
Council Tax	4.99%	Based on current maximum allowable Council Tax increases as set by MHCLG
Tax base growth	0.80%	Based on the weighted average growth across each of the existing authorities
ASC - direct costs only	4.00%	Lower than existing MTFS assumptions and recent trends - assumes further transformation savings (over next 4 years gross cost pressures average 8% per annum and transformation savings will reduce that to nearer 6%) and tapering down of cost increases over decade post LGR
CSC - direct costs only	5.00%	Lower than existing MTFS assumptions and recent trends - assumes further transformation savings and tapering down of cost increases over decade post LGR
Education - direct costs only	3.00%	Lower than existing MTFS assumptions and recent trends - assumes further transformation savings and tapering down of cost increases over decade post LGR
SEN home to school transport - direct costs only	3.00%	Lower than existing MTFS assumptions and recent trends - assumes further transformation savings and tapering down of cost increases over decade post LGR
Waste Disposal - direct costs only	3.00%	Consistent with existing MTFS assumptions across authorities.
Highways - direct costs only	2.00%	Based on current government targets and consistent with existing MTFS assumptions

Capital financing	4.20%	Based on current HCC MTFS assumptions

BUDGET AGGREGATION AND DISAGGREGATION

CFOs have accepted methodologies (for financial modelling purposes) for disaggregating the HCC budget and funding (and aggregating D&B budgets) to specific geographical areas and adjusting this for boundary review variants where required.

HCC undertook an exercise to disaggregate its 2025/26 budget to specific geographical areas using metrics that reflect underlying patterns of activity and demand across the County.

Further apportionments were then undertaken to reflect unitary options involving boundary reviews. These affect the individual proposed new authorities but not the overall quantum of costs and savings for each option.

COSTS AND SAVINGS FROM LGR

LGR RECURRING ANNUAL SAVINGS

When modelling, a clear distinction between benefits directly resulting from LGR, such as removal of duplicate roles, services and systems, versus benefits resulting from additional transformation that could be delivered by future authorities**.** There are two reasons for this:

- Firstly, decisions on additional transformation will be taken by future authorities themselves.
- Secondly, there are reasonable differences of opinion within our partnership on which of the proposed models is likely to be “more transformational”.

As a result, our shared financial model does not estimate any additional financial benefits arising from transformation, although each of the individual proposals provides further information on opportunities relevant to each option.

Savings have been categorised into three key areas:

- Staffing - estimated savings in relation to the implementation of LGR predicated on consolidation and subsequent efficiencies resulting in a reduced capacity requirement.
- Direct Costs – estimated savings in relation to increased economies of scale and optimised use of resources.
- Democratic and governance reorganisation – estimated savings in relation to costs of elections, members allowances and staffing in relation to democratic services as result of fewer authorities in existence.

The staffing and direct cost savings are net i.e. there will be some increases in costs from disaggregation/duplication – but these will be offset by wider savings from consolidation and efficiency.

Income from fees and charges is excluded from the estimated savings, with no assumptions about future changes. However, harmonising fees and charges across existing services where there are differences could affect income levels either increasing or decreasing, though this will be decided by future authorities and so is not included at this stage.

All authorities within Hertfordshire will continue to deliver Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) savings between now and vesting day, and savings accepted within this financial model will be in addition to these. It should be noted this may impact the ability of the new unitary

authorities to realise the estimated savings within the financial model as where savings are made in advance of vesting day there may be potential duplication.

STAFFING

Staffing savings in relation to the implementation of LGR are predicated on efficiencies through consolidation and therefore a reduced capacity requirement. Staffing has been split into three key areas (excluding HRA staffing):

- Statutory Officers,
- Tiers 1-3 (excluding statutory officers) and
- General fund - all other staff.

The General Fund employee costs budgets 2025/26 for each of the authorities were used to inform and calculate benefits and costs. These have been scaled using the growth assumptions to 2028/29 to reflect the estimated staffing levels and budgets at this time. A percentage reduction has then been applied to the estimated employee budget as at 2028/29 for each of the areas detailed varied for the different options.

The following key assumptions have been made:

Item	Assumptions	
Statutory Officers - 2U	81.3%	Statutory officers are defined as those legally mandated roles responsible for ensuring proper governance, legal compliance, and financial integrity within a local authority. The officers included for the purposes of the financial model are: Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) Monitoring Officer S151 Officer (Chief Financial Officer) Statutory officer savings are derived from an estimated percentage reduction of officers required in the new unitary authorities because of fewer authorities existing under LGR. The percentage reduction is taken from the Pixel model[1] and has been benchmarked against other LGR business cases and existing unitary authorities of a similar size. Within the model percentage reductions decrease the greater the number of unitary authorities to reflect the reduced opportunities for consolidation and a greater capacity requirement as a result. These are prudent estimates based upon reasonableness, achievability and high-level application
Statutory Officers - 3U	71.9%	
Statutory Officers - 4U	62.5%	
Tier 1 - 3 (excl stat officers) - 2U	49.1%	Tiers 1-3 have been taken to be the current leadership and senior management for each authority. Statutory officers have been excluded to prevent any duplication of potential savings. Tiers 1-3 savings are derived from an estimated percentage reduction of officers required in the new unitary authorities because of fewer authorities existing under LGR. The percentage reduction is taken from the Pixel model and has been benchmarked against other LGR business cases and existing unitary authorities of a similar size. Within the model percentage reductions decrease the greater the number of unitary authorities to reflect the reduced opportunities for consolidation and a greater capacity requirement as a result.
Tier 1 - 3 (excl stat officers) - 3U	42.2%	
Tier 1 - 3 (excl stat officers) - 4U	38.3%	

		These are prudent estimates based upon reasonableness, achievability and high-level application
Other general fund staff costs - 2U	2.90%	Statutory officers and Tiers 1-3 are excluded from these calculations.
Other general fund staff costs - 3U	2.20%	All other staff savings are derived from an estimated percentage reduction of officers required in the new unitary authorities resulting from consolidation of services through LGR. The percentage reduction is taken from the Pixel model and benchmarked against other LGR business cases. Within the model, percentage reductions decrease the greater the number of unitary authorities to reflect the reduced opportunities for consolidation as a result. It should be noted that the percentage reduction is recognised as being low and is likely to be of a higher level as there will be significant consolidation of services particularly the back office and across corporate functions. This, however, has been left at a prudent lower level to reflect that for example in the back office there will be significant consolidation but there will also potentially be additional resource requirements in relation to disaggregating services such as social care. These disaggregation costs that have not been specifically included or estimated at this time due to the complexities of estimating the requirements before detailed service design has been undertaken. These are prudent estimates based upon reasonableness, achievability and high-level application
Other general fund staff costs - 4U	1.40%	

DIRECT COSTS

These savings are expected to arise from economies of scale and optimised resource use through LGR, including eliminating duplicate contracts and consolidating office space resulting in reduced property costs.

An efficiency percentage has been applied to the non-staffing baseline for 2028/29, scaled from the 2025/26 direct costs budgets. To avoid overstating potential savings, a contingency percentage reduction has also been applied.

Item	Assumptions	
Direct Cost - 2U (D&Bs)	3.00%	*District and Boroughs* Overall, a percentage reduction has been applied through benchmarking of other cases to the total estimated budgeted District and Borough Direct Costs in 2028/29. Percentage reduction is applied against the estimated total Direct Costs in 2028/29 less a 10% reduction contingency to the baseline to prevent overstating of the potential saving. The 10% contingency reduction is derived from a prudent and reasonable estimate, supported by benchmarking against other LGR cases. It is assumed that savings for a 4 unitary model will be half of those for a 2 unitary and in the middle of both for 3 Unitary Authorities
Direct Cost - 3U (D&Bs)	2.25%	
Direct Cost - 4U (D&Bs)	1.50%	

		reflecting a decreasing saving with a greater number of unitary authorities through reducing economies of scale. These are prudent estimates based upon reasonableness, achievability and high-level application
Direct Cost - 2U (HCC)	1.38%	*HCC* Overall percentage reduction has been applied through benchmarking of other cases to relevant service Costs in 2028/29 Percentage reductions are deemed to be less for the County as it is assumed that many of the Direct Cost benefits from LGR will result from consolidation of District and Borough services although there will be some efficiency from services such as waste where functions are currently split across HCC and the District and Boroughs and from benefits of having housing and Adult social care within the same organisation Percentage applied against the estimated total Direct Costs 2028/29 less a 10% reduction contingency to the baseline to prevent overstating of the potential saving. The 10% contingency reduction is derived from a prudent and reasonable estimate, supported by benchmarking against other LGR cases. It is assumed that savings for a 4 unitary model will be half of those for a 2 unitary and in the middle of both for 3 Unitary Authorities reflecting a decreasing saving with a greater number of Unitary Authorities These are prudent estimates based upon reasonableness, achievability and high-level application
Direct Cost - 3U (HCC)	1.04%	
Direct Cost - 4U (HCC)	0.69%	

DEMOCRATIC AND GOVERNANCE REORGANISATION

Savings derived for Democratic and Governance assume a reduction in costs of elections, Members' allowances and staffing in relation to democratic services due to fewer authorities being in existence.

Item	Assumptions	
Democratic and governance - 2U	£4.743m	A percentage reduction has been applied to the democratic budget across the District and Boroughs using Pixel assumptions. The Pixel model assumptions are based on other LGR cases as a percentage reduction, these are: 2U - 40% 3U - 30% 4U - 20% A validation exercise was undertaken by CFOs to ensure the reasonableness of the Pixel figures. This included reviewing input from the Democratic workstream and calculation of estimated costs and savings. Following this exercise, it was deemed that the figures were representative of the estimated savings anticipated.
Democratic and governance - 3U	£3.557m	
Democratic and governance - 4U	£2.371m	

PHASING

Each individual LGR recurring saving has been phased over the years according to the expected timing of when they will be realised or incurred.

Phasing in profiles	FY 2028/29	FY 2029/30	FY 2030/31	FY 2031/32	FY 2032/33
Statutory officers	60%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Tiers 1 -3 staffing	30%	60%	100%	100%	100%
Other general fund staff	30%	60%	100%	100%	100%
Direct costs	20%	40%	80%	90%	100%
Democratic and governance reorganisation	30%	60%	100%	100%	100%

Phasing in profiles	Assumptions
Statutory officers	It is assumed that 60% of statutory officer posts will be reduced in Year 1 to reflect the revised capacity requirements of the new authorities and fewer in existence. However, some capacity will need to be maintained in Year 1 to accommodate a safe transition and the closing of the previous authorities.
Tiers 1 -3 staffing	It is assumed that 30% of Tiers 1 -3 officer posts will be reduced in Year 1 to reflect the revised capacity requirements of the new authorities and fewer in existence. However, capacity will need to be maintained in Year 1 to accommodate a safe transition and the closing of the previous authorities. Remaining consolidation of services and posts will take place over Years 1 and 2 to further reflect the revised capacity requirements.
Other general fund staff	It is assumed that 30% of other general fund staff posts will be reduced in Year 1 to reflect the revised capacity requirements of the new authorities and fewer in existence. However, capacity will need to be maintained in Year 1 to accommodate a safe transition, and consolidation of services and posts will take place over Years 1 and 2 to further reflect the revised capacity requirements.
Direct costs	Direct costs have been phased over a 5-year period to reflect some immediate savings will be able to be achieved through, for example cessation of duplicated third-party contracts and spend, but it will take longer to drive out savings from service restructuring through consolidation and for example property maintenance and running costs due to reducing office space. Some savings will also depend on end dates of existing contracts.
Democratic and governance reorganisation	It is assumed the creation of new authorities and election of new councillors will require a smaller reduction in democratic resources in the first 2 years until a steady state is reached. Therefore, savings have been phased to maintain capacity in Year 1.

LGR RECURRING ANNUAL COSTS

LGR recurring annual costs have been split into two distinct categories:

- Additional costs of scale – these are recurring costs in relation to the anticipated additional resource requirement to service local democratic arrangements and support locality working and engagement because of aggregation.
- Diseconomies of scale - cover recurring costs created because of disaggregation in relation to social care and Information Technology

Additional Leadership and Management capacity required because of disaggregation are accounted for within the differing savings and staffing level reductions for Statutory Officers and Tiers 1 -3.

Additional back-office staff capacity requirements because of disaggregation are accounted for within the reduced staffing reductions against the general fund staff for each of the unitary options as it is not possible to accurately estimate the resource requirements at this stage prior to detailed service design.

There is limited recent evidence of unitarisation involving the disaggregation of county-level services at as scale equivalent to Hertfordshire, making it challenging to accurately estimate associated costs. As a result, the financial model's cost projections for IT and social care disaggregation carry a significant risk of variation, either upwards or downwards and as a result a higher and lower end range has been modelled.

Item	Assumptions		
Additional Costs of Scale - 2U	£1.000m		These are recurring costs in relation to the anticipated additional resource requirement to service local democratic arrangements and support locality working and engagement because of aggregation. These assumptions have been taken from the Pixel model and are based on other LGR cases. Additional benchmarking has been undertaken of recently released LGR cases. No costs are assumed for the 4U option as it is assumed there are no additional resource requirements in relation to locality working.
Additional Costs of Scale - 3U	£0.400m		
Additional Costs of Scale - 4U	£0.000m		
Diseconomies of Scale - 2U	High	£6.405m	**IT** The high and low scenarios reflect the complexity and uncertainty in relation to future ERP/Finance and HR provision. The range of costs account for the solution/provider landscape, the options relating to the scale of migration and integration activity and the existing highly customised platforms and processes. No savings in ongoing costs outside of IT have been assumed to arise from the adoption of a single ERP. It should be noted that it will be the decision of the shadow authority to determine and decide the approach to and procurement of IT systems and services (subject to transition planning requiring decisions to be made prior to this) and therefore these costs are highly likely to change. The additional running costs are in relation to Social Care systems and ERP / Finance and HR systems. All other running costs are assumed to be accounted for within current budgets. Ongoing running costs of the social care systems are assumed to be the same for each the high and low scenario as there are assumed to be no differences in approach. **Social Care Management Staffing costs**
	Low	£2.966m	
Diseconomies of Scale - 3U	High	£12.600m	
	Low	£6.956m	
Diseconomies of Scale - 4U	High	£18.255m	
	Low	£8.079m	

Two scenarios (high and low) have been modelled to reflect the complexities and difficulties of estimating additional costs in relation to staffing because of disaggregation at this stage prior to detailed service design.

A high scenario was created by the DASS and DCS undertaking an analysis of current management posts down to Head of Service level within the existing county structures to identify which posts are necessary in each council given the TOM approach. Some services within this have been assumed to be shared for the purposes of the modelling.

It is assumed that all other front-line roles / costs below Head of Service level are split across the new authorities without duplication. Using current county pay grades.

A low scenario was created by benchmarking the costs of social care management in other existing unitary authorities that are of comparable scale to potential unitary authorities for Hertfordshire, using publicly available information.

As this was based on publicly available data, HCC have noted the following caveats.

Comparator Quality and Sample Size
The analysis uses a relatively small sample, which may limit its ability to fully reflect variations in management costs across different authorities. Some comparators have Ofsted ratings below "Good," which might suggest a relationship between cost levels and service quality.

Structural Assumptions and Scope Differences
The cost modelling may not fully capture Hertfordshire's investment in integrated partnership models. These differences in approach could affect the accuracy of cost and complexity estimates.

Data Reliability and Regional Relevance
There are some variations in the data, such as salary differentials. Additionally, the analysis does not fully account for regional factors like cost of living, population demographics, and geographic differences, which are important when comparing similar-sized authorities with different local circumstances.

PHASING

Each of the recurring annual costs for both the additional costs of scale and diseconomies of scale have been phased by year, based on when it is anticipated these would be incurred.

Phasing in profiles	FY 2028/29	FY 2029/30	FY 2030/31	FY 2031/32	FY 2032/33
Additional costs of scale	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Diseconomies of scale	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Phasing in profiles	Assumptions				
Additional costs of scale	These are assumed to be fully incurred from vesting day to support the successful implementation of new locality and democratic working arrangements.				
Diseconomies of scale	These are assumed to be fully incurred from vesting day as systems will be required to be in place from this day to enable effective running and administration of the new authorities.				

LGR ONE OFF COSTS

These are the estimated one-off costs that are incurred to support the creation of the new authorities. These are split into three distinct areas:

- IT Disaggregation – costs related to the process of separating and dividing existing IT systems, infrastructure, data, and services that were previously shared or centralised as well as the implementation of new systems and processes where duplication is required.
- IT Consolidation - process of combining and consolidating existing IT systems, infrastructures, and services from predecessor councils into a single, unified IT environment for the new authority.
- Transition costs – these are one-off, short-term costs incurred to move from the existing council structures to the new authorities.

IT COSTS

Item	Assumptions		
IT Disaggregation Costs - 2U	High	£32.940m	Two scenarios have been modelled for IT disaggregation (high and low) to reflect the complexities and uncertainties of estimating disaggregation costs at this stage.
	Low	£17.540m	
IT Disaggregation Costs - 3U	High	£43.540m	It should be noted that it will be the decision of the shadow authority to determine and decide the approach to and procurement of IT systems and services (subject to transition planning requiring decisions to be made prior to this) and therefore these costs are highly likely to change.
	Low	£25.290m	
IT Disaggregation Costs - 4U	High	£54.240m	
	Low	£33.040m	Both the high and low scenarios assume disaggregation costs will be incurred in relation to social care case management systems. Each new authority will require access to a case management system from vesting day; this could be either through an existing or new system. The estimated cost included covers the potential duplication of the existing systems and the migration and configuration required. These costs increase the greater the number of authorities. Each new authority will need access to an HR and Finance system. This can take two forms which is to implement separate systems or to implement what is known as an ERP which is effectively a combined and integrated HR and Finance system. The range of costs account for the solution/provider landscape, the options relating to the scale of migration and integration activity and the existing highly customised platforms and processes.

		An external company was commissioned to review the initial estimated costs provided in relation to the implementation of an ERP system. As a result, costs were amended to reflect feedback and validation provided. Other potential disaggregation costs in relation to IT include: Disaggregation of existing server hardware Repackaging of existing HCC applications to make available across the new unitary authorities Migration of existing WAN infrastructure sites across HCC and all District and Boroughs Migration of records management systems Replication and disaggregation of other systems across the new authorities.
IT Consolidation Costs - 2U IT Consolidation Costs - 3U IT Consolidation Costs - 4U	£17.000m £17.000m £17.000m	The following key IT consolidation costs have been included within the financial model; these are assumed to remain the same regardless of the option chosen: Estimated technology costs for establishing network infrastructure, Alignment of the baseline for cyber security and incident response, Alignment of Microsoft agreements, single landing page for public websites, Email & communication (including telephony) set up, finance and payroll systems, CRM Estimated resources /skills required for transition activities. No assumptions have been made on vendor price increases because of reorganisation both locally and nationally.

GENERAL

<table>
<tr><th>Item</th><th colspan="2">Assumptions</th></tr>
<tr><td>Programme Management</td><td>£15.000m</td><td>These cover the programme management costs required in the setting up coordinated planning, governance, delivery, and control of all the activities required to implement structural changes in creating new unitary authorities.

Based on resource requirements provided by the Transition workstream, it is estimated this will require the following programme resource:
<table>
<tr><th>Role</th><th>FTE</th></tr>
<tr><td>Programme Director</td><td>20</td></tr>
<tr><td>Senior Project Managers</td><td>13</td></tr>
<tr><td>PMO Lead</td><td>14</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Officers</td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td>Programme SME Leads</td><td>17</td></tr>
<tr><td>Functional Leads</td><td>15</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Managers</td><td>12</td></tr>
<tr><td>Change Managers</td><td>12</td></tr>
</table>
</td></tr>
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		<table><tr><td>Analysts</td><td>12</td></tr><tr><td>Operating Model Leads</td><td>14</td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>72</td></tr></table> A 15% reduction has been applied to the overall cost of the estimated resources which is assumed to reflect use of current internal resources and capacity across all authorities. Each unitary option is currently assumed to incur the same costs, as the number of authorities will not influence the resource required as it would be run as an overall programme. These have been reviewed in line with other business cases and the Pixel model and accepted as a reasonable prudent high-level assumption.
Contract novation / renegotiation	£4.000m	These one-off costs cover the legal, commissioning and procurement costs of novating and renegotiating contracts because of LGR. These are taken from the Pixel model and benchmarked against other LGR business cases and has been accepted as a reasonable and prudent high-level assumption.
Communications and Rebranding	£1.200m	These costs are expenditure incurred by councils to manage public, stakeholder, and staff communications and to develop and implement the visual identity, branding, and messaging for the new unitary authorities. This is an estimated figure taken from the Pixel model and benchmarked against other LGR business cases and has been accepted as a reasonable and prudent high-level assumption.
Estates & Facilities - reconfiguration	£2.500m	These costs refer to the one-off or transitional expenses associated with changing, consolidating, or adapting the property and accommodation portfolio of existing councils as part of reorganisation and the new unitary authorities. This is an estimated figure taken from the Pixel model and benchmarked against other LGR business cases and has been accepted as a reasonable and prudent high-level assumption.
Relocation	£1.700m	These costs refer to the reasonable and necessary expenses paid to employees who are required to move their home or place of work as a direct result of LGR. This is an estimated figure taken from the Pixel model and benchmarked against other LGR business cases and has been accepted as a reasonable and prudent high-level assumption.
Specialist support and advice	£5.000m	These include activities related to but not limited to: Closedown activities - dissolving what will be the former authorities including completing final accounts, external audit, plus legal and other costs. Creation of a new council - covering legal costs and development of new constitutions. Audit - covering specialist support and assurance for detailed design. This is an estimated figure taken from the Pixel model and benchmarked against other LGR business cases and has been accepted as a reasonable and prudent high-level assumption.

Redundancy Costs	2U	£13.080m	Estimated redundancy costs per FTE have been calculated for: Tiers 1-3 (including Statutory officers) Other General Fund staff These are based on a weighted average redundancy cost across the existing authorities adjusted to take into account a 5% vacancy factor (reducing the total) and the addition of a 20% increase on this total to account for pension strain. These have then been applied against the resulting average FTE reduction calculated as part of the staffing savings detailed above.
	3U	£10.072m	
	4U	£8.046m	
Contingency	10%		It has been considered prudent to include a contingency for transition costs due to the estimated nature of the costs and to account for unexpected costs arising. This has been included at 10% for each of the scenarios modelled to reflect the significant amount of one-off costs already included and benchmarking of other LGR business cases. A lower contingency of 5% has been applied to the high IT disaggregation costs due to high amount already included.

DISTRIBUTION PROFILES

Phasing in profiles	FY 2028/29	FY 2029/30	FY 2030/31	FY 2031/32	FY 2032/33
IT Disaggregation Costs - 2U	58.49%	17.06%	9.68%	7.38%	7.38%
IT Disaggregation Costs - 3U	58.49%	17.06%	9.68%	7.38%	7.38%
IT Disaggregation Costs - 4U	58.49%	17.06%	9.68%	7.38%	7.38%
IT Consolidation Costs - 2U	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
IT Consolidation Costs - 3U	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
IT Consolidation Costs - 4U	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Programme Management	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Contract novation / renegotiation	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Communications and Rebranding	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Estates & Facilities - reconfiguration	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Relocation	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Specialist support and advice	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Redundancy Costs	60%	20%	20%	0%	0%
Contingency	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Phasing in profiles	Assumptions
IT Disaggregation Costs - 2U	These costs have been phased over a 5-year period to reflect when they are likely to occur and be realised.
IT Disaggregation Costs - 3U	These costs have been phased over a 5-year period to reflect when they are likely to occur and be realised.
IT Disaggregation Costs - 4U	These costs have been phased over a 5-year period to reflect when they are likely to occur and be realised.
IT Consolidation Costs - 2U	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre- and post-venting day.
IT Consolidation Costs - 3U	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre- and post-venting day.
IT Consolidation Costs - 4U	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre and post vesting day.
Programme Management	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre and post vesting day.
Contract novation / renegotiation	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre- and post-venting day.
Communications and Rebranding	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre- and post-venting day.
Estates & Facilities - reconfiguration	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre- and post-venting day.
Relocation	These costs are assumed to be over the first two years of the new authorities being in place
Specialist support and advice	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre- and post-venting day.
Redundancy Costs	It is assumed that redundancy costs will follow the phasing of staffing savings
Contingency	These costs are assumed to be incurred fully in year 1 for the purposes of the financial model although it is recognised that costs may be incurred pre- and post-venting day.

COMPARATORS AND BENCHMARKING

Other LGR business cases used as comparators and benchmarks include those undertaken in Surrey, West Sussex, Essex, East Sussex, Hampshire, North Yorkshire and Cumbria. It should be noted, however, that these areas do not always share the same population size, geography, or demographic characteristics as Hertfordshire. Accordingly, while reliance has not been placed upon these examples, they have been used as a reasonableness test to help inform and validate the assumptions within this business case. Every effort has been made to ensure that comparisons are drawn from the most relevant and comparable examples available.

SPECIFIC FINANCIAL RISKS AND ISSUES

Strategic Authority – some existing costs and budgets will transfer to the Strategic Authority such as the Fire service. These have not been included in the financial model at this stage due to the complexities of splitting out budgets and resource. No additional running costs have been assumed for the Strategic Authority within the financial model.

Existing MTFS savings – If the savings assumed to be achieved by vesting day are not delivered, this would reduce the projected baseline position and may require the new authorities to identify additional savings beyond those expected from LGR.

It should also be noted that, while annual savings are included in the MTFS up to 2027/28, no non-LGR savings (to address underlying funding gaps) have been incorporated into the financial model.

Savings – while a prudent approach to savings has been adopted, it is not yet possible to fully determine which savings are cashable and which may be non-cashable—for example, where expenditure is funded by ring-fenced grants. Therefore, although expenditure may be reduced in some cases, there could be limitations on how those savings can be used.

MTFS forecasts – as outlined earlier the financial models assume that cost increases – especially in Social Care and SEND, are lower in the years after LGR than in the years preceding it. Council tax increases are also assumed at the 4.99% (2.99% council tax + 2% adult social care precept) every year in line with government assumptions on funding.

Shared service arrangements – Hertfordshire has a track record of successful shared services. It has been assumed for the purposes of the financial case that shared service arrangements will continue where long-term countywide contracts exist, such as for Highways and Waste Disposal. Without these arrangements, the additional costs linked to disaggregation could rise significantly.

DSG Deficit /HNB – the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant funds education for children with SEND, including special schools, independent placements, and additional support in mainstream settings.

Rising demand for SEND provision has led many councils to overspend, as grant funding has not kept pace with costs. The government's 'statutory override' allows councils to exclude these deficits from their accounts, but the financial shortfall remains. The override has been extended to March 2028 while longer-term reforms are developed.

The County Council forecasts a cumulative DSG deficit of £255 million by March 2028, with annual overspends expected to continue. The outcome of national reforms will be critical to the financial sustainability of all three structural options. Any remaining HNB deficit would need to be divided between the new authority or authorities, creating a risk that an unfunded deficit could be transferred.

Pay Harmonisation – no assumptions have been made in relation to pay harmonisation within the financial model although noting that any pay harmonisation could result in significantly increased costs.

Borrowing – If alternative funding sources are insufficient to cover transition costs, borrowing may be required. Borrowing costs have not been included in the financial model at this stage and could reduce projected savings and the baseline funding available.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – the HRA sits outside of General Fund revenue expenditure. Although the four HRA's in Hertfordshire receive support services / cost of democracy from the General Fund the impact on HRA's for one off, on-going costs and savings has not been included within the financial business case.

It is important to note that the HRA entails significant costs and scale that will require further consideration as the chosen option becomes clearer.

	Housing Stock	Total Costs (£m)
3 CENTRAL configuration		
St Albans	4,899	17,538
Welwyn Hatfield	8,847	48,588
Total	**13,746**	**66,126**
2 WEST / 4 NORTH WEST unitary configuration		
Dacorum	10,061	59,033
St Albans	4,899	17,538
Total	**14,960**	**76,571**
2 EASTERN/ 4 CENTRAL configuration		
Stevenage	**7,911**	**37,209**
Welwyn Hatfield	8,847	48,588
Total	**16,758**	**85,797**

Assets disaggregation – has not been accounted for within the financial model but this potentially poses risks at a later stage in terms of ensuring the transfer of assets and their corresponding revenue streams and or liabilities does not inadvertently worsen the financial position and sustainability of the new authorities. Disposal of surplus assets may help to defray the costs of reorganisation.

Shared services – whilst some shared services are already in existence across for example Audit, Fraud, Procurement and Building Control, across Hertfordshire, these may no longer align geographically with the new authority boundaries. This may pose additional costs in relation to:

- Disaggregating shared systems or contracts that are no longer aligned geographically.
- Potential duplication of effort or investment if new, separate services are required.
- Loss of economies of scale once shared arrangements end.

However, in other cases existing shared services will not require disaggregation and there may be opportunities to expand these and create greater economies of scale.

Companies and other entities – where they exist this may cause additional complexity in aggregating and disaggregating balance sheets and asset valuation or else amending governance and ownership arrangements. As a result, additional specialist support may be required. This is assumed to be covered by the existing allocation of specialist support within the one-off costs.

Shadow authority costs – it has been assumed that the costs of the shadow authority can be covered by existing budgets and one-off costs and the contingency where required. These are unlikely to have a material impact on the financial assessment of alternative unitary options being considered, nor on their ongoing financial sustainability.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Regardless of the option chosen, implementing the new authorities will involve significant costs. The programme will likely need to operate on an 'invest to save' basis, with funding secured either from within the councils or through government support. All potential local funding sources to support this investment will be reviewed and considered. However,

outcomes from the Fair Funding Review could further restrict these sources — for example, by limiting the use of reserves or the ability to generate capital receipts.

This risk requires careful management to cover transition costs without compromising service delivery or financial stability. While multiple funding options are available, their impacts have not yet been included in the financial model.

Savings – savings generated through the programme can be used to help fund the costs, acknowledging that there is a time lag between expenditure and savings.

Reserves – council's hold a range of specific and general reserves. Although many are earmarked for specific commitments, a review may reveal opportunities to release or reallocate some—either temporarily or permanently—to support the investment requirement.

Capital Receipts - due to LGR, office space requirements are expected to decrease, potentially generating capital receipts. These funds could help cover transition costs; however, they have not yet been estimated because it is currently too complex to predict which buildings might be sold.

Capital Directives – these are provisions that allow the Government to authorise councils to classify certain revenue expenditures as capital (long-term investment) spending. This classification enables councils to use capital funds, such as those from capital receipts, or to borrow,

[1] This model was created by Pixel Financial management to help estimate the savings and costs in relation to Local Government Reorganisation in 2028-29

APPENDIX B – MODELLING ASSUMPTIONS USED FOR COUNCILLOR NUMBERS

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED COUNCILLOR NUMBERS FOR THE PROPOSED MODELS

2UA	3UA BASE	3UA MODIFIED	4UA BASE	4UA
2 WEST – 117	3 WEST - 66	3 WEST - 72	4 NORTH WEST - 84	4 NORTH WEST – 84
2 EASTERN- 117	3 CENTRAL – 75	3 CENTRAL – 69	4 SOUTH WEST - 79	4 SOUTH WEST – 79
	3 EAT - 93	3 EASTERN- 93	4 CENTRAL – 100	4 CENTRAL – 89
			4 EASTERN– 64	4 EASTERN– 75

INTRODUCTION

To develop the set of proposed councillor numbers for the models described in Hertfordshire's LGR submission, colleagues from across our legal and democratic services, have come together to develop a methodology for modelling these numbers.

The methodology was based on guidance set out by The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), alongside professional judgement of the requirements each of the three models described would need to be effectively run and serviced.

Our methodology for proposing these councillor numbers is described below. Our approach for each model has flexed based on the requirements of the new Unitary Authority model being proposed. While the 117 councillor representation number for the 2UA model exceeds the LGBCE guidance, we believe we have set out a strong and compelling case, for this as an interim measure pending a full LGBCE review that will be commissioned shortly after vesting of the two authorities. We are open to other options if the Secretary of State deems this necessary.

The assessment below has focused on the modified proposals for ease of reference but has been reviewed with the base proposals. The base proposals would result in changes to the ratios noted in the report but do not materially change any of the assessments and conclusions made.

METHODOLOGY

LGBCE issued guidance in February 2025 for local authorities going through LGR and described local government *'as diverse as the communities it services, providing services, leadership and representation tailored to the characteristics and needs of individual areas. Our aim in an electoral review, is to recommend electoral arrangements, including a council size, which is right for the local authority in question.*

The guidance further states "While we have no set limits, our view is that an extremely strong and compelling case would be needed for an authority made up of more than 100 members or less than 30 members: too many members and the structure potentially becomes unwieldy and accountability is diluted; too few and the authority may not be able to fully discharge its functions and effectively represent local communities.

Therefore, whilst LGBCE gave guiding principles for setting the councillor numbers for new unitary authorities, it did not prescribe a given formula or methodology for determining the number of councillors required.

It is also predicated on these options being the proposed interim arrangements in recognition that an LGBCE review will automatically follow the vesting of the new Unitary Authorities.

LGBCE gave three core areas that should be considered when determining councillor numbers for a new Unitary footprint.

1) **Strategic leadership:**
   - How many councillors are needed to give strategic leadership and direction to the authority in the long-term?
   - How many councillors will be needed to manage the business of the council and take decisions effectively?
   - How will decision making, delegation and the governance of service provision be delivered?
   - What are the plans for devolution of powers down to the parish tier?

2) **Accountability:**
   - How many councillors are needed to scrutinise council decisions?
   - How many councillors are needed to support the regulatory functions of the authority, such as planning and licencing?
   - How many councillors are needed for representation on outside bodies and partnerships?

3) **Community leadership:**
   - How many councillors are needed to represent and engage with local people and communities?
   - How will casework be handled and what support will be in place to help councillors fulfil this role?

The LGBCE guidance also includes additional areas to considered, including wider local and national policy context; local geography, demographic and community characteristics and understanding of the Councillor's roles and responsibilities within the local area. In addition, the guidance goes into detail about the factors that are relevant to the number of councillors. These include considerations around the governance arrangements of the council, committee numbers, arrangements for scrutinising the council and the number of parish councils and external bodies with which it expects the Councillors to engage. In addition, it recommends consideration of the ratio of electors to councillors. This guidance, along with the technical guidance included within the LGBCE documentation was reviewed and considered as part of this process.[8]

APPLYING THE LGBCE GUIDANCE TO HERTFORDSHIRE LGR

Our approach for applying this guidance to the Hertfordshire proposals, was as follows;

1) We designed the base governance structure of the proposed unitary models.
   - It was agreed that the number of committees and panels would remain consistent whether there are 2, 3 or 4 Unitary Authorities established.
   - Area Committees will increase in number where there are fewer, larger unitary authorities.
   - Differences will occur where a greater number of committees are required to cover a larger geographical area for regulatory matters, which will need to be split into Area Committees, as well as dealing with local representation such as Area Boards and other agreed structures.
2) We reviewed the changes that the new configurations will cause on the role of the councillor, including;
   - The new structures will include both County and District functions with wider geographical areas and increased population and electorate, changing the role and remit of the councillors.

[8] The Local Government Boundary Commission for England, *LGR guidance note* (2025), https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/lgbce_lgr_guidance_note_21052025_1_0.pdf

- Ratio of electors to councillors will significantly increase for the councillors in the new Unitary Authorities

3) We conducted a benchmarking exercise (table C) against recently created unitary councils, to illustrate the fairly broad range of councillor numbers established and to understand how these increase as the electorate they represent increases. We took an average ratio for 4,016 electors per councillor from this benchmarking exercise and used it as a reference point for our analysis.
4) We agreed the building blocks that would be used for the basis of electoral areas. LGBCE advised using the existing division or borough ward boundaries to simplify the process. We assessed options using existing County Council division boundaries and District/Borough ward boundaries (table A).
5) Considered the existing number of councillors across the existing 11 councils;
   - The total number of Cllrs is 517 which equates to: 439 District Cllrs and 78 County Cllrs
   - The number of electors is 895,832 which equates to: - 2,040 per district/borough Cllr and 11,485 per County Cllr.
6) Consulted on our approach at meaningful intervals with Hertfordshire Leaders Group and Chief Executive's Coordinating Group to share options, analysis and outputs. The proposed councillor numbers for each of the three models have been agreed by these two groups.

MODELLED SCENARIOS

We modelled the following scenarios for the 2UA and the modified 3UA and 4UA models.

Scenario 1: 2 councillors per County division

Scenario 2: 3 councillors per County division

Scenario 3: 1 councillor per borough / district ward

Scenario 4: 2 councillors per borough / district ward

Scenario 5: Using district/borough wards and reducing all multi-councillor wards by 1 councillor e.g. a three-councillor ward becomes a two-councillor ward, a two-councillor ward becomes a one-councillor, but one councillor wards stay as they are.

Table A – Cllr numbers from each modelled scenario

		Scenario 1 - 2x cllrs per County division			Scenario 2 - 3x cllrs per County division			Scenario 3 - 1x cllr per ward			Scenario 4 - 2x cllr per ward			Scenario 5 - 2 and 3-cllr wards reduced by 1 cllr				
Option	Electors	No. divisions	No. cllrs	Ratio	No. divisions	No. cllrs	Ratio	No. wards	No. cllrs	Ratio	No. wards	No. cllrs	Ratio	1-member district wards	2-member district wards	3-member district wards	No. Cllrs	Ratio
2b.1	443,148	39	78	5,681	39	117	3,788	90	90	4,924	90	180	2,462	13	26	51	141	3,143
2b.2	452,684	39	78	5,804	39	117	3,869	86	86	5,264	86	172	2,632	6	25	55	141	3,211
2b TOTAL	895,832	78	156	5,743	78	234	3,828	176	176	5,090	176	352	2,545	19	51	106	282	3,177
3g.1	259,713	22	44	5,903	22	66	3,935	50	50	5,194	50	100	2,597	5	14	31	81	3,206
3g.2	358,738	31	62	5,786	31	93	3,857	74	74	4,848	74	148	2,424	13	26	35	109	3,291
3g.3	277,381	25	50	5,548	25	75	3,698	52	52	5,334	52	104	2,667	1	11	40	92	3,015
3g TOTAL	895,832	78	156	5,743	78	234	3,828	176	176	5,090	176	352	2,545	19	51	106	282	3,177
3j.1	236,198	21	42	5,624	21	63	3,749	42	42	5,624	42	84	2,812	0	9	33	75	3,149
3j.2	286,134	25	50	5,723	25	75	3,815	64	64	4,471	64	128	2,235	13	26	25	89	3,215
3j.3	373,500	32	64	5,836	32	96	3,891	70	70	5,336	70	140	2,668	6	16	48	118	3,165
3g TOTAL	895,832	78	156	5,743	78	234	3,828	176	176	5,090	176	352	2,545	19	51	106	282	3,177
4a.1	189,109	16	32	5,910	16	48	3,940	36	36	5,253	36	72	2,627	8	12	16	52	3,637
4a.2	228,865	20	40	5,722	20	60	3,814	45	45	5,086	45	90	2,543	6	16	23	68	3,366
4a.3	223,819	19	38	5,890	19	57	3,927	41	41	5,459	41	82	2,730	0	9	32	73	3,066
4a.4	254,039	23	46	5,523	23	69	3,682	54	54	4,704	54	108	2,352	5	14	35	89	2,854
4a TOTAL	895,832	78	156	5,743	78	234	3,828	176	176	5,090	176	352	2,545	19	51	106	282	3,177

Table B – Assessment of pros and cons for each scenario modelled.

Scenario	Pros	Cons
Scenario 1: 2 councillors per County division	• All 3 options are within LGBCE 30-100 guidance for a UA. • Consistent/simple structure using existing boundaries. • 2 Councillor divisions give a good balance to manage constituency work.	• Ratio for elector/councillor are high at between c5,600-5,900. • The number of councillors particularly for the 3 & 4 proposals is low for running council business.

Scenario 2: 3 councillors per County division	• 3 & 4 UA models are within LGBCE 30-100 guidance, but 2 UA goes above to 117 per UA - this could be positive for transition to have more councillors noting that numbers will likely be reduced on review. • Consistent/simple structure using existing boundaries. • Lowers the elector/councillor ratio to between c3,600-3,900, which would be positive for local representation. • Number of councillors for running the unitary is improved compared to 2 councillor version.	• 117 councillors per UA for the two unitary models is quite high and would very likely be reduced by LGBCE on review. • However, note Buckinghamshire started at 147 and was then reduced to 97 so there is precedent for starting higher for the transition period. • If 117 was deemed too high, consider reverting to 2 councillor division for 2 unitary proposal and 3 councillor division for options 3 & 4.
Scenario 3: 1 councillor per borough / district ward	• All 4 options are within LGBCE 30-100 guidance. • Consistent/simple structure using existing boundaries. • Wards would more closely reflect local identities as they have been assessed through district reviews	• Numbers of councillors in 3 and 4 unitary options are low. • Because some districts have lower numbers of wards, distribution of councillors would be unbalanced. • Elector/Councillor ratios are relatively high 4,400-5,600
Scenario 4: 2 councillors per borough / district ward	• Wards would be more closely reflect local identities as they have been assessed through district reviews. • Consistent/simple structure using existing boundaries. • Elector/Councillor ratio is low at between c2,300-2800	• All 4 options have at least one of the unitary authorities above LGBCE 30-100 guidance. • Councillor numbers in the 2 and 3 unitary options are high, although it is more balanced in the 4 unitary options with only one being above the 100 Councillor LGBCE guidance.
Scenario 5: Using district/borough wards and reducing all multi-councillor wards by 1 councillor	• Consistent/simple structure using existing boundaries. • Wards would more closely reflect local identities as they have been assessed through district reviews. • Allows a better geographical balance of councillors. • Councillor/elector ratio is improved at between c2,800-3,600	• The 2 unitary option has 141 councillors, and a case would need to be made to justify this number similar to the 3 member per division in the County division option. • 3 UA option include at least one authority above LGBCE 30-100 guidance, although the 4 unitary option is within the LGBCE guidance

It was agreed that the preferred option for the 2UA and 3 UA model was to use existing County Divisions with 3 councillors per division (scenario 2 above). In respect of the 4UA it was agreed to use existing District/Boundary wards as the base model utilising scenario 5 above. However, the ward-by-ward analysis of the 4UA (scenario 5 model) highlighted high variations of electorate to councillor ratios in some wards. Further modelling was carried out to reduce those ratios by adding back in councillors to most 2 members wards where they had been previously removed.

The agreed numbers for each unitary proposals are set out at the top of this appendix.

Based on the options above, we did further analysis, testing;

1) **Ratio of Electors to Cllr**

As table C shows, the 9 most recent new unitary councils had a broad range of Cllr numbers from 46-110 and the Cllr numbers tend to increase in line with the elector numbers. The elector Cllr ratio ranges from

2718 – 5373 (N.b. 2718 is an outlier and most are significantly higher). The average for elector/Cllr ratio is 4016.

The role of the councillor will change significantly with the new structure covering both County and District functions with wider geographical areas and increased population and electorate. Inevitably, this will mean that the ratio of electors to councillors will increase for Councillors in the new Unitary Authorities and as such these have been assessed in the light of other recently created Unitary Authorities so that officers and Councillors can visualise the ratios for different options, as shown in table A.

Table C – Most recent new unitary councils

Council	Created	No of Wards	No of Councillors	Population	Population/ward	Population/ Councillor
BCP	2019	33	76	301183	9127	3963
Dorset	2019	52	82	295195	5677	3600
Buckinghamshire	2020	49	97	410789	8383	4235
North Northamptons	2021	31	78	261970	8451	3359
West Northamptons	2021	35	76	299118	8546	3936
Cumberland	2023	46	46	216592	4709	4709
Westmorland and Furness	2023	33	65	176693	5354	2718
North Yorkshire	2023	90	90	483576	5373	5373
Somerset	2023	55	110	446703	8122	4061
Overall	-	-	-	-	**6820**	**4016**

2) **Ratio of Cllrs to Committees**

The base governance structure, for each unitary will have more elements than the two-tier councils due to the merger of most functions into single unitary councils. As between the 2, 3 and 4 UA models it is envisaged that there would be a similar number of committees but there may be a marginal increase in the number of Area Committees required by fewer larger unitary authorities which cover a larger area and population.

The same may be the case in respect of regulatory committees such as planning and licencing required to cover a larger geographical area for regulatory matters, but this could be covered by committees with a wider geographical coverage coupled with broader delegation to officers.

Governance structures should be designed to ensure that the committee seat ratio to the number of available councillors is appropriate to ensure that councillors are able to discharge their duties, including committee attendance, constituent case work and engagement, effectively.

Based on analysis of the likely committees that each unitary authorities will need, exclusive of Local Community/Strategic Partnerships Boards, it is estimated that the unitary options under consideration will have the following numbers of committee seats:

Two unitary authority - 171 committee seats.

Three unitary – 167 committee seats

Four unitary – 154 committee seats

Table D - Ratio of Councillor to Committee Seats

Unitary option	Scenario option	Councillor Number	Ratio (Committee seat/Cllr)
2 WEST	County divisions – 3 Cllrs per division	117	1.46
2 EASTERN	County divisions – 3 Cllrs per division	117	1.46
MODIFIED 3 WEST	County divisions – 3 Cllrs per division	72	2.3
MODIFIED 3 CENTRAL	County divisions – 3 Cllrs per division	69	2.4
MODIFIED 3 EAST	County divisions – 3 Cllrs per division	93	1.8
MODIFIED 4 NORTH WEST	District / Borough wards, minus 1 Cllr (from wards with 2 or 3 existing Cllrs.)	84	1.83
MODIFIED 4 SOUTH WEST	District / Borough wards, minus 1 Cllr (from wards with 2 or 3 existing Cllrs.)	79	1.94
MODIFIED 4 CENTRAL	District / Borough wards, minus 1 Cllr (from wards with 2 or 3 existing Cllrs.)	89	1.73
MODIFIED 4 EAST	District / Borough wards, minus 1 Cllr (from wards with 2 or 3 existing Cllrs.)	75	2.05

It is acknowledged that the role of the councillor in the new unitary authorities will change as functions are combined and they have a larger electorate to represent, but for the purposes of comparison, we have benchmarked against all eleven Hertfordshire authorities which together, have an average committee seat to Councillor ratio of 1.76.

It will be noted that under the two unitary model (3 Cllr per division), the ratio is improved when compared against existing Hertfordshire authorities, but this is due to the relatively high councillor numbers under that option (117 Cllrs). This could benefit earlier transition planning and may well be reduced following the initial electoral review. Modelling for three and four unitary increases the ratio from the average currently across Hertfordshire but is arguably proportionate to the new functions and populations of those authorities.

In addition to the committee membership and political meetings, there are circa 250 outside bodies across Hertfordshire for which there will be some requirement for councillors to engage and attend. There are also 112 Town/Parish Councils across Hertfordshire, many unitary authority councillors are likely to be dual-hatted members, but even if they are not, unitary authority councillors will frequently attend Town/Parish Council meetings. The additional workload from outside bodies and Town/Parish Councils also needs to be considered when finalising councillor numbers to ensure that councillors have sufficient capacity to carry-out their roles effectively.

AGREEING PROPOSED CLLR NUMBERS FOR THE PROPOSED MODELS

The team assessed the proposals for 2UA, 3UA and 4UA in table F, against the LCGBE criteria and are confident that each of the proposals does adhere to the guidance whilst acknowledging that a full electoral review carried out post vesting day will mean that further changes will likely be required.

These were reviewed and agreed by Hertfordshire's Leaders Group and the Chief Executive Leaders Group

Table F. Summarising the observations of the chosen Cllr numbers, as against the LGBCE Core Factors

Unitary Option	Strategic Leadership	Accountability	Community Leadership
2UA (County divisions – 3 Cllrs per division)	117 councillors will provide a large pool of councillors which will help to ensure that there is a balance of experience to help set the strategic direction for the council. There will be enough councillors to carry out the business of the council and a high number during the initial transition period will assist.	The committee seat per councillor ratio at 1.46 is lower than the current average in Hertfordshire of 1.76 so committee workload will be manageable and allow councillors to effectively carry out their scrutiny and regulatory functions. A lower ratio will allow more capacity for councillors to work on outside bodies and other roles such as town and parish councils.	The 2UA model returns 117 councillors per unitary. Whilst this is above LGBCE guidance, it keeps the elector to councillor ratio c,3800 reasonable and enables councillors to effectively carry out their representative roles. 3 member wards also allow sharing of representation and improved resilience.
3UA (County divisions – 3 Cllrs per division)	Councillor numbers proposed are 72, 69 and 93. This should be sufficient to set the strategic leadership for the council and carry out the day-to-day business of the council.	Committee seat ratio is 2.2 on average between the three UAs which is higher than current Hertfordshire average but proportionate to the change in functions covered.	All councillor numbers remain under the 100 guidance. Councillor/elector ratios average c3800 which is appropriate for local representation.
4UA District / Borough wards minus 1 Cllr (from wards with 2 or 3 existing Cllrs.)	As a result of the manual adjustments, the councillor numbers proposed are 84,79,89 and 75. The councillor numbers proposed should be sufficient to set the strategic leadership for the council and carry out the day-to-day business of the council.	The committee seat ratio is improved (1.8) compared to the 3UA model and with a lower electorate to represent this should make committee attendance for scrutiny and regulatory functions manageable.	All councillor numbers remain under the 100 guidance. Councillor/elector ratios average c2,700 is lower, but this will only help local representation and time to spend on outside bodies and other roles.

FOOTNOTE: BIRD'S ESTATE

Watford and Hertsmere Councils have been in discussion about the appropriate location of the Bird's Estate on the border of the two councils in a three unitary model. It is noted here that this is not included in this submission, but should be considered post-LGR.

APPENDIX C – EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

See Separate Document

APPENDIX D – SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Local government reorganisation in Hertfordshire presents a unique opportunity to reshape public services and governance for a more sustainable future. As the county embarks on this significant transition, it is vital to ensure that environmental, social, and economic sustainability are embedded at every stage.

This assessment evaluates the potential impacts of LGR across ten key sustainability criteria, using a structured framework informed by local data, best practice, and stakeholder engagement. The findings highlight substantial opportunities to enhance sustainability governance, delivery, and outcomes, with benefits outweighing risks in most areas. Where risks are identified, particularly during the transition period, targeted mitigation measures are proposed.

This document is designed to support informed decisions and the implementation of effective strategies. It includes a summary table, detailed analysis, and clear recommendations to guide Hertfordshire towards a resilient and sustainable future.

Climate adaptation and resilience	Benefits outweigh risks	Enhanced strategic capacity for climate risk assessment and adaptation planning. Improved coordination of emergency planning and incident response Single-tier accountability enabling integrated infrastructure investment. Greater scale and resources for accessing national climate adaptation funding. Ability to align adaptation planning with development and transport strategies.	Potential loss of local climate risk knowledge during transition Risk of adaptation planning being deprioritised during implementation	Conduct comprehensive climate risk mapping and vulnerability assessments. Embed adaptation planning in strategic risk assessments. Establish joint financial mechanisms and reserves. Develop cross-authority learning on adaptation approaches. Link adaptation planning to statutory duties
Community awareness and behaviour change	Benefits outweigh risks	Unified sustainability messaging improving clarity and impact. Greater scale enabling investment in communications and engagement. Consistency in approaches to waste reduction and energy efficiency Enhanced capacity for targeted campaigns	Potential disruption to ongoing campaigns Risk that unified messaging lacks local resonance. Possibility that dissenting voices are amplified	Develop aligned messaging framework during transition. Ensure consistent language with local adaptation. Invest in segmented communications. Establish protocols for community feedback. Maintain focus on trusted local messengers
Community engagement and empowerment	Finely balanced	Strategic coherence enabling alignment with county-wide priorities. Greater resources for engagement and participatory approaches Potential for enhanced support to community initiatives	Perceived or actual distance between communities and decision-makers Loss of established relationships and community trust Reduction in responsiveness to hyperlocal initiatives Confusion about authority engagement during transition	Conduct audit of key community contacts and relationships. Systematically transfer relationship information Establish neighbourhood-level engagement mechanisms.

		Opportunity to develop sophisticated engagement infrastructure		Maintain dedicated community sustainability officers. Invest in community capacity building. Provide clear information about new structures. Establish community advisory groups
Data, monitoring, and accountability	Benefits outweigh risks	Unified key performance indicators and data systems enabling consistent measurement across county. Enhanced capacity for sophisticated data analysis, modelling, and evidence-based decision-making Improved transparency and accountability through consistent reporting frameworks Greater ability to track progress, identify what works, and adapt approaches based on evidence. Economies of scale in data infrastructure investment and specialist expertise	Potential loss of legacy data or inconsistent baselining if not systematically managed Risk of gaps in time-series data during transition affecting ability to track trends Possibility of incompatible data systems requiring costly integration Temporary reduction in data quality or availability during transition	Develop shared data platforms and standards during transition, ensuring compatibility with existing systems. Conduct systematic data audits mapping all existing sustainability datasets, baselines, and time-series. Establish clear protocols for data transfer, ensuring no loss of historical information. Agree consistent baseline approaches for new authorities whilst maintaining continuity with previous data where possible. Invest in data infrastructure and specialist capacity. Publish transparent methodologies and ensure data is accessible to communities, businesses, and researchers. Establish independent sustainability monitoring and reporting arrangements
Biodiversity and natural capital	Benefits outweigh risks	Aligned implementation of Local Nature Recovery Strategy ensuring coherent, landscape-scale approach. Consistent application of Biodiversity Net Gain across all development, removing current inconsistencies. Single-tier responsibility enabling integrated management of planning, highways, public estate, and natural capital. Strategic Authority coordination of county-wide ecological networks and priority habitats Clearer messaging to landowners, farmers, and developers about expectations and support Greater capacity for ecological expertise, monitoring, and enforcement	Potential loss of local ecological knowledge and site-specific understanding during transition Risk of established conservation partnerships and volunteer networks being disrupted Temporary reduction in capacity or focus on nature recovery during implementation period	Use LNRS development to embed consistent approaches whilst capturing local ecological knowledge. Develop shared ecological data platforms building on existing biodiversity baseline work. Conduct systematic mapping of conservation partnerships, volunteer networks, and key relationships. Ensure ecology specialists and conservation teams maintained during transition with clear responsibilities. Establish biodiversity indicators and targets from day one, with transparent monitoring and reporting. Invest in community engagement on nature recovery, ensuring local communities remain active partners
Green growth and employment	Benefits outweigh risks	Enhanced capacity for strategic planning of green skills pipelines aligned with economic development.	Risk that green skills planning not sufficiently connected to economic development in new structures.	Align green skills planning with economic development and retrofit strategies from day one.

		Greater scale enabling significant investment in retrofit, renewable energy, and sustainable transport programmes creating local jobs. Consistent messaging to businesses about sustainability expectations, support, and opportunities Single tier planning and economic development enabling clearer links between growth sectors and skills provision. Strategic Authority coordination with universities, colleges, and employers on county-wide skills strategy Potential to position Hertfordshire as attractive location for green businesses and investment	Potential that early focus on reorganisation delays green growth initiatives. Possibility that green job creation concentrated in some areas rather than distributed equitably	Clarify economic development responsibilities and ensure sustainability embedded throughout Establish clear mechanisms linking strategic employment support, skills provision, and major sustainability programmes. Monitor green job creation geographically to ensure inclusive distribution. Engage businesses, training providers, and employment support organisations early in transition. Maintain momentum on key programmes (retrofit, EV infrastructure, renewable energy) during transition
Sustainable consumption and circular economy	Benefits outweigh risks	Unified sustainable procurement policies, standards, and contracts across authorities Greater purchasing power enabling influence over supply chains and leverage for sustainability requirements. Consistent recycling and waste reduction approaches creating clearer messages to residents and businesses. Enhanced capacity for circular economy initiatives including repair, reuse, and sharing scheme. Potential for bulk procurement of sustainable products and services reducing costs	Risk of disruption to existing sustainable procurement relationships and contracts during transition Potential that lowest-cost procurement takes precedence over sustainability in early period. Possibility that successful local circular economy initiatives lost in larger structures.	Apply learning from regional sustainable procurement research to set standards across authorities from day one. Engage suppliers early about transition, emphasising continuity of sustainability expectations. Conduct audit of existing sustainable procurement practices, contracts, and supplier relationships. Establish sustainability criteria in all procurement from outset, with clear weighting and evaluation. Develop social value frameworks ensuring local economic benefit and environmental standards. Support community sector circular economy initiatives through grants, space, and partnerships
Built environment and energy	Benefits outweigh risks	Aligned housing, planning, and energy strategies enabling integrated approaches to net-zero development. Single-tier planning removing two-tier conflicts and delays in delivering sustainable development. Strategic coordination of energy infrastructure including renewable generation, heat networks, and EV charging Greater capacity for area-based retrofit programmes and innovative financing models	Potential disruption to ongoing retrofit schemes, energy projects, and development during transition Risk of inconsistent application of sustainability standards across former district areas during early implementation Possibility that housing delivery pressures override sustainability requirements	Conduct comprehensive audit and benchmarking of current approaches, schemes, and standards during transition. Maintain momentum on key retrofit and energy programmes, using them as demonstration projects for new approaches. Trial Retrofit One Stop Shop model to test integrated service delivery and maintain programme continuity. Establish robust sustainability standards for new development from day one,

		Enhanced ability to influence development quality through unified planning and housing functions. Potential to establish exemplar net-zero housing standards across all new development		with clear monitoring and enforcement. Ensure planning and housing teams have sustainability expertise and capacity. Develop Local Area Energy Plans providing strategic frameworks for investment decisions. Link retrofit programmes to fuel poverty reduction and decent homes standards, strengthening delivery case
Statutory duties and prioritisation	Finely balanced	Single-tier accountability creating clarity about sustainability responsibilities. Opportunity to embed sustainability across all statutory functions rather than treating as separate agenda. Potential for sustainability to become core to service delivery, not optional extra. Greater strategic capacity enabling both statutory compliance and ambitious sustainability action	Risk that unitary authorities prioritise immediate statutory duties over longer-term sustainability transformation, particularly during early implementation period. Potential for sustainability initiatives to be seen as "nice to have" rather than essential. Possibility of sustainability capacity and budgets being reduced if seen as non-statutory Danger that performance management focuses on statutory indicators rather than sustainability outcomes	Embed sustainability in all statutory duty delivery from day one, not as separate workstream. Link sustainability programmes to statutory requirements wherever possible. Maintain and build on successful programmes during transition, acknowledging inevitable "settling in" period but demonstrating continuity and commitment. Establish clear sustainability targets, indicators, and reporting from outset, ensuring accountability. Ensure sustainability expertise represented in senior leadership and embedded across all service areas. Develop business cases demonstrating how sustainability investment supports statutory duty delivery and reduces long-term costs. Engage elected members on sustainability priorities and secure political commitment
Transport and mobility	Benefits outweigh risks	Single-tier responsibility for spatial planning, transport planning, and development enabling genuinely integrated approaches. Clear accountability for active travel infrastructure, EV charging, public transport, and highways Strategic Authority coordination of strategic corridors and engagement with national rail network Enhanced capacity for transport modelling, behaviour change programmes, and investment in sustainable alternatives. Removal of two-tier conflicts that currently	Potential disruption to Local Transport Plan development and delivery during transition Risk of established relationships with transport operators and stakeholders being disrupted Possibility that car-focused approaches dominate if sustainable transport not prioritised	Prioritise aligned spatial planning and transport stakeholder engagement during transition to maintain momentum. Ensure continuity of Local Transport Plan development with clear sustainability ambitions. Conduct audit of transport programmes, partnerships, and commitments, ensuring systematic handover. Establish sustainable transport targets and monitoring from day one. Invest in active travel and public transport infrastructure early, demonstrating commitment and building public confidence.

		hamper delivery of ambitious sustainable transport programmes. Greater ability to link transport planning with housing, employment, and education, reducing need to travel		Engage transport operators, community transport providers, and advocacy groups throughout transition. Link transport planning with major development sites, ensuring sustainable access designed from outset. Develop cross-authority learning on what works in sustainable transport delivery

CONCLUSION

This assessment demonstrates that local government reorganisation presents significant opportunities to enhance sustainability governance and delivery across Hertfordshire, with benefits substantially outweighing risks for eight of ten criteria assessed. The two finely-balanced criteria—community engagement and statutory duties—require particular attention to mitigation measures but do not undermine the overall positive assessment.

The assessment reveals a transformative opportunity to embed sustainability at the heart of public service delivery. Across environmental, social, and economic dimensions, the analysis demonstrates that the move to a single-tier authority can unlock significant benefits, ranging from enhanced climate resilience and unified data systems to strategic green growth and integrated transport planning. For eight out of ten criteria, the advantages of reorganisation clearly outweigh the risks, provided that transition is managed proactively and mitigation measures are robustly implemented.

However, the assessment also highlights the value of proactive focus in two finely balanced areas: community engagement and statutory duties. The risk of diminished local responsiveness and the potential for sustainability to be deprioritised during statutory compliance must be addressed through targeted actions, such as maintaining dedicated community officers, embedding sustainability in statutory functions, and ensuring transparent reporting and accountability.

A successful transition will depend on clear communication, continuity of key programmes, and the preservation of local knowledge and relationships. Strategic investment in data infrastructure, ecological expertise, and green skills will be essential to realise the full potential of reorganisation. Furthermore, the creation of advisory groups, segmented communications, and inclusive engagement mechanisms will help maintain public trust and empower communities.

Hertfordshire stands at a pivotal moment. By embracing the opportunities presented and committing to sustained leadership in sustainability, the county can set a benchmark for integrated, resilient, and equitable local governance. The recommendations outlined in this assessment provide a roadmap for maximising positive impacts, mitigating risks, and ensuring that sustainability remains a core priority throughout and beyond the reorganisation process.

Local Government Engagement Feedback Report Appendix - Data

The below appendix includes the data and feedback collected from key stakeholder events and resident engagement survey responses.

The following questions were asked to strategic stakeholders:

1. Which local government services are a priority for you?
2. What is working well in Hertfordshire in terms of local government structures?
3. What most needs improvement in Hertfordshire?
4. What partnerships or collaborations are working well that must be preserved or scaled up?
5. What opportunities do you see arising from this change?
6. What innovations or changes would you like to see in how services are delivered?
7. What concerns or risks do you see with Local Government Reorganisation?
8. Do you have a specific recommendation with regard to reorganisation?

The following questions were asked in the widely distributed survey:

1. What are you responding as (resident of Hertfordshire, member of staff etc.)?
2. What council area do you live in?
3. If you work for a council, which one do you work for?
4. How much do you know about the Government's plans to make changes to local councils, called Local Government Reorganisation?
5. Which of these services are most important to you (infrastructure, waste services etc.)?
6. How much do you know about the Government's plans to make changes to local councils, called Local Government Reorganisation?
7. Do you have a view on which option of 2, 3, or 4 new councils, you would prefer and what are your reasons?
8. What overall impact, if any, do you think would come from councils in Hertfordshire being joined with other neighbouring councils, in regard to services and value for money?
9. What potential benefits of this reorganisation would be most important to you?
10. What opportunities and improvements would you like to see come from Local Government Reorganisation?
11. What concerns you the most when thinking about Local Government Reorganisation?
12. Would you like us to keep you informed about progress?
13. Do you have any additional comments?
14. What is your gender?
15. What is your age group?
16. What is your ethnic group?
17. Do you consider yourself to have a disability, long-term illness, or health condition?

Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Data

For reference, the organisations engaged included (but were not limited to):

Ashbourne Insurance (Broxbourne)	B3Living	BIDs/Partnership
Bishops Stortford Town Council	Box Moor Trust	Buntingford Chamber of Commerce
Buntingford Town Council	Citizens Advice (multiple districts)	Community Action Dacorum
Community Alliance Broxbourne & East Herts	DENS	East & North Herts NHS Trust
Everyone Active (leisure contractor)	Gascoyne Estates	Hertford Regional College
Hertford Town Council	Hertfordshire & West Essex ICB	Hertfordshire Futures (LEP)
Herts Care Providers Association	Herts Community NHS Trust	Herts Partnership (Mental Health) Trust
Hightown Housing Association	Hitchin BID	Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
Letchworth Heritage Foundation	Love Hoddesdon BID	North Herts and Stevenage CVS
North Herts College	Oaklands College	Oxygen Studios (Hertsmere)
Sawbridgeworth Town Council	Sunnyside Rural Trust	VCFSE Alliance
Ware Town Council	Watford & West Herts Chamber/Businesses	Watford Cultural Leaders Group
Welwyn Garden City	West Herts College	

Q1. Which local government services are a priority for you?

Stakeholders highlighted a wide range of service priorities, with the most commonly cited themes being **housing, social care, public health**, and **community services**. Priorities varied across different areas and sectors.

Other Notable Mentions

- **Policing and public safety**

- **Leisure**
- **Road maintenance / Highways**
- **Education**

While other local priorities such as services to help businesses grow, community safety, environmental health, and education were noted, the overwhelming emphasis was on the continuity and expansion of core front-line services that address need at individual, family, and neighbourhood levels.

Stakeholders highlighted a broad but consistent set of service priorities, with housing, social care, and public health emerging as the most frequently cited themes. These priorities reflect both the strategic role of county-wide systems and the operational significance of borough-level partnerships. Voluntary sector organisations, including various Citizens Advice stakeholders, gave detailed breakdowns of service areas most critical to their client base. DENS highlighted housing, food, and basic financial support as essential services that "must not be compromised or fragmented." They emphasised the importance of coordinated referrals and long-standing relationships with borough councils. Health stakeholders and housing providers reinforced the centrality of safeguarding, adult care, and planning.

Alignment was evident around the importance of housing-linked services, not only as a function of shelter, but also as a lever for wider wellbeing, including mental health and family cohesion. Stakeholders called for stronger integration between service domains and for greater consistency in delivery and access. This theme was pronounced in the feedback from service delivery partners who work across organisational boundaries.

Q2. What is working well in Hertfordshire in terms of local government structures?

Stakeholders offered reflections on the current system, highlighting strong relationships, clear delineation of responsibilities, and well-established collaborative structures. Many responses showed stakeholders reflecting positively on their relationship with their District/borough council.

Collaboration and Governance Mechanisms
Stakeholders repeatedly referred to strong joint working between councils. Citizens Advice, businesses, and public sector partners referenced forums like the Hertfordshire Leaders' Group, the Hertfordshire Growth Board, and various cross-council working groups as examples of embedded and effective collaboration. These structures were described by Citizens Advice Broxbourne as enabling "unified strategies and pooled expertise," particularly across areas like economic development, planning, and devolution proposals.

Further Education leaders also underlined the importance of relationships at the County Council level, with one principal remarking, "It is hard to imagine Hertfordshire without the County Council" and stressing the value of economic development leadership at this level. Stakeholders valued HCC's ability to operate while maintaining relationships with sectors spanning the entire county footprint.

Relationships and Local Accessibility
Relationships at the district level were seen as a major strength. Many respondents, particularly from the voluntary and community sector, described district councils as accessible, responsive, and willing to collaborate. This was evident in places like St Albans, Dacorum, Broxbourne and Three Rivers, where stakeholders pointed to co-designed initiatives, practical partnerships, and mutual trust. Local offices, familiar points of contact, and continuity of officer relationships were all cited as factors underpinning strong joint work.

Strategic Economic Focus and Business Engagement
Local government was widely credited with playing a proactive role in shaping the local economy. Initiatives like the Business Pledge and regeneration partnerships were seen as evidence of meaningful collaboration. Watford Chamber of Commerce noted that "these touchpoints ensure local business voices are heard and considered." Hertfordshire-wide structures such as Hertfordshire Futures were recognised as offering a business-led but council-supported focus on long-term growth.

Effective Service Delivery and Joint Planning
Core services were described as effective including waste collection, social care, education, and health partnerships. In Dacorum and Broxbourne, for example, refuse and recycling were praised as *"efficient"* and *"reliable"* by respective stakeholders. The alignment of local government and health boundaries was also noted as enabling better coordination of services, particularly in the Health and Care Partnerships.

Analysis
Stakeholders described Hertfordshire's local government structures positively, underpinned by a combination of clear roles, trusted relationships, and embedded governance.

Critically, much of what is working well was attributed not just to structure but to culture - officers and elected members across Hertfordshire were described as willing to work with partners, take a pragmatic approach, and form trusting relationships. These working relationships are helping to maintain service continuity, foster innovation (especially in social care and place-based initiatives), and build a foundation for reform as structural changes proceed.

While not without areas for improvement, stakeholders largely viewed the existing frameworks as a strong platform from which to evolve. Whether through collaboration with the business community, targeted local delivery, or coordination across complex systems like health and housing, the structures in place are supporting effective, trusted local government in Hertfordshire.

Q3. What most needs improvement in Hertfordshire?

Key areas identified for improvement were referral processes and service integration, housing supply, access to services, and infrastructure and coordination.

Joined up Working and Referral Pathways

Several stakeholders flagged the need for stronger integration between services. Sunnyside Rural Trust emphasised the gap between adult social care and social enterprise, calling for *"better integration."* At a Hertsmere roundtable, attendees noted *"differences between district and county levels"* in transport coordination. Communities' 1st echoed this, warning that *"fragmentation between tiers causes confusion… [and] conflicting priorities,"* and pushed for greater consistency and equity in commissioning.

Housing Supply and Affordability

Multiple stakeholders raised concerns about housing access. The Watford Chamber described *"a pressing need for more affordable housing,"* alongside the need for flexible commercial space; Box Moor Trust also stressed that *"more affordable housing options are needed"*. These views reflect a broader concern that current local housing strategies fall short of meeting demand.

Digital Inclusion and Online Access

Digital exclusion emerged as a concern. Welwyn Garden City BID said that *"a more user-friendly system"* is needed, particularly for older residents without online access. Citizens Advice Broxbourne echoed this, warning that services had *"moved online without parallel support for clients lacking digital skills or devices,"* and proposed a joined-up inclusion programme via libraries, hubs, and drop-ins.

Transport and Service Accessibility

Multiple stakeholders highlighted the need for improved transport links, particularly east to west. At the HCC Business Forum, Richard Ward stated, *"Transport infrastructure, particularly east to west"* requires improvement. The St Albans District Chamber of Commerce also flagged the lack of east/west connectivity in particular. During a panel for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, it was said that *"There is a need for better connectivity between towns… to improve accessibility and reduce travel barriers for residents."*

Other Issues Noted

- **Road maintenance**
- **Bureaucracy**
- **Access to social care for complex cases**

Analysis

While stakeholders recognised many strengths in current service structures, they also identified clear areas for improvement. Stakeholder feedback highlights fragmentation between county and district responsibilities and need for more joined up and coherent service delivery across Hertfordshire. Housing remains a major pressure point, with repeated calls for more affordable options and better alignment with social care and public health provision. Transport was also flagged, with a lack of connectivity between towns and east to west, creating barriers to accessing services, especially in rural and peripheral areas. Stakeholders also criticised bureaucratic inefficiencies, citing overly complex processes around community assets and SEND transport.

Taken together, the feedback suggests that while core services are generally viewed positively, there is appetite for improvements in access, consistency, and collaboration, particularly at the operational interface between councils and communities, and an appetite for streamlined systems that prioritise fairness, reduce duplication, and enable faster, more accessible support for residents.

Q4. What partnerships or collaborations are working well that must be preserved or scaled up?

Stakeholders consistently highlighted the value of local partnerships, especially between councils and the voluntary or health sectors. These relationships were often described as critical to maintaining service delivery, local knowledge, and community trust.

Borough and District Council Relationships

Strong local partnerships were repeatedly praised. Sunnyside Rural Trust described the working relationship between Watford, Three Rivers, and Dacorum as *"particularly effective,"* with *"natural links and shared approaches that benefit service delivery."* A Herts and West Essex ICS stakeholder reinforced this point, citing *"strong place-based partnerships with good engagement from District and Borough Councils"* as critical to achieving neighbourhood health goals. Meanwhile, Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult emphasised that

local government had supported high-growth businesses, noting that *"local start-ups… have thrived with local government contributing to success."* Everyone Active, a Three Rivers DC stakeholder, highlighted *"strong leisure partnerships across seven of the local councils"* and advocated for these to continue.

County-wide Relationships

County-wide partnerships were also highlighted, with health and care leaders at HCC's Health and Care Providers roundtable citing *"good work at scale / county-wide on things like the Better Care Fund Board"* and warning against losing the benefits of this coordinated approach. Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust stakeholder said at the HCC roundtable that there was a *"risk that we are unable to hang on to what works, and successful partnerships are undone by structural changes."*

Voluntary and community Partnerships

There was praise for the strength and value of voluntary sector relationships with local councils, noting their impact on trust, service delivery, and community engagement. Citizens Advice St Albans District mentioned the strong relationships with St Albans City and District Council, and Community Action Dacorum (CAD) praised its strong ties with both Dacorum Borough Council and county adult social care, noting these relationships *"foster trust"* and enable the voluntary sector to contribute to *"service delivery and policy discussions."* A stakeholder from HCC added that *"lots of community leaders are already linked in with parish and town councils,"* so they should be part of the strategic picture. Watford Town Centre BID reflected positively on its multi-agency collaborations, stating that there was benefit from partnerships that *"bring together different skills, perspectives, and resources"* to deliver.

Education and Community Engagement Links

North Herts College said they had *"spent time building good relationships with Stevenage Borough Council,"* calling it *"a good example of partnership working."* They warned that LGR must not *"scupper existing strategies and development plans."*

Analysis

Stakeholders were clear that the success of services across Hertfordshire depends on maintaining and scaling the partnerships that already work. Various sector organisations emphasised their strong relationships with borough councils. There was a consensus that these partnerships are built on trust, responsiveness, and local knowledge, and that they would be difficult to replicate quickly under a new structure if disrupted. Several stakeholders also flagged more formalised partnerships, such as those under the Hertfordshire Growth Board and business improvement districts (BIDs), as valuable mechanisms that blend strategic alignment with local adaptability. Beyond organisational links, several stakeholders identified joint commissioning, co-location of services, and shared use of community assets as practical aspects of partnership. Views shared included that reorganisation should not start from scratch but must take care to retain the partnerships that already deliver outcomes for residents.

Q5. What opportunities do you see arising from this change?

Responses to this saw stakeholders often balancing potential benefits with risks. Key themes included streamlined service delivery, opportunities for growth and scale, and enhanced cross-area collaboration.

Streamlining and Efficiency

Many stakeholders viewed reorganisation as a route to more coherent and joined up public services. DENS described it as *"a chance to unify and align services and funding streams,*

reducing duplication", stating that services should be *"better linked with adult social care and public health,"* due to the complex, multi-agency needs of clients. At a meeting in North Herts, stakeholders stressed the opportunity of services becoming *"preventative rather than reactive, due to being able to pool resources."* The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority pointed to "streamlined planning processes," while an ICB representative noted the potential for *"working more effectively with available resources"* and co-located delivery models. A Business stakeholder in Watford also welcomed the idea of *"quicker decision-making politically."*

Improved Use of Data and Digital Opportunities

Stakeholders also hoped for a smarter, more data-driven approach. B3Living wanted greater emphasis on *"using data to drive understanding"* and *"working on outcomes."* One NHS Trust representative hoped for *"more / better shared data,"* and an HCC business stakeholder noted opportunities in *"detailed cost modelling"* and *"using data to identify efficiencies."*

Digital transformation was also highlighted. At a Welwyn panel, residents wanted "improved use of digital tools and communication" to enhance sustainability and service tracking. Welwyn Garden City BID saw value *in "smarter town centre management using real-time data (e.g., footfall, parking usage)"* to shape decisions and enhance the visitor experience.

Inward Investment and Wider Strategic Planning

In North Herts, there was optimism about *"creatively"* regenerating towns and unlocking *"local regeneration opportunities."* In Watford, stakeholders said the town's *"proximity to London"* meant cross-border growth and population trends must be actively considered.

Other Opportunities Noted

- **Expanded Reach and Growth for the Voluntary Sector**
- **Enhanced Community Empowerment and Local Models**

Analysis

Stakeholders identified a range of opportunities arising from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). These were generally pragmatic and focused on service design, delivery, prevention instead of reaction and system integration, rather than structural reform alone. The most consistently cited opportunity was the chance to streamline services, reduce duplication, and create more coherent referral and casework pathways. It was noted that these benefits would only be realised through thoughtful implementation and sustained local partnership. Central among the opportunities was the potential to streamline services and integrate delivery across housing, health, and social care, particularly for residents with complex or overlapping needs.

Looking ahead, some stakeholders saw the reorganisation as a catalyst for economic renewal and local empowerment. While some views were cautious, there was an aspiration that if reorganisation is shaped well, it could create a more connected, responsive and forward-looking local government for Hertfordshire.

Q6. What innovations or changes would you like to see in how services are delivered?

Stakeholders proposed a wide range of innovations, often focused on digital transformation, co-location, community involvement, and streamlined access. The voluntary sector made the most detailed contributions.

Digital Access and Integrated Systems

Digital transformation was again a strong theme across stakeholder input. Community Action Dacorum proposed *"shared service platforms"* and *"online social meeting opportunities."* *"Streamlining of portals for residents to use"* was also noted at a North Herts roundtable, with a comment that the current system is *"too many and probably confusing."* At a Welwyn panel, participants saw potential in *"a single, user-friendly digital platform"* to support housing and council services. Watford stakeholders suggested *"greater use of digital tools and real-time data,"* while one St Albans respondent said changes could *"release the investment needed"* to deliver better digital services at scale.

Co-location and Shared Delivery Hubs

Some stakeholders backed physically aligning services and systems to improve delivery. DENS advocated for *"shared data protocols and systems,"* citing INFORM CRM from the homelessness sector. A North Herts roundtable supported aligning *"front and back end of services,"* currently split across tiers. In East Herts, co-location was suggested for benefits systems, noting that *"revs and bens being in one place will be more accessible."*

Simplification and Standardisation

Several stakeholders sought clarity and consistency in the system. A Three Rivers stakeholder from the MoD said they wanted *"a simpler system – confusing if you don't work in the council."* At an HCC education roundtable, it was noted that *"working with fewer councils would be more straightforward."* At the HCC Health roundtable, a stakeholder called for *"more consistency and standardisation across housing, employment and community assets such as leisure services."*

Analysis

Stakeholders proposed a wide-ranging and at times detailed set of innovations they would like to see in future service delivery, regardless of governance structure. Stakeholders saw the proposed reorganisation as a chance to introduce more integrated, responsive, and community-led models of delivery. Across the board, there was interest in using digital innovation to streamline access and unlock real-time coordination between services. Some envisioned a unified *"front door"* model, underpinned by shared platforms and data protocols that reduce duplication and support proactive outreach. This was particularly important to voluntary organisations working with vulnerable residents.

Q7. What concerns or risks do you see with Local Government Reorganisation?

Concerns covered loss of local accountability, disruption to services and financial strain.

Loss of Local Accountability and Knowledge

Some stakeholders stated that reorganisation could erode local insight and relationships. B3Living questioned whether the *"loss of personal relationships and hyper-local knowledge"* would reduce service effectiveness. Everyone Active in Watford echoed this, warning of the *"loss of local inputs",* and Watford BID raised fears that local distinctiveness might be diluted as decision-making becomes *"more centralised or less connected."* A Dacorum Public Service stakeholder similarly expressed concern that larger structures might result in *"risk of losing local community connection and decision-making as structures become larger and more distant."*

Service Disruption During Transition

Transition periods were seen as a risk. A stakeholder from LSH Investment Management warned of a *"pause in decision making/investment"* during restructuring and stakeholders in

North Herts warned against a *"period of inertia."* Sunnyside Rural Trust stressed the danger of *"potential disruption to adult social care services… which could negatively affect vulnerable people."* Citizens Advice services, including from St Albans and Broxbourne likewise cautioned that *"reorganisation demands significant officer time for governance, IT integration and policy harmonisation, diverting capacity away from casework."*

Financial Strain and Unexpected Costs

Some stakeholders questioned whether LGR would deliver long-term savings. A Dacorum stakeholder said, *"promised savings… may be short-lived,"* and expressed concern that there could be *"rapidly increasing council tax bills"* for town councils. Three Rivers stakeholders worried that the focus would shift *"on cost savings and not on services."* Broxbourne stakeholder B3Living questioned whether savings would *"be fed back into the new authorities or… reduced by the government."*

Analysis

Stakeholders raised concerns about reorganisation, with common themes including the potential loss of local insight, disruption to services during transition and financial uncertainty. Many stressed the importance of preserving local insight and relationships, noting that these could be harder to maintain within larger structures. The transition period was seen as a time of potential disruption, with risks of paused investment, diverted officer capacity, and short-term challenges for services such as adult social care. While not seen as insurmountable, these issues were flagged as areas requiring clear planning and coordination.

There were also questions around whether financial savings would be realised in practice, with concerns that cost reductions could come at the expense of service quality or lead to higher pressures on town and parish councils. Looking ahead, many stressed the need to support collaboration across any new boundaries, with early relationship-building and coordination seen as key to maintaining effective local services.

Q8. Do you have a specific recommendation with regards to reorganisation?

Stakeholders were invited to make specific recommendations in relation to Hertfordshire's proposed Local Government Reorganisation. While plenty of respondents declined to express a view, others provided direct preferences between the potential models for reorganisation, including two-unitary, three-unitary, or four-unitary structures, or reflected on specific design and delivery principles that any model should accommodate.

Resident Engagement Data

1. Are you responding as a

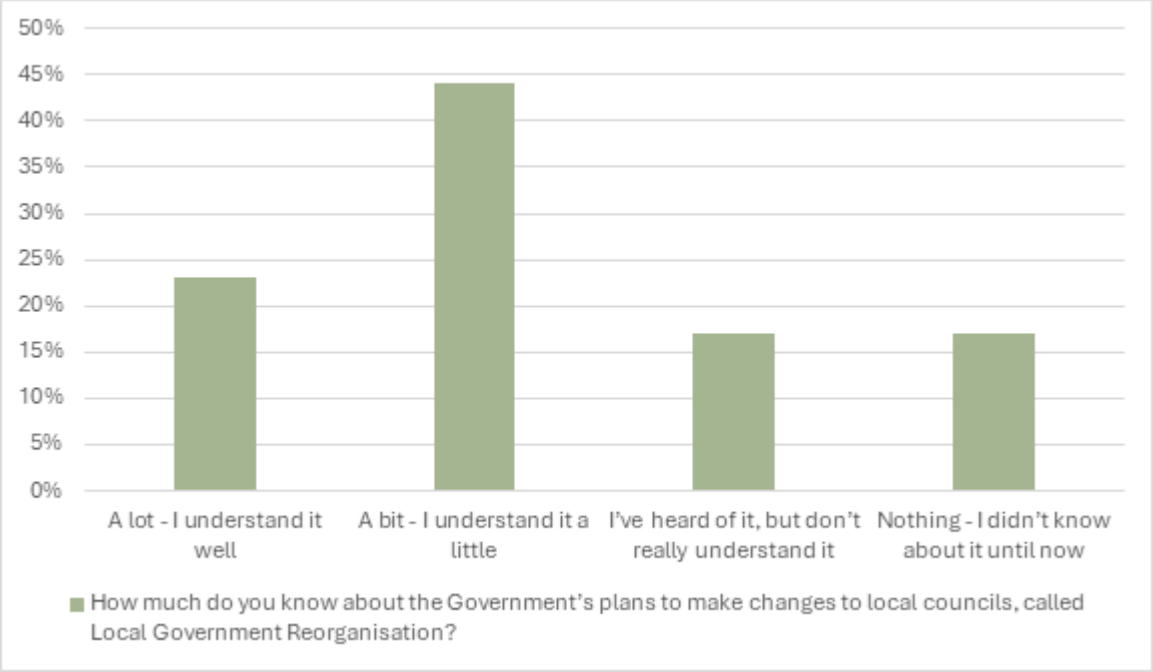
Responding as	Respondents (By number)	Respondents (By percentage)
Resident in Hertfordshire	6342	89%
Member of staff for district, borough or county council within Hertfordshire	357	5%
Councillor (District/Borough)	57	>1%
Member of staff for a town or parish council within Hertfordshire	53	>1%
Charity	53	>1%
Councillor (Parish)	40	>1%
Community group	29	>1%
Voluntary organisation	24	>1%
Other public body	221	>1%
Micro business (0–9 employees)	20	>1%
Councillor (Town)	17	>1%
Small business (10–49 employees)	13	>1%
Councillor (County)	11	>1%
Large business (250+ employees)	8	>1%
Other	93	1%

2. Which council area do you live in?

council area of respondent	Respondents (By number)	Respondents (By percentage)
Broxbourne Borough Council	353	5%
Dacorum Borough Council	846	12%

East Hertfordshire District Council	680	10%
Hertsmere Borough Council	378	5%
North Herts District Council	691	10%
St Albans City and District Council	1073	15%
Stevenage Borough Council	388	5%
Three Rivers District Council	810	11%
Watford Borough Council	727	10%
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council	1048	15%
I live outside Hertfordshire – (Please specify your relationship to Hertfordshire, if you have a role/business within Hertfordshire please note in which council area this resides)	159	2%

3. How much do you know about the Government's plans to make changes to local councils, called Local Government Reorganisation?



Results: 23% (1558): A lot – I understand it well, 44% (3067): A bit – I understand it a little, 17% (1148): I've heard of it, but don't really understand it, 17% (1141): Nothing – I didn't know about it until now

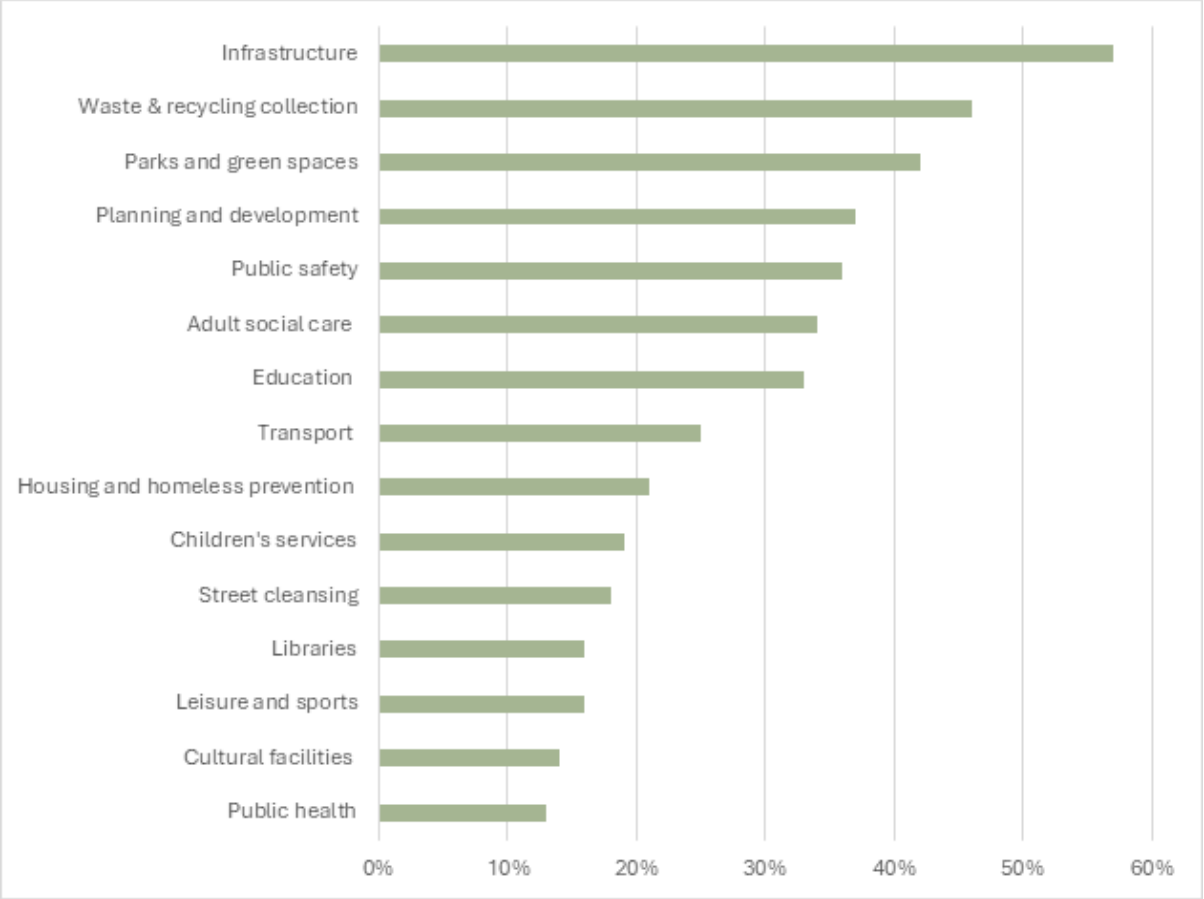
Most Hertfordshire residents came into the survey with at least some awareness of the Government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) plans, but detailed understanding was limited. When asked about their knowledge of these proposals, a large majority had heard of them, though many admitted they didn't grasp the specifics. In the survey, over four in five participants (around 83%) indicated they had heard about LGR in some form. This suggests that general publicity or word-of-mouth about the reorganisation had reached a broad number of respondents, with the caveat that those answering the survey are much more likely to have been informed, especially if they came to the survey on their own accord.

However, familiarity did not always equate to understanding. In fact, only about 23% felt they knew "a lot" about the plans, saying they understood LGR well. A further group, roughly 44%, said they knew "a bit" and understood it a little. This was the largest group, indicating that while most people knew of LGR, their knowledge was still limited. They might have been aware that some kind of council changes were being discussed but not the details of the options or implications. Given that submissions on specific plans are yet to take place, this is unsurprising; however, 67% having at least some knowledge of LGR shows a decent awareness across respondents.

Meanwhile, a significant minority confessed to very low awareness. Approximately 17% of respondents answered "Nothing – I didn't know about it until now." An additional group of around 17% had only heard of it and "don't really understand it." Taken together, roughly a third of respondents had little to no prior knowledge of LGR before engaging with the survey. This does show a success in the survey reaching those who were not previously engaged by promoting it through various channels.

It's worth noting that those responding as council staff had a notably higher knowledge base for LGR in Hertfordshire, as might be expected, with just 1% of staff members saying they didn't know anything about it and 95% saying they had at least some understanding of LGR, showing a good level of staff engagement.

4. Which of these services are most important to you?



Results: 57% (3735): Infrastructure (e.g. local road repairs, pavement/footpath repairs, streetlights), 46% (2970): Waste and recycling collections, 42%(2765) Parks and green spaces, 37% (2433): Planning and development (e.g. planning applications, planning enforcement, building control/safety, protecting old buildings, local development plans), 36% (2378): Public safety (e.g. Fire and rescue, Community Safety, Neighbourhoods), 34% (2217): Adult social care (e.g. support for older people, adults with physical or learning disabilities, mental health needs, or long-term conditions; residential care; home care; supported living), 33% (2179): Education (e.g. school admissions, transport, special educational need provision, 25% (1611): Transport (e.g. buses), 21% (1391): Housing and homeless prevention (e.g. affordable/social housing), 19% (1246): Children's services (e.g. looked-after children, those with special educational needs or disability, fostering or adoption), 18% (1147): Street cleansing, 16% (1072): Leisure and sports (e.g. leisure centres), 16% (1062): Libraries, 14% (884): Cultural facilities (e.g. theatres, museums), 13% (875): Public health (e.g. drug or alcohol dependency support, sexual health services, health improvement programmes)

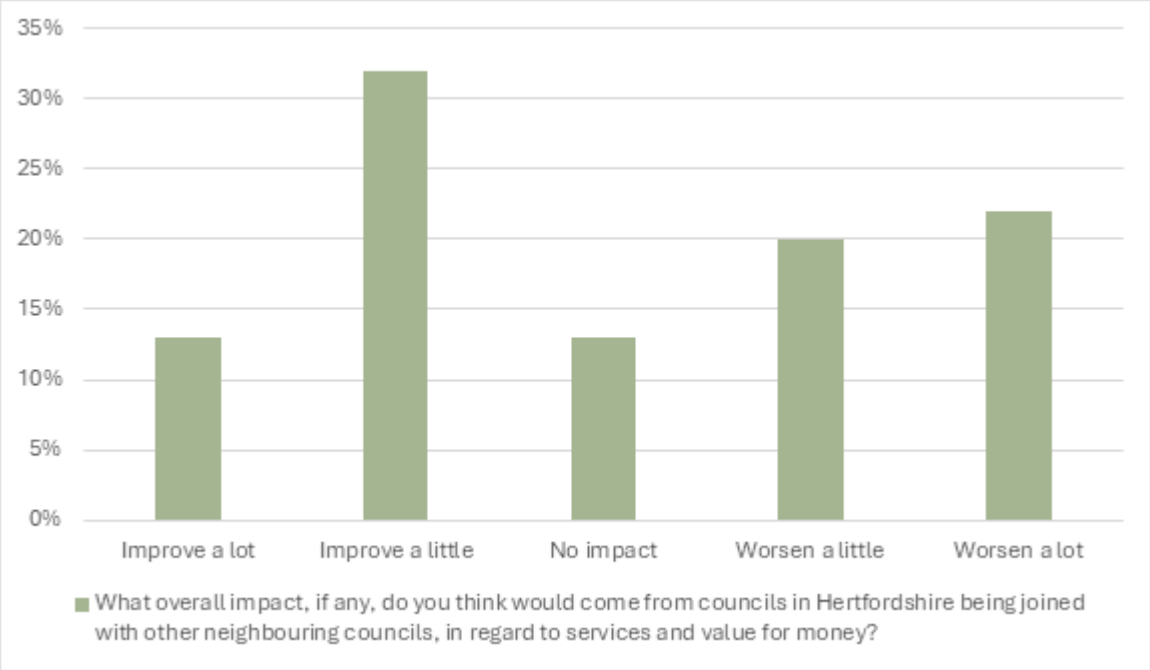
When residents were asked to select *which, local services are most important to them*, several clear priorities emerged. The survey allowed people to pick up to five services from a list covering the broad range of council responsibilities. The results show that residents gravitate toward the fundamental, day-to-day services that affect all communities. Maintaining local infrastructure and cleanliness, and core people-focused services, topped the list of priorities.

Infrastructure (e.g. local road repairs, pavement/footpath repairs, streetlights) was the most frequently selected service, with 57% of respondents selecting this. Alongside this, public transport (such as bus services) also featured, though slightly less prominently, with 25% of respondents selecting it. This suggests that while residents value transport, they placed even more weight on the physical upkeep of roads and highways that councils manage. Comments in the consultation echoed this emphasis: numerous respondents mentioned fixing roads as a key improvement they want to see, underscoring infrastructure's top-tier importance.

Another top service priority was waste collection and recycling. “Waste and recycling collections” was one of the most commonly chosen options by residents, selected by 46%. This reflects that refuse collection is a universal service everyone relies on weekly. People tend to notice immediately if bins aren’t collected or if recycling services change, so it makes sense that this service was front-of-mind. In open-text feedback, residents frequently brought up waste services. The high ranking of waste management in the survey results confirms that residents view this as essential to their quality of life and the image of their neighbourhoods.

It’s also worth noting which services were less commonly selected as top tier. More specialised services, for example public health and leisure facilities, were chosen by fewer respondents. This doesn’t mean they’re unimportant, but in a prioritisation exercise, average residents likely view them as more peripheral to their daily lives. Leisure and cultural facilities (parks, libraries, museums, sports centres) received a moderate level of interest. Many did pick parks and open spaces as important, ranking third at 42%, but these tended to rank just below the critical infrastructure and care services. Various comments from people who directly engaged with more specialised services did show that for those who use them they do remain important functions of local government in Hertfordshire, for example culture and leisure facilities attracted a number of mentions in open text answers.

5. What overall impact, if any, do you think would come from councils in Hertfordshire being joined with other neighbouring councils, in regard to services and value for money?



Results: 13% (670): Improve a lot, 32% (1723): Improve a little, 13% (684): No impact, 20% (1074): Worsen a little, 22% (1153): Worsen a lot

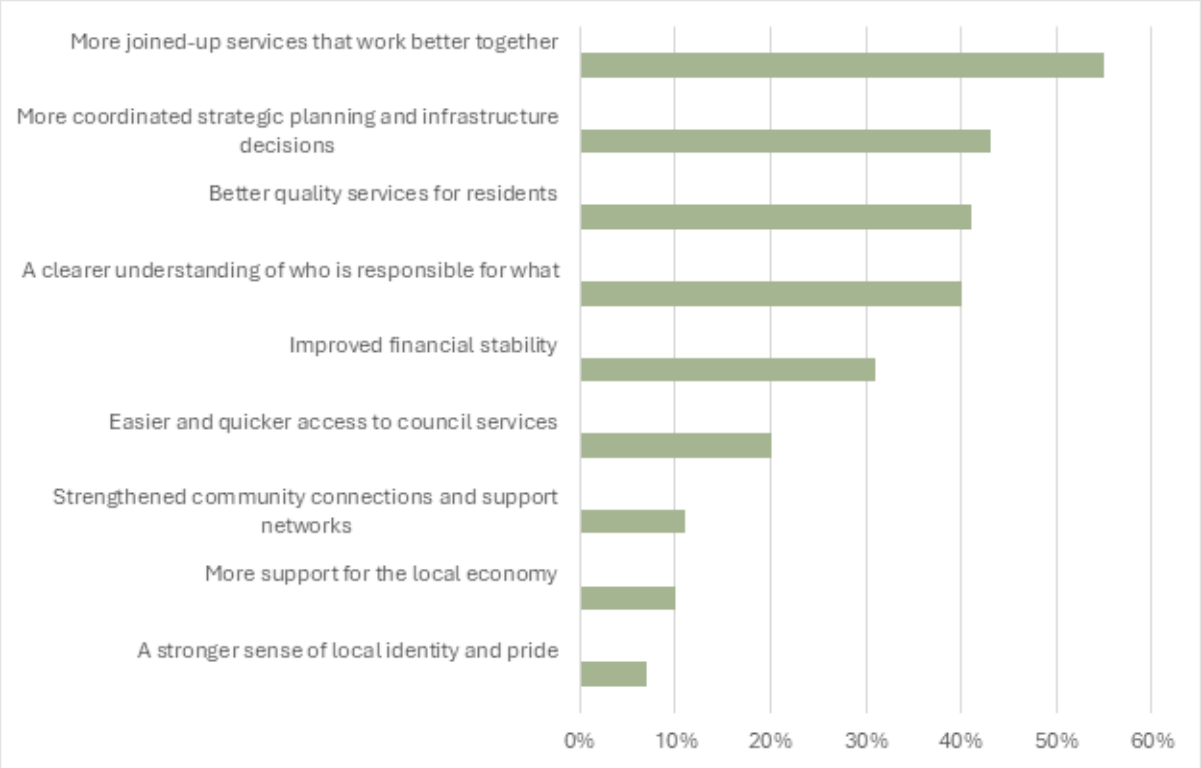
Opinion is divided on the likely overall impact of joining Hertfordshire’s councils together, especially regarding service outcomes and value for money. When residents were asked whether merging councils would improve or worsen services and value, responses spanned the spectrum. However, the largest single group was cautiously optimistic, and a plurality anticipated an improvement, which is a positive early sign for views on LGR in Hertfordshire. At the same time, a substantial portion feared a negative impact. This split viewpoint underscores the community’s uncertainty and the balance of hope vs. concern regarding reorganisation.

In quantitative terms, about 45% of respondents expected some level of improvement in services and value for money if councils were merged. Within this, more people leaned to mild optimism rather than dramatic gains – the most common answer was “Improve a little.” Residents choosing this option seem to think there would be efficiencies or service enhancements, but not major improvements. On the other side, roughly 42% of respondents anticipated a negative impact on services and value for money. The concerns driving these views mirror the earlier question on worries: people are concerned about bureaucratic upheaval, loss of local focus, and transitional pains leading to service decline.

Meanwhile, about **1 in 10 residents predicted no impact**. These individuals presumably feel that services might continue at status quo levels, and any financial efficiencies could balance out against implementation costs, resulting in a net neutral effect.

Overall, these results, with a plurality expecting improvements, show cautious optimism, which is a hopeful outcome in the current political climate where residents can lean to being sceptical or dismissive.

6. What potential benefits of this reorganisation would be most important to you? Please select your top three priorities?



Results: 55%(2721): More joined up services that work better together, 43%(2120): More coordinated strategic planning and infrastructure decisions, 41%(2013): Better quality services for residents, 40%(1976): A clearer understanding of who is responsible for what, 31%(1536): Improved financial stability, 20%(996): Easier and quicker access to council services, 11%(528): Strengthened community connections and support networks, 10%(489): More support for the local economy, 7%(365): A stronger sense of local identity and pride

When asked to select the most important potential benefits of LGR, residents’ choices shed light on what they value most in the prospect of change. The survey invited people to pick their top three potential benefits from a list, and the pattern of responses reveals a clear emphasis on practical improvements for residents and communities. In particular, benefits related to service quality, coordinated planning, and financial prudence ranked highest, alongside a desire for clearer governance.

The top priority benefit, chosen by a 55% of respondents, was the prospect of “More joined up services that work better together.” Residents appreciate that a unitary council could coordinate services seamlessly. This was reflected also in the second most chosen priority “More coordinated strategic planning and infrastructure decisions.” The idea that housing, planning, and social services could collaborate more easily under one roof, or waste collection and street cleaning could be managed in tandem, was seen as a priority for residents. The importance of “joined up” working reflects frustrations with the current siloed system. By selecting these as the top potential benefits, people are saying they value integration and coordination, they hope to see less fragmentation leading to smoother service delivery.

Better quality services for residents was also a priority for 41% of residents. This echoes the qualitative feedback: many people will judge the reform on whether day to day services like road maintenance, waste collection, social care, etc. actually get better. The importance of service quality came through strongly; it was a principal yardstick for many respondents when envisioning benefits.

Another major potential benefit identified by 40% of respondents was “a clearer understanding of who is responsible for what.” This was one of the most popular picks on the list and explicitly mentioned in a number of comments which stated this could both help residents and improve accountability. “Improved financial stability” was listed by 31% of respondents with many referencing efficient use of funds in comments as well as economies of scale and reduced duplication.

Benefits related to community and local identity were further down the priority list. “A stronger sense of local identity and pride” was selected by 7% of respondents, and “strengthened community connections and support networks” being selected by 11%, suggesting a focus by respondents on practical improvements on service delivery, coordination and efficiency in the LGR process.

7. What opportunities and improvements would you like to see come from Local Government Reorganisation?

This question offered respondents the opportunity to use an open text box to encourage respondents, even if sceptical of LGR, to say what they would want to see from the upcoming reorganisation. Residents offered a wide range of aspirations for how reorganising local government might improve public services and governance in Hertfordshire. Feedback to this question revealed several key themes covering both aspirations for tangible benefits in day-to-day services as well as broader structural gains. Many respondents hoped reorganisation would lead to more efficient delivery of services, elimination of duplication, and better value for money. Others highlighted the chance to simplify the system, making councils easier to understand and access, while still preserving local identity and accountability under any new structure. The following analysis explores these themes in turn, using respondents’ own words to illustrate their expectations.

Most common words from answers to above question

Improved Service Delivery and Quality

A prominent theme was the expectation that services would be better integrated and improved under a new unitary system. Residents envisage councils working in a more joined up way, ending the current fragmentation of responsibilities. The idea of reducing the postcode lottery came up: by reorganising councils, residents believe service standards could be made more consistent across the county. One St Albans resident said they hoped for *"Better and more integrated services being available to local communities - less of a postcode lottery for services,"* likewise a Three Rivers resident said they wanted *"Aligned services, without 'postcode lottery' imbalances"* and a Dacorum resident said they wanted *"Less postcode lottery"* but caveated that they don't expect *"much to take effect until 3+ years post reorganisation as it will take time for the new structure to bed in and deliver services to a wider audience."*

This demonstrated a hope shown by various respondents that a streamlined council structure could direct resources to enhance service quality, with larger unitary authorities better able to coordinate improvements across multiple areas. In this line of thinking, some also felt that services could become more accessible, for instance, by pooling resources; new councils might offer a single point of contact for various services. Overall, residents' comments show optimism that reorganisation could *"enhance community services due to larger budgets – even if you have to travel further to access them"*, as one St Albans resident noted, believing bigger councils could deliver a more consistent level of services county-wide. A number of respondents used the word 'equity' to describe what they hope can be done on service delivery across Hertfordshire, like East Herts resident who envisioned *"Greater equity of services across the county."* Naturally, some felt they might be on the other side of a levelling of service delivery, like a St Albans resident who opposed LGR because they believed *"taxes raised locally should only be spent locally. Not redistributed."*

A Watford resident who formerly worked at HCC said success would look like *"financial efficiency to avoid so much of our taxes are spent on providing services by the current 10 local councils repetitively. including by expensive 3rd party providers with less than effective contract management"*. By simplifying the structure, residents hoped they would no longer be bounced between county and district authorities when seeking help.

Simplification, Accountability and Communication

Another clear opportunity in respondents' eyes is the simplification of local government. People welcomed the prospect of a more straightforward system replacing the current two-tier (county/district) arrangement, which some described as confusing or inefficient. A common refrain was that having fewer councils could eliminate redundant bureaucracy. One Broxbourne resident advocated to *"eliminate duplication to cut waste to improve efficiency*." This desire to remove overlapping functions and departments was echoed across few submissions that see the merger of councils as a chance to streamline back-office operations and administration. In turn, they expect this to make the council easier to deal with. As a Three Rivers resident in the survey said, *"clarity that one council is responsible for everything rather than, as now, buck-passing between tiers."* This was reflected in a number of respondents' comments who hoped for a *"less confusing structure"* (Welwyn Hatfield resident), *"lines of responsibility would be less confusing and more straightforward making access to services easier and more efficient"* (Dacorum resident), *"At present, it can be confusing for people to know whether [HCC] or their local district/borough council is responsible for certain services. Under a unitary model, I would hope to see clearer accountability and more resources made available to different departments across the council, leading to more efficient and effective service delivery."* (Broxbourne resident).

In line with a better understanding of responsibilities in local government, respondents mentioned improved accountability as a hoped-for outcome. Some are frustrated by the diffusion of responsibility in the two-tier system, described by many respondents as *"passing the buck"* between county and boroughs/districts. Reorganisation is seen as a chance to establish clear lines of accountability. This came through in numerous comments, like a Hertsmere resident who called for *"Clearer accountability – one council responsible for all services, so residents know who to contact."* This clarity of responsibility is hoped to not only reduce confusion but also to drive better performance: if one authority can be held to account for outcomes, it has stronger incentives to deliver. One Stevenage resident termed this as an opportunity for *"One council responsible for everything so no arguments on who's responsible for what."* This shows a desire for transparency and straightforward governance. In addition, a few respondents connected accountability with better communication, one Watford resident hoping that LGR *"will make communication…better."* Communication was mentioned in various contexts:

- **Communication from local government to residents** (*"Improved listening to, consultation with, and communications with individual residents and communities by the Unitary Authorities."* - St Albans resident)
- **More uniform messaging across authorities** *("More joined up communication generally"* - Watford resident)
- **Communication between councils** ("*Better communication and access between all services and Councils"* - Three Rivers resident)
- **Communication between the Unitary Authorities and Town and Parish councils** (*"better communication with Parish and Town councils perhaps through Neighbourhood Committees*" - Three Rivers resident)

Financial Efficiency and Value for Money

Financial improvements were at the forefront of some residents' minds. A large number of respondents hope that reorganisation will produce cost savings and better value for money in local government. The prospect of reducing overheads by combining councils was frequently mentioned. *"Significant savings over time. More joined up services for residents,"* one Dacorum resident commented, linking financial efficiency with service integration. Others spoke in terms of cutting waste: by merging structures, councils could spend less on management and administration, freeing up funds for frontline services or allowing a reduction in council tax. Indeed, lower council tax was an improvement some unsurprisingly, wished to see. A number of respondents explicitly wrote that they hoped for their council tax bill to decrease if duplication is eliminated. *"a big cost saving that is then passed on to*

residents as a reduction of council taxes" (Hertsmere resident) *"Efficiency in delivery of services and reduced Council taxes"* (Stevenage resident) *"Reduced council taxes"* (North Herts resident).

Many respondents raised taxes in the context of them being spent more efficiently rather than being decreased, or both in tandem, showing that for many, taxes and services were tied together; and it isn't just a case of wanting less taxes or less tax increases, but wanting to see their money used more effectively. *"A lowering of council taxes, and a more efficient use of funds"* (Dacorum resident) *"Better use of council taxes and avoid…increasing it. Speedy delivery of projects and streamline decision making and approval processes."* (Watford resident), *"Better management of the council taxes collected."* (St Albans resident). Some respondents explicitly mentioned reducing bureaucracy: *"A reduction in bureaucracy and better-quality services for residents"* was the hope of one St Albans respondent, tying streamlined governance to service outcomes.

Strategic Planning and County-Wide Coordination

Many residents said one benefit that should be aimed for would be 'joined up' service, sometimes naming specific services they want to see a more collaborative approach to. Many comments named infrastructure, often in tandem with other public services, and notably transport, as an area they would like to see LGR bring about joined up planning: *"More joined up working i.e. between housing and care services"* (staff member in Local government from Stevenage), *"More joined up services with better communication so things run smoother"* (Watford resident*), "more joined up thinking between departments i.e. councils and highways"* (North Herts resident), *"Better joined up services and better transport links throughout Hertfordshire"* (Watford resident), *"Better joined up infrastructure planning and new developments"*(Welwyn Hatfield resident), *"More joined up services i.e. recycling and waste"* (Broxbourne resident). *"More joined up working with social services and trading standards for the benefit of services and residents"* (local Government staff member*) "Joined up thinking, pooled resources and talent. Joined up ideas on infrastructure, planning and development for housing and town planning development."* (North Herts resident) *"Better joined up services. and fix the infrastructure."* (Welwyn Hatfield resident), *"More joined up planning for housing, health services and the infrastructure to support this, schools, roads, doctors etc"* (Hertsmere resident), *"unitised management of roads (parking, highways, transport all joined up)"* (St Albans resident). *"More joined up planning for large housing and infrastructure. Make sure there are enough Transport staff."* (Local government staff member from Dacorum). *"More joined up working with the highways and planning teams in the planning application process."* (Three Rivers resident).

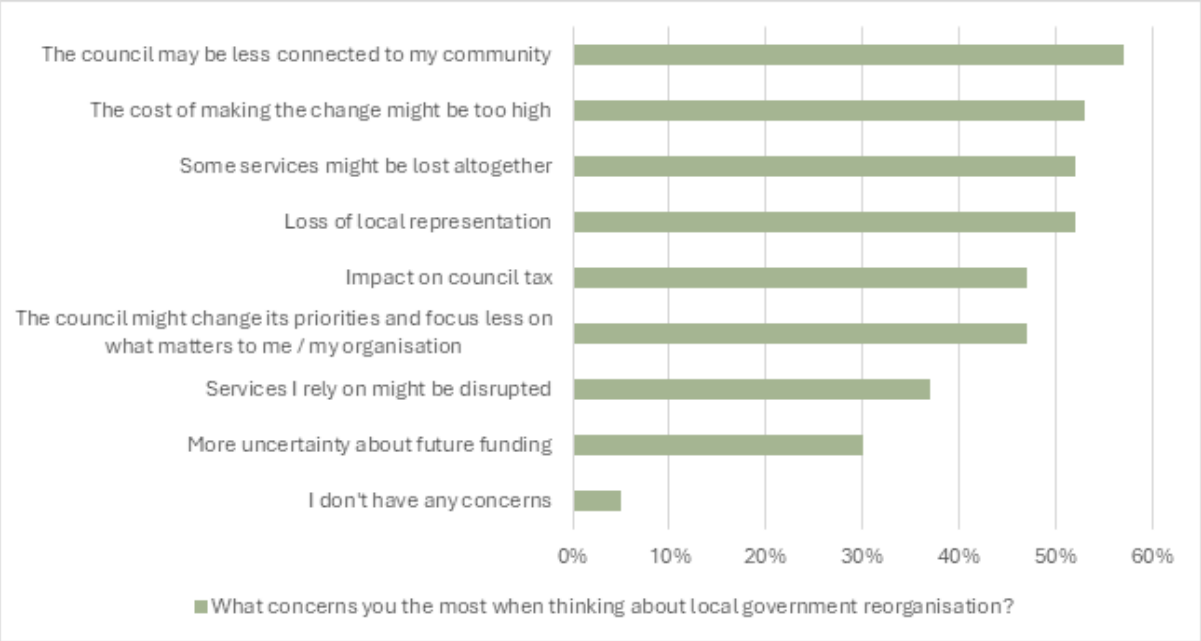
In the above comments, respondents also looked at the reorganisation as a chance to improve long-term planning and coordination across the whole of Hertfordshire. In the current system, planning for infrastructure, housing, transport and other cross-boundary issues can be seen to be fragmented among different councils. Residents see value in having larger authorities that cover wider areas, believing this would enable *"More coordinated strategic planning"* (Dacorum resident). This reflects an expectation that big challenges, from road networks and public transport to housing development and environmental management, could be addressed more effectively when dealt with at a larger geographic scale. The feedback included comments about consistency in planning and policy: with fewer councils, policies could be aligned so that neighbouring communities work toward common goals instead of potentially pulling in different directions. A resident from Watford (in a different question) argued that planning at a broader scale is essential to avoid *"fragmented or siloed approaches."*

Community Identity and Local Representation

Some residents also stressed that reorganisation must respect community identities and maintain local representation, and some saw opportunities for improvement on this front as well. Some said the new councils should be designed around natural communities and be

able to work in *"functional areas,"* (North Herts resident) and wanting the aim to be to foster *"A strong sense of local identity and pride"* (Three Rivers resident). On the other hand, some respondents were concerned about losing the very local touch they value; hence, they noted that systems should be put in place to preserve local input, for example on Dacorum resident who opposed LGR as they didn't want to lose *"local identity."* Some suggested empowering or creating more town and parish councils more, under the new structure, to ensure grassroots voices are heard – effectively using reorganisation to improve the democratic link to communities. A Dacorum resident called for *"Devolution of genuinely local low level services to town & parish level,"* a sentiment reflected in a few comments; *"Formation of Parish Council for St Albans"* (St Albans resident), *"Parking is very much a local issue and should be devolved to the town/parish council level"* (St Albans resident), *"Parish councils having broader responsibility"* (Hertsmere resident), *"Better funding for each parish and town councils to administer. More power to Parish and town councils for planning decisions"* (East Herts Town Councillor), *"More power and funding devolved to local parish councils*" (Three Rivers resident), *"better communication with town and parish councils who know how our local residents feel"* (East Herts Parish Councillor), *"devolution of more services to the lower tier (town/parish councils) making them easier to access"* (St Albans resident).

8. What concerns you the most when thinking about Local Government Reorganisation?



Results: 57% (2855): The council may be less connected to my community, 53% (2671): The cost of making the change might be too high, 52% (2600): Some services might be lost altogether, 52% (2595): Loss of local representation, 47% (2344): Impact on council tax, 47% (2369): The council might change its priorities and focus less on what matters to me / my organisation, 37% (1829): Services I rely on might be disrupted, 30% (1486): More uncertainty about future funding, 5% (245): I don't have any concerns

When asked to choose their top concern, respondents spread their concerns somewhat evenly across the given options, although concern about council being less connected to communities (57%) was the most selected concern, with loss of local representation (52%) and that council might change its priorities and focus less on what matters to the respondent (47%) also being a notable concern. Currently, with district and borough councils, residents have councillors who focus on relatively small communities. If those councils are merged into large unitary authorities, people worry that their town or village might have fewer councillors or be a smaller fish in a bigger pond.

A concern registered by the majority (53%) of respondents was also the financial cost of implementing the change. People are concerned that millions could be spent on merging councils would ultimately come out of taxpayers' pockets without commensurate benefit. In other words, residents fear wasting money on the process itself. This concern often came paired with scepticism about the promised savings. This was also evident in the 47% who were concerned of the impact on council tax.

Loss (52%) and disruption (37%) to services were registered as concerns, although it should be noted people were more concerned over losing services rather than the disruption of services. Residents fear that in the process of merging councils, with new structures, staff changes, essential services might falter or disappear, even if temporarily. For example, one Dacorum resident in a free-text comment voiced anxiety that a complicated reorganisation will mean *"There will be a huge cost to implement the reorganisation and I don't think any one of the benefits above is more important than the others that would justify the cost and disruption."*

It's notable that only a small minority, around 5%, said *"I don't have any concerns"* about reorganisation. The vast majority do have at least one significant concern, underlining that while people see opportunities, and the plurality of respondent expect improvements, they are also quite apprehensive and do expect some cost, temporary or permanent, to reorganisation.

9. What is your gender?

Gender	Male	Female	Prefer not to say	Prefer to self-describe
Respondents (By number)	2146	2406	252	20
Respondents (By percentage)	44%	50%	5%	0%

10. What is your age group?

Age Group	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	Prefer not to say
Respondents (By number)	12	108	377	695	920	1059	959	554	246
Respondents (By percentage)	0%	2%	8%	14%	19%	21%	19%	11%	5%

11. What is your ethnic group?

Ethnic group	Asian or Asian British	Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	White (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British)	White (Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma, or other White group)	Other ethnic group	Prefer not to say
Respondents (By number)	135	58	79	3807	245	92	483
Respondents (By percentage)	3%	1%	2%	78%	5%	2%	10%

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE

PROPOSAL FOR TWO UNITARY AUTHORITIES

V3 draft - last saved 6th November 2025

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Proposal for two unitaries

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Foreword:

Hertfordshire is a county defined by its vibrant communities, rich heritage, and a shared ambition for a better future. From dynamic towns to tranquil villages, residents take pride in where they live and care deeply about the public services that support their wellbeing. Yet, for many, the current structure of local government feels complex and remote leading to confusion over responsibilities, duplication of effort, and delays in accessing support.

This proposal sets out a clear and confident vision for change. By transitioning from eleven councils to two new unitary authorities—East and West Hertfordshire—we can create a system that is simpler to navigate, more responsive to local needs, and better equipped to deliver high-quality services.

This is not merely a structural reform; it is a people-centred transformation. It is about ensuring that children receive the support they need to thrive, that older residents can live with dignity and independence, and that families facing hardship are not left behind. It is about preserving what works, addressing what doesn't, and building a system that places residents at its heart.

We have listened carefully to our communities, businesses, and partners. They have told us they want councils that are rooted in their local areas, that understand the unique needs of their residents, and that work collaboratively to solve problems. They want services that are joined-up, accessible, and fair. And they want change that is safe, not disruptive.

The two-unitary model delivers on these expectations. It simplifies governance, generates financial efficiencies that can be reinvested in frontline services, and strengthens the connection between councils and the communities they serve. It is a model built on local identity, shared ambition, and a deep commitment to making Hertfordshire the best it can be—for everyone who lives here.

This is a pivotal moment for Hertfordshire. A moment to shape a future that is easier to understand, more responsive to local priorities, and ready to meet the challenges ahead. We believe this proposal offers the clearest, safest, and most resident-focused path forward—and we are proud to present it on behalf of the people of Hertfordshire.

THE PROPOSITION (MHCLG CRITERION 1)

Overview of Proposal: Two new councils, a fresh start for Hertfordshire

This proposal, backed by solid evidence and local insight, makes a clear case for change: creating two new councils is the best way to deliver a stronger, simpler and more sustainable future for Hertfordshire. This includes extensive engagement[1] with residents, stakeholders and partners across Hertfordshire, where the two unitary authority (2UA) model received broad support for its simplicity, strategic coherence and alignment with existing service footprints.

Framed around three core principles – Stronger, Safer, Simpler - the model sets out how two unitaries working alongside a new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), will best deliver key services and act as a catalyst for bold public service reform to improve them further. By simplifying and unifying services, this will deliver simpler access and navigation by residents and enable greater integration and innovation, building on the strengths of the current 11 councils and other public, voluntary and community sector partners.

The two new unitaries will work closely with the communities they serve, harnessing their knowledge, skills and lived experiences to better understand and respond to the issues that matter most to residents. Together they will provide the scale, resilience and sustainability to act efficiently and consistently across their places.

With lower overheads and much greater economies of scale compared to the other models, the two new unitary model will cost significantly less to run, releasing £50m-£55m each year to protect frontline services and keep council tax down. This provides the only realistic means of funding ambitious improvements in services (particularly investing in prevention and early intervention) and strong community engagement. Minimising disruption will also reduce the risks of transition and deliver transformed services more quickly.

Two unitaries will be stronger, safer and simpler

Residents across Hertfordshire consistently express a desire for a local government that is easier to navigate, more responsive to local needs, and better equipped to deliver high-quality public services. The establishment of two new unitary councils offers a clear and effective solution to these concerns.

This model simplifies the current complex structure of local government, providing residents with greater clarity and accountability. It ensures that services are delivered by councils that are closer to the communities they serve, deliver more tailored and timely responses to local priorities.

Importantly, the two-unitary approach achieves this transformation with minimal disruption, preserving the financial efficiencies of reform while enhancing the ability of councils to work collaboratively with residents, partners, and stakeholders. It creates a governance framework that is stronger in capacity, safer in service delivery, and simpler in structure—ensuring that every resident benefits from a system designed to meet their needs effectively and sustainably.

Stronger

Safe and legal services from day one

Our top priority is ensuring that services delivered by the new councils are safe, legal and uninterrupted

[1] *Source: Local Government Engagement Feedback Report on Unitary Options*

from day one. The disaggregation of County Council services into two unitaries is the lowest level of disaggregation and will transition to the current operational footprint that is already well established. We will ensure the division into two unitaries does not undermine the good and outstanding Adult and Children's Services hard-won improvements and the hard-won improvements in our SEND services that our most vulnerable residents rely on. As we transition to two new unitaries, every resident currently receiving support will continue to do so - no one will fall through the gaps. This commitment to continuity and safeguarding is central to our approach and underpins the design of the 2UA model.

Clear strategic priorities
The two unitary authorities will set clear, long-term strategic visions working in partnership with the Mayoral Strategic Authority and other local stakeholders. The two unitary authority model best supports strategic development and delivery at county scale, effectively delivered through the two authorities working together with business and partners – reducing fragmented and duplicated relationships that may slow down strategic direction and delivery. The Mayoral Strategic Authority and two unitary authorities will work together at pace to identify and respond to the priorities that matter most to residents and businesses, coordinating investment and action across the county to ensure equal opportunities to thrive.

The collaboration between two unitary authorities, working in close partnership with the strategic authority, will create a more resilient and capable governance structure. This alignment strengthens the collective ability to address complex environmental and climate challenges, leveraging the general power of competence to act innovatively and decisively in the public interest. By pooling resources, expertise, and strategic oversight, the two unitary authorities, will be better positioned to deliver ambitious sustainability outcomes, support commitments to reduce emissions, and respond effectively to the evolving needs of communities and ecosystems across the county.

Resilience to financial shocks
The two unitary authority model provides the strongest and most financially resilient organisational model. Covering a range of rural and urban areas and meeting the Government's minimum population criterion of 500,000 residents, the two unitary authorities will have the strongest council tax base and so will be better equipped to absorb demand shocks and manage pressures such as government funding changes or additional demand for key services, such as Social Care and Homelessness.

Insight and intelligence
Two councils operating at scale will work with the new Mayor and key partners to build a shared, countywide picture of Hertfordshire. This breadth of insight will enable smarter, evidence-led decisions and more preventative interventions, tackling issues before they escalate. It also unlocks new opportunities for collaboration and innovation both within and between the new authorities that would be harder to achieve with a more fragmented model.

Safer

Better support for vulnerable children and young people
Children's Services provides compelling evidence is a clear example of where integration adds real value. By aligning county level services with district and borough functions, such as Leisure, Early Help and Housing - the two new councils will be able to deliver a stronger, more preventative early help offer. Our priority is to ensure Hertfordshire children and young people are supported to achieve and live happy fulfilling lives. the two unitary model ensures parity of service access across the county from education to provision as well as ensuring, through minimal disaggregation, that we protect the current operational

service delivery model on the ground that protects our most vulnerable children and that no child falls through any boundary change or is disadvantaged through differing service offers across the County.

Stronger partnership working

Alignment with the Police's two operational areas will simplify partnership working to keep residents safe. Two unitaries will provide the most streamlined structures for our businesses to engage with, minimising bureaucracy and enabling them to focus on growing and setting the conditions for employment and prosperity.

Hertfordshire's existing East/West health geography aligns with the proposed two-council model, supporting integrated services and strong partnerships across health and adult social care that are vital for continuity and resilience. Maintaining this structure will minimise disruption during transition, enhance collaboration, and enable further progress in delivering joined-up care that supports the NHS 10-Year Plan.

Simpler

Economies of scale in commissioning
Two councils operating at scale will unlock significant financial efficiencies through smarter commissioning. Services currently procured separately across 10 districts can each be consolidated into more efficient and coherent contracts, reducing duplication, increasing buying power and improving outcomes. The two unitaries will also have the scale, capacity and capability to negotiate good value for money on the critical, high-volume contracts for care of our elderly and vulnerable young people. Contracts will be tailored to each council's needs while delivering wider efficiencies, particularly in high-cost areas such as waste collection.

Maximising use of income and funding
Two councils with stronger strategic oversight will be better placed to make the most of available funding. Development contributions, such as the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements, can be allocated more consistently and transparently. This simplifies prioritisation of infrastructure needs and ensures investment is targeted where it delivers the greatest impact.

Creating commercial opportunities
Bringing services together will open up new opportunities to generate income. In addition to council tax and business rates, the new councils will adopt a commercial mindset, making bold yet risk informed decisions to support long-term sustainability through shared, hosted or traded ventures with each other or other organisations.

Leaner workforce
Executive roles and responsibilities are currently replicated across 11 councils. Moving to two unitary authorities will reduce overheads through streamlined staffing structures and build strategic capacity across both geographies. This creates the conditions to embed best practice, shape new career pathways and attract and retain talent, while delivering significantly more financial efficiencies than other models.

Savings in property and assets
Moving to two unitary authorities creates maximum opportunities to rationalise the local government estate. By reducing the number of buildings needed for corporate services but maximising the public estate to deliver local services in the heart of the community, this may include family hubs, day centres, youth centres and libraries to maximise touch points for local communities to access services. Joined-up

approaches to regeneration, procurement and capital investment will further enhance financial efficiencies.

Clearer responsibilities
Residents consistently say that the current two-tier structure of local government in Hertfordshire is confusing. By transforming from 11 councils to two, it will be much clearer for residents which organisation is responsible for council services in their places and best equip them to hold the council to account.

Better resident experience

The two unitary model will make it clear to residents who to contact for support and services, the two unitary model also protects and ensures parity of services across the East and West of the County. The two unitary model being the most cost efficient due to lower overheads and higher efficiency will be able to implement new operating models which prioritise simplicity, accessibility and inclusion, using digital technology to enhance this wherever appropriate.

Maintaining a clear digital and physical presence
Residents that can will expect to interact with our services through digital communication by default. At the same time, physical service access points will be geographically spread to ensure clear points of contact for protecting the most vulnerable, and especially for those who are homeless. This will be possible as a result of the lower overheads and greater efficiency of the two unitary model.

Joined-up processes
From day one, the two new councils will improve resident experience by joining up key processes such as social care assessments, grants, benefits, housing and planning applications. Aggregation of district council services and limited disaggregation across critical large scale services will support a swifter transition to the new unitary model enabling faster transition and greater capacity for transformation and service improvement and innovation. Services will be designed around what residents say matters most, creating simpler, more responsive pathways and a better overall experience.

Strong local democracy
The new two new unitaries will have clear democratic structures, making it easy for residents to know who is responsible for services and hold them to account. 117 councillors in each council will provide visible, local leadership. Transparent decision-making will build trust and confidence in their ability to deliver. Robust scrutiny will ensure services focus on the right outcomes and offer value for money. Plans for whole council elections every four years will bring consistency and predictability to the democratic cycle.

Climate resilience and sustainability

Hertfordshire faces increasing environmental pressures, including flood risk, biodiversity loss, and the need to transition to net zero. The 2UA model enables coordinated climate adaptation and mitigation strategies across both geographies, embedding sustainability into infrastructure, planning, and service delivery. This approach strengthens long-term resilience, supports green growth, and ensures communities are better protected from the impacts of climate change.

VISION

Hertfordshire is growing fast - with 1.2m residents, a dynamic economy and globally leading sectors. To meet this scale and ambition, it needs local government that is bold and built for the future.

This proposal sets out a clear vision for two councils:

- **West Hertfordshire**: Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford
- **East Hertfordshire**: Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield

Together, they will deliver:

- **Stronger leadership** with clear strategic priorities and visible accountability
- **Strong, safe and legal services from day one** that are joined-up, preventative and rooted in place
- **Simplified governance** that is easier to navigate for residents and partners
- **Financial resilience** through scale, efficiency and commercial innovation

These priorities reflect the themes raised during public and stakeholder engagement, where the East/West model was seen as the most coherent and least disruptive configuration. Hertfordshire has also historically operated well across these two geographical footprints in the areas of strategic planning and social care delivery.

Working alongside a new Mayoral Strategic Authority, the two councils will unlock the benefits of devolution on a countywide footprint - enabling decisive action on shared challenges across health, policing, transport, planning and housing.

This creates **healthier, safer and more inclusive places**, where public services delivery partners work together to prevent harm, support independence and respond quickly to emerging needs. By formalising what is already working on the ground, it provides the clarity, coherence and capacity to meet fluctuating demand pressures with financial sustainability.

In summary, the East/West Hertfordshire model is:

- **Ambitious in scale, locally rooted**: large enough to drive system-wide change yet designed to reflect local identities and stay close to communities.
- **Focused on prevention**: prioritises early intervention and addresses the root causes of demand.
- **Responsive and forward-looking**: built to adapt to changing needs and technologies with two equally sized populations enabling fair and effective service planning across both areas.
- **Resilient and future-ready**: structured to withstand pressures and deliver over £360m long-term savings which will be required to enable these improvements in frontline services.
- **Inclusive and growth-oriented**: with all parts of the public sector working more effectively together to support the vulnerable, and streamlined structures to support our businesses, it will drive prosperity and positively benefit communities.

CORE STRENGTHS

1. High quality, consistent services

Two financially sustainable councils will deliver faster, better, and more affordable services across the county. A single-phase transition will minimise risk and protect those most in need. **Services will remain rooted in place**, with locality teams and community hubs ensuring that delivery is tailored to the needs and character of each area. This approach supports clearer service pathways, faster responses to local issues and stronger relationships between residents and their councils.

2. Strong local leadership and oversight

Streamlined structures will put in place visible leadership, clearer accountability for residents, businesses and partners and more effective advocacy. Councillors will play a central role in shaping services and championing place-based innovation, supported by robust governance and neighbourhood-level forums that **ensure decisions reflect the voices of local people.**

3. Smarter Use of Resources

This model unlocks significant efficiencies by reducing duplication across systems, consolidating service footprints and enabling joined-up recruitment, commissioning and data sharing. This will **generate savings which can be reinvested in services including early intervention and preventative services**. It also supports more strategic use of public assets and infrastructure, enabling better planning across housing, transport, health and education, reducing the tax burden on residents over time.

4. Future-readiness and innovation

The scale and coherence of the 2UA model creates the conditions for long-term transformation. It creates the financial headroom and officer capacity to deliver digital innovation, smarter use of data, and more agile service design - allowing both councils to thoughtfully spearhead public service reform. Distinct sector strengths across East and West Hertfordshire also support targeted economic growth, aligning strategic planning with national policy and unlocking new opportunities for residents and businesses.

Why this is the right model for Hertfordshire

The East/West Hertfordshire model is more than a transition framework - it provides a **future-ready platform for public service reform**. It combines **strategic coherence with operational agility**, bringing about smarter, leaner and more responsive delivery.

By aligning council boundaries with NHS-led Health and Care Partnerships and Hertfordshire Constabulary's operational structures, the model strengthens joint working, provides integrated service delivery and delivers better outcomes for residents. This integrated approach provides wraparound support for the most vulnerable residents and reduces demand for critical services. It reflects how the vast majority of public services already operate across the county, preserving what works while creating the conditions for innovation and system-wide transformation.

The 2UA model supports joined-up planning and delivery across housing, transport, skills, health and public safety, aligning with Government ambitions for devolution and place-based reform. It is strongly backed by key partners and offers the **lowest risk** pathway to reform, safeguarding continuity in high-risk services while unlocking long-term benefits.

Only the size and geography of two unitaries is sufficient to support both strategic delivery and the safe and legal delivery of critical services from day one.

Alignment with national policies

The 2UA delivers place-based delivery of national programmes and strategies including:

10-Year Health Plan: Greater alignment across health and local government in the two unitary model supports more joined up care and targeted health interventions.

Get Britain Working: Two coherent economic geographies facilitate better integration of employment, health and skills initiatives, improving access to work and delivering locally tailored support to help those facing barriers to employment.

10-Year Infrastructure Strategy: Coordinated planning across housing, transport, energy and digital infrastructure is made more possible with two councils operating across wider areas. One of the key constraints to Hertfordshire's economic growth (and housing growth) is the poor east-west connectivity, particularly by public transport. Addressing this is a key priority for our businesses. The 2UA model will be best placed to do this as it minimises fragmentation and unlocks maximum savings and embeds long-term sustainability to fund infrastructure investment to unlock growth.

Modern Industrial Strategy: With distinct sector clusters in each unitary - such as life sciences and advanced manufacturing in the East, and creative industries and professional services in the West - this model promotes cluster-based growth, innovation and alignment with national economic priorities. Each unitary will be small enough to understand and engage with its businesses, while also being sufficiently large to address some of the key barriers they face and be a strong voice championing them.

Strategic Coherence and Partnership Delivery

The two new councils will act as equal partners, collaborating closely with the Mayoral Strategic Authority to deliver countywide priorities while retaining distinct local leadership. They will share responsibility for joint planning, commissioning and delivery in areas such as transport, housing, skills and community resilience, underpinned by aligned service footprints, integrated governance structures and shared data systems.

This approach reduces duplication, reduces overheads, and enhances operational efficiency. These recurring savings can be reinvested into frontline services, community infrastructure and place-based innovation. Resources can be targeted to local priorities, ensuring improved outcomes for residents and businesses. Locality teams and community hubs will ensure services remain accessible and responsive to the distinct needs of each place. This boosts public confidence, strengthens civic identity and unlocks new opportunities for community-led innovation.

While all LGR options carry complexity, this model presents the **lowest risk** during transition. By minimising disruption to the 80% of local government services in Hertfordshire that are currently delivered by the County Council, the 2UA model reduces fragmentation and protects continuity in high-risk services such as adult social care, Children's Services, SEND and waste. In so doing, it mirrors how 'always-on' services already operate across the county, creating the **safest environment** for transition.

The 2UA model is designed to meet Hertfordshire's most pressing challenges through scale, coherence and local responsiveness. It will tackle:

- **Complex service demands:** Rising pressures in Children's Services, adult social care, SEND and homelessness require a model that enables early intervention and integrated planning to tackle deficits in sufficiency and quality of provision, ensuring consistent safeguarding across the county.

- **Inequality and inclusion:** With pockets of deprivation, health inequalities and economic inactivity, the model supports targeted, place-based responses built on strong partnerships and a prevention-first approach.

- **Infrastructure delays:** Rapid population increases and housing demand place strains on transport, schools and social care and health services. The 2UA model delivers long-term strategic planning across both geographies.

- **Recruitment challenges and rising costs:** Rising demand and workforce shortages, particularly in social care, education and regulatory services, are driving up costs and straining service resilience. The 2UA model delivers stronger workforce planning, smarter use of public assets and more coordinated recruitment, helping to stabilise costs and retain skilled professionals.

By aligning resources with local need, it creates the conditions for faster implementation, better use of public assets and more joined-up support for communities, making it the most **practical, resilient and cost-effective option** to meet Hertfordshire's future needs.

Mitigating Risks and Strengthening the Case for Change

The 2UA model mitigates key risks associated with reorganisation:

- **Operational disruption**: By aligning with existing service footprints (e.g. East/West health trusts, Joint Strategic Plans), the model reduces the need for major service redesign.

- **Democratic disconnect:** Two councils of around 600,000 residents each retain strong local representation through ward-based governance and neighbourhood forums.

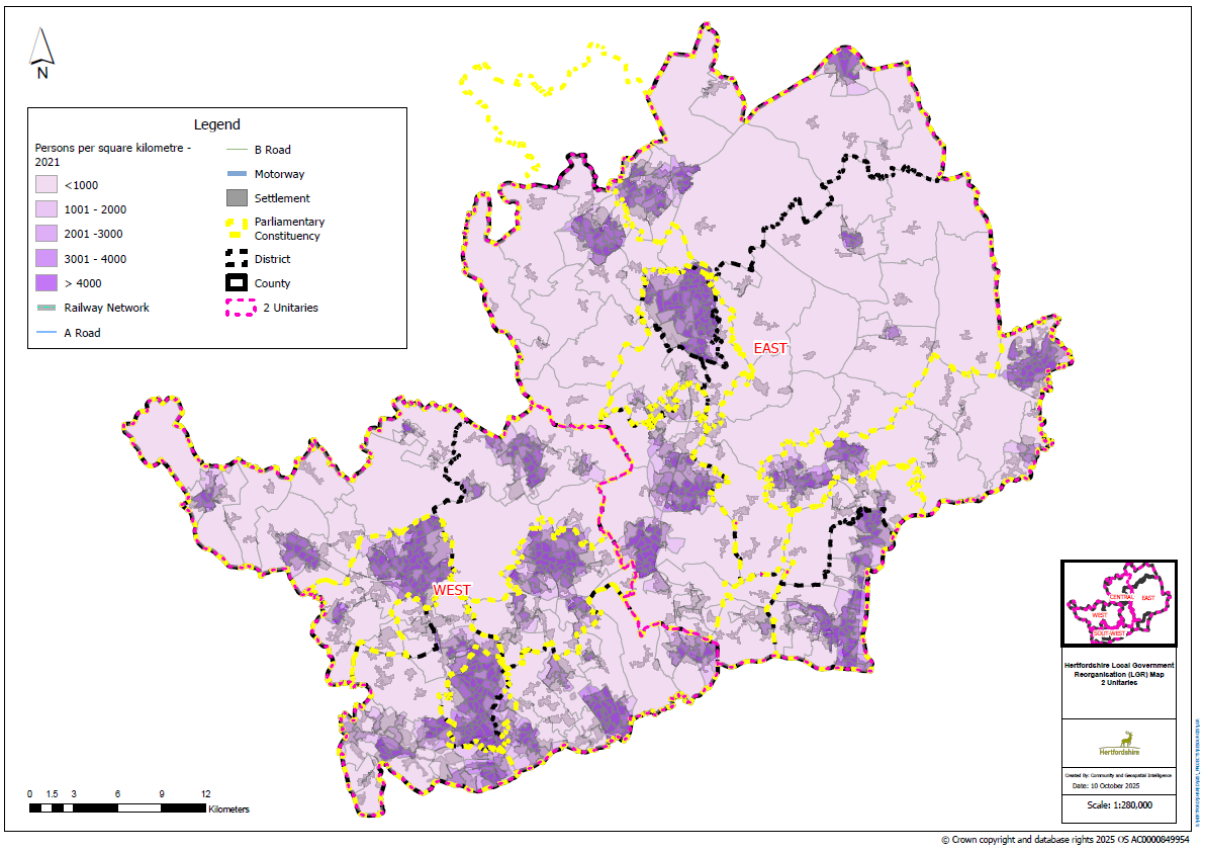
- **Financial and delivery risk:** The model avoids the fragmentation of smaller units, striking a balance between strategic capacity and local accountability.

- **Transition complexity:** Fewer authorities mean simpler aggregation/disaggregation of services, lower implementation costs, and faster realisation of benefits.

SCALE, EFFICIENCY AND CAPACITY (MHCLG CRITERION 2)

Balancing Strategic Scale with Community-Centred Services

2UA Model Map [2]



The 2UA model creates two coherent authorities - **West Hertfordshire** and **East Hertfordshire** - each reflecting distinct geographies, economies and communities yet with the **scale, strategic capacity** and **operational readiness** to deliver high quality services and shape local growth.

Strategic Scale and Population Sizes

The 2UA model creates two authorities that both meet MHCLG guidance on a minimum size of 500,000 to ensure robust strategic capacity to deliver at scale, services that can operate at scale but tailored to the community and will be financially resilient as demand continues to increase. **Indeed, the 2UA model is the only one that meets this minimum criterion for Hertfordshire. As shown in *Table 1*, East and West Hertfordshire are closely matched in population size, supporting equitable service planning and avoiding volatility.**

This demographic scale is matched by economic weight. Hertfordshire's Gross Value Added (GVA), as shown in **Table 1,** exceeds Liverpool City Region, is close to Oxford and Cambridge combined and is on a par with Surrey. The county is home to over 61,000 enterprises and 720,000 jobs, with nationally

[2] *Source: 2UA map (HCC)*

significant strengths in life sciences (cell and gene), defence, aerospace, digital technologies and film and TV production. [3]

These sectors are not only critical to Hertfordshire's future but also to the UK's global competitiveness and national security. The scale and complexity of Hertfordshire's economy demand a governance model that reflects its strategic importance. Two unitary authorities of equal weighting will provide the operational capacity, strategic coherence and democratic accountability needed to support this level of economic ambition - aligning Hertfordshire with other high-performing regions and enabling it to fulfil its role as the UK's innovation heartland.

Both counties have opted for an East/West configuration that aligns with existing service footprints, supports balanced growth and enables the formation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Surrey's model reinforces the viability of the 2UA approach, demonstrating how two large, strategically aligned councils can deliver financial resilience, simplify governance, and maintain continuity in high-risk service - principles that underpin Hertfordshire's own proposal.

Table 1: County Total GVA (2023)[4]

Bedfordshire	£16.93 billion
Buckinghamshire	£22.95 billion
Cambridgeshire	£32.89 billion
Essex	£47.16 billion
Liverpool City Region	£38.5 billion
Hertfordshire	£45.72 billion
Oxfordshire	£23.5 billion
Surrey	£45.6 billion

The East and West Hertfordshire model delivers:

- **Equitable service planning:** Closely matched population sizes reduce volatility and ensures fair distribution of resources.
- **Targeted place-based interventions:** Distinct deprivation profiles across East and West Hertfordshire allow each authority to respond to local needs with tailored strategies.
- **Operational simplicity:** Fewer unitaries mean lower transition risk, clearer governance and more coherent commissioning -reducing duplication and ensuring continuity.
- **Supports innovation in globally significant employment sectors**: delivering strategic planning and investment across nationally important sector clusters.

Scale is underpinned by **local responsiveness**. The 2UA model embeds Local Democratic Forums, community hubs and neighbourhood-level commissioning, ensuring services remain rooted in place and responsive to the communities they serve.

[3] *Source: Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2025-20235*
[4] *Source: ONS, Regional Gross Value Added (Balanced by Industry)*

Table 2[5]

	West Hertfordshire	East Hertfordshire
District areas covered	Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford	Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield
Total population (2024 estimate)	**625,222**	**610,569**
Population projection 2045 (ONS)	660,000	660,000
Population projection 2045 (internal est.)	722,000	758,000
Population density (people per km2)	1,043	562
Parliamentary constituencies	Harpenden and Berkhamsted; Hemel Hempstead; Hertsmere; South West Hertfordshire; St Albans; Watford	Broxbourne; Herford and Stortford; North East Hertfordshire; Hitchin; Stevenage; Welwyn Hatfield
Gross Value Added (GVA) per £m	27,301	22,439
Business count	34,200	26,865
Employment Rate (16-64 years)	80%	81%
Council tax base	52%	48%
Share of most deprived areas in Hertfordshire	43%	57%

Efficiency and Transition Costs

The 2UA model delivers the **highest financial savings** and **fastest payback period**, supporting long-term sustainability. It builds on existing collaboration and functional geographies, where districts already work together through **Joint Strategic Plans (JSPs)** that reflect shared housing markets, infrastructure priorities and economic linkages.

This coherence is already visible in practice:

- **Emerging JSPs in both East and West Hertfordshire** show strong spatial alignment on housing and growth.
- **Shared footprints** across health, care, policing and joint commissioning deliver integrated public service delivery and more effective early intervention.

As shown in ***Table 2***, both areas have **strong economic foundations** - reflected in their Gross Value Added (GVA) figures of £27.3bn (West) and £22.4bn (East) - and comparable council tax bases (East 48%, West 52%), which provide a stable platform for financial resilience. Crucially, the scale of the model allows resources to be targeted in response to local needs and service pressures - supporting equitable outcomes without overstretching smaller unitaries.

The 2UA configuration also ensures better alignment of housing, employment land and infrastructure planning. This is critical to meeting housing demand, reversing the loss of commercial floorspace[6] (over **771,000 sq. m. lost** county-wide) and supporting place-based regeneration. The choices made in a

Source 4: ONS, Regional Gross Value Added (Balanced by Industry)
Source 5: Local Government Reorganisation Statistical Selection Model (HCC)
[6] *Loss of Employment Space in Hertfordshire: Lambert Smth Hampton, 2019*

Spatial Development Strategy **(**SDS) can be delivered more effectively through two coherent unitary local plans.

Functional Economic Geography and Employment Patterns

Employment patterns and travel-to-work patterns reinforce the place-based case for two authorities. As shown in ***Table 1***, West Hertfordshire has the highest job density, particularly around Watford, while East Hertfordshire has more dispersed employment, with key clusters in Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City.

Commuting flows also differ significantly:

- **West Hertfordshire** towns such as Watford, Hemel Hempstead and St Albans have strong commuting links into London and a high level of inflow to Watford and St Albans and the surrounding areas.
- **East Hertfordshire** areas including Stevenage, Broxbourne and North Hertfordshire show more intra-county and regional commuting. This area also sees a high level of commuting into London, with Broxbourne and East Herts seeing primary flows into London and across to Welwyn Hatfield.

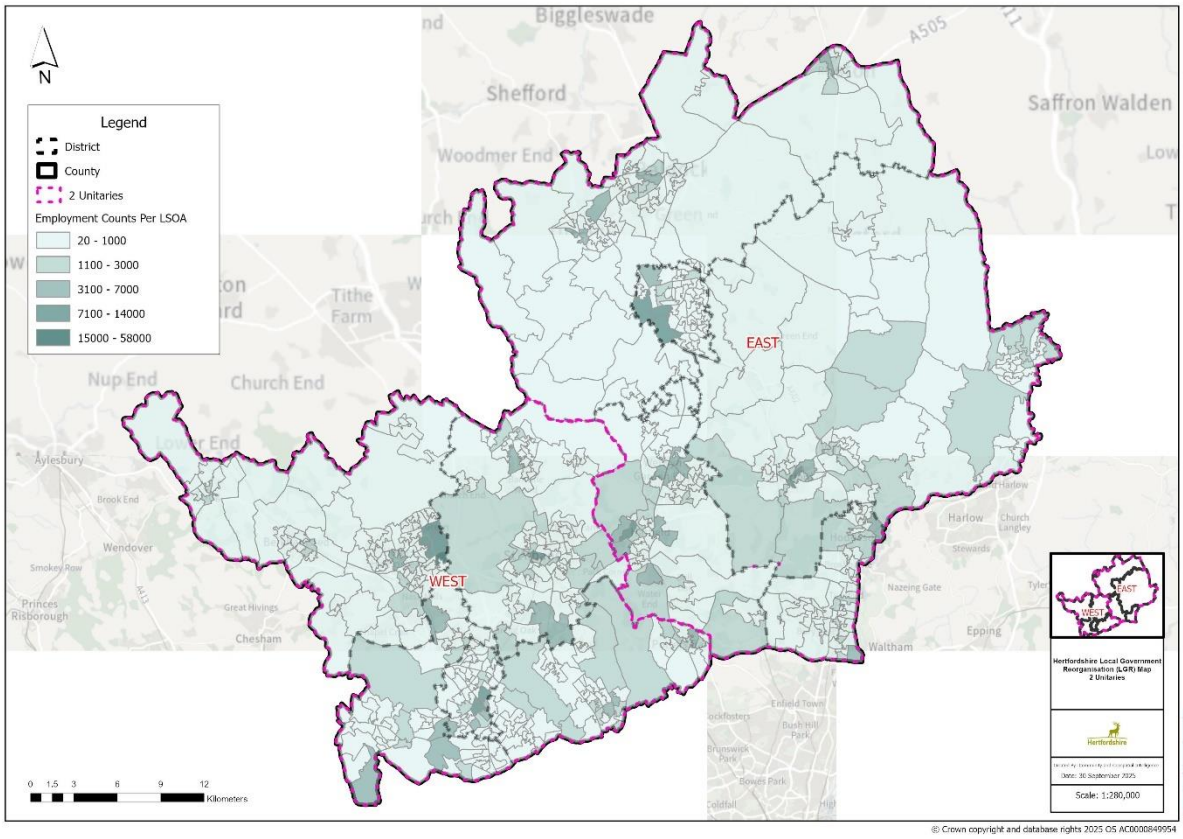
The employment density map (Map 2) provides further evidence for the 2UA model by visualising job concentrations across Hertfordshire. It shows high-density employment zones in Watford, Hemel Hempstead and St Albans in the West, and more dispersed but significant clusters in Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City and Broxbourne in the East. These patterns align closely with the proposed East/West boundaries, reinforcing the strategic coherence of the model.

The map highlights the **polycentric nature of West Hertfordshire**, with multiple high-density employment zones that benefit from proximity to London and major transport corridors. In contrast, **East Hertfordshire's employment is more dispersed**.

This spatial pattern supports the case for two unitary authorities by:

- Preserving functional labour markets and commuting flows
- Delivering tailored infrastructure and transport planning
- Avoiding fragmentation of economic clusters and anchor institutions
- Supporting strategic planning aligned to distinct economic geographies

MAP 2: Employment Density[7]



This model allows each authority to respond to these dynamics through locally tailored transport and infrastructure planning. It also supports strategic coherence by ensuring shared planning led by the Mayoral Strategic Authority, while allowing each unitary to focus on its distinct economic geography.

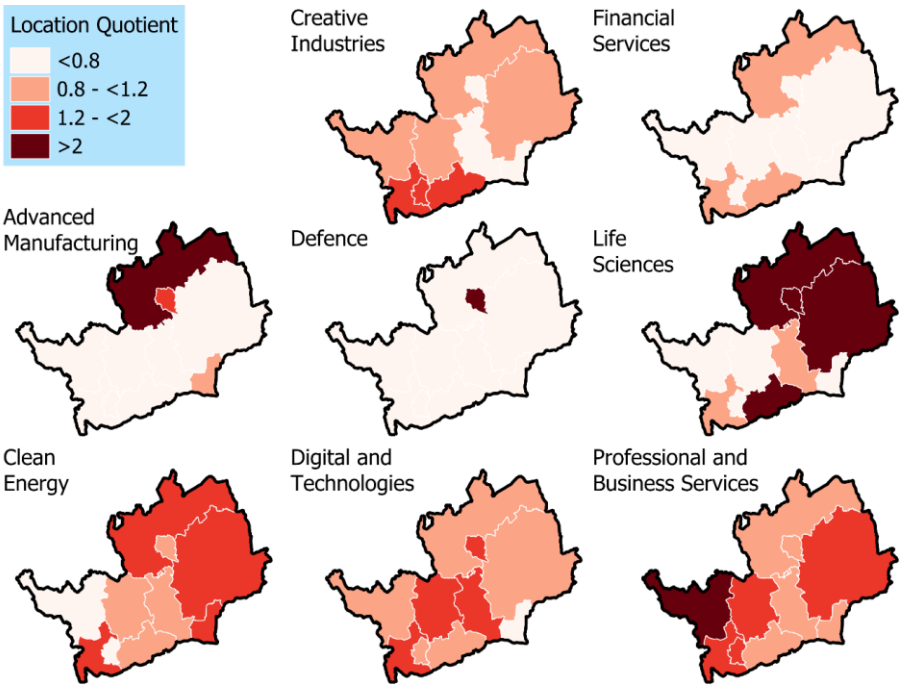
The sectoral strengths across East and West Hertfordshire, as shown in **Figure 1**, further justify the East/West configuration. These maps clearly demonstrate that Hertfordshire's economic strengths are concentrated in **distinct clusters** that align with the proposed East/West geography. This evidences the 2UA model as the most coherent and least disruptive configuration for strategic planning, economic development and partnership working. In contrast, more unitaries would fragment these clusters, dilute strategic focus and complicate engagement with anchor institutions and investors.

- **East Hertfordshire** shows high concentrations in **life sciences**, **advanced manufacturing**, **defence** and **digital technologies**, particularly around Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield and Broxbourne. These sectors are nationally significant and closely linked to the **Cambridge sub-region**, reinforcing East Hertfordshire's role in the Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor.

- **West Hertfordshire** is characterised by strong clusters in **creative industries**, **professional and business services**, and **clean energy**, with key hubs in Watford, St Albans and Dacorum. These sectors are more London-facing and benefit from proximity to the capital and strategic transport corridors like the M1 and M25.

[7] *Source: HCC*

Figure 1: Concentrations of IS-8 sectoral employment by district across Hertfordshire (2021-23) [8]



Housing Market Variation and Lifestyle Differences

Housing market variation across Hertfordshire further evidences the place case for two unitary authorities. West Hertfordshire faces higher house prices and lower levels of social housing, while East Hertfordshire shows greater concentrations of affordable housing need. This is reflected in the housing register figures[9], with East Hertfordshire districts collectively accounting for over **11,000 households** on the register - more than double the **5,000** in West Hertfordshire.

East Hertfordshire also delivered significantly more affordable housing in both 2023/24 (**853 units**) and 2024/25 (**810 units**) compared to West Hertfordshire (**469** and **579 units**, respectively), highlighting both the scale of need and the capacity to respond. However, **West Hertfordshire has a higher number of households in temporary accommodation (783) than East Hertfordshire (594)**, suggesting that acute housing pressures - driven by affordability challenges and limited social housing stock - are resulting in more households requiring emergency support.

These differences underscore the need for **tailored housing strategies** within each geography. The proposed 2UA model enables each authority to respond more effectively to its distinct housing challenges, whether that is managing social housing stock and tackling overcrowding in the West, or coordinating affordable housing delivery and addressing homelessness in the East, within a coherent strategic framework.

Projected Housing Demand and Strategic Growth

Hertfordshire is undergoing one of the most ambitious growth programmes in the UK, with over **274,000 new residents** expected by 2045 and tens of thousands of new homes planned across two nationally significant strategic sites: **Hemel Garden Communities** in the West and **Gilston Area** within the Harlow

[8] *Source: SQW, based on a detailed analysis of data from BRES, using the sectoral definitions provided by UK government (with the exception of clean energy, which uses a definition provided by DataCity) (Hertfordshire Futures Economic Strategy 2025)*

[9] *Source: Local Authority housing data (compiled by Stevenage Borough Council)*

& Gilston Garden Town in the East. These developments are not only large in scale - each delivering over **10,000 homes**, major infrastructure investment, and thousands of jobs - but also complex in governance, requiring coordination across multiple partners, planning authorities and service systems.

The **2UA model** provides the scale, coherence and strategic capacity needed to manage this level of growth effectively. It ensures each new authority will lead decisively on delivery within its geography, while aligning with countywide priorities through the Mayoral Strategic Authority. Compared to more fragmented models, the 2UA configuration offers:

- **Unified leadership** across strategic sites
- **Simplified engagement** for developers and investors
- **Integrated planning** across housing, transport, education and health
- **Reduced risk** of delay, duplication or misalignment
- **Stronger partnerships** with national agencies such as Homes England and The Crown Estate

Socio-economic variation

Geo-demographic analysis confirms that West Hertfordshire is more affluent than East Hertfordshire, with a higher proportion of households in the most affluent Acorn[10] categories. As shown in the Acorn breakdown:

- **Luxury Lifestyles & Established Affluence:**
    - West: 38%
    - East: 27%
    - Herts average: 32%
- **Stretched Society & Low Income Living:**
    - West: 19%
    - East: 23%
    - Herts average: 21%

This pattern is reinforced by the Hertfordshire Personas segmentation in ***Table 2***, which shows West Hertfordshire has a higher proportion of Highly Affluent Maturity and Affluent Families, while East Hertfordshire has more Stretched Families and Young Financially Stretched households.

Table 2[11]: Hertfordshire Personas

Persona **Percentage of households**	**West**	**East**	**Herts**
Highly Affluent Maturity	18%	13%	**16%**
Financially Secure Maturity	3%	4%	**3%**

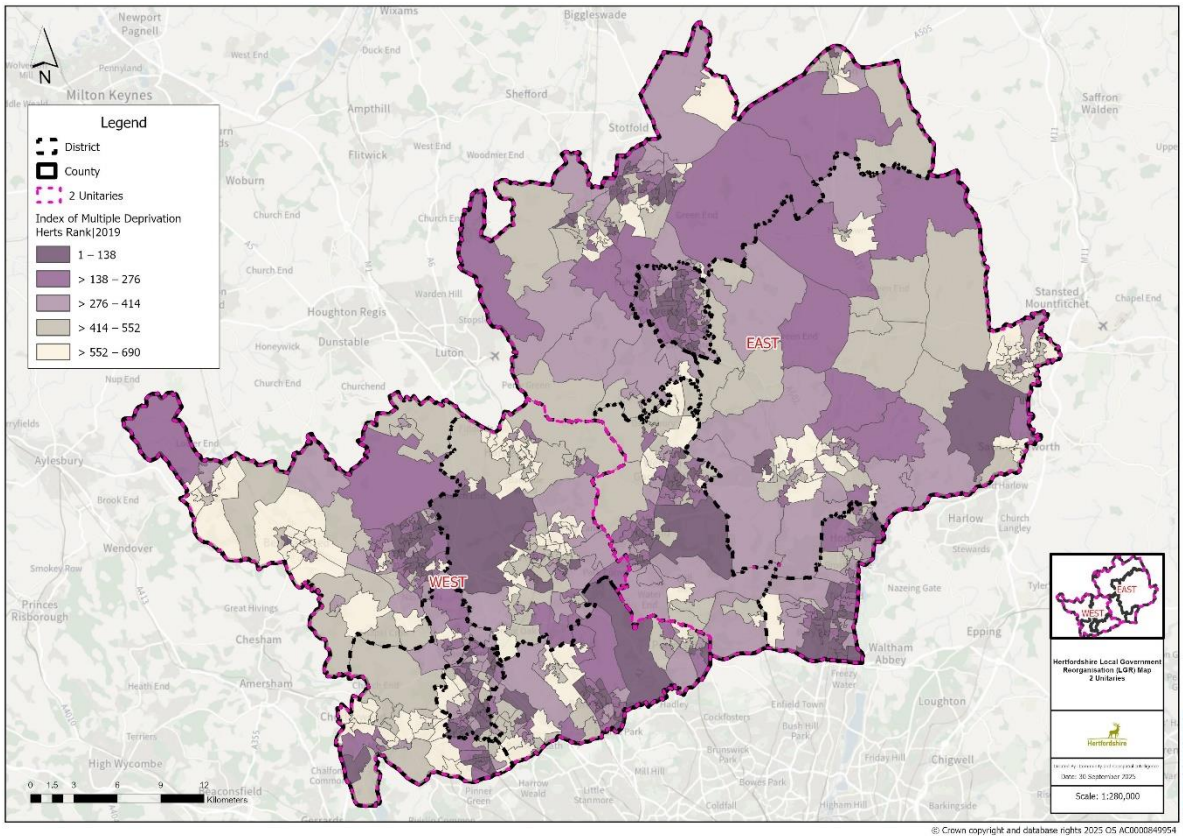
[10] *Source: LGR Acorn Analysis, September 2025 (HCC)*
[11] *Source: LGR Acorn Analysis: Breakdown of Hertfordshire Personas, September 2025 (HCC)*

Affluent Families	19%	14%	**16%**
Comfortable Neighbourhoods	34%	35%	**34%**
Stretched Families	13%	19%	**16%**
Young financially stretched	11%	13%	**12%**
Struggling Elders	1%	2%	**1%**

These differences correlate with housing pressures: West Hertfordshire's affluence is reflected in **higher house prices and lower social housing availability**, while East Hertfordshire's more stretched profile aligns with **greater affordable housing need and demand for supported accommodation**.

The 2UA model ensures each authority can shape housing strategies that reflect the distinct needs and characteristics of their communities - supporting more responsive, equitable and place-based planning within a shared strategic framework.

DeprivatioMAP 3[12]: Index of Multiple Deprivation



Map 3 evidences a clear spatial pattern across the proposed East and West Hertfordshire boundaries. **East Hertfordshire contains a greater share of neighbourhoods ranked among the most deprived nationally**, particularly in Stevenage, Broxbourne and parts of North Hertfordshire. In contrast, **West Hertfordshire has a higher concentration of areas ranked among the least deprived**, notably in St Albans, Three Rivers and parts of Dacorum.

[12] Source: HCC

This pattern is reinforced by detailed deprivation metrics across 10 domains from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[13]. **East Hertfordshire consistently shows higher levels of deprivation** than West Hertfordshire in areas such as:

- **Education, Skills and Training** (East: 12% vs West: 8%)
- **Health Deprivation and Disability** (East: 11% vs West: 9%)
- **Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI)** (East: 12% vs West: 8%)
- **Crime** (East: 11% vs West: 9%)

These figures highlight the need for **targeted, place-based interventions** in East Hertfordshire, particularly in education, health and child poverty. The 2UA model ensures each authority can respond to these distinct deprivation profiles with tailored strategies, ensuring resources are allocated where they are most needed. It also supports strategic coherence by aligning deprivation patterns with existing service footprints and partner geographies. This allows for more **equitable resource allocation**, targeted early intervention, and place-based commissioning - particularly in areas such as housing, education, public health and employment support.

Infrastructure and Service Demand

The 2UA model ensures that both East and West Hertfordshire have the scale, infrastructure and strategic coherence to deliver high quality services from vesting day and beyond. Each geography contains a balanced footprint of public assets - including hospitals, libraries, fire stations, civic offices and leisure centres - supporting equitable access and delivering continuity in service delivery. This is evidenced in **Table 4** and visualised in **Map 3**, which demonstrates parity across key infrastructure categories, confirming operational readiness and balanced leadership capacity.

Service demand data across Adult Social Care, Children's Services, education and public protection shows by a significant degree, **the greatest parity across all the proposed models**. This is detailed in **Table 5** which highlights comparable volumes of activity across long-term care, safeguarding, and education services. This balance supports equitable outcomes and confirms that both authorities have the capacity to manage demand effectively from day one.

The model reflects existing service footprints and partner geographies, reducing transition risk and avoiding disruption to high-risk services such as safeguarding, SEND, waste and emergency response. It ensures smarter commissioning and integrated planning, with locality-based delivery models that remain rooted in place. Community hubs and neighbourhood teams will ensure services are tailored to local needs, strengthening relationships between residents and their councils and improving responsiveness.

The 2UA model builds climate resilience into infrastructure planning, enabling strategic, place-based approaches to climate adaptation, ensuring that highways and transport services are designed to withstand extreme weather events and long-term environmental pressures. Coordinated investment in sustainable drainage, green infrastructure, and low-carbon transport networks helps mitigate climate risks while supporting national net zero goals. Larger authorities are better positioned to embed resilience into asset management, emergency response planning, and community engagement, ensuring infrastructure remains safe, reliable, and future-proof.

[13] Source: Local Government Statistical Selection Model (HCC)

Cultural services - including libraries, museums, heritage sites and community arts programmes - are recognised as vital components of Hertfordshire's civic infrastructure. The 2UA model ensures consistent and equitable access to these services while allowing for locally responsive provision that reflects the distinct identities of East and West Hertfordshire. With strategic oversight and scale, the new authorities will be better placed to attract external funding, support cultural innovation and align cultural investment with broader place-based goals.

The model also supports integration across housing, health, education and employment services, delivering early intervention and preventative approaches. It provides the scale and coherence needed to embed digital transformation, predictive analytics and smarter commissioning across both authorities - driving innovation and improving outcomes for residents. These capabilities underpin long-term financial resilience and service sustainability.

Map 3[14]: Distribution of Key Infrastructure and Service Assets across Hertfordshire (2023)

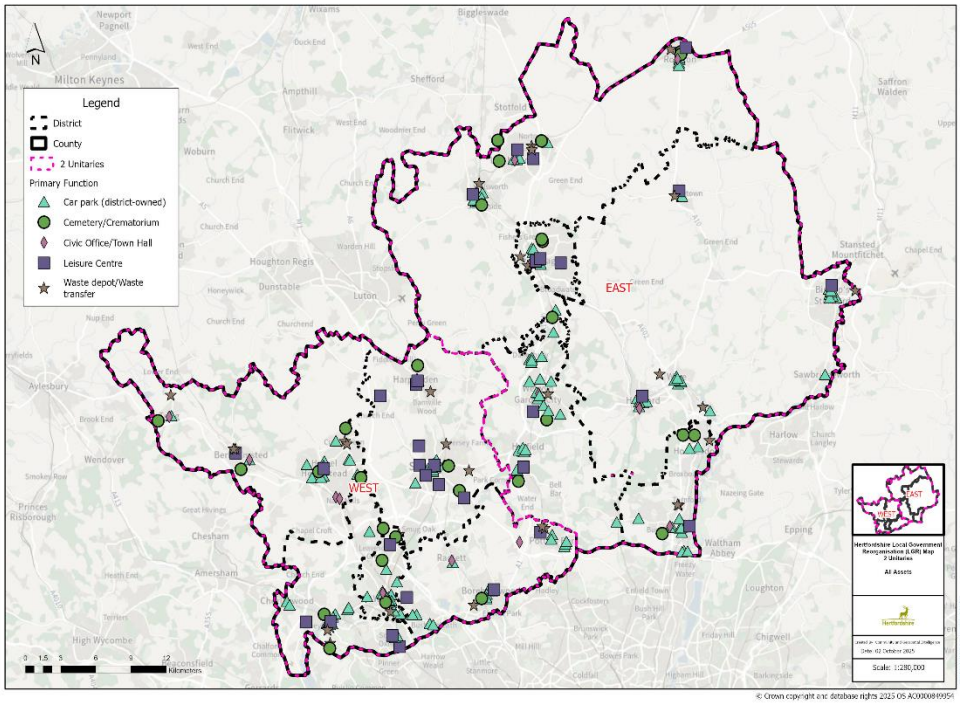


Table 4[15]

Assets	West	East
Number of Hospitals	18	16
Number of Libraries	24	22
Number of Fire Stations	14	15
Number of Recycling stations	8	8

[14] Source: HCC

[15] Source: Local Government Reorganisation Statistical Selection Model (HCC)

Number of Waste Transfer stations	17	15
Total Highways Length - km	2,228	2,853
Number of Leisure centres	18	13
Number of Civic offices	12	10
Number of Cemeteries & Crematoria	15	14

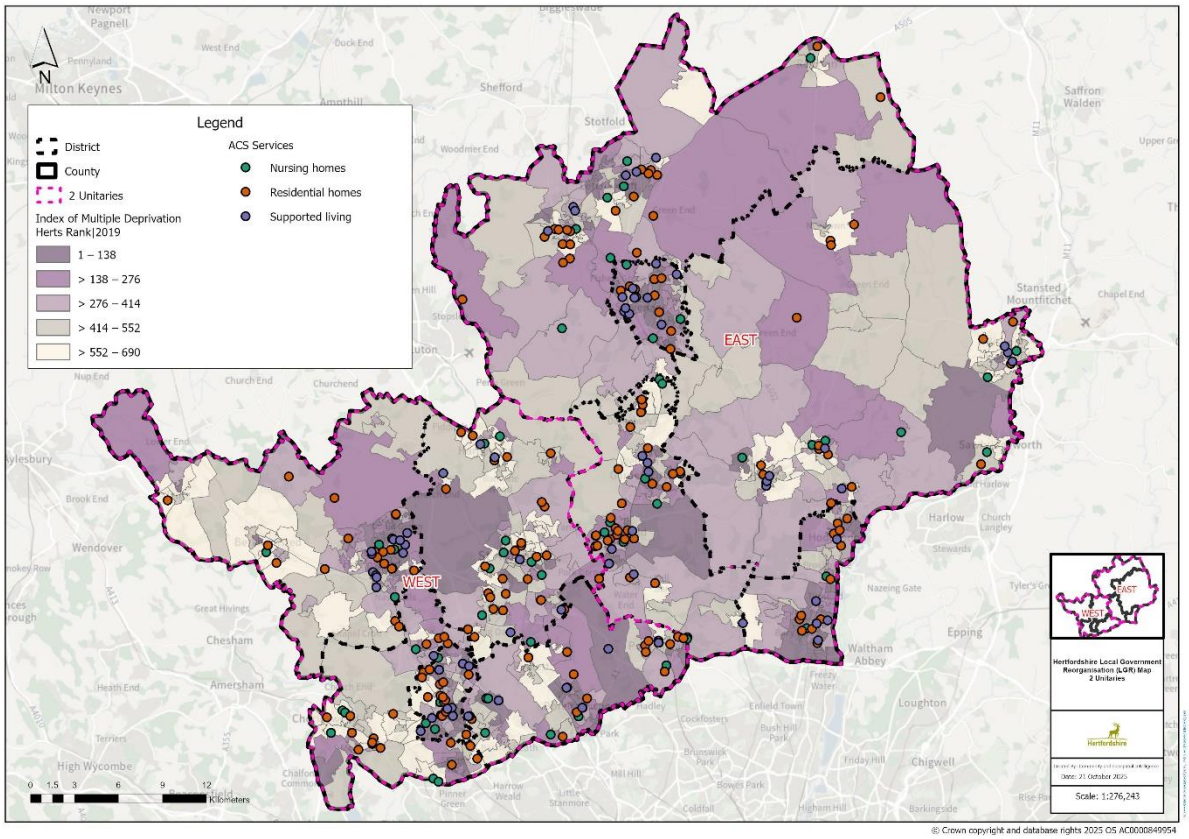
Table 5[16]

Services Demands	West	East
Adults in Long Term Nursing	433	483
Adults in Long Term Residential	928	940
Adults in Long Term Homecare	1,729	1,834
Number of Adult Care Services (ACS) Assessments (Adults)	8,296	7,205
Number of Residential/Nursing settings	132	117
Number of Homecare/Supported Living settings	149	171
Number of Children Looked After (CLA) (plus distributed SMC)	464	522
Children with a Child Protection (CP) Plan	266	370
Children's Services assessments in FY (plus distributed SMC)	2,698	2,750
Number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	6,757	7,929
Number of Children's Residential Settings	18	45
Registered Children's Beds	282	454

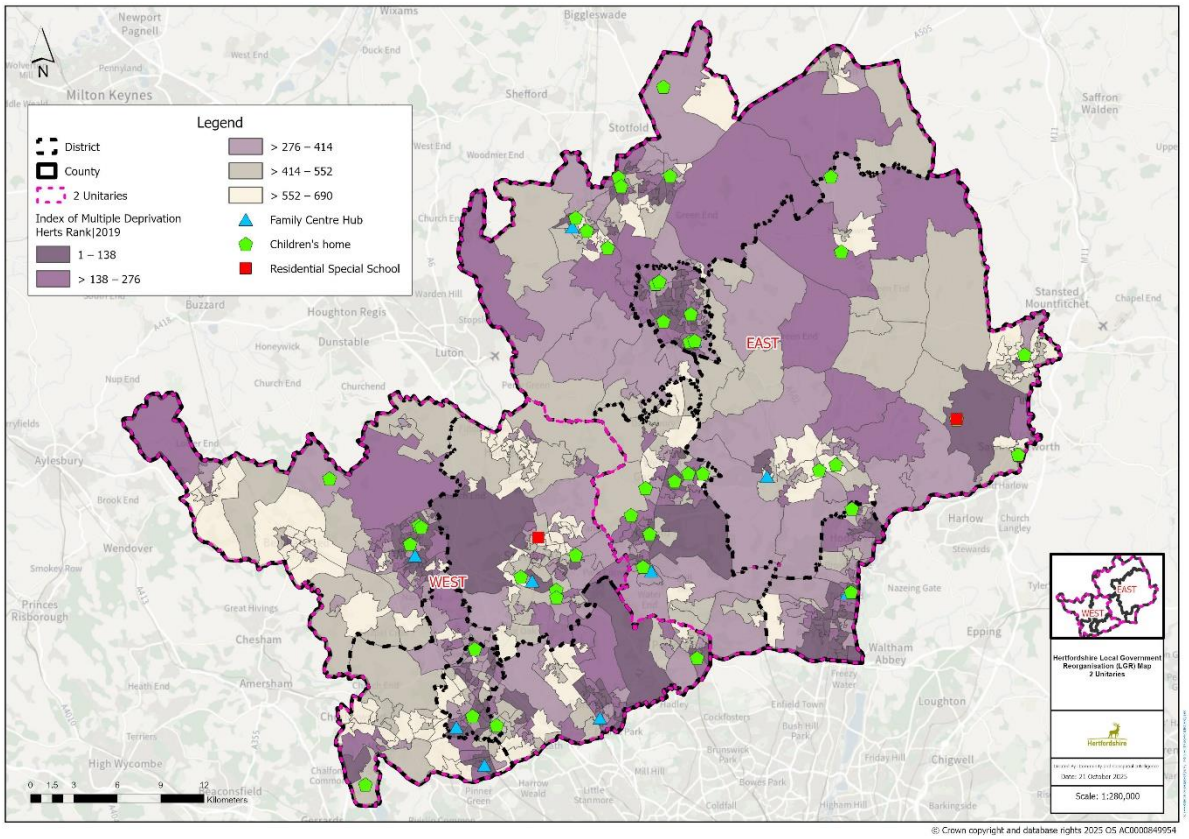
Mapping data, which sets out the service points for adult and children's social care evidences how the 2UA proposal delivers the most effective, balanced & resilient model for residents. The proposed 2UA model avoids the risk of residents presenting critical needs but facing unitaries which have limited capacity to respond.

Map [4]: Alignment of Adult Social Care service points with deprivation

[16] Source: Local Government Reorganisation Statistical Selection Model (HCC)

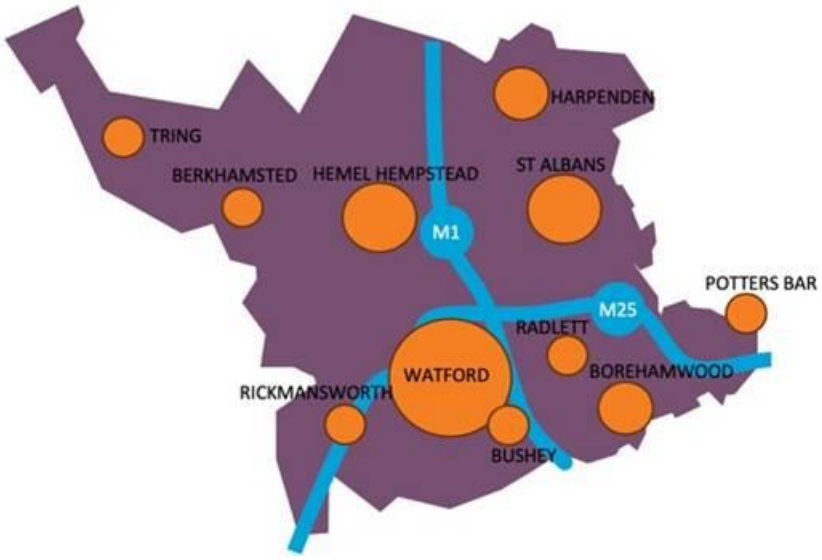


Map [5]: Alignment of Childrens Social Care service points with deprivation



West Hertfordshire: confident, connected and creatively charged

West Hertfordshire blends urban vibrancy with rural character, underpinned by a rich civic and cultural heritage. From the Roman legacy of St Albans to its role as the spiritual heart of the county, the area reflects centuries of civic leadership and innovation. Today, it is home to thriving sectors including film and TV production, professional services and clean technologies, supported by exceptional connectivity to London and beyond. This unique mix of history, place and ambition positions West Hertfordshire as a *confident and forward-looking region, ready to lead and grow.*



West Hertfordshire is a sizeable economic area. It generates economic output (measured as GVA) of over **£27.3 billion** through **34,000 enterprises** and **411,000 jobs**. Its resident population of around 625,222 is projected to grow by 15% **(or 96,000people)** by 2045 (internal projection). This reinforces the need for strategic planning and resilient service delivery. [17]

It is distinctively polycentric, with three major towns (the modern business centre of **Watford**, the post war New Town of **Hemel Hempstead**, and ancient **St Albans)**, several smaller towns and a significant rural area, much of it within Metropolitan Green Belt and some within the Chilterns National Landscape.

Connectivity and Infrastructure

West Hertfordshire benefits from **exceptional connectivity** with the **M1, M25, and West Coast Mainline,** with about a third of its land within the **M25** and the **London Underground** network extending into this area. Historic transport routes such as **Watling Street**, the **Grand Union Canal** and the **Metropolitan Railway** reinforce its role as a strategic gateway between London and the South East. The 2UA model provides an opportunity to rebalance this relationship, ensuring West Hertfordshire can define its own strategic identity and reduce reliance on London through more **self-contained growth.**

Civic and Cultural Identity

St Albans, with its Roman heritage and Cathedral, serves as the spiritual heart of the county. Its civic significance is long standing, from its role in the Magna Carta to its place in the Wars of the Roses. **Watford's urban area exceeds 130,000** (compared to the current borough which has a population of about 100,000). The town is well positioned to pursue **city status**, with significant cultural and sporting amenities, strong connectivity and a confident civic identity. West Hertfordshire's rural landscape has

[17] *Source: Local Government Reorganisation Statistical Selection Model – HCC*

historically shaped its identity and economy, with industries such as paper, silk, and brewing reflecting its relationship with water and land.

Strategic Links and Sub-Regional Opportunities

West Hertfordshire is strategically positioned as a **gateway to London and the South East**, with strong commuting flows and economic ties to the capital. Its proximity to major transport corridors such as the **M1, M25**, and **West Coast Mainline**, as well as **Luton Airport**, supports high levels of labour mobility and business connectivity.

It also unlocks stronger economic synergies between **Watford and Hemel Hempstead**. The two towns are **less than ten minutes apart by rail**, and yet they orient in opposite directions - Watford towards London, and Hemel Hempstead towards Luton. This presents a unique opportunity to strengthen shared growth and labour market integration.

Similarly, developing **the Abbey Line** could enhance links between **Watford and St Albans**, improving connectivity, supporting modal shift, and delivering more integrated planning across the sub-region. These connections reinforce West Hertfordshire's role in the **London–Luton–Milton Keynes growth arc**, and the 2UA model enables the area to define its own strategic identity, reduce reliance on London, and pursue **self-contained, place-based growth** aligned with national priorities.

Economic Strengths and Sectoral Clusters

West Hertfordshire hosts several nationally significant sectors aligned with the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy:

- **Professional and business services:** Major hubs in Watford and St Albans tap into the London-facing labour market. Growth is constrained by housing affordability, but developments such as **Hemel Garden Communities** offer solutions.
- **Film and TV:** The greater Watford area hosts major studios and has secured considerable recent investment, opening the potential for regional collaboration across Buckinghamshire, Surrey and Berkshire. This would reflect the sector's functional economic geography and allow for a more effective response to growth constraints such as skills and workforce development.
- **Agri-tech:** Anchored by Rothamsted Research, there is scope to strengthen links between Harpenden and Hemel Hempstead to unlock growth.

Anchor Institutions and Assets

As the **Place Profile Summary** below shows, West Hertfordshire is home to key anchor institutions including West Herts College, the Building Research Establishment (BRE), and Rothamsted Research, which support innovation, skills development and sectoral growth. This strategic coherence ensures West Hertfordshire will contribute fully to national priorities while responding to local needs.

BRE and Rothamsted Research are two nationally significant anchor institutions in West Hertfordshire. The Building Research Establishment (BRE), based in Watford, is a leading centre for innovation in the built environment, sustainability and construction standards. It plays a key role in the Herts IQ Enterprise Zone and works closely with public sector partners to support research, skills development and policy innovation - particularly in areas such as housing, energy efficiency and climate resilience. Rothamsted Research, located in Harpenden, is one of the oldest agricultural research institutions in the world and continues to lead in agri-tech and environmental science. Its strategic collaborations with local authorities and universities support innovation in food systems, land use and rural economy. Together, these institutions offer significant opportunities for joint working under the 2UA model.

Planning and growth

Two major programmes anchor West Hertfordshire's growth agenda:

Hemel Garden Communities (HGC): A transformational programme delivering up to 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs to the north and east of Hemel Hempstead by 2050. It includes new schools, healthcare facilities, green infrastructure and sustainable transport. Led by a partnership of Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City & District Council, Hertfordshire County Council, and supported by Hertfordshire Futures, HGC is a nationally recognised exemplar of garden town development.

Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter (Herts IQ): Is a designated Enterprise Zone focused on clean growth, construction innovation and environmental technologies. It is backed by private and public sector partners including, The Crown Estate, Building Research Establishment (BRE), Rothamsted Research and University of Hertfordshire. The site will deliver 3 million sq. ft of commercial space, just 30 minutes outside London.

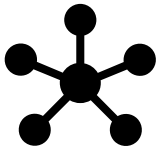
West Herts College plays a pivotal role in supporting the construction and clean growth sectors through its specialist programmes in modern methods of construction (MMC), engineering, and building services. The college offers apprenticeships and technical training aligned to the needs of Herts IQ and Hemel Garden Communities, including off-site construction and sustainable building techniques.

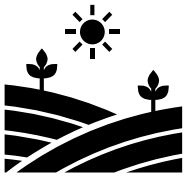
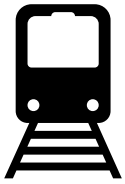
South West Hertfordshire Joint Spatial Plan

The South West Hertfordshire Joint Spatial Plan provides a locally determined strategy for housing and infrastructure across Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers and Watford. The 2UA model formalises this geography, ensuring accelerated delivery, strategic coherence, and joined-up planning across housing, transport and employment.

West Hertfordshire has the **scale, connectivity** and **sectoral strength** to chart its own course. The 2UA model ensures it can do so with clarity and coherence - supporting strategic planning, reducing out-commuting, and strengthening civic and economic identity.

West Hertfordshire: Place Profile Summary



Sectors: Agri-tech/ Clean Industries; Construction; Film and TV; Professional and Business Services

Key developments: Hemel Garden Communities; Hertfordshire IQ Enterprise Zone**;** Watford Junction; Watford Riverwell

Education/anchor institutions: Building Research Establishment (BRE); Rothamsted Research; West Herts College

Major companies: Bourne Leisure; Costco; Elstree Studios; Imagination Technologies; JD Wetherspoons; Majestic Wines; Sky Studios Elstree; TJX Europe; Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden;

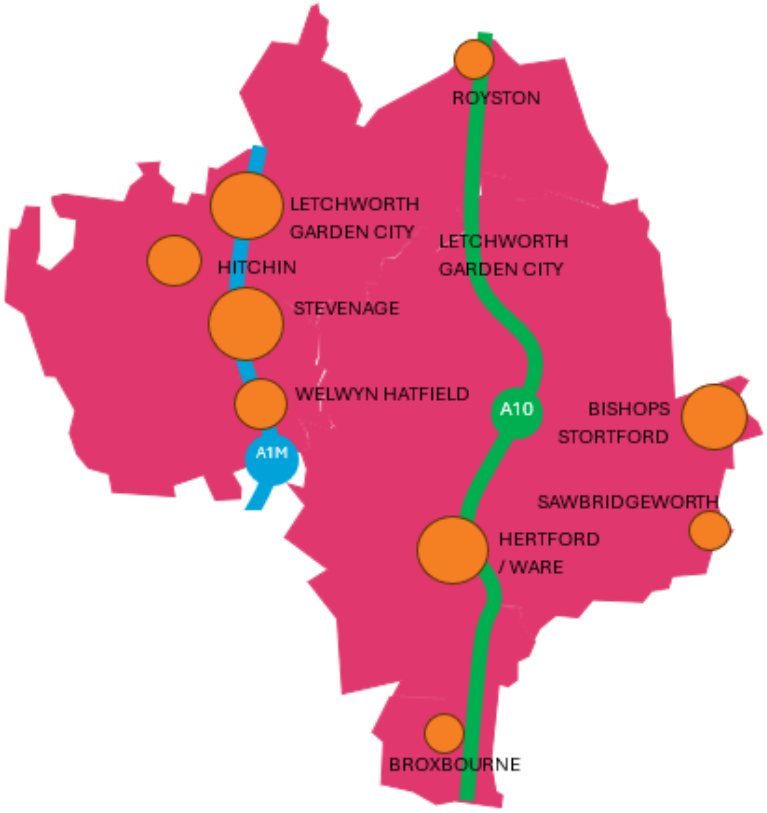
Culture/Heritage: Berkhamsted Castle; Frogmore Paper Trail; St Albans Cathedral; Tring Natural History Museum; Watford Museum; Palace Theatre; Verulamium Roman ruins

Green Spaces/Places of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): Chilterns National Landscape (AONB) including Ashridge Estate and Tring Park; Cassiobury Park; Verulamium Park; Whippendell Wood (Site of Special Scientific Interest);

Connectivity: Luton Airport; M1; M25, West Coast Mainline

East Hertfordshire: Pioneering, purposeful and poised for growth

East Hertfordshire blends rural character with cutting-edge capability. From the Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn to the post-war innovation of Stevenage, it has long been a place of planned growth and civic ambition. The area also played a pivotal role in British aviation history, with Hatfield serving as the home of the de Havilland Aircraft Company - a legacy that continues to shape its strengths in aerospace and advanced manufacturing. Today, East Hertfordshire is a nationally significant hub for life sciences, defence and digital technologies, with strong strategic links to Cambridge and the Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor. With a spirit of enterprise and a legacy of purposeful development, it is well-positioned to lead sustainable innovation and inclusive growth.



East Hertfordshire is home to **610,569 people**, and its population is projected to grow rapidly – by **24% (or 147,000 residents)** – in the period to 2045 (internal projection). It generates economic output of about **£22bn in GVA**. It is home to **27,000 enterprises** and **314,000 jobs**[18] with a sizeable and dynamic economy with significant assets and strategic potential.

The area is defined by two key transport corridors: the **A1(M)** and **East Coast Mainline** linking **Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City** and **Hatfield** to **Hitchin, Letchworth** and **Baldock** to the north. The **A10 corridor** connects **Broxbourne**, **Ware**, and **Hertford** to the wider region. This could be harnessed further in the future, particularly given the need to accelerate housing growth.

These towns support a mix of historic and future growth with a mix of market towns, Garden Cities of (Letchworth Garden City and Welwyn Garden City), and post-war New Towns (Stevenage, Hatfield)) forming a diverse and strategically important blueprint for the built environment.

[18] *Source: Local Government Reorganisation Statistical Selection Model (HCC)*

Connectivity and Infrastructure

East Hertfordshire benefits from strong connectivity via the **A1(M)**, **A10**, **M25**, and **East Coast Mainline**, with proximity to both **London Stansted Airport** (east) and **London Luton Airport** (west). These transport links support employment, trade, and mobility, and position East Hertfordshire as a key contributor to regional and national growth.

Civic and Cultural Identity

East Hertfordshire's geography includes a mix of market towns, post-war developments, and agricultural areas shaped by rivers flowing into the **River Lea**. Historic industries such as brewing and malting have evolved into modern sectors including **aviation**, **space**, and **life sciences**, particularly around **Stevenage**. It supports a mix of historic and future growth with a mix of market towns, Garden Cities of (Letchworth Garden City and Welwyn Garden City), and post-war New Towns (Stevenage, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead) forming a diverse and strategically important blueprint for the built environment.

Strategic links and sub-regional opportunities

East Hertfordshire has strong strategic links to the **Cambridge sub-region** and is well-positioned within the **Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor**. These connections support labour market integration, sectoral collaboration, and housing delivery.

Its proximity to **London Stansted** and **London Luton Airports** enhances its role in international trade and mobility. The area also benefits from connections to other parts of **Cambridgeshire** and **Essex**, particularly through the **West Anglia Mainline** and **M11**, supporting growth in locations such as **Gilston** and **Harlow**.

Economic Strengths and Sectoral Clusters

East Hertfordshire hosts several nationally significant sectors aligned with the Government's **Modern Industrial Strategy**:

- **Life Sciences**: Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City, Ware, Bishop's Stortford, and Royston form a nationally significant cluster with strong links to Cambridge.
- **Advanced Manufacturing, Aerospace & Defence**: Stevenage, Letchworth, and Royston anchor this sector, with strategic connections to Bedfordshire and the wider growth corridor.
- **AI & Data Centres**: Waltham Cross is home to major infrastructure such as Google's data centre, with potential for clustering and innovation.
- **Housing & Growth**: Gilston is a major focus for planned housing growth, with opportunities to align with life sciences and employment hubs.

Planning and growth

East Hertfordshire is at the heart of one of the UK's most ambitious housing and infrastructure programmes: the **Harlow & Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)**. With a projected population increase of over 163,000 by 2045, the area requires a governance model capable of delivering strategic planning, infrastructure coordination and sustainable growth at scale.

The **Gilston Area**, located to the north of Harlow, is a key component of the HGGT designation. It will deliver **10,000 new homes**, including:

- **8,500 homes** across six villages by **Places for People**

- **1,500 homes** in a seventh village by **Taylor Wimpey**

The development includes:

- **£1.3 billion** in infrastructure investment
- New **primary and secondary schools**
- Healthcare, leisure, retail and employment space
- Extensive **green infrastructure**, including parks, community gardens and country parks
- Strategic transport upgrades, including the **Central and Eastern Stort Crossings**

Planning permission was granted by **East Herts District Council** in January 2025, following one of the largest Section 106 agreements in the country.

The HGGT programme is a collaboration between:

- East Herts District Council
- Harlow Council
- Epping Forest District Council
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Essex County Council
- Homes England
- Places for People

The Gilston development addresses significant challenges to existing housing markets, transport corridors and service footprints. The 2UA model formalises this geography, delivering:

- **Accelerated delivery** of housing and infrastructure
- **Strategic coherence** across planning, transport and community services
- **Alignment with the Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor**, reinforcing East Hertfordshire's role in regional economic development

The Gilston site is already embedded within a coherent strategic geography - one that aligns with housing markets, NHS footprints, and transport corridors. The 2UA model strengthens this alignment, ensuring East Hertfordshire will lead decisively on delivery.

Anchor institutions and assets

East Hertfordshire is home to key anchor institutions including the University of Hertfordshire, North Herts College, Hertford Regional College, Oaklands College, and the Royal Veterinary College. These institutions are key pillars which drive workforce development, innovation, and sectoral growth.

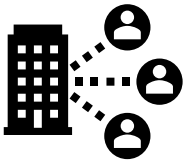
The University of Hertfordshire (UH) is a particularly significant anchor institution in East Hertfordshire. The **Hertfordshire Civic University Partnership** between UH and Hertfordshire County Council is a formal agreement designed to build and maintain a strategic and purposeful relationship between the two organisations. It identifies and oversees joint projects that positively impact students, staff, communities and businesses across the county. The Partnership is underpinned by a Board chaired by the Director of Public Health and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise), which sets out strategic priorities and workstreams, and expands collaboration in fields of shared interest and expertise.

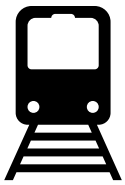
The 2UA model ensures East Hertfordshire will build on its strategic assets and respond to distinct economic opportunities:

- **Strong links to the Cambridge sub-region:** Cambridge has been identified for accelerated housing growth and is pivotal within the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. There is a clear opportunity for East Hertfordshire to position itself in this sub-region supporting labour market delivery and sectoral collaboration. These links are very much less strong in West Hertfordshire.
- **Proximity to London Stansted Airport (on its eastern boundary) and London Luton Airport (to the west):** This creates an opportunity for employment, trade and supply chain development; it will also bring amenity value to businesses looking to trade internationally and people seeking to travel. This would require co-ordinated planning to manage growth and mitigate risks.

By formalising this geography, the 2UA model supports strategic planning, unlocks sectoral growth, and ensures East Hertfordshire will contribute fully to national priorities while responding to local needs.

East Hertfordshire: Place Profile Summary





Sectors: Advanced Manufacturing; AI and Data Centres, Defence; Life Sciences

Key developments: Growing Baldock; Gilston area (part of Harlow Gilston Garden Town); Stevenage Town Centre (SG1); Elevate Quarter (life sciences); Brookfield Riverside and Garden Village;

Education/anchor institutions: University of Hertfordshire; North Herts College; Hertford Regional College; Oaklands College; Royal Veterinary College

Major companies: Airbus Defence and Space; Computacenter; Eisai; Google; GSK; Johnson Matthey; MBDA; Roche; Willmott Dixon

Culture/Heritage: Hatfield House; Gordon Craig Theatre; Hertford Castle; Hertford Theatre; Knebworth House; Royston Cave; Shaw's Corner; Welwyn Roman Baths; historic market towns (Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Ware): Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities

Green spaces/Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): Lee Valley Nature Reserve; Panshanger Park; Therfield Heath (Site of Special Scientific Interest SSSI); Broxbourne Woods (Hertfordshire's only National Nature Reserve

Connectivity: London Stansted (East); London Luton (West); A10, A1M, M25, East Coast Mainline

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The 2UA model delivers the most **cost effective** and **financially resilient** solution for Hertfordshire's future. It delivers the highest level of projected savings and the fastest payback on transition costs, creating the conditions for long-term stability, investment in core services and inclusive growth.

Annual savings are almost double the level of 3UA, and almost four times the level of the 4UA proposal (under high-cost scenario). Under this scenario it is the only option that can pay back transition costs within 5 years and generate a surplus.

Under these assumptions, the two unitary model delivers £79 million in cumulative savings over five years (by 2032/33) – but then with transition costs paid off – the surplus rises substantially to £366m over ten years – significantly higher than other options.

Operating at a larger scale ensures that each authority stronger financial planning capability, better risk management and greater purchasing power. This scale also creates the conditions to tackle complex, cross-cutting challenges, with greater strategic capacity, stronger partnerships and more coherent planning across wider geographies. It also provides the flexibility to absorb future demand pressures, particularly in high-cost areas such as Adult Social Care, housing and Children's Services – supporting our most vulnerable residents , while maintaining service quality and workforce stability.

The financial scale of the 2UA authorities also means that those councils:

- are most able to withstand risks inherent in the business case assumption
- Are most able to deliver the necessary transformation and change
- Are most able to deliver critical services to residents from day 1

As well as delivering the highest level of savings, the 2UA proposition is best able to manage and mitigate these wider financial risks as follows.

Transformation:

- As outlined elsewhere in this proposal, both children's services and adult social care have an excellent track record in developing and delivering groundbreaking transformation programmes – including Family safeguarding (children's) and Connect and Prevent (adult care)
- One of the key lessons in developing these programmes (and then supporting roll out across Hertfordshire for Family Safeguarding) is the necessary scale to be able to develop and deliver such programmes. It is also crucial that you have a structure that enables the right partnership working (for example with Health in adult care)

Service delivery at scale

- The county council currently delivers high quality services – with many rated good or outstanding. Being able to maintain scale in within 2UA will mean a greater chance of this being maintained. There is a clear link between service performance and financial performance – with those councils with poorly performing services (especially in Children's Services and Adult Care) also more likely to be facing financial difficulties
- This submission also outlines how the 2UA proposition will enable greater equity and access to services – given their geographical locations (including key services such and children's homes, nursing care provision and SEND places). Greater numbers of unitary councils risk not only access to services – but the cost pressure that comes from not having that capacity locally.

Delivery of LGR savings

- As outlined above, scale gives greater ability to deliver:
    - Safe and legal services from day one
    - The transformation needed as part of LGR
    - The wider service transformation needed to maintain excellent services
- Each council will need to identify the resourcing needed to deliver LGR and wider change. The 2UA proposition means there is a greater likelihood of having access to the people needed, and also having the greater pooling of reserves and asset sales to fund the substantial transition costs

District and community services

- One of the major concerns in local government is that increasing costs in social care could eventually mean that there is very little funding available for all other services which is crucial to communities and residents.
- Ensuring that the most efficient structures are in place for local government in Hertfordshire will maximise the funding available for the broad range of services residents rely on.

Ultimately, the two unitary model provides the scale to invest in preventative services, the flexibility to respond to future challenges, and the stability to deliver consistent, high-quality services for all residents.

CONTEXT

All eleven authorities in Hertfordshire have worked together with an external consultancy to develop a shared financial model and set of assumptions. The process that has been followed and the detail behind these assumptions is set out in detail within the accompanying "spine" document and technical appendix.

Important contextual points to note are:

- Chief Financial Officers of all eleven authorities have used best endeavours to follow a robust methodology and to develop a comprehensive and reasonable set of assumptions for the purposes of assessing the likely impacts, costs and savings arising from local government reorganisation. Significant uncertainties remain in several key areas and further due diligence is required on elements of our proposal, and so the results should be seen as an indication of future impacts rather than a firm prediction.
- Modelling assumptions have been accepted by all eleven organisations, including the use of ranges in key areas as detailed separately.
- The impact of the Fair Funding Review (FFR) is not reflected in our financial modelling because clear information is not available from government to enable this. We engaged with a third-party organisation to try to assess likely impacts but could not rely on the results as there are apparent conflicts with information from other sources and indications from government that modelling assumptions may change before FFR is finalised. Our understanding is that once implemented FFR may change both the quantum and distribution of revenue funding in Hertfordshire over the medium-term, which may have a material impact on the financial resilience of future unitary authorities.
- The scope of our modelling includes financial benefits and savings that arise directly and causally from the process of reorganisation; for example, removal of duplicate management posts and savings from having fewer elections. As a partnership we have not modelled any additional benefits or savings from additional transformation by new authorities once they have been created, which would have a further impact on the performance of new unitary authorities in practice.
- The financial model assumes is that new authorities will harmonise the District and Borough element of Council Tax at the taxbase-weighted average and then apply annual uplifts in line with

government assumptions on funding. In reality the levels of annual council tax increases will be a decision for future authorities.

Headline results – TWO unitary authorities

	Higher cost scenario	**Lower cost scenario**
MTFS – outperforms the two-tier baseline in	2031/32	2030/31
One-off investment costs required to deliver LGR	£102m	£85m
Annual recurring NET savings from LGR by year 5	£50m	£55m
Cumulative net (deficit) / surplus from LGR after 5 years	£79m	£113m
Cumulative net (deficit) / surplus from LGR after 10 years	£366m	£418m
Payback on LGR savings in	2031/32	2030/31

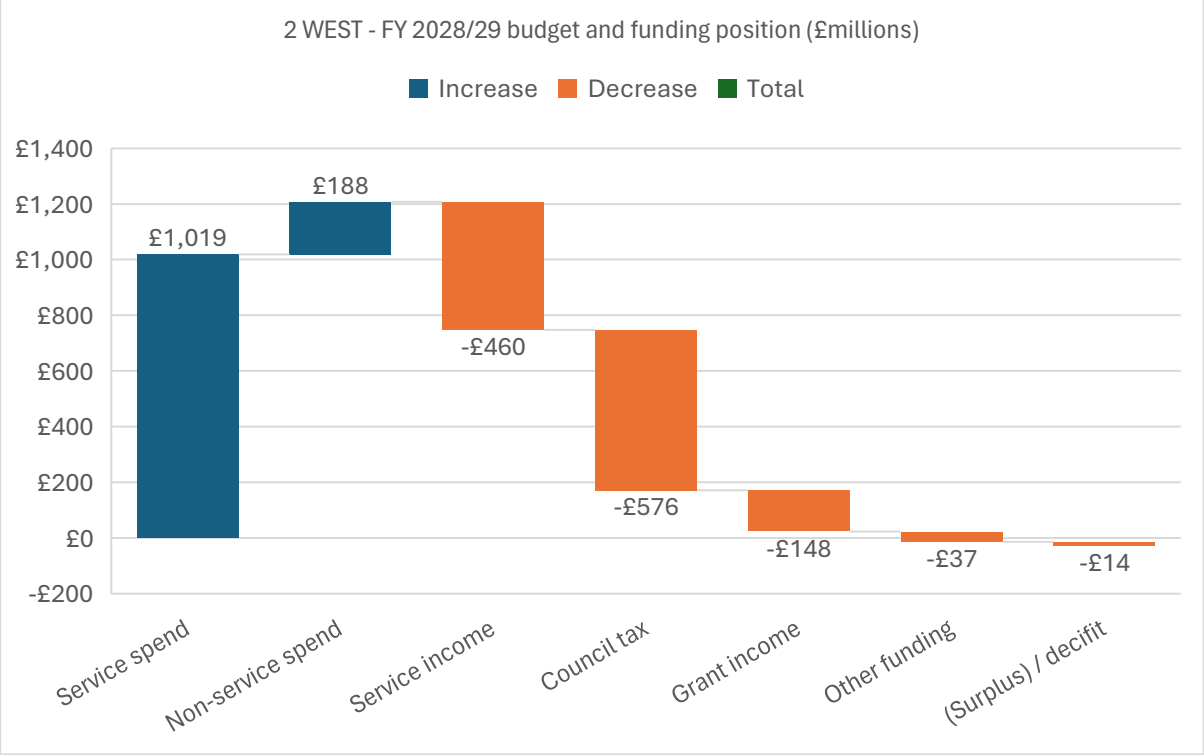
This summary scorecard shows the overall aggregate performance of the two unitary option. A further breakdown of the performance of individual authorities within this option is included later in this section. On an overall basis the headline results are:

- The two unitary authority option "outperforms" the two-tier baseline in 2030/31 in the lower-cost scenario and 2031/32 in the higher cost scenario; the fastest of all options. This means that the cumulative net savings from LGR alongside the ability to raise additional council tax, if future authorities choose to do so, mean that this provides greater financial resilience than would have been the case without LGR.
- Estimated up-front investment costs to deliver the two unitary option range from £85m under the lower cost scenario to £102m under the higher-cost scenario. A further breakdown of these cost estimates is provided below.
- By year 5 after LGR, assumed here to be 2032/33, all costs and savings from LGR are fully "phased-in". At this point the two unitary authority option will deliver recurring net annual savings of £50m - £55m over the baseline for predecessor authorities.
- Adding up all costs and savings from LGR on a cumulative basis, after five years the two unitary option will have saved a net total of £79m to £113m.
- After ten years, the cumulative savings indicate a range of £366m to £418m.
- Excluding council tax and focusing just on the "payback" from the costs of investing in LGR, this option "pays back" on investment costs in 2031/32 (four years after LGR) in the higher-cost scenario, or 2030/31 (three years after LGR) in the lower-cost scenario.

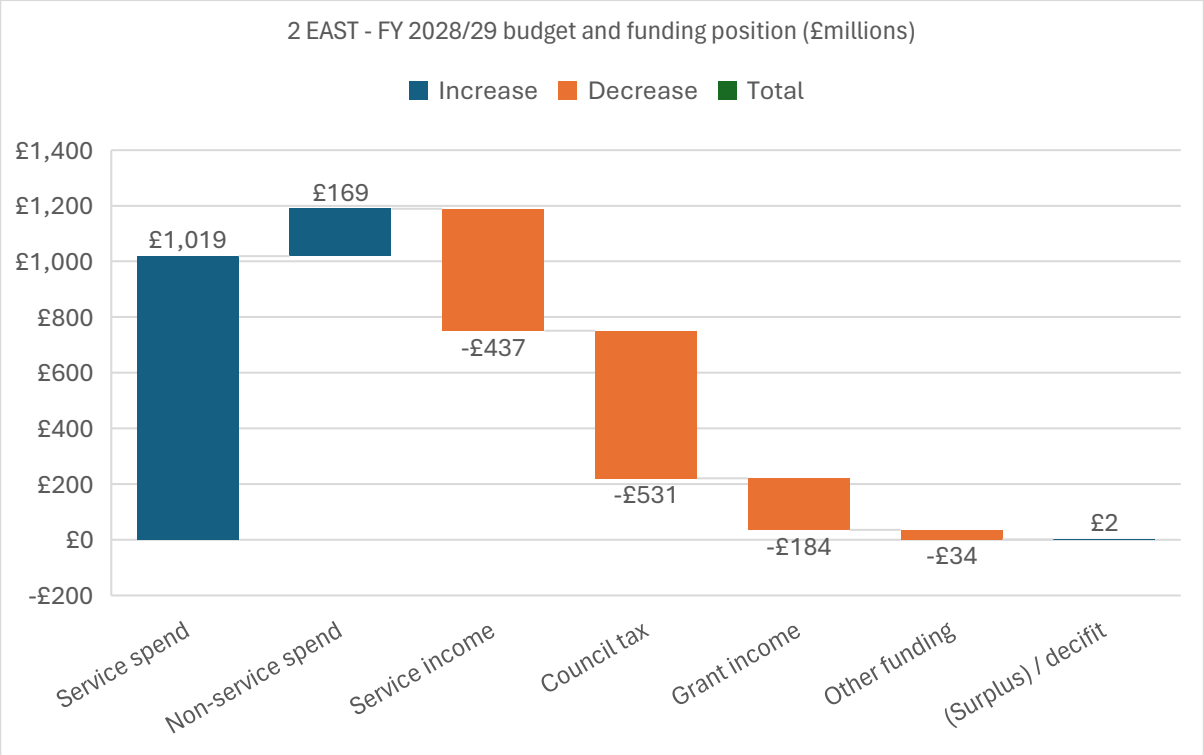
New unitary authorities – modelled budgets and funding position for year one (2028/29)

The graphs below show the anticipated year one budget for each proposed new unitary authority, excluding the initial costs and savings from LGR. On current assumptions and to different extents, new authorities will begin with opening surpluses or deficits based on modelled demand and service expenditure in each area, the likely funding of each area and the capacity of each area to generate Council Tax.

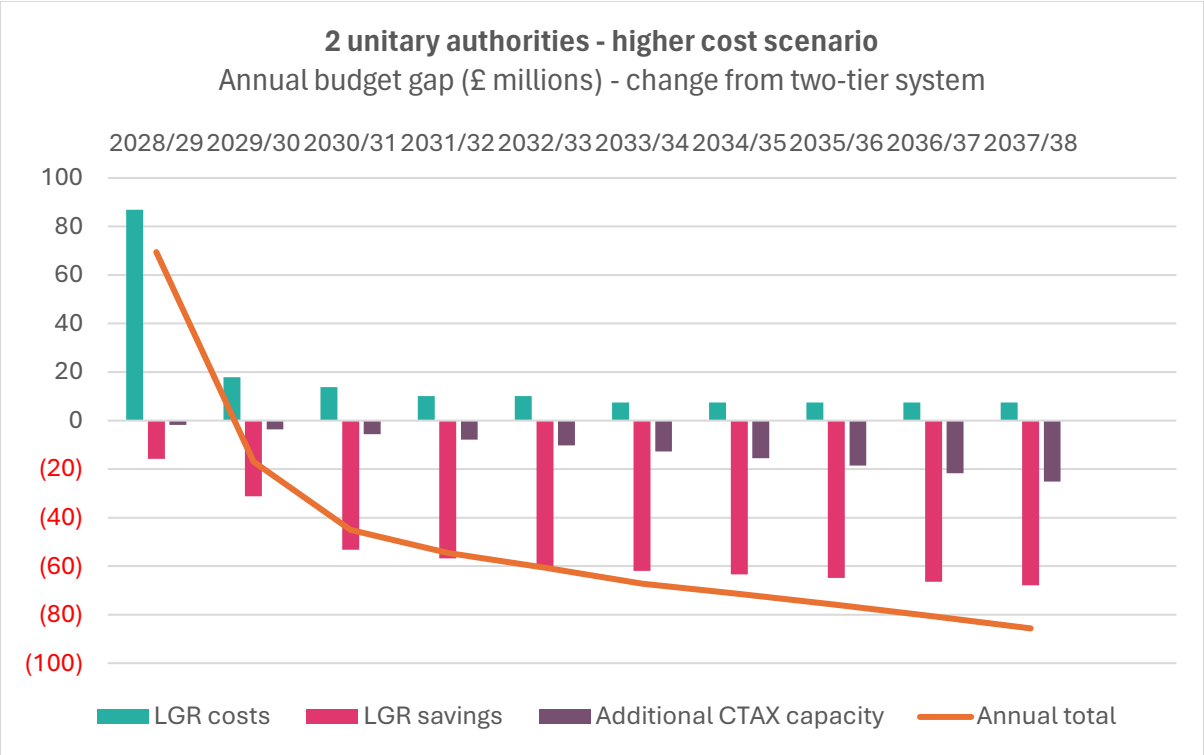
Year 1 budget and funding – 2 West

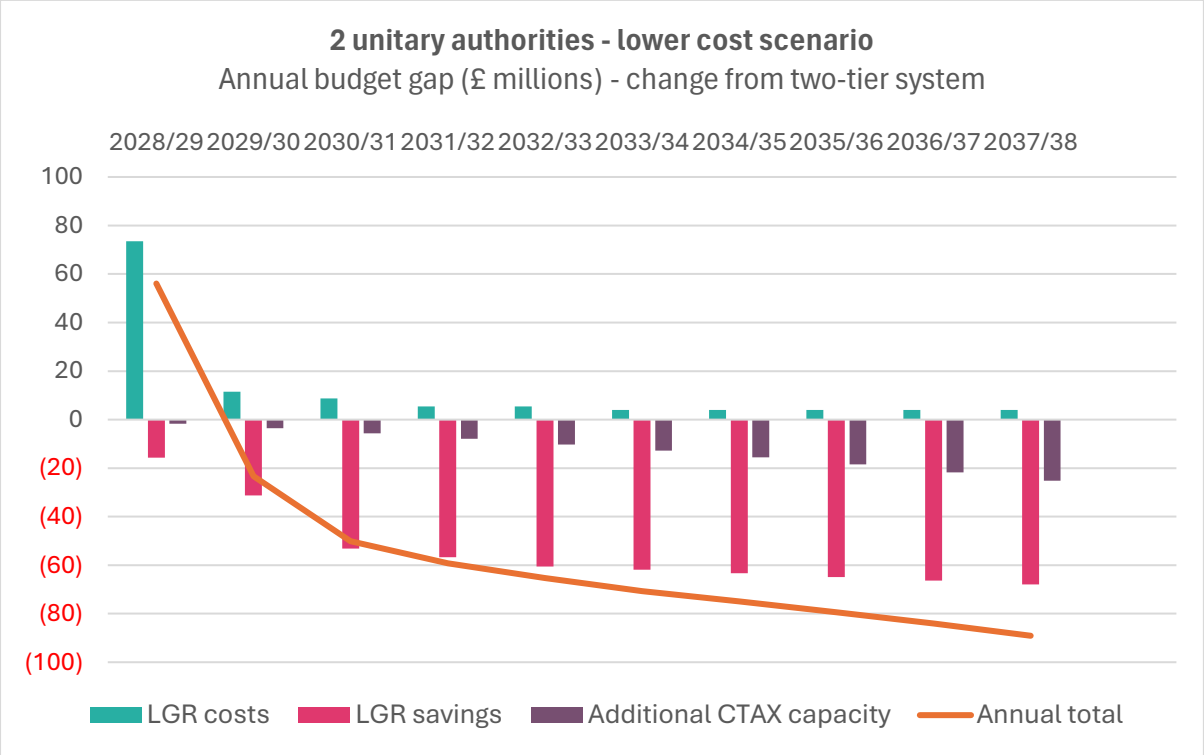


Year 1 budget and funding – 2 East



Performance against the two-tier baseline over time





These two graphs are shown in-year rather than on a cumulative basis and show the in-year difference from the two-tier baseline that is delivered by LGR under this option. The modelled two-tier baseline is shown as zero, and the estimated impacts of LGR are shown as increases or (decreases) from that baseline. The key finding is that despite significant up-front costs, implementing this option would rapidly make Hertfordshire better off overall than the two-tier baseline in both the lower and higher-cost scenarios. The different elements of the chart are summarised as follows:

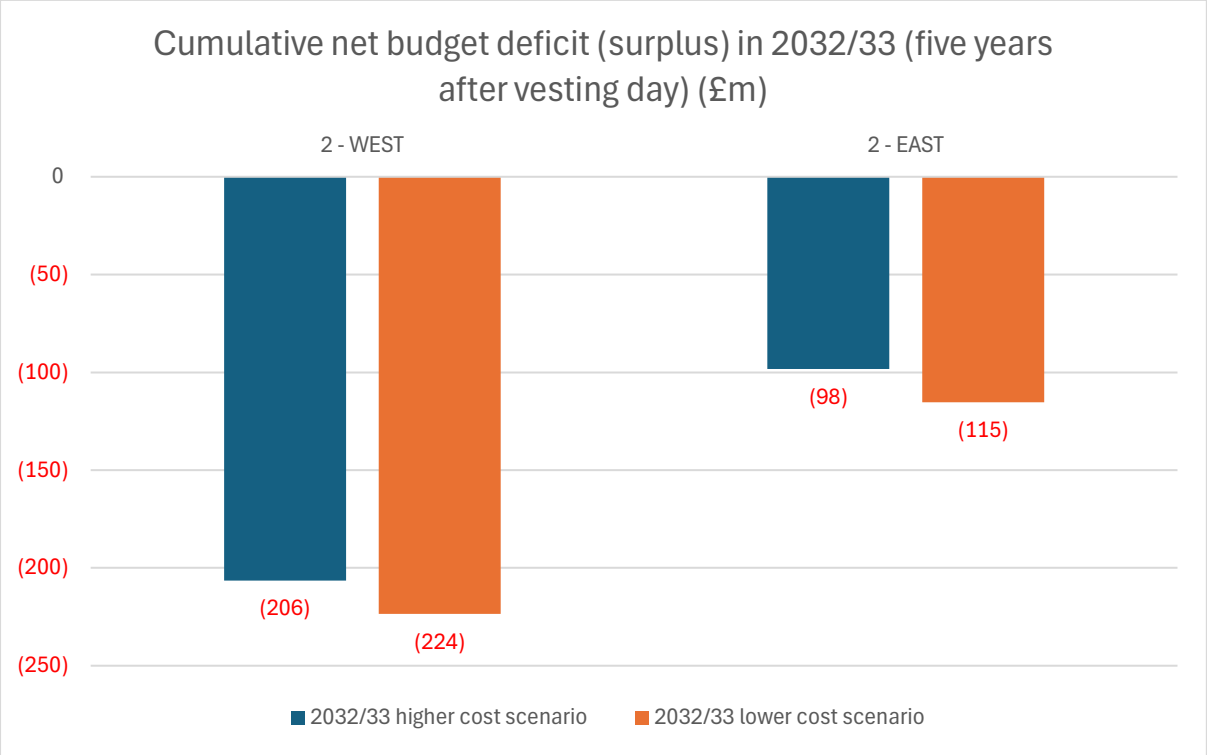
- **LGR costs** – this line adds together one-off costs (e.g. programme management) and recurring costs (e.g. duplicating management teams for social care). The majority of one-off investment costs will be incurred in the first year of LGR in 2028/29, and after five years only recurring elements of cost remain.

- **LGR savings** – this line shows the total recurring savings that are delivered by LGR (e.g. by removing duplication). These savings are higher than recurring costs, through elimination of duplicate roles or functions; these are higher than ongoing costs and are anticipated to deliver annual savings.

- **Additional CTAX capacity** – this line shows the extent to which future unitary authorities would be able to raise additional Council Tax over and above the two-tier baseline should they wish to do so. This is the maximum potential for additional Council Tax in line with current referendum limits. This will be a decision for future authorities themselves.

- **Annual total** – this line shows the aggregate movement from the two-tier baseline forecast under this option, adding up all of the above.

Medium-term POSITION OF INDIVIDUAL UNITARY AUTHORITIES OVER TIME

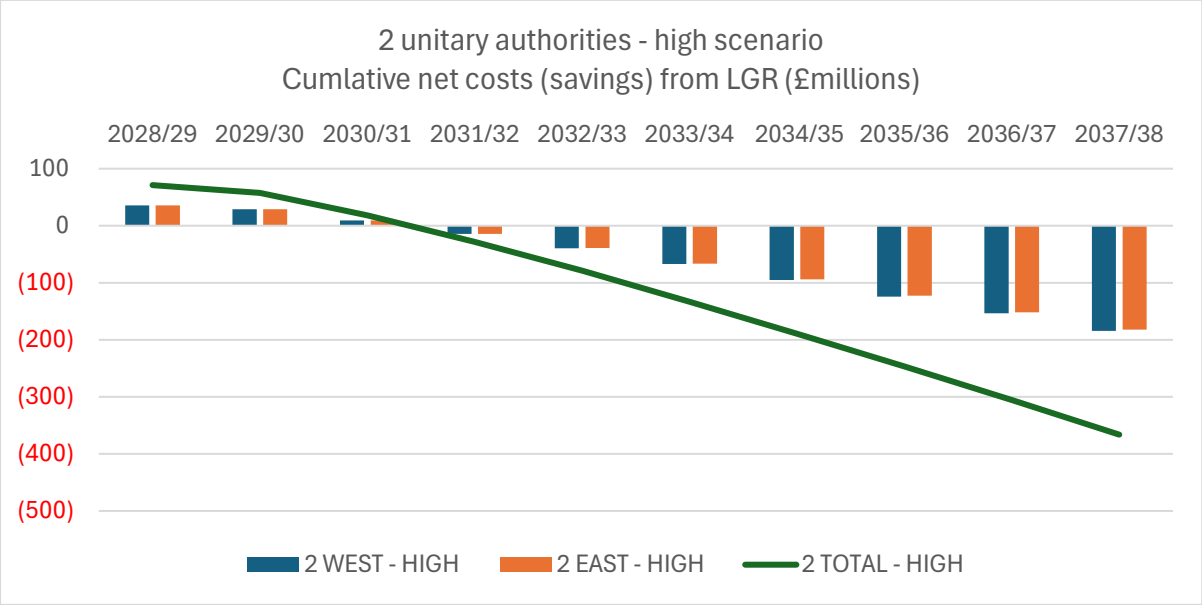


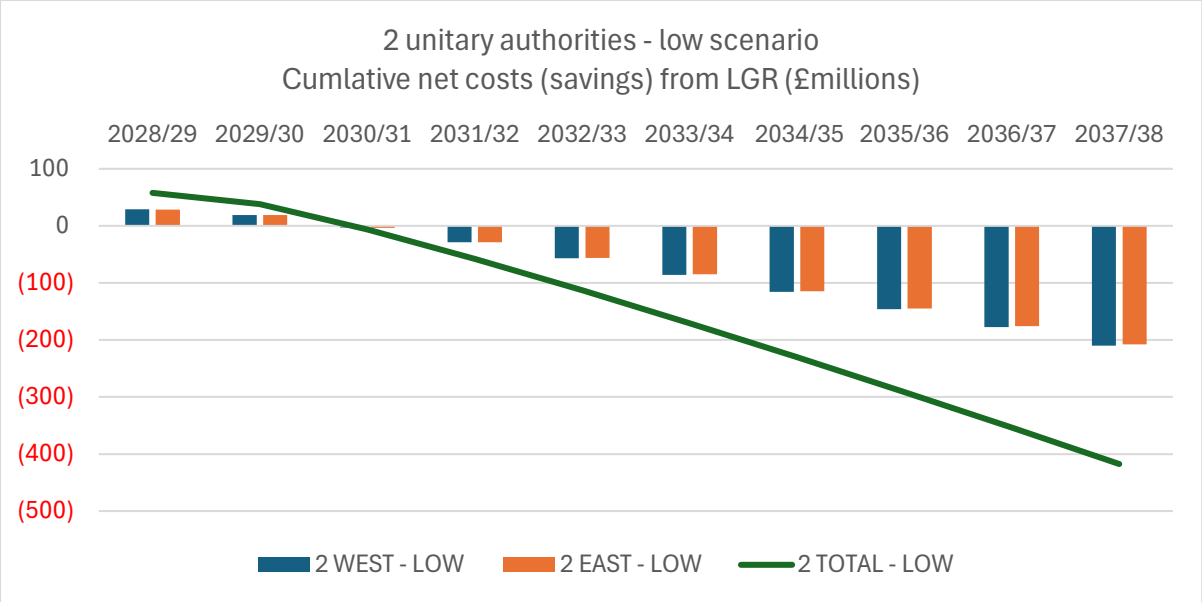
This graph combines all baseline modelling assumptions including inflation, assumed council tax increases and the impacts of LGR to show the cumulative net budget position for each unitary authority after the first five years of LGR. The set of baseline assumptions that we have used indicate that all models will be in a surplus position after this period, with increases in Council Tax outstripping underlying inflation for the cost of delivering services, and the investment costs of delivering LGR beginning to pay back. Further sensitivities have been modelled to test this position, and the surpluses will be quickly eroded if, for example:

- The significant savings planned in the 2025-26 to 2027-28 period (pre-vesting day) are not delivered in full, contributing to a more challenging opening position for new authorities.
- Inflation occurs at a higher rate than is assumed in our modelling.
- New authorities decide to increase Council Tax at a lower rate than the default assumed here, which is in line with government assumptions on future funding.
- There is any slippage in delivering the anticipated benefits from LGR.
- Further unexpected shocks occur.

The surplus shown above indicates that the 2 unitary model is likely to have the highest level of resilience in the event of any (or a combination) of the above occurring.

Costs and savings from LGR





These graphs show cumulative net costs and savings from LGR over time for individual unitary authorities, with detailed assumptions included below.

Cumulative net costs / (savings) from LGR – higher cost scenario

£m	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
2 WEST - HIGH	36	29	9	(14)	(40)	(67)	(95)	(124)	(154)	(184)
2 EAST - HIGH	35	29	9	(14)	(39)	(66)	(94)	(123)	(152)	(182)
2 TOTAL - HIGH	**71**	**58**	**18**	**(28)**	**(79)**	**(133)**	**(189)**	**(247)**	**(306)**	**(366)**

Cumulative net costs / (savings) from LGR – LOWER cost scenario

£m	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
2 WEST - LOW	29	19	(3)	(29)	(57)	(86)	(116)	(146)	(178)	(210)
2 EAST - LOW	29	19	(3)	(29)	(56)	(85)	(115)	(145)	(176)	(208)
2 TOTAL - LOW	**58**	**38**	**(6)**	**(58)**	**(113)**	**(171)**	**(230)**	**(291)**	**(354)**	**(418)**

LGR COST AND SAVINGS DETAILED ASSUMPTIONS

The table below shows cost and savings assumptions in detail, identifying the areas in which a range has been accepted by partners. For further detail see appendix A in the accompanying “spine” document.

	LGR costs and savings (£ m)									
Assumption	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**2030/31**	**2031/32**	**2032/33**	**2033/34**	**2034/35**	**2035/36**	**2036/37**	**2037/38**
One off-costs										
IT disaggregation (HIGH)	21.2	6.2	3.5	2.7	2.7					
IT disaggregation (LOW)	11.3	3.3	1.9	1.4	1.4					
IT consolidation	18.7									
Programme management	16.5									

Contract novation and renegotiation	4.4									
Estates and facilities - reconfiguration	1.4	1.4								
Communication and rebranding	1.3									
Staff relocation	1.9									
Specialist support and advice	5.5									
Transition cost - redundancies	8.6	2.9	2.9							
Total one-off costs (HIGH)	**79.5**	**10.4**	**6.4**	**2.7**	**2.7**					
Total one-off costs (LOW)	**69.6**	**7.5**	**4.7**	**1.4**	**1.4**					
Recurring costs										
Additional costs of scale	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Diseconomies of scale (HIGH)	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4	6.4
Diseconomies of scale (LOW)	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Total recurring costs (HIGH)	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**
Total recurring costs (LOW)	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**	**4.0**
Recurring savings										
Staff savings	(10.0)	(19.5)	(30.1)	(30.7)	(31.3)	(31.9)	(32.5)	(33.2)	(33.9)	(34.5)
Democratic and governance reorganisation	(1.4)	(2.8)	(4.7)	(4.7)	(4.7)	(4.7)	(4.7)	(4.7)	(4.7)	(4.7)
Direct cost savings	(4.3)	(8.9)	(18.4)	(21.4)	(24.5)	(25.3)	(26.1)	(26.9)	(27.8)	(28.7)
Total recurring savings	**(15.7)**	**(31.2)**	**(53.2)**	**(56.8)**	**(60.5)**	**(61.9)**	**(63.4)**	**(64.8)**	**(66.4)**	**(67.9)**

Balance sheet - benchmarking

Benchmarking of the consolidated balance sheets of new organisations against existing unitary authorities was undertaken by an independent organisation in March 2025.

	Net Assets	URR	URR+DSG	CFR	Debt gearing
2b.1 East	TOP	2ND	2ND	3RD	TOP
2b.2 West	TOP	TOP	TOP	3RD	TOP

Existing and future Hertfordshire authorities have relatively stable balance sheet financial health when compared with all existing unitaries. In this exercise they were compared to unitary authorities (excluding Metropolitan and London Boroughs). The table above shows the results by quartile.

- **Net assets** - all options would see the proposed unitaries in the top quartile.
- **Usable Revenue Reserves (URR)** – all options will hold usable reserves at a level above the median.
- **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit** – currently low when compared with other areas, but forecasting much greater deficits in future which will impact the resilience of all options.
- **Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)** – the one area with consistently low performance. There are a handful of exceptions, driven by East Herts and Broxbourne.
- **Debt gearing** - all options show above top quartile levels in respect of debt gearing.

Other key financial risks and assumptions

Please refer to appendix A of the spine document for a further list of specific risks and assumptions that are relevant to this option. In particular:

Strategic Authority – some existing costs and budgets will transfer to the Strategic Authority such as the Fire service. These have not been included in the financial model at this stage due to the complexities of splitting out budgets and resource. No additional running costs have been assumed for the Strategic Authority within the financial model.

Existing MTFS savings – If the savings assumed to be achieved by vesting day are not delivered, this would reduce the projected baseline position and may require the new authorities to identify additional savings beyond those expected from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

It should also be noted that, while annual savings are included in the MTFS up to 2027/28, non-LGR savings (to address underlying funding gaps) have already been incorporated into the financial model.

Savings – while a prudent approach to savings has been adopted, it is not yet possible to fully determine which savings are cashable and which may be non-cashable—for example, where expenditure is funded by ring-fenced grants. Therefore, although expenditure may be reduced in some cases, there could be limitations on how those savings can be used.

MTFS forecasts – as outlined earlier the financial models assume that cost increases – especially in Social Care and SEND, are lower in the years after LGR than in the years preceding it. Council tax

increases are also assumed at the 4.99% (2.99% council tax + 2% adult social care precept) every year in line with government assumptions on funding.

Shared service arrangements – Hertfordshire has a track record of successful shared services. It has been assumed for the purposes of the financial case that shared service arrangements will continue where long-term countywide contracts exist, such as for Highways and Waste Disposal. Without these arrangements, the additional costs linked to disaggregation could rise significantly.

DSG Deficit /HNB – the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant funds education for children with SEND, including special schools, independent placements, and additional support in mainstream settings.

Rising demand for SEND provision has led many councils to overspend, as grant funding has not kept pace with costs. The government's 'statutory override' allows councils to exclude these deficits from their accounts, but the financial shortfall remains. The override has been extended to March 2028 while longer-term reforms are developed.

The County Council forecasts a cumulative DSG deficit of £255 million by March 2028, with annual overspends expected to continue. The outcome of national reforms will be critical to the financial sustainability of all three structural options. Any remaining HNB deficit would need to be divided between the new authority or authorities, creating a risk that an unfunded deficit could be transferred.

Pay Harmonisation – no assumptions have been made in relation to pay harmonisation within the financial model although it is recognised that pay harmonisation will occur over several years. Whilst staff will initially move into the newly formed authorities taking their existing terms and conditions (including salary) under TUPE transfer, over time staff are likely to move on to the new organisations' terms and salary levels.

Borrowing – If alternative funding sources are insufficient to cover transition costs, borrowing may be required. Borrowing costs have not been included in the financial model at this stage and could reduce projected savings and the baseline funding available.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – the HRA sits outside of General Fund revenue expenditure. Although the four HRA's in Hertfordshire receive support services/Cost of democracy from the General Fund the impact on HRA's for one off, on-going costs and savings has not been included within the financial business case.

Assets disaggregation – has not been accounted for within the financial model but this potentially poses risks at a later stage in terms of ensuring the transfer of assets and their corresponding revenue streams and or liabilities does not inadvertently worsen the financial position and sustainability of the new authorities. Disposal of surplus assets may help to defray the costs of reorganisation.

Shared services – whilst some shared services are already in existence across for example Audit, Fraud, Procurement and Building Control, across Hertfordshire, these may no longer align geographically with the new authority boundaries. This may pose additional costs in relation to:

- Disaggregating shared systems or contracts that are no longer aligned geographically.
- Potential duplication of effort or investment if new, separate services are required.
- Loss of economies of scale once shared arrangements end.

However, in other cases existing shared services will not require disaggregation and there may be opportunities to expand these and create greater economies of scale.

Companies and other entities – where they exist this may cause additional complexity in aggregating and disaggregating balance sheets and asset valuation or else amending governance and ownership arrangements. As a result, additional specialist support may be required. This is assumed to be covered by the existing allocation of specialist support within the one-off costs.

Shadow authority costs – it has been assumed that the costs of the shadow authority can be covered by existing budgets and one-off costs and the contingency where required. These are unlikely to have a material impact on the financial assessment of alternative unitary options being considered, nor on their ongoing financial sustainability.

HIGH-QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE SERVICES (MHCLG CRITERION 3)

GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC ARRANGEMENTS

Strong local democracy is the foundation of public trust and effective decision-making. Hertfordshire's proposed governance model under the 2UA structure has been designed to ensure robust accountability, visible leadership and meaningful representation for residents.

Each new council will be supported by **117 councillors**, a figure grounded in detailed modelling, national guidance and practical governance needs. It is also supported by detailed analysis of committee workload and community representation. While the 117 councillor representation number for the 2UA model exceeds the LGBCE guidance, we believe we have set out a strong and compelling case, for this as an interim measure pending a full LGBCE review that will be commissioned shortly after vesting of the two authorities. We are open to other options if the Secretary of State deems this necessary.

The case for this level of representation is built on four key factors:

1. Community Leadership

Councillors will represent larger areas and populations, covering both county and district functions. The expanded role requires an appropriate number of councillors to maintain strong local representation and manage increased casework. Three councillors per ward is proposed which allows for shared workload and stronger representation.

2. Governance Capacity

Each authority will operate a Leader and Cabinet model with an estimated 170-200 committee seats. The proposed councillor count ensures sufficient capacity to manage committee workloads, provide representation on outside bodies, maintain democratic oversight, and avoid overburdening members - especially during the critical early years of transition.

3. Electoral Equality

Modelling shows that 117 councillors per authority results in an average elector-to-councillor ratio of 3,828, which is well within the range seen in other unitary authorities. This supports fair and accessible representation.

4. Boundary Simplicity

Using existing county divisions provides and stable structure for the interim period until a full electoral review is undertaken, aligning with Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and Secretary of State guidance to minimise complexity and cost.

A detailed map of parliamentary constituencies and district boundaries (see **Map 1, Proposition**) illustrates how the proposed East/West configuration reflects natural geographies and existing administrative footprints. While not designed to align directly with constituency boundaries, the 2UA model offers a clearer and more coherent framework for MP engagement than more fragmented alternatives. This supports stronger advocacy, simplifies strategic dialogue, and reinforces community identity.

While the proposal exceeds the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's guideline of 100 councillors per authority, this reflects a considered and pragmatic choice to **safeguard democratic integrity and ensure resilience** during transition. It prioritises continuity, avoids disruption, and ensures that residents remain well-represented through structural change. This governance model complements the wider 2UA vision: **simplified structures**, **clear lines of accountability**, and **strong local leadership** that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of Hertfordshire's communities.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

The two-unitary authority (2UA) model provides a **strategic, scalable and future-proof solution** for delivering high-quality services from day one, while enabling long-term transformation and public service reform.

By consolidating services into two coherent authorities, it avoids the fragmentation and volatility associated with smaller authorities. It ensures each new unitary has the capacity to manage demand and workforce pressures. This scale supports smarter use of assets, investment in digital transformation and more equitable funding across diverse communities, particularly for services such as Adult Social Care and Public Health.

The viability of the two-unitary model is further evidenced by the distribution of service demands, as evidenced earlier in **Table 5,** across East and West Hertfordshire. Both areas demonstrate comparable levels of activity across Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and education, supporting equitable service planning and financial resilience.

This balance mirrors the infrastructure footprint outlined in the Place section, confirming that the proposed geographies are not only strategically coherent but also operationally ready. The 2UA model enables each authority to manage demand effectively, maintain consistent standards, and invest in preventative approaches without volatility or fragmentation associated with smaller unitaries. The 2UA model also enables consolidated commissioning across two larger authorities, reducing duplication and simplifying contract management. It supports stronger funding bids and fosters strengthened relationships with Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) partners, enabling integrated service delivery and joint initiatives at scale. Unified commissioning also allows for standardised eligibility criteria and outcomes measurement, improving service consistency and impact evaluation. Larger authorities can support voluntary organisations to coordinate efforts, share data and align goals.

1. Single Disaggregation and Service Continuity

This model enables a **single, coordinated disaggregation** of countywide services, reducing complexity and risk. This ensures:

- Safe and legal operation of critical services from day one
- Continuity of statutory functions such as Adult and Children's Social Care, Public Health, Highways and Waste Disposal
- Efficient transition planning with manageable programme oversight

This approach avoids the duplication and disruption that would arise from multiple disaggregation pathways, particularly in high-risk areas such as safeguarding, emergency response and judicial services.

2. Alignment with Key Partnership Geographies

This model aligns with the existing footprints of other public sector partners, including health, policing, safeguarding boards, local resilience forums and Coroner and judicial services. This alignment enables more coherent planning and delivery and supports:

- Streamlined strategic engagement and enabling stronger partnership working
- Reduced duplication and friction
- Faster, joined-up responses to complex challenges such as domestic abuse, youth violence, exploitation and asylum/migration

3. Flexibility to Respond to Local Differences

This model balances **scale** and **local responsiveness** through:

- Local Democratic Forums at a local community level
- Neighbourhood-level planning aligned with NHS and safeguarding models
- Place-based commissioning that reflects demographic and geographic diversity

This ensures services are designed around real communities, not administrative boundaries, and can respond to local health inequalities and community safety priorities.

4. Future Shape of Critical Services

This model supports long-term transformation by enabling:

- Integrated delivery of housing, health, education and employment, supporting early intervention and preventative approaches. The 2UA model also enables the application of strategic frameworks, see **Case Study: Hertfordshire Healthy Placemaking Framework.**
- Innovation through shared digital platforms, predictive analytics and smarter commissioning
- Strengthens service design in key areas such as mental health, family hubs and emergency planning.

5. Workforce and Financial Resilience

The model delivers:

- Leaner management structures and more efficient use of resources
- Workforce stability through co-ordinated recruitment, training and career pathways across the two unitaries
- Equitable service delivery by aligning funding with need

6. Strategic Reform and Devolution Readiness

The model positions Hertfordshire for future strategic reform by:

- Retaining a strong countywide identity, enabling up joined-up planning across two key growth areas.
- Creating the scale and clarity of leadership needed to unlock devolved powers and investment.
- Avoiding disruptive boundary changes

Two unitaries provides a clear and manageable framework for service delivery from day one. Each new authority will inherit a coherent operating footprint, enabling immediate continuity in statutory services. A single disaggregation process will ensure that countywide services are safely transitioned, with shared arrangements in place for specialist functions such as emergency duty teams, coroner services and contact centres.

This model places residents and communities at the heart of structural reform by delivering:

- Faster and more consistent responses to safeguarding, domestic abuse, youth violence and exploitation
- Integrated care pathways that reduce hospital admissions and support independent living
- Coordinated housing and health interventions to tackle homelessness and poor housing conditions
- Shared intelligence and data systems that enable early intervention and targeted support
- Streamlined commissioning and joint investment in preventative services and community infrastructure

Case study: Hertfordshire Healthy Placemaking Framework
Arising from the Hertfordshire Growth Board's 'Healthy and Safe Places for All' mission, the **Hertfordshire Healthy and Safer Placemaking Framework** provides a countywide blueprint for embedding health, wellbeing and safety into spatial planning and regeneration. Developed collaboratively by Hertfordshire County Council, district and borough councils, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), NHS partners and the voluntary sector, the Framework ensures that both new and existing communities are designed to support physical, mental and social health.

The Framework is a key enabler of **place-based public service reform**, offering practical guidance for Local Planning Authorities, and, in time, any Mayoral Strategic Authority on how to embed health outcomes into local plans and spatial development strategies. It supports a **joined-up approach to housing, transport, green infrastructure and community services**, ensuring that planning decisions actively contribute to reducing health inequalities and improving population wellbeing.

Crucially, the Framework will support delivery of Hertfordshire's two **Joint Strategic Plans (JSPs)** - North East Central JSP and South West JSP - which already reflect coherent housing markets, infrastructure

priorities and economic linkages. The 2UA model formalises these geographies, enabling the Healthy Placemaking Framework to be applied consistently across both authorities, while ensuring **local responsiveness** to distinct community needs.

SAFEGUARDING ESSENTIAL SERVICES WHILST DRIVING INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

The two unitary model provides a future ready framework for delivering high risk, demand-led services more effectively and sustainably, ensuring continuity, resilience and improved outcomes for residents. The model is designed to preserve Hertfordshire's most critical services while unlocking opportunities for innovation, integration and inclusive growth.

A new report[19] commissioned by the County Councils Network (CCN) warns that smaller unitary councils -particularly those below 500,000 population - face a "triple whammy" of risks to care services: rising costs, workforce shortages, and reduced service quality. These risks include higher care fees due to reduced purchasing power, duplication of senior roles amid existing recruitment challenges, and greater volatility in demand. Smaller councils are also more likely to experience extreme concentrations of care users, especially in areas like Stevenage and Watford, leading to unaffordable costs and reliance on expensive out-of-area placements. In contrast, larger councils are more likely to receive 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Ofsted ratings and attract skilled staff. **The 2UA model avoids these risks by maintaining scale, enabling financial resilience, and supporting consistent service quality across both authorities.**

These risks are particularly relevant in Hertfordshire, where the proposed East/West configuration aligns with existing health system footprints and operational geographies. NHS partners are strongly advocating support for greater joint working across local government and health. The South & West Hertfordshire Health & Care Partnership[20] states that this joint working provides several critical benefits, including:

- **Improved strategic planning**: Coherent geographies allow for more effective joint planning across health and local government, particularly in areas such as prevention, public health and social care.
- **Integrated service delivery**: When council and NHS footprints align, it becomes easier to design and deliver joined-up services that meet the needs of local populations, especially those with complex needs.
- **Population health management**: Shared geographies support the development of place-based approaches to improving health outcomes, reducing inequalities, and targeting resources where they are most needed using shared data and insights. This is increasingly important as the population ages and demand for complex care increases.
- **Workforce and estates planning**: Shared boundaries facilitate better coordination of workforce strategies and use of public sector estates.

The 2UA model enables consistent safeguarding practices across both authorities, reducing gaps and variation. It supports better data sharing for early risk identification, more uniform training for staff, and faster escalation of concerns, improving protection for children and families at risk of harm.

[19] *Source: County Councils Network (CCN)/Newton report : Analysing the impact on people-based services: October 2025*

[20] *Letter from Chair of West Herts NHS Trust and CEO, West Herts NHS Trust and Chair, Chair, South & West Herts Health & Care Partnership*

These priorities reflect the feedback received during public and stakeholder engagement, where continuity of care, joined-up services and confidence in safeguarding were consistently raised. The 2UA model responds directly to these concerns - **preserving what works, protecting critical services and ensuring that no resident is disadvantaged by geography or transition**.

ADULT CARE SERVICES

The Adult Care Service is optimistic about the opportunities presented by the 2UA model, including integration with housing services, working collaboratively to embed prevention, and building on its existing 'Connected Lives' approach to delivery of Care Act statutory duties. This sees formal care and support services as complementing the existing strengths people have in their own families, networks and communities that help them live the lives they want to.

The Adult Care Service in Hertfordshire is recognised by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as being one of the foremost in the country. The Service is recognised nationally as a leading organisation, strongly advocating for the sector and influencing policy and practice development. This strength is based on effective leadership and management backed by financial resilience to sustain good quality services and approaches in a challenging context.

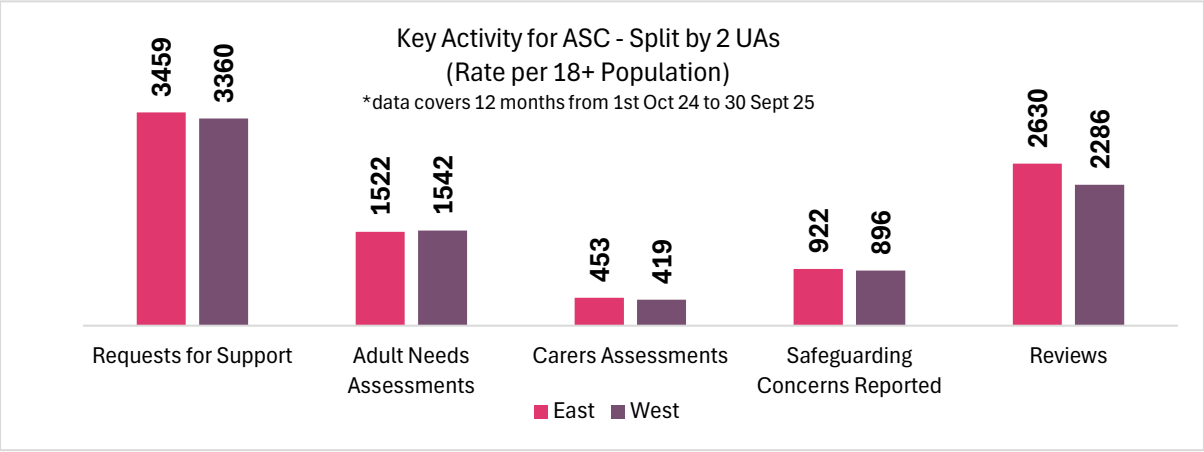
Operationally the Service is 'always on' with round the clock coverage every day of the year; hospital discharge teams work on a seven day basis, 8am to 8pm, and prevention of admission teams have a similar work pattern. Overnight, the Safeguarding Out of Hours Service provides emergency response and Mental Health Act assessment coverage. In-house direct care provision teams work night and day to ensure full continuity of care to people with critical care and support needs. This level of coverage and continuity is essential to keeping people safe and well.

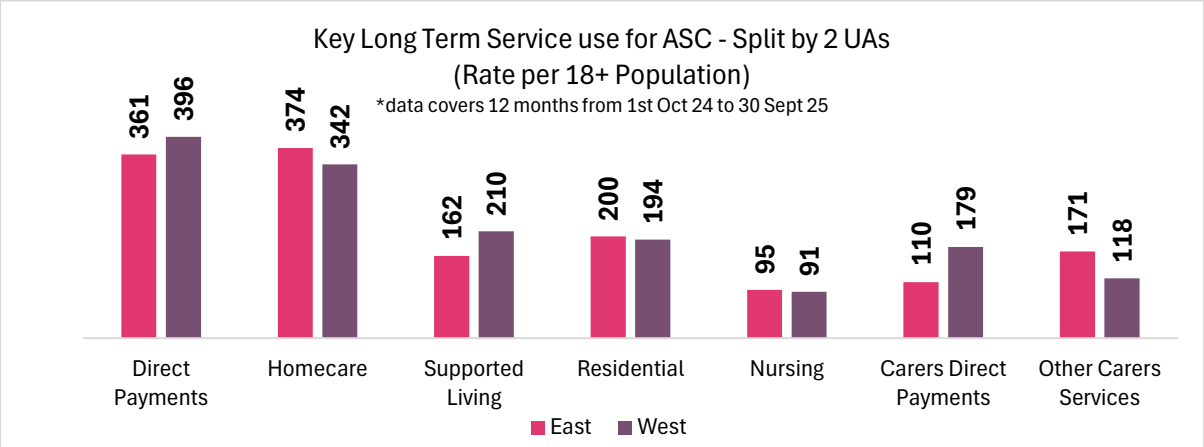
It is therefore vitally important that the new configuration of local government in Hertfordshire ensures the continuity of the quality and effectiveness of services and smoothly sustains the direct provision of care and support day-in day-out. Only the two unitary model can both achieve this and diminish the disruption and harm from disaggregating this leading Service by:

- **Using the existing management, workforce and local delivery arrangements for Adult Social Care which are already configured to match the proposed two new unitary councils**

  Adult Social Care teams already operate on district footprints, with senior operational leadership divided into two strategic areas which align precisely with the proposed two unitary footprints and mirror local health systems. Team management and workforce structures are organised into these two geographies and so continuity is ensured. As **Table 6** demonstrates, the two areas have very similar volumes of case activity and there is a clear operational coherence in the proposed split by area:

Table 6[21]





Sufficiency of workforce is a challenge in Adult Social Care; there is high competition for registered professionals such as social workers and occupational therapists with and a thriving agency market. The 2UA model will work more easily together, better enabling control of the market for these roles, minimising the risk of spiralling workforce costs arising from competition for staff in a more fragmented geography.

Case management systems, budget and performance analyses are each already configured to enable reporting and monitoring on the two new unitary areas, ensuring the ongoing capability to steer the business and identify and mitigate emerging operational and financial pressures that are inevitable in a complex, highly volatile operational environment.

- **Leveraging the knowledge, expertise in and understanding of the populations in the two proposed unitary councils, ensuring vital continuity**

Both geographies have similar population sizes and contain areas of both relative deprivation and affluence; **Table 7** below shows the variation by district of current case load and illustrates the variety and intensity of activity and provision that operational staff and commissioners are well versed in managing across the two areas:

[21] *Source: HCC*

Table 7[22]

Activity and Services Adults aged 18+ - Rate per population comparison across districts			Key Activity					Key Long Term Services						
	Population 18+ (nearest 100)	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) - Average IMD Score	Requests for Support	Adult Needs Assessments	Carers Assessments	Safeguarding Concerns Reported	Reviews	Direct Payments	Homecare	Supported Living	Residential	Nursing	Carers Direct Payments	Other Carers Services
Broxbourne District	78,000	**16.2**	3482	1560	446	864	2759	408	**480**	166	125	33	114	166
East Hertfordshire District	**120,300**	9.7	2953	1246	465	741	1964	354	288	100	126	59	125	132
North Hertfordshire District	**109,200**	10.5	3651	1650	475	914	2877	323	404	133	**261**	125	81	167
Stevenage District	73,800	**18.4**	**3911**	**1797**	**511**	**1230**	**3587**	392	409	**241**	213	**221**	109	**279**
Welwyn Hatfield District	95,400	10.2	3536	1497	375	970	2390	352	336	209	**279**	65	123	147
East	**476,700**	**13.6**	**3459**	**1522**	**453**	**922**	**2630**	**361**	**374**	**162**	**200**	**95**	**110**	**171**
Dacorum District	**124,000**	12.3	3533	**1756**	**506**	896	2521	**448**	339	224	179	89	**228**	102
Hertsmere District	89,700	13.5	3426	1520	436	936	2389	**430**	398	221	217	132	203	160
St Albans District	**123,500**	8.5	3264	1432	391	837	2079	376	291	**251**	173	64	162	111
Three Rivers District	78,900	10.2	3232	1446	356	772	1868	344	341	111	146	27	137	90
Watford District	84,600	15.1	3280	1480	365	1053	2487	358	358	210	**264**	150	143	133
West	**500,700**	**11.9**	**3360**	**1542**	**419**	**896**	**2286**	**396**	**342**	**210**	**194**	**91**	**179**	**118**
**IMD Score: Higher = more deprived.*	**High**	Low												

The different population characteristics of the two areas are well understood, as are the services, networks and offers in each locality. Teams use this knowledge to design care and support plans around each individual. This 'community connections' approach ensures people are anchored into their local networks based on a detailed understanding of what is available. Instability from disaggregation into smaller units risks loss of this in-depth knowledge and understanding. Conversely, there is a fantastic opportunity to build on this in the two unitary structures by blending in the skills and knowledge of all new colleagues with minimal distraction.

- **Combining the economy of scale that will allow for inequalities in supply and demand to be stabilised and for strong influence to shape, oversee and support the Hertfordshire care economy effectively**

Managing the multi-billion pound Hertfordshire care economy to shape sufficiency of provision for residents, whether they pay for their own care or receive financial support from the council, is a core task. The care market is fragile, there are areas of significant deficits in supply and quality such as nursing care for people with dementia; care providers exit the market regularly requiring 'last resort' support by the council to re-provide care.

It is vital that each authority has sufficient strategic capacity to understand the market, shape and manage it effectively, drive quality and respond when there are failures. The ability to own, direct and control this work is important given the impact on individuals of service failure and the high risk of overspend if supply side pressures are not effectively managed. A two unitary solution gives councils sufficient scale to invest in their own strategic commissioning capacity building on existing expertise and to more easily collaborate to ensure provider sustainability, fair fee structures and consistent quality standards across their footprint.

- **Building on strong partnership delivery which already reflects the two new unitary geographies**

In its 2024 inspection of Adult Social Care the Care Quality Commission assessed Hertfordshire's partnership arrangements as 'outstanding'. The CQC detailed the 'long term, strong effective relationships with NHS Trusts and it was clear that this had led to really positive outcomes for people'.

Like Adult Social Care itself, Hertfordshire's health geography is aligned along the East / West area model that is proposed for the two new councils. Health and Care Partnerships are established in these two

[22] *Source: HCC*

areas, which group around acute hospitals at Watford and Stevenage in the West and East respectively. Adult Care Services is at the heart of work in these two areas, shaping strategy, supporting operational resilience, for example, in planning for Winter, and facilitating day to day 'system flow'. It is recognised as a reliable partner, supporting joined up delivery and ambitious to lead where appropriate. This work must not be interrupted as changes take place.

The two area geographic coherence already underpins integrated services across social care and health and ensures colleagues work together to deliver the best outcomes for residents; a number of jointly delivered services are long established, for example social care-led Integrated Hospital Discharge Teams based in two acute hospitals, jointly commissioned 'Discharge to Assess' pathways out of hospital overseen by two Post Hospital Area Teams, and two area based Prevention of Admission Teams which work closely with Community Health Providers, one for each unitary area.

System-wide alignment across health and care provides a strong foundation for transition, minimising disruption and enabling continuity in service delivery. Structural change needs to build on operational realities. Put bluntly, the two unitary geographies simply makes sense and allows easy continuity of effective partnership relations and vital working across health and social care. This stability is essential for maintaining trust with residents, communities and frontline teams during transition.

Looking forward, having councils which match existing health and care partnerships at place level will support the objectives of the NHS Long Term Plan. Simplifying structures around two new councils rather than the current eleven enables even closer alignment and commonality of purpose with local Health and Care Partnerships. Within a simpler, stronger and unified area partnership we can make further progress in joining up commissioning and delivery across health and social care and bring in council expertise in wider determinants of healthy outcomes. The opportunity is to enhance delivery models at neighbourhood levels with professionals from a wide range of disciplines to support residents and communities impactfully.

- **Generating strength in statutory roles and governance to deliver transformation**

Strong governance is a foundation of success in Adult Social Care. CQC expects clear responsibilities, roles and systems of accountability to deliver good quality, sustainable care and support and ensure robustness in safeguarding.

Case Studies

These case studies show how the two unitary model can build on Hertfordshire's existing strengths by delivering smarter, more joined up adult care. They highlight how using data and technology can help prevent problems before they escalate, and how working closely with communities leads to better support for people in need. The approaches are flexible, cost effective and inclusive - helping carers and vulnerable residents access the right help at the right time. Together, they demonstrate how the new model can improve outcomes, make better use of resources and strengthen public confidence in local services. The 2UA model provides the strategic scale, streamlined leadership and system-wide coherence to embed and expand these innovations consistently.

This is particularly important in managing complexity of need and ensuring continuity of provision in both urban and rural settings. The two new councils will also have the financial and operational scale to be better placed to absorb future demand pressures and reinvest in service innovation. This includes the ability to respond flexibly to demographic change, rising complexity of need, and workforce challenges - while maintaining service quality and resilience.

Case Study 1: Connect & Prevent: Strategic Community Empowerment in Hertfordshire

The *Connect & Prevent* programme by Hertfordshire County Council is a leading example of how strategic community empowerment across a mixed urban-rural context is delivering measurable improvements to help residents lead independent lives. It combines AI driven insight, joined up data, and community-led delivery.

The biggest opportunity identified to reduce long-term care starts was to provide better support to community carers. The programme has identified over **58,000 carers**, including **48,000 formal** and **10,000 informal**, and using predictive analytics with **67% precision**, is forecasting breakdown events and enabling proactive intervention to prevent them.

Through its **Carers Hub model**, it delivers personalised support via holistic conversations, local outreach and follow-ups to empower carers. This approach has led to a **25% measurable improvement in wellbeing and resilience**, with **75% receiving community-based support** and only **one in eight requiring formal assessment**. It is anticipated to generate **£1.2 million per annum in financial benefit**.

This initial project demonstrates a scalable model with strategic alignment, technological innovation, and community-first principles that are transforming public service delivery. The 2UA model provides the scale and coherence needed to position Hertfordshire as a national leader in proactive, preventative support. It offers a replicable blueprint for embedding empowerment into governance and service design - enabling programmes such as Connect & Prevent to be delivered consistently, strategically and equitably across both authorities.

Case Study 2: Community Wellbeing and VCFSE Partnership Model

Hertfordshire County Council's Community and People Wellbeing Team (CPWT), part of Adult Care Services, provides a strategic model for how a unitary authority can work in close partnership with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector to deliver inclusive, preventative support. Operating across district footprints, CPWT commissions over 50 services and manages multiple grant programmes, including the Household Support Fund, supporting hundreds of organisations to promote wellbeing, connect residents to services and fill gaps in specialist provision.

Beyond commissioning, CPWT leads on sector development and engagement. It funds infrastructure bodies such as Community Help Hertfordshire (CHH), supports volunteering through GoVolHerts, and delivers regular communications to over 800 stakeholders via its monthly briefing. The team convenes the VCFSE Forum and the Annual Hertfordshire VCFSE Conference, enabling organisations to shape strategies on issues such as mental health, learning disability and adult care budgets. It also supports diverse communities through partnerships with the Faith and Health Networking Board and Hertfordshire Community Leaders Forum. CPWT runs eight Co-Production Boards, public engagement events and contracts such as Viewpoint and Healthwatch Hertfordshire. It ensures residents' voices inform service design, procurement and monitoring, using surveys, workshops and direct visits to commissioned services.

The team plays a central role in emergency and humanitarian responses, coordinating efforts across districts and boroughs during the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis, and successive humanitarian events. It has developed widely used resources such as the Referral and Information Book and commissioned countywide specialist services. CPWT has hosted six conferences and over 35 webinars to build sector capacity and represents Hertfordshire nationally through the Local Government East Strategic Migration Partnership.

This model demonstrates how strategic coordination, local delivery and community empowerment can be embedded within a unitary structure. It offers a blueprint for how each authority under this model can maintain strong relationships with local partners, respond flexibly to emerging needs and deliver inclusive, place-based services that reflect the diversity and complexity of their communities.

Case Study 3: Health Integration

Hertfordshire's Integrated Care Programme Team provides a strategic blueprint for how two unitary authorities can lead and embed health and social care integration across complex systems. Established in response to the Government's Better Care Fund, the team has driven transformation across organisational boundaries, developing pioneering models for care transition services such as Integrated Discharge Teams, Hospital and Community Navigators and HomeFirst.

Operating across both South and West Hertfordshire and East and North Hertfordshire, the team has delivered system-wide and place-based change, mobilising health, social care, VCFSE partners, and people with lived experience. It has successfully navigated major structural reforms, including the transition from Primary Care Trusts to Clinical Commissioning Groups, and now plays a central role in the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System (ICS), the Integrated Care Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board and the three Health and Care Partnerships.

The team oversees the Better Care Fund and leads programmes focused on intermediate care, hospital discharge, complex care, frailty, prevention and the development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. These programmes are co-designed at county level and tailored to local needs across both proposed unitary footprints, demonstrating how strategic scale and local responsiveness can be delivered in tandem.

Its system leadership is embedded in strategic governance, ensuring transformation is informed by residents, service users and community partners. The team's work has been nationally recognised, including in the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) East of England What We Are Proud Of report, highlighting projects such as the Enhanced Nursing Dementia Pilot, Assistive Technology, Prevention of Admission services, and a Learning Disability Frailty Risk Assessment Tool.

The team led Hertfordshire's Adult Social Care emergency response during COVID-19 - launching a Care Provider Hub, pioneering the county's first Virtual Hospital, establishing Designated Clinical Settings and coordinating PPE, staffing and discharge protocols with health and care partners across South and West Hertfordshire and East and North Hertfordshire.

The Integrated Care Programme Team's approach shows how strategic coordination, system design and local delivery can be effectively embedded into a model that is flexible, agile and scalable - able to respond to emerging strategic needs while maintaining a strong focus on local delivery. Its track record demonstrates the ability to improve outcomes for residents, build strong partnerships, and deliver sustainable change at both system (Hertfordshire) and place levels (South and West Hertfordshire, East and North Hertfordshire), while responding to both strategic priorities and operational challenges.

Strategic advantages of a 2 Unitary solution for Adult Care Services

Balanced demand across East and West

New requests for support per 100,000 adults are closely aligned - East: 3,459; West: 3,360 (**Table 7**) - with similar volumes of adult needs assessments and safeguarding concerns. This parity ensures equitable service planning and supports consistent safeguarding standards across both authorities.

Operational coherence and continuity
ASC teams already operate on district footprints that map directly onto the proposed East/West boundaries. Hospital discharge pathways and health system geographies are also aligned, supporting integrated care and joint commissioning.

Scale without fragmentation
Unlike smaller unitary models, the 2UA configuration avoids the volatility and variation in activity rates and enables more stable management of long-term care placements, carers' assessments and safeguarding workloads. This stability enables better workforce planning, market shaping and financial resilience.

Digital and data infrastructure
The scale of the 2UA model supports investment in shared digital platforms, predictive analytics and business intelligence (BI) tools. A unified BI framework across two authorities enables consistent performance monitoring, strategic planning and risk identification (such as postcode lottery and workforce gaps).

Workforce and market resilience
Larger units allow for coordinated recruitment, retention and Continuing Professional Development strategies, while supporting commissioning across two footprints. This avoids fragmentation and competition in the care market, helping to maintain sufficiency and quality of provision.

Together these factors make the 2UA model the most balanced, scalable and future-ready configuration for Hertfordshire. It enables strategic coherence while preserving local responsiveness, ensuring that **Adult Social Care services remain safe, sustainable and equitable for all residents.**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES (SOCIAL CARE, EDUCATION AND SEND)

Hertfordshire has an excellent track record of cost-effective delivery and sustained improvements to critical services such as children social care. This is down to a relentless focus on putting outcomes for children first, using transformative and innovative approaches to creating local provision including residential care and specialist school places and so driving down use of costly independent providers. It has strong partner relationships with the Integrated Care Board, Hertfordshire Constabulary, schools and the voluntary sector; the 2UA model is an opportunity to unlock further innovation and preventative service delivery, whilst avoiding the risks of disaggregating countywide services and partnerships.

Bringing together Housing, Planning and Children's Services will harness more housing solutions that meet the needs of young people leaving care or those transitioning to Adult Social Care. For young people at risk of homelessness, changing how these services work for greater integration and collaboration will make a significant positive difference to their lives. The data evidence shows that the East/West Hertfordshire model will create equitable unitary authorities including referrals into Children's Service and numbers of children in care, school age pupil split, specialist provision and SEND **(see Tables 5 and 8).**

There is a strong correlation between the level of deprivation and the number of children coming into care (more deprived districts such as Stevenage, Watford and Dacorum have greater rate of children in care); at the same time the critical resources to meet need such as children's homes and foster carers varies by district. The 2UA model has greater capacity to enable equitable management of the most significant and volatile areas of children's service expenditure including care placements, as well as Home to School Transport and High Needs Funding (SEND).

Table 8: Children' Services and Schools[23]

	East	West
0-17 population	129,571	141,230
Total schools	273	259
Special schools	13	13
Number of pupils eligible for free school meals	16,667	14,115
Children looked after	522	464
Children's Services Referrals in Financial Year	678	674
SEND: number of children with Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	7,929	6,757

Two large unitaries are more financially sustainable in the context of volatile demand-led pressures and placement inflation in Children's Services and secures the leadership and quality assurance resource required to ensure safe and effective service delivery whilst minimising duplication across multiple Children's Services. It integrates our prevention-first strategy with effective strategic leadership and accountability, and by minimising highly disruptive disaggregation of high-risk services, including safeguarding, SEND and youth justice, the model protects established strategic plans, improvement journeys and Ofsted ratings. Hertfordshire's children's social care was judged to be overall outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspection and has consistently achieved some of the lowest numbers of children in care and on child protection plans.

The 2UA model is specifically designed to protect and enhance Hertfordshire's most critical services including our nationally acclaimed **Family Safeguarding approach** (see **Case Study 4**) that delivers integrated social care, mental health, domestic abuse and probation services across local neighbourhood teams, and successfully prevents children coming into care. Key statutory safeguarding functions – including the multi-agency front door and the youth justice service - are currently delivered on a countywide footprint to support partnership resilience and consistency. Transfer of these existing arrangements to a 2UA model would represent the least amount of disruption to child protection, multi-agency resource and the workforce than models requiring greater disaggregation. This model is **advocated by key partners including Hertfordshire Constabulary and the Integrated Care Boards and the Independent Scrutineers for both Children's and Adult's Safeguarding Board**, as it is designed to preserve critical partnerships whilst building on our strengths. It provides a coherent structure that supports continuity and resilience in service delivery.

Crucially it will give confidence that the new authorities will have workforce stability and capacity to deliver high risk and specialist services, including recruitment to key statutory roles that are hard to recruit, such as the Director of Children's Services (DCS), social workers and education psychologists; and avoid the pitfalls of disaggregating specialist teams at scale, duplicating management structures and costs across smaller unitary models. It will minimise transition costs from new directorates and loss of economies of scale from commissioning of high-cost services such as children's placements. The 2UA model offers the clearest structure to facilitate a cooperative Alliance-approach across key assets such as children's homes and foster carers, preserving current capacity and avoiding the pitfalls of disaggregating these resources across new boundaries.

[23] *Source: Local Government Reorganisation Statistical Model (HCC)*

SCHOOLS

The new unitary councils will take on the support of state-maintained schools across their geography. This model best preserves Hertfordshire's strong foundations in education, ensuring consistency, equity and strategic oversight across the county. Over 90% of schools in Hertfordshire are good or outstanding and grounded in strong foundations of strong school improvement, coordinated school place planning, and consistent admissions. Hertfordshire has cultivated a strong 'family of schools' approach, creating collaboration between academies and maintained schools across all phases. The preventative improvement model, utilising a locally created school-owned company (HFL Education), has ensured that standards are above national averages from KS2 to KS4 - uniquely for the East of England. The 2UA model would enable this collaborative system, which is popular with school stakeholders because of the demonstrable impact, to be maintained.

Both East and West geographies would be supporting similar pupil numbers taking current student population and geographical location of schools into account. This model will provide a more consistent approach to school planning and admissions, in particular, for disadvantaged children - including those excluded or missing from school, children in care and those with SEND who may attend special schools outside their home authority.

By avoiding the highly disruptive disaggregation of school admissions responsibilities, especially for special schools, whose distribution differs by Primary need, the model protects against the risk of a postcode lottery in specialist provision. The 2UA model avoids the complexity for parents and schools of working with multiple teams for SEND - preserving consistency and reducing administrative burden. This also applies for Home to School Transport, where the 2UA model allows for significantly greater financial and operational efficiencies, particularly for transport to specialist provision.

Hertfordshire has consistently been one of the lowest funded authorities per head for High Needs funding, the mechanism for supporting children with SEND, and with levels of need continuing to significantly outstrip the grant provided, the result is +£258m forecast cumulative deficit by April 2028. Whilst the 2UA model will not address the structural financial deficit in the SEND system, it does provide a level of scale and coherence which offers opportunities to harness economies of scale across statutory SEND services, strategic specialist provision planning and admissions and commissioning.

Case Study 4: Family Safeguarding Model

Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding Model is a ground-breaking and nationally acclaimed model of delivering multi-disciplinary support for children and families in need of help and protection. Delivered on an East and West footprint, the approach brings specialist practitioners and social workers together to help families, secure and keep more children living safely at home.

The scale, operational footprint and the benefits for agencies such as Public Health, Integrated Care Board, probation and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) is such that the budget is comprised of significant partner contributions and can support a range of specialist adult practitioners - psychologists, domestic abuse practitioners, mental health workers, drug and alcohol workers, sexual harm prevention practitioners and probation officers – to meet the differing needs of children and their families. A 2UA model will support the scale and budget required to maintain the specialist training and workforce necessary to sustain the Family Safeguarding Model's effectiveness and mitigates the risks of complicated partnership funding arrangements and reduced or unsustainable access to specialist interventions.

The model has been nationally evaluated and underpins much of the national children's social care reforms and is commended by the Department for Education in its guidance. In Hertfordshire, it has been pivotal in sustaining very low rates of children on child protection plans, children in our care and care leavers.

Case Study 5: Children's Social Care Reform

The neighbourhood model, currently being introduced under new Children's Social Care legislation and national reforms, forms the foundation of the 2UA operating model and aligns with the operational boundaries of key statutory partners, including Hertfordshire Constabulary and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). Hertfordshire Constabulary has restructured its safeguarding leadership across the proposed 2UA footprint to harness economies of scale, while the ICB is amalgamating into the largest in England, overseeing seven local authorities. The 2UA model alone protects and strengthens existing relationships aligned to continuing local health partnerships at a time of significant public sector reform.

Under this national reform, integrated multi-agency teams, comprising professionals from health, social care, police, housing, education and community safety will operate across two neighbourhoods in each unitary, providing families with a single, accessible gateway to support. These teams will prioritise preventative and timely interventions, maintain multi-agency input from statutory partners, and avoid the inefficiencies of requiring partners to resource multiple gateways and multi-agency child protection teams (MACTs), which are becoming statutory under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Case Study 6: Hertfordshire Fostering and Residential Service

The new unitary councils will take on the support children in care and sufficiency of care placements. Hertfordshire County Council currently cares for 1,042 children, with 316 (30%) placed with in-house foster carers. The national shortage of foster carers presents a significant challenge, with the service operating at 97% capacity. When in-house carers are unavailable, children are placed via independent residential and fostering agencies - often out of area and at great cost - disrupting vital connections to family, school and community networks. Children's care placements represent the biggest financial and operational risk to Children's Services.

To address these pressures, Hertfordshire launched a countywide Fostering and Residential Sufficiency Strategy in 2022. Delivered in three phases, the residential strategy creates 70 additional care places, enabling 85% of placement needs to be met locally by 2027 and significantly reducing cost. A joint funded NHS/Local Authority specialist mental health children's home has been established, improving outcomes for children with complex needs and reducing reliance on costly independent provision and delayed hospital discharges. Its success is reliant on scale and partnership funding best facilitated by the 2UA model and an alliance of provision.

These strategies have been developed on a countywide footprint. Foster carers and children's homes are not evenly distributed across the districts, and disaggregation risks gaps in provision, misalignment between need and delivery, and increased financial strain. On the 2UA model, both East and West geographies would be supporting similar numbers of children in care, taking account of current population and geographical location of children's homes and foster carers.

Under more fragmented models, an increased number of children in care could be placed out of area in independent provision at a significant cost to the local authority. Disconnected recruitment activity would create unhelpful competition for foster carers and require additional resources. Hertfordshire currently has two successful countywide innovative projects, an emergency foster care project where children need a home in an emergency allowing time to calm a crisis and potentially return the child home to their birth family and a step out of residential care project. These small but impactful schemes

would be compromised if disaggregated as they could not be replicated across multiple areas due to the minimal, but specialist resource required to deliver them.

How the 2UA model supports a safe and sustainable transition

- **Keeps services manageable and joined-up** – with only two councils, it is easier to coordinate mission critical Children's Services, education and SEND without creating unnecessary complexity.
- **Preserves existing East/West service footprints** – many specialist services already operate on an East/West basis, which fits naturally into the proposed 2UA structure and avoids disruption.
- **Aligns with health and police boundaries** – two councils match existing partner geographies, making it easier to maintain strong multi-agency working and referral pathways & protecting vulnerable children & young people.
- **Reduces duplication and costs** – with two councils, there is less need to replicate leadership teams, systems and contracts. It also makes joint planning and purchasing easier, helping avoid competition and manage costs for services like foster care or specialist school places.
- **Makes it easier to maintain consistent standards** – with two councils, it is easier to coordinate practice models, performance frameworks and improvement plans, while still allowing for local flexibility.

PUBLIC PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SAFETY

Hertfordshire's Public Protection and Community Safety services are a critical part of the county's public safety infrastructure, encompassing regulatory enforcement, emergency planning/response, environmental health, trading standards, licensing and community safety. The 2UA model provides the scale, coherence and strategic capacity needed to deliver these services effectively, while preserving resilience and minimising disruption to existing partnerships.

The model supports a more robust and coordinated response to major incidents and public protection challenges, including those highlighted in the Grenfell Phase Two report. By aligning with existing policing structures, which already operate on an East/West divisional basis, the 2UA model strengthens operational coordination and supports effective multi-agency working across community safety, safeguarding, and localised issues such as anti-social behaviour.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a key concern for communities and requires close collaboration between local authorities, police, housing providers and voluntary sector partners. The 2UA model enables targeted, place-based responses to ASB, while maintaining strategic oversight and consistency in enforcement approaches. It supports the integration of community safety teams with wider public protection services, ensuring that interventions are timely, proportionate and responsive to local needs.

Regulatory services such as planning enforcement, trading standards and environmental health face national workforce pressures and skills shortages. The 2UA model provides greater resilience by enabling strategic workforce planning, supporting specialist teams and reducing duplication across smaller units. It also allows for standardisation of approach, improving consistency and efficiency in enforcement and public protection.

For businesses, the model offers a clearer and more consistent regulatory environment. Many businesses operate across local authority boundaries, and the 2UA model reduces handoffs and

complexity by supporting a single front door for queries and compliance. This improves the business experience and will set the conditions for economic growth through streamlined regulation.

The model is also supported by the Chief Fire Officer, who is exploring a two-division structure aligned with policing. This further reinforces the case for coherent public protection delivery, ensuring that fire and rescue services can work seamlessly with other agencies to protect communities. By maintaining partnerships and enabling integrated service delivery, the 2UA model ensures Hertfordshire's Community Protection services remain resilient, responsive and fit for the future. It provides the leadership, scale and operational clarity needed to safeguard residents, support businesses and uphold public confidence in local enforcement and safety services.

Case Study 7: Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's Youth Engagement and Volunteer Programmes

Programmes such as Fire Cadets, LiFE courses and targeted arson prevention exemplify how locality-based, preventative services are already delivering impact across the county. These initiatives engage thousands of residents annually, support vulnerable young people, and strengthen community resilience. The 2UA model provides the strategic capacity to sustain and expand these programmes, ensuring consistent standards, smarter commissioning, and stronger outcomes across both authorities.

How the 2UA model supports a safe and sustainable transition for Community Protection

- **Keeps services coordinated and resilient** – with two councils, it is easier to maintain joined-up enforcement, regulatory and emergency response services without unnecessary fragmentation.
- **Aligns with Police and Fire boundaries** – two councils match existing partner geographies, supporting strong multi-agency working and effective coordination on community safety and emergency response.
- **Reduces duplication and supports specialist teams** – with two councils, there is less need to replicate leadership, systems and contracts, helping retain specialist expertise and manage workforce pressures.
- **Improves consistency for residents and businesses** – a two unitary model makes it easier to standardise enforcement approaches and provide a single front door for regulatory services, reducing complexity and improving responsiveness.

Public Health

Public Health is a statutory local government function based on 3 critical objectives: improving the health of the local population and reducing health inequalities, planning for and responding to emergencies that present a risk to Public Health, and advising the NHS and other partners on population need and evidence-based interventions. The Director of Public Health leads a range of preventative programmes that provide support for the leading causes of ill health including smoking, obesity, alcohol, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity. The 2UA model provides the scale, specialism and efficiency needed to achieve Public Health outcomes for the local population. It:

- ensures that the new unitaries will have the Public Health trained specialist workforce needed to commission evidence-based programmes and advise on Public Health interventions including pandemics and other health-related emergencies. The specialist Public Health workforce is small and there are likely to be gaps in workforce if teams are split into ever smaller units. The shortage of Directors of Public Health is a risk noted nationally.

- maintains existing joint work between Public Health and the NHS on an East and West footprint, maximising the potential benefits of the Government's neighbourhood health model, minimising disruption to existing pathways and reducing the risk of a postcode lottery for residents living in different geographical areas.

- provides best value for money. Commissioning services on more than two footprints will incur additional costs of management time for running procurements and commissioning services. This will also adversely impact on staff in the NHS and voluntary sector partners bidding to provide Public Health services.

- minimises disruption to existing countywide statutory partnerships convened or supported by the Director of Public Health such as the Drugs and Alcohol Strategic Board, the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership Board, the Hertfordshire Mental Health Learning Disabilities and Neurodiversity Health and Care Partnership, and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Case Study 8: Mental health and substance use: transformation programme

Hertfordshire County Council's Public Health department is leading a service transformation programme to improve support for individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use needs (COMHSU). This multi-agency initiative, in collaboration with the Hertfordshire Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Neurodiversity Health and Care Partnership, aims to improve access to integrated, coordinated care, ensuring that people receive timely and appropriate support.

COMHSU is more common than many might think with up to 50% of people with severe mental ill health also using substances, and the majority of drug (70%) and alcohol (86%) users in community substance use treatment in England experiencing mental ill health. In Hertfordshire, people with both mental health and substance use needs have historically faced fragmented services, with people often 'falling through the gaps' in services.

The HCC Director of Public Health launched this programme in Summer 2024 and has funded a dedicated Strategic Lead to drive this work forward. It forms a key part of the HCC Public Health Business Plan, contributing to Priority 5: 'Help people to live healthy lives' and aligning with the strategic aim of 'Partnerships and influencing policy'.

The programme brings together a wide range of stakeholders – including commissioners, statutory providers and voluntary and community sector organisations across mental health, substance use, criminal justice, districts and borough councils, acute hospital trusts, Healthwatch and others - working collaboratively to improve pathways and outcomes for people with COMHSU.

Case Study 9: Age Friendly Hertfordshire

By 2043, residents aged 65 and over are expected to make up 23.2% of Hertfordshire's population (Herts Insight, 2023). This presents both challenges and opportunities, underscoring the urgent need to create communities that support healthy ageing and improve quality of life. The Age Friendly Hertfordshire programme represents a strategic response to this need. An Age-friendly Community is a supportive environment where individuals can enjoy a healthy and fulfilling later life. It is a place where residents can engage in meaningful activities and actively contribute to their communities for as long as possible.

Funded by Hertfordshire County Council Public Health and jointly led by Age UK Hertfordshire and North Herts & Stevenage CVS, the programme is being delivered in partnership with local organisations across all sectors. The initial baseline report gathered the views of approximately 3,000 residents on their local

neighbourhoods and where improvements could be made. A recent stakeholder event then focussed on identifying the actions to prioritise to create a more age friendly Hertfordshire. These actions will involve adapting local environments, transport, businesses and services to be accessible and inclusive. This will include work across county council departments, as well as district/borough colleagues – all working with residents and businesses. Outcomes will include more social participation, less isolation, better health and wellbeing. One example to date has been Age UK, HCC public health and Intalink reviewing bus shelters with input from local residents to make them more welcoming and inclusive.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing is a critical determinant of economic performance as well as health, wellbeing and life outcomes. The 2UA model delivers a more coordinated approach to housing and homelessness, recognising housing as a key determinant of personal outcomes and community wellbeing. A larger authority footprint and asset base allows for planning across wider geographies while retaining the flexibility to respond to local challenges, ensuring services remain rooted in place.

Current pressures and need

Housing need in Hertfordshire varies across districts but remains a critical pressure point. Around **16,000 households** - 3.2% of all households - are on housing registers, below the national average of 5 –6%. However, some areas, e.g. Welwyn Hatfield, exceed this benchmark. There are with **1,377 households in temporary accommodation**, including **920 families with children**. Despite only **4,307 homes available to let each year**, more than **6,000 households are owed a legal duty to assist**, and nearly **7,000 households**[24] are approaching services at the point of crisis. These pressures are compounded by a fragmented policy and delivery landscape, with multiple allocations, homelessness prevention, and tenancy sustainment policies across the 10 districts.

The proposed East and West Hertfordshire unitary authorities face distinct challenges:

Table 9[25]

Indicator	East Hertfordshire	West Hertfordshire
Total Housing Stock	25,8422	25,9241
Housing Register Size	11,031	5,016
Households in Temporary Accommodation	594	783
Affordable Housing Delivery 2023/24	853	469
Affordable Housing Delivery 2024/25	810	579
Homelessness Approaches	4,160	2,799
Homelessness Duties Owed	3,452	2,596

East Hertfordshire shows greater affordable housing delivery and register demand, while West Hertfordshire faces more acute affordability challenges and higher use of temporary accommodation. These differences underscore the need for tailored strategies within a coherent framework.

How the 2UA model responds

Strategic delivery and transition

[24] *Source: Local Authority Housing Data (supplied by Stevenage Borough Council)*
[25] *Source: Local Authority Housing Data (supplied by Stevenage Borough Council)*

The 2UA model supports a 'lift and shift' approach to transition, ensuring continuity of statutory functions such as homelessness prevention, allocations and temporary accommodation management. This is critical given the significant dependency on internal support services, the complexity of IT systems (10 primary and 50+ support systems[26]), and the need to maintain regulatory compliance from day one.

This model enables:

- **Consistent early intervention and prevention strategies**, reducing crisis presentations
- **Unified advice and housing options services**, improving access and outcomes for residents
- **Integrated commissioning** of temporary accommodation and housing-related support, reducing duplication and cost
- **Stronger alignment with Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Public Health**, enabling holistic support for vulnerable households
- **Improved data sharing and digital platforms**, supporting predictive analytics and targeted interventions.

The scale of the 2UA model is particularly advantageous for housing delivery. Larger unitary councils are better positioned to identify suitable sites for development, overcome delivery barriers (e.g. flood zones, protected landscapes, fragmented land ownership) and align housing growth with infrastructure investment. This includes transport, schools, healthcare, and utilities, all of which are critical to unlocking sustainable development.

The new authorities will be able to make better decisions about the use of land and premises. Their portfolios will comprise district and county land. There will be more scope to develop and redevelop sites for the highest priority needs, such as affordable and specialist housing and package land together, using existing assets for different housing purposes. It will also be easier to form and maintain strategic partnerships with housing associations and private providers.

It also enables strategic oversight of major growth corridors, such as Hemel Garden Communities and the A10 tech corridor in the West and East, facilitating joined-up planning across district boundaries and aligning housing delivery with economic development and infrastructure priorities.

The 2UA model provides an opportunity to develop more robust, standardised processes for meeting statutory obligations across services. In areas such as housing standards and homelessness duties, this consistency will reduce variability, improve service quality, and mitigate the risk of non-compliance. Shared governance and unified oversight will support clearer accountability and better performance monitoring.

Integration with Critical Services

Housing stability directly affects demand for adult and children's social care. Improved housing can reduce safeguarding risks and support independent living. The 2UA model supports integrated case management frameworks and governance, enabling housing teams to work more closely with social care professionals to deliver joined-up support.

[26] *Source: Housing Service Design Workshop – Hertfordshire, September, 2025*

Poor housing conditions and homelessness are also closely linked to Public Health outcomes, including respiratory illness, mental health challenges and substance misuse. Embedding models such as **Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM**) into housing transformation will be essential to improving health outcomes and reducing demand for emergency and long-term healthcare services.

The model supports the integration of housing, Adult Social Care and Children's Services into a **Team Around the Family** approach, enabling joined up support for vulnerable households and reducing fragmentation in service delivery. Families experiencing or at risk of homelessness will benefit from fewer handoffs, clearer pathways to support, and stronger relationships with health and social care services.

Homelessness often intersects with issues such as offending, substance misuse and mental health. The 2UA model provides an opportunity to strengthen pathways between housing and criminal justice services, including probation, police, courts and third sector mental health and substance misuse providers. By maintaining strategic scale and embedding housing within multi-agency neighbourhood teams, the model supports joint strategies that enable smoother transitions from the criminal justice system and reduce the risk of repeat homelessness.

Partnerships and Market Shaping

The 2UA model provides the scale and strategic oversight needed to:

- Align housing growth with infrastructure investment, including transport, schools, healthcare and utilities
- Develop coherent, area-wide strategies for housing and homelessness, replacing 10 separate plans
- Standardise processes for housing standards, homelessness duties and tenancy sustainment
- Strengthen partnerships with housing associations, private landlords and commissioned providers
- Support integration of housing with employment, education and community safety strategies.

The evolving partnership landscape must also include **private sector landlords and commissioned providers**, such as those contracted by the Home Office. The **Private Rented Sector (PRS)** is a significant component of the housing market and a vital prevention tool for statutory homelessness services. The 2UA model provides the **scale, visibility and strategic oversight** needed to engage proactively with PRS stakeholders across a broader geography. This enables:

- More consistent enforcement of housing standards
- Better coordination of access to accommodation
- Earlier identification of risks that could escalate into homelessness or community safety issues

By aligning PRS engagement with unified housing strategies, registers and prevention frameworks, the 2UA model reduces fragmentation and ensures a more coherent, preventative approach to housing challenges.

This mirrors the trend toward larger, more resilient housing providers - such as the merger of Watford Community Housing and Settle/Paradigm - and positions the new authorities to engage strategically with the sector, manage risk and deliver better outcomes.

District-run Environmental Health, PRS regulation, and licensing services play a vital role in maintaining housing standards. Teams responsible for addressing overcrowding, pest infestations, sanitation, and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing will be directly impacted by changes in housing strategy and service delivery. The 2UA model ensures these regulatory functions are integrated and resourced to respond to shifts in demand and maintain compliance.

Wider System Impact

Stable housing supports economic participation, educational attainment and community safety. Homelessness can disrupt employment and reduce access to job opportunities. The 2UA model offers scope to integrate housing with employment support and economic development programmes, strengthening social value delivery through contracts and contributing to more effective homelessness prevention strategies.

The quality and location of housing, particularly temporary accommodation, can significantly affect educational outcomes. Children in unstable housing situations may experience disrupted school attendance, lower attainment and reduced wellbeing. More effective prevention and early intervention will support educational stability and reduce pressure on school-based support services.

Homelessness and unstable housing can also correlate with increased anti-social behaviour and community safety concerns. During transition, frustrations or gaps in service access may increase demand on ASB teams and impact community cohesion. The 2UA model enables collaborative approaches between housing, community safety, and enforcement teams to manage these risks.

Access to transport is another critical factor. The location of temporary accommodation and the design of outreach or Housing First models must consider how vulnerable residents will reach services, employment, and education. Inaccessible support can lead to increased demand for statutory provision. The 2UA model allows for strategic planning that aligns housing with transport infrastructure to ensure services remain accessible.

The 2UA model facilitates better:

- **Economic participation** by enabling strategic housing delivery in proximity to employment centres and aligning housing services with local economic development plans across coherent East/West geographies.
- **Educational outcomes** by enabling strategic oversight of temporary accommodation and locality-based housing services that reduce school disruption and support earlier intervention for families at risk.
- **Community safety** by aligning housing enforcement with police and safeguarding structures already operating on East/West footprints, ensuring consistent, joined-up action across neighbourhoods.
- **Transport access** by aligning housing strategy with infrastructure planning, ensuring temporary accommodation and outreach models are located near public transport and essential services.

The model provides strategic oversight of **Temporary Accommodation (TA)** and **homelessness prevention**, supporting consistent standards, shared procurement frameworks, and improved outcomes. By aligning housing with wider growth, planning, and regeneration, the 2UA model ensures housing services actively support place-based transformation.

Specialist housing provision

Appropriate provision of specialist housing for adults with care and support needs will be a key opportunity area. The two unitary councils will have the capacity and financial strength to deliver development in this area that addresses significant supply deficits. This will both provide better housing with care options for people and help achieve financial sustainability in care purchasing budgets.

The scale of the new authorities supports more efficient commissioning, better use of data and improved coordination with voluntary and community sector partners. This enables earlier intervention, more sustainable housing solutions, and will have a greater positive impact on residents' everyday lives.

How the 2UA model supports a safe and sustainable transition

- **Preserves operational coherence**: Aligns housing services with existing district footprints, supporting a safe and legal transition from vesting day.
- **Supports integrated working**: Embeds housing within multi-disciplinary teams alongside Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Public Health.
- **Improves service resilience**: Reduces fragmentation and duplication, enabling consistent standards across homelessness, allocations, tenancy sustainment and housing-related support.
- **Strengthens strategic commissioning**: Enables shared procurement and investment in specialist housing and community-based provision.
- **Protects statutory compliance**: Ensures readiness through robust governance, statutory leadership and continuity of core functions.
- **Enables data-driven planning**: Supports improved data sharing, unified systems and stronger insight into housing need and service performance.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

The 2UA model supports integrated transport planning aligned with Hertfordshire's recognised economic corridors along the M1 and A1(M) - critical arteries for business, logistics and labour mobility. This strategic alignment enables more efficient infrastructure investment, better coordination of public transport and targeted improvements in road safety and active travel.

Hertfordshire is a **polycentric county**, with multiple economic centres and significant **net commuting flows both into and out of the county**. Many residents travel across district boundaries for work, education and services, and the county also attracts commuters from neighbouring areas.

By operating at a scale that reflects how people live and move, the 2UA model supports long term planning across wider catchments, improving connectivity between homes, jobs and services. This enhances productivity, helps manage congestion and strengthens Hertfordshire's role as a key contributor to the UK economy. Local responsiveness ensures that community specific transport needs are met, while strategic oversight enables smarter investment decisions and better value for money.

Fragmenting governance further would risk weakening the ability to plan and invest coherently across these geographies.

How the 2UA model supports a safe and sustainable transition for Highways and Transportation Services

- **Preserves operational coherence** – The 2UA model enables clear geographic allocation of depots, assets and staff, preserving local knowledge and ensuring continuity in day-to-day operations such as reactive repairs, inspections and winter maintenance. Depot-based teams and inherited service models will remain in place initially, with transformation phased post-vesting day.

- **Supports integrated working** – Highways and transport will be embedded within wider place-based teams, enabling alignment with planning, regeneration, and environmental services. This supports joined-up delivery of infrastructure projects, active travel schemes, and community transport initiatives.

- **Improves service resilience** – With only two authorities, the model avoids fragmentation of specialist teams and supports shared delivery of functions such as traffic management, engineering design and school transport. This protects critical expertise and enables flexible deployment across boundaries.

- **Strengthens strategic commissioning** – The scale of the 2UA model allows for more effective management of contracts, including the continuation of county-wide arrangements (e.g. Jacobs professional services contract). It also supports joint procurement and shared service models where appropriate, reducing duplication and improving value for money.

- **Protects statutory compliance** – Each UA will become the legal highway authority for its area, with clear governance and leadership structures in place. Statutory duties, including network management, inspection regimes, and development control advice, will be maintained from Day One, supported by inter-authority agreements for shared services.

- **Enables data-driven planning** – Shared or hosted digital systems will be protected, ensuring access to historical data and continuity in asset management, scheme planning, and traffic coordination. Over time, councils may choose to consolidate or separate systems based on strategic need.

- **Supports equitable access and community engagement** – The model enables harmonisation of policies such as parking charges and school transport, reducing post-code lottery resident and ensuring fairness across the county. Neighbourhood highway officers and local improvement schemes will remain visible and responsive to community needs.

PROTECTING OUR CULTURAL SERVICES

The 2UA model provides the most effective structure for preserving and strengthening civic identity across Hertfordshire's polycentric landscape. With two coherent authorities, the model enables a consistent and coordinated approach to safeguarding historic rights, ceremonial functions and civic traditions, where residents wish them to be retained.

The proposed East/West boundary reflects a long-standing and natural division within the county. While Hertfordshire's external boundaries have changed on occasion, most notably in 1965 when Barnet was exchanged for Potters Bar, its internal boundaries are deeply rooted. They are based on groupings of parishes, which have served as the principal units of local administration since medieval times. The current district areas are not dissimilar to the boundaries of the Poor Law Unions and Registration Districts established in the 1830s, when new forms of governance were introduced. The East/West divide is therefore not only administratively coherent but also historically grounded.

There is also a clear geographical logic to the proposed configuration. The **East**, traditionally more arable and lower lying, is shaped by rivers flowing into the **River Lea**, with **Hertford** acting as a strategic and historic centre. The **West** converges around the **River Colne**, with towns such as **St Albans** and **Watford** forming civic and spiritual anchors. These natural features have long influenced settlement patterns, trade routes and local identity, reinforcing the logical and coherent geographies of the East/West split.

This model simplifies the process of establishing Charter Trustees or town councils where locally desired, ensuring that mayoralties, market rights and other privileges conferred by Royal Charters and Letters Patent are retained. While these legal instruments are valid, it is worth noting that all 10 districts have had a Mayor for the past 51 years, and where such privileges existed before 1974, they can continue under the new arrangements.

Critically, model also avoids the need for disruptive boundary reviews. Because the proposed East and West Hertfordshire authorities align with existing borough and district boundaries, there is no requirement to redraw electoral or administrative geographies to preserve civic identity. This provides immediate clarity and continuity for residents, elected members and civic institutions, while reducing the complexity, cost and uncertainty often associated with structural change.

The 2UA model offers the flexibility for each authority to work with communities to determine the most appropriate arrangements for civic life, whether through formal structures or integrated civic leadership. This enables local choice while maintaining clarity and legal continuity from vesting day onwards.

By enabling both the preservation of historic identity and the opportunity for civic renewal, the 2UA model ensures that Hertfordshire's civic traditions remain visible, valued and connected to the communities they serve.

Culture, in its broadest sense, is a vital expression of this civic identity. From libraries and museums to festivals, public art and heritage sites, cultural assets reflect the stories, values and aspirations of local communities. The 2UA model enables more locally responsive cultural planning, aligned with the distinct identities of East and West Hertfordshire. This supports civic pride, community cohesion and place-making, ensuring that cultural heritage and innovation continue to enrich civic life across the county.

MAXIMISING ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

The two unitary model maximises accountability, simplifies performance management and strengthens alignment with national frameworks such as the Local Government Outcomes Framework and the NHS Long Term Plan. It reduces fragmentation, improves data coherence and enables clearer decision making across services. This supports better outcomes, more transparent governance and a stronger platform for future innovation.

By consolidating systems and streamlining oversight, the model enables smarter use of data and digital infrastructure to monitor performance, target interventions and drive continuous improvement. Residents will benefit from more consistent service standards, clearer lines of responsibility, and a more responsive public sector. These improvements also support economic resilience by ensuring that services are efficient, scalable and capable of adapting to future challenges.

MEETS LOCAL NEEDS AND INFORMED BY LOCAL VIEWS (MHCLG CRITERION 4)

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK AND IMPACT ON PROPOSAL

Engagement[27] with residents, local authorities, voluntary organisations and strategic partners across Hertfordshire revealed **broad and consistent support** for the 2UA model. The 2UA model was frequently cited as the most coherent and least disruptive configuration, particularly in relation to strategic planning, service integration and value for money. Support was rooted in practical considerations, with respondents highlighting how the model could **simplify governance**, **reduce duplication and improve outcomes across housing, health, and social care.**

Of those who expressed a preference in the public engagement survey, 33.8% favoured a two-unitary model, 22.5% preferred three, and 43.7% supported four. This evidences a relatively narrow gap between the two-unitary and four-unitary options, with the two-unitary model emerging as a strong contender.

Financial Efficiency and Simplification

Across both public and stakeholder engagement, the potential for cost savings and reduced duplication was the most consistently cited benefit of the 2UA model. Respondents highlighted:

- Shared back-office functions
- Streamlined governance
- Economies of scale

"Efficiency through shared back-office functions" - North Herts resident

"Fewer stakeholders = clearer governance" – Stevenage resident

"The best financial and effective option with economies of scale" – Three Rivers resident

Strategic stakeholders echoed this view, with Hertfordshire Futures business board members and Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) Investment Management, describing the model as *"simple and efficient"* and *"big enough to capture the benefits of consolidation but small enough to be locally accountable"*.

Strategic Coordination and Service Integration

Integration across housing, health, and social care was a recurring theme. Fragmentation between tiers was frequently cited as a barrier to effective delivery. The 2UA model was seen as the best way to overcome this, delivering:

- Joined-up referral pathways
- Consistent service standards
- Strategic planning across broader geographies

"I would prefer as little amount of new councils as possible. I am concerned that there will be a postcode lottery of services and a disconnect in things like adult care." North Herts resident

This view was strongly echoed in the public engagement survey. On benefits of reorganisation:

[27] *Source: Local Government Engagement Feedback Report on Unitary Options and Appendix*

- **55%** selected “more joined-up services that work better together”
- **43%** cited “coordinated strategic planning”
- **41%** highlighted “better quality services”

These priorities align directly with the strengths of the 2UA model, which delivers integrated and consistent service delivery across housing, health, and social care - areas where fragmentation was frequently cited as a concern, combined with significant savings that will be reinvested to further improve key services.

Alignment with Existing Geographies and Service Footprints

A recurring theme in both public and stakeholder feedback was the strategic coherence of the East/West configuration. Respondents highlighted how the proposed boundaries align with existing operational footprints across health, policing and transport, helping to preserve partnerships and reduce transition risk. Stakeholders and residents cited the following benefits:

- Alignment with NHS Health and Care Partnership footprints
- Coherence with Hertfordshire Constabulary’s divisional structure
- Simplified engagement for strategic planning and commissioning
- Reduced disruption to existing service delivery partnerships

The Herts and West Essex ICB and Citizens Advice St Albans noted that the East/West split reflects current operational footprints and would minimise disruption. Watford Community Housing cited that two unitaries would be a natural extension of *“existing strategic planning and health joint working initiatives”*.

“We welcome as much alignment of local authority boundaries with the NHS as possible. As you are aware, the NHS is now organised over two footprints within the county, south and west Hertfordshire and east and north Hertfordshire. This configuration aligns extremely closely with the option of two unitary authorities and is our strong preference from the options set out.” – East and North Herts Teaching NHS Trust

“Many of our strategic partners including health and Hertfordshire Constabulary are organised on an East/West basis. This makes operational planning and partnership working considerably more practical” - HCC staff member

“West groupings mirror the South & West Herts Health and Care Partnership footprint (Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford), while the East side aligns with East & North Herts hospital catchments (Lister/ New QEII)” – East Herts voluntary sector respondent

Geographic Coherence and Travel-to-Work Patterns

The East/West configuration was consistently described as geographically logical and reflective of how people live, work and access services across Hertfordshire. Respondents highlighted that the proposed groupings align with:

- Travel-to-work areas
- Hospital catchments
- Leisure and retail patterns
- Community and civic ties

"The proposed West and East reflect real travel-to-work, retail and transport corridors (M1/M25 vs A1(M)/A10" - East Herts voluntary sector respondent

Local Accountability and Representation

Some respondents noted concerns about the scale of two councils covering 1.2 million residents, but many felt that the model supported strong local representation, particularly if paired with strengthened roles for town and parish councils.

Key themes included:

- The need to retain local voice and civic identity
- Support for devolving responsibilities to hyper-local bodies
- Recognition that scale can be balanced with responsiveness

Supporters also felt that two councils would strike a good balance between being large enough to be strategic, yet not too remote for residents. A parish councillor from Three Rivers described two unitaries as *"not too big, not too small… 1.2 million residents so 2 is a good number"*.

Minimising Disruption and Supporting a Smooth Transition

The 2UA model was consistently viewed as the least disruptive option for reform. Stakeholders highlighted its ability to:

- Build on existing service footprints and operational geographies
- Avoid unnecessary disaggregation of high-risk services
- Reduce complexity for residents, staff and partners during transition
- Enable continuity in safeguarding, care pathways and commissioning relationships

"Matches the current geographic footprint and would mean less disruption than other models" – Citizens Advice Bureau St Albans

This reinforces the case for the 2UA model as a stable and practical platform for reorganisation - one that protects what works while enabling transformation.

SUPPORTS DEVOLUTION ARRANGEMENTS (MHCLG 5) (MHCLG CRITERION 5)

This section describes the Hertfordshire Councils' ambition for devolution in the county. We recognise that devolution is achieved through a separate legislative process, and we have written to the Secretary of State in this regard. The references throughout this document are intended to signal our ambition and demonstrate how our strategic direction supports the government's potential opportunities for Hertfordshire.

The 2UA model enables swift and effective devolution to a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). A leadership of three (the Mayor and two local authority Leaders) will provide decisive, visible and accountable leadership for Hertfordshire, streamlining governance and decision-making. The two unitary authority model best supports strategic development and delivery at county scale, effectively delivered through the two authorities working together with business and partners – reducing fragmented and duplicated relationships that slow down strategic direction and delivery.

Each unitary will be sufficiently local to understand and champion the needs of its communities, yet large enough to support the Mayor in developing effective strategies and to make decisions in the interests of

their whole area. The efficiency and financial sustainability of the two unitaries will enable them to respond to the strategic direction set by the MSA, moving at pace to deliver the necessary services and infrastructure. This will deliver rapid progress to unlock growth, further boosting our thriving economy and supporting our world-leading businesses as well as the local companies that form the bedrock of our local high streets and communities, creating more jobs for local residents.

Two unitary leaders and a Mayor will also lead to faster action on the environment, from meeting net zero commitments to protecting and enhancing our green spaces as set out in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, to decarbonising the economy and taking advantage of the many opportunities of 'green growth'. Two financially sustainable unitaries supporting a Mayor can provide the bold, consistent and ambitious leadership and action that is needed to ensure Hertfordshire's residents, businesses and our environment thrive in the future.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (MHCLG CRITERION 6)

Community empowerment will be central to the identity and operating model of the two new unitary authorities. Hertfordshire is made up of many diverse and interconnected communities, each with its own identity, strengths and priorities. The 2UA model provides a scale of organisation that can support neighbourhood-level governance and community-led decision-making, while avoiding the imposition of artificial boundaries that risk dividing communities which naturally collaborate to deliver economic, social and cultural benefits.

The model is designed to ensure decisions are made closer to communities, with clear lines of accountability and visible local leadership. This includes formal mechanisms such as Local Democratic Forums, strengthened partnerships with parish and town councils, and shared physical infrastructure such as libraries and family hubs. These familiar touchpoints will act as accessible spaces for engagement, support and community action.

The Local Government Engagement Feedback Report highlighted strong support for localism - a principle that is fully embedded in the 2UA model. By maintaining coherence across community networks and civic infrastructure, the 2UA model enables stronger local leadership and inclusive engagement. It builds on Hertfordshire's existing strengths in community partnerships, ensuring that Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations continue to play a central role in shaping and delivering support.

This approach recognises that communities are best placed to understand their own needs and priorities. It supports grassroots initiatives, from local arts programmes and heritage projects to community-led festivals, which foster identity, wellbeing and economic vibrancy. By embedding this model across both organisations, from service design to decision making, this model will create simplicity and accessibility for communities, residents and businesses.

Delivering the vision

With each authority serving around 600,000 residents the 2UA model enables a coherent and scalable framework for locality working. Localised management structures with dedicated service teams and locality leads will strengthen civic leadership. This approach provides the flexibility to tailor delivery to the distinct character of different places, whether urban, rural, or mixed, while maintaining consistency in standards and strategic oversight.

The scale of the new authorities also provides the internal capacity for robust engagement, supported by stable workforce structures and improved data and insight capabilities. This will enable more proactive, preventative and place-based approaches to service design and commissioning.

Community Engagement: Principles and Practice
This model will establish a clear and consistent approach for community engagement, enabling residents, community groups and local businesses to influence decisions that are best taken locally. This will include:

- **Supporting community action and involvement**, recognising the value of local knowledge, lived experience and grassroots leadership.
- **Transparent processes** demonstrating how local input informs outcomes
- **Accessible engagement channels** tailored to different communities including digital platforms, in-person forums and targeted outreach.
- **Co-designed services and policies** developed in partnership with residents, businesses and local leaders via a range of locally accountable structures such as Local Democratic Forums, youth councils and people's assemblies.

Infrastructure for Delivery
To ensure this vision is delivered in practice, the following infrastructure will underpin our approach:

- **Local Democratic Forums** will act as a formal mechanism for engaging with local communities and responding to local needs
- **Locality Teams** will be embedded across services to support place-based delivery and facilitate community action
- **Digital platforms** will provide faster response times and better visibility of local issues
- **Shared facilities and community hubs** such as libraries, family hubs will be familiar, physical touchpoints for residents. Acting as a direct link between local communities and the new unitaries, they will help tackle social isolation and will be key focal points for building community networks and engagement on local issues

This joined-up system reflects how people live their lives - not through institutional boundaries, but through trusted relationships, shared spaces and local priorities. This builds on Hertfordshire's existing strengths and responds to stakeholder feedback calling for visible local presence, simpler access to services and stronger community voice.

Operationalising the Four Pillars of Community Empowerment
The 2UA model brings to life the four pillars of community empowerment outlined in the full submission ensuring that communities retain influence over decisions that affect their everyday lives.

1. Local Democratic Forums

Local Democratic Forums (LDFs) will play a key role in ensuring that the two unitary councils and their services listen and are responsive to local needs and aspirations.

Convened by councillors representing that particular area, these forums will bring together local NHS partners, police, voluntary and community organisations, town and parish councils and local businesses to:

- Engage with residents and local communities
- Shape services and direct the distribution of grant funding
- Maintain community assets and consider their transfer to community stewardship where appropriate
- Use integrated data to identify and address emerging issues early.

Developed in line with proposed neighbourhood governance provisions in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, LDFs will be constituted as formal area committees empowered with budgets and access to officer support and other resources that can be used to address issues that matter most to local people.

The forums will provide transparent processes and accessible engagement channels, ensuring local priorities inform decision-making. This will enable residents to participate directly – whether through raising issues; asking questions of service providers; or contributing to participatory budgeting or local residents' panels.

Every area of each unitary will have its own forum. A flexible approach will be taken to ensure the geography of these forums reflect 'real places', covering both larger urban areas and smaller rural settlements. Where possible, forum boundaries will align the areas with NHS health integrated neighbourhood areas to maximise local accountability and responsiveness.

2. Town, Parish and Community Councils

Town, parish and community councils – collectively known as 'local councils' - are vital partners in the 2UA model. They provide essential hyper-local services, foster civic pride and act as a direct voice for their communities.

The Local Government Engagement Feedback Report highlighted strong support for empowering parish and town councils to take on greater responsibility for very local matters. The 2UA model reflects this by enabling tailored charters and co-designed arrangements that **delegate appropriate functions to local councils**, including grounds maintenance, community facilities and neighbourhood planning, and, where appropriate, the transfer of community assets.

Both new unitary councils will work with the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils and develop and continue existing engagement frameworks such as Parish Voice Forums and a countywide conference. In unparished areas, alternative mechanisms, such as area forums, will ensure residents have a voice on local decision making. We will also consider the possibility of creating of new local councils where there is local appetite to do so.

3. Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector

The third pillar of community empowerment focuses on Hertfordshire's vibrant VCFSE sector. Given this sector's central role in empowering residents and enabling meaningful engagement, this section gives a detailed overview of how the 2UA model will embed and strengthen VCFSE partnerships across both authorities.

The county's existing infrastructure supports active participation from individuals, grassroots groups, faith communities and charities of all sizes, many of which are commissioned to deliver community-based support and represent local voices.

This inclusive ecosystem is already embedded in strategic planning and delivery across Hertfordshire. VCFSE partners are equal members of key statutory boards, including Health and Wellbeing; Domestic Abuse; Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG); the Drugs and Alcohol Strategic Board, and both Hertfordshire Adults Safeguarding Board and the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership. Long-standing partnerships such as the VCFSE Alliance, Community Leaders Forums, Multi-Faith Forums, and Community Help Hertfordshire (CVS network) are supported by Hertfordshire County Council, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), and other statutory bodies, ensuring continuity and collaboration.

Adult Care Services, Children's Services, and Public Health commission a wide range of services that support hundreds of thousands of residents. These are funded through HCC budgets, Public Health allocations, pooled funding with the ICB, the Better Care Fund, and central government grants. The collective impact is delivered through thousands of local VCFSE organisations, ensuring that services are responsive, locally rooted, and co-produced with communities.

VCFSE representatives have raised concerns that any move away from a countywide approach, such as requiring them to respond to multiple Local Authorities, would risk fragmenting their capacity, limiting their ability to pool expertise, and weakening their collective voice. Splitting contracts into smaller areas could increase management costs and exacerbate existing challenges in recruiting staff and volunteers, making critical community-based services harder to deliver.

The 2UA model addresses these concerns by preserving countywide commissioning, collaboration and funding arrangements whilst also enabling them to engage on specific local issues through the LDF. It enables consistent leadership of initiatives such as the Cost of Living response and Household Support Fund distribution, ensuring that the most vulnerable residents are supported effectively.

The 2UA model also empowers communities to play an active role in building climate resilience. By embedding decision-making at the neighbourhood level, residents and local organisations can shape responses to climate risks that reflect their unique environmental contexts and priorities. This includes community-led initiatives such as flood preparedness, energy efficiency schemes, local food networks, and nature recovery projects. Through strengthened partnerships with VCFSE organisations and local forums, the model supports inclusive engagement on climate action, ensuring that all voices are heard—especially those most vulnerable to climate impacts. By aligning local knowledge with strategic support, the 2UA model enables communities to become active participants in creating a more sustainable and resilient Hertfordshire.

The case studies below demonstrate how coordinated countywide strategies built on community engagement, consultation and coproduction deliver real impact.

Case Study 9: Hertfordshire Dementia Strategy

The Hertfordshire Dementia Strategy 2023–2028 is delivered through the Mental Health, Learning Disability and Neurodiversity Health and Care Partnership (MHLDN). Workstreams are chaired by experts-by-experience and bring together local community groups, faith representatives, charities of all sizes, and all three tiers of Local Authority alongside countywide statutory services.

Significant progress has been made, particularly in response to community calls for better coordination across services. Hertfordshire County Council funds the majority of community-based dementia support, including a countywide helpline, one-to-one support, and local hubs, all delivered through **Memory Support Hertfordshire**, a network of charity partners guided by community need and innovating to support Strategy delivery.

A key strand of this work is the development of **Dementia Friendly Communities**, which brings together VCFSE organisations, statutory services, and local businesses. This initiative provides access to expertise, resources, communication tools, and shared learning, enabling communities, from high streets to districts, to collaborate on initiatives such as the Dementia Friendly Community accreditation scheme.

Case Study 10: Hertfordshire Carers Strategy

The Hertfordshire Carers Strategy is a long-standing multi-agency partnership focused on improving support for unpaid carers of all ages. Community empowerment and co-production are central to both delivery and the current refresh of the Strategy.

Led jointly by Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board, the Strategy is driven by strategic lead officers working closely with the Hertfordshire Carers Co-production Board and its subgroups. The independent charity **Carers in Hertfordshire** is the key commissioned partner, funded through pooled health and social care budgets.

All aspects, from recommissioning planning to individual projects, involve statutory and voluntary sector partners alongside unpaid carer representatives, ensuring that carers remain central to decision-making. Recent work includes a review of carers breaks, where carers highlighted the need for continuity of care and better access in evenings, weekends, and rural areas. A task and finish group also co-produced improvements to information resources and developed an updated card and information about the **Carers In Case of Emergency** action plan.

4. Councillors as Community Empowerment Leaders

Councillors will act as visible local advocates, champions and enablers of community engagement and participation. Through Local Democratic Forums, they will:

- Facilitate community development and problem solving
- Build local capacity and civic leadership
- Champion community ambitions and connect residents to council and partners services.

Councillors will be supported by strengthened locality support teams and dedicated locality budgets, digital platforms and physical touchpoints such as libraries and community hubs.

Inclusive and Thematic Engagement
To ensure diverse voices are heard we will embed **inclusive and thematic engagement structures** alongside place-based approaches. These will include:

- **Youth Councils and Forums** to shape priorities for young people
- **Faith and Inter-Faith networks** to engage communities around shared values and social action
- **Citizens' Panels and People's Assemblies** to deliberate on complex issues

- **Communities of interest** (e.g. carers, disabled residents, ethnic minority groups) to ensure inclusive representation.

A Model That Goes Further

The 2UA model delivers greater consistency and coordination in how locality working is delivered across the county. It supports stronger partnerships with parish and town councils and provides the flexibility for each authority to adapt its approach to reflect the character, priorities and service needs of its communities.

By combining physical access points with digital innovation and embedding councillor advocacy into service design, the model creates a responsive, inclusive, and easy-to-navigate system. This approach builds on Hertfordshire's existing ambitions and goes further to establish a system that is more local than the existing two-tier system, unlocking the power of local communities, supporting grassroots action, and ensuring every resident has the opportunity to shape local decisions and outcomes.

Importantly, the model reflects the priorities raised in the Local Government Engagement Feedback Report, where respondents consistently emphasised the importance of localism and the delegation of very local matters to parish and town councils. By embedding these principles into the governance and delivery architecture, the 2UA model ensures that hyper-local leadership is not only preserved but strengthened - enabling communities to take greater ownership of the issues that matter most to them. Example below evidences the approach of Local Area Boards, to engage and empower communities.

Local Area Boards

Purpose and Principles : Local Area Boards (LABs) serve as a mechanism to:
- Strengthen local democracy, empower communities, Improve service delivery responsiveness
- Facilitate place-based decision-making with transparency and accountability
- Community-led priority setting via collaborative working with partners

Structure and Governance

- **Chair : Elected unitary councillor** representing the area
- **Membership : Local Unitary councillors, Community representatives** (e.g. parish/town councils, voluntary sector), **Public service partners** (e.g. police, health, education)
- **Geographic Coverage**: Each board covers a **defined locality** within the unitary council (Based on **natural communities**, **parish boundaries**, or **former district areas**)
- **Meetings and Engagement**: **Quarterly public meetings**, **Working groups** for specific themes (e.g. youth, transport, health) , **Online platforms** for consultation and feedback

Functions and Powers: **Influence over local service delivery** and consultation on major changes

- **Delegated budgets** for local grants, minor highways improvements e.g grass cutting and open space maintenance, oversight of community centres and play areas
- **Access to Area Board funding** and ability to leverage external funding through partnerships
- **Local Priority Setting** Annual community-led priority setting process and Development of local action plans aligned with the council's strategic goals

Support and Accountability

Council Support: Dedicated **Democratic Services Officer** & **Community Engagement Officer** to support outreach and coordination
Monitoring and Evaluation: Annual **impact reports** including integration with the council's **performance and assurance framework**

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The East/West Hertfordshire model offers a clear, deliverable pathway to local government reform. Its strength stems from the fact that the County Council currently delivers the majority of public services across Hertfordshire. This enables a **single-phase transition** that minimises disruption, reduces risk and accelerates the delivery of benefits residents and staff. These are:

- **Lower implementation costs**
  With fewer organisations to restructure, the 2UA model **avoids the complexity and cost** of repeated disaggregation. It builds on existing service footprints and partnerships, reducing the need for wholesale system change.

- **Reduced transition risk**
  The approach to safely and securely disaggregating IT platforms and underlying sensitive data is being carefully considered. A 2UA model **reduces associated risk due to the complexity** of large-scale data migration activity across multiple organisations.

- **Faster transition and early benefits**
  A two-unitary structure allows for quicker alignment of governance, systems and staff. This means earlier delivery of savings, **faster stabilisation of services, and a shorter period of uncertainty** for residents and employees.

- **Higher net savings and cumulative cash flow**
  The model delivers greater long-term financial resilience through streamlined management, reduced duplication and smarter use of assets. It generates **higher cumulative savings** and a **faster return on investment** than more fragmented alternatives.

- **Greater integration across statutory services**
  The model supports a more integrated approach across statutory services, enabling **more coherent commissioning, better outcomes** and more efficient use of public resources.

- **Stronger focus on prevention**
  The scale and capacity of the 2UA model allow for investment in **preventative approaches** across resident-facing services, particularly in Adult Social Care, Children's Services, SEND and early help – supporting earlier interventions and reducing long-term demand.

- **Improved performance management and accountability**
  A simplified structure enables unified performance frameworks, **clearer lines of accountability** and better use of data and insight to drive improvement.

- **Capacity to invest in locality working**
  The financial headroom created by the model supports investment in **strong locality models**, ensuring services remain close to communities and responsive to local needs.

- **Reduced risk to residents**
  With fewer moving parts, the 2UA model reduces the risk of disruption to high-risk services during transition. It enables **continuity in safeguarding, care pathways** and commissioning relationships, reducing risks for the most vulnerable.

With the two unitary model standing up favourably against government criteria Hertfordshire can move forward from day one with confidence - protecting what works, reforming what doesn't, and delivering a simpler, stronger and more sustainable future for all its communities.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE

PROPOSAL FOR THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES

V3 draft – last saved 6th November 2025

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FOREWORD

THREE-UNITARY AUTHORITY MODEL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE: ROOTED IN PLACE, DESIGNED FOR PREVENTION AND BUILT TO DELIVER PROSPERITY

Hertfordshire has for generations been a place of economic dynamism, rural beauty and strong connections to the capital. These treasured qualities – and the people who embody them – demand councils that truly understand their needs.

The three-unitary authority model for Hertfordshire is a bold response to the government's call for change that puts our residents first. Developed through strong collaboration, informed by robust evidence and shaped by extensive engagement with the people who call Hertfordshire home, it offers clarity, purpose and a framework fit for the future. This proposal creates three distinct councils: West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire.

At its heart are our people and the places they know. This model follows how people already live, work and connect; with significantly more alignment than the base proposal. It is the natural conclusion for our county's future. The people of Hertfordshire have been clear, and this proposal delivers authorities small enough to preserve local identity and sense of belonging, yet large enough to deliver the strategic leadership, financial sustainability and capacity for essential growth. Services become more accessible, transparent and empowering. One council to contact, one place to go, clearer accountability for the services you use every day.

By design, the model is prevention-led. It tackles root causes, reduces demand pressures and reinvests savings into frontline services. With housing, public health and social care under one roof, councils see the full picture, spot problems early and intervene when it matters most.

This model unlocks devolution and drives economic growth. It speeds up housing delivery and infrastructure investment. Streamlined decision-making attracts businesses whilst ensuring community spirit grows and our residents, businesses and places thrive.

At this historic moment, we can create councils fit for generations to come, preserving the dynamism, pride of place and sense of community that makes Hertfordshire special. In the pages that follow, you will see how this vision becomes reality. A proposal rooted in our people and built to deliver the prosperity our communities deserve.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

For the avoidance of doubt, this document reflects the modified proposal for the establishment of three unitary authorities in Hertfordshire. Notwithstanding this, the base proposal, as presented in the accompanying 'spine' document, for three unitary authorities in Hertfordshire also satisfies the criteria set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). As such, the base proposal is capable of standing on its own merits should the Secretary of State determine not to exercise discretion to modify the existing boundary between Hertsmere Borough Council and Watford Borough Council. However, it is the considered view of the councils supporting three unitary authorities in Hertfordshire that the modified proposal set out herein more effectively meets MHCLG's criteria.

DEVOLUTION

This document frequently references devolution and we acknowledge the centrality of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill in enabling this. Our ambition to move towards a three-unitary authority model reflects a firm commitment to the government's objective of rebalancing power away from central government. By establishing streamlined and strategically aligned governance structures, we aim to empower local leaders to drive prosperity and deliver improved outcomes for the people of Hertfordshire.

While we recognise the distinction between local government reorganisation and devolution, our commitment to devolution remains resolute. The references throughout this document are intended to signal that ambition and demonstrate how our strategic direction supports the government's potential opportunities for Hertfordshire.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THREE-UNITARY AUTHORITY MODEL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire is at a defining crossroads. The proposal to establish three new Unitary Authorities presents a transformative opportunity to replace the county's current structure of 11 councils with three streamlined, future-ready Unitary Authorities – reimagining local government to unlock the county's full potential. The model strikes an ideal balance between local and strategic governance, with the voice of community at its core. It sets out a vision for three new councils that are large enough to deliver efficiencies and shared benefits, yet small enough to preserve local identity and community connection.

The three-unitary model reflects the reality of Hertfordshire's economy and the strength of its community identities, creating authorities that can lead and grow, whilst remaining responsive and deeply connected to the people they serve. By prioritising the empowering of communities and leveraging scale where it matters, Hertfordshire will set the stage for a future where every community can thrive.

ROOTED IN PLACE

The proposed West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire authorities reflect how residents live, work and connect with their communities. Each aligns with established travel patterns, business hubs and housing markets, offering governance that is both familiar and responsive. These areas are shaped by distinct economic ecosystems and specialist sectors, supported by unique mixes of infrastructure and housing development. Collectively, they are well-positioned to deliver the government's Modern Industrial Strategy and 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy. At the same time, they face shared challenges, housing affordability, pockets of deprivation and skills gaps, that demand targeted, coordinated solutions.

DESIGNED FOR PREVENTION

Each authority is optimally sized to integrate health, social care, housing, education and policing. Multidisciplinary teams working from community hubs will identify risks early and coordinate support before issues escalate, reducing pressure on statutory services and strengthening community resilience. This model aligns with the NHS 10-Year Health Plan, enabling joint commissioning, shared data systems and coordinated workforce planning. By embedding prevention from the outset, rather than retrofitting it, Hertfordshire will lead the shift from reactive services to proactive community support.

BUILT TO DELIVER PROSPERITY

The scale of each authority enables it to attract investment, develop specialist skills programmes and deliver major housing and infrastructure projects. The model supports accelerated housing delivery, skills development aligned with 'Get Britain Working', and the transition to net zero through integrated planning. Combined with a Mayoral Strategic Authority, this structure lays the foundation for transformational devolution, empowering local leadership with control over transport, housing, skills and economic development.

A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR TRANSFORMATION

The financial case for restructuring into three Unitary Authorities is both robust and compelling. By year five, the model will deliver recurring annual net savings of £30-£38 million, with cumulative savings reaching £181-£258 million over ten years. Transition costs of £91-£111 million are fully recovered within four to six years. This configuration strikes a balance between efficiency and local connection, enabling each authority to maintain specialist services, invest in digital transformation, build strong reserves for future resilience, and protect discretionary services. Crucially, the model achieves financial independence without reliance on external equalisation or emergency government support. The three-unitary structure will support investment in transformation aligned with our ambition for place, prevention, prosperity.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE: BUSHEY'S INTEGRATION INTO WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

This document justifies and represents a modification request for the proposed transfer of Bushey (population 28,411) from Hertsmere to West Hertfordshire as part of Local Government Reorganisation. The boundary change aligns administrative structures with community identity, service delivery patterns and economic geography. **Appendix 2** provides further detailed information, supporting evidence and data, and establishes how the proposed boundary change underpins the case for strong public services and financial sustainability.

The proposal is to amend the boundary, as per **Appendix 2A**, to realign the existing Hertsmere wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath so that they fall within the West Hertfordshire Unitary Authority.

Geographic reality
Bushey sits as an isolated enclave in south-west Hertsmere, physically separated from the rest of the district by the M1/A41 corridor and over two miles of greenbelt to Borehamwood. In contrast, less than 0.5 miles of greenbelt separates Bushey from Watford, where urban areas flow together naturally. The proposed boundary along the M1/A41 creates a clear, logical and identifiable dividing line that reflects actual settlement patterns.

Community identity
Bushey's community connections overwhelmingly orient towards Watford:

- 97.6% of Bushey residents visit Watford town centre, with 55% naming it as their most visited destination
- 1,829 pupils (29% of Bushey's school population) have home addresses in Watford
- Over 900 Bushey residents commute to Watford for work
- Historical development since the Victorian era has embedded Bushey within Watford's economic and social fabric
- Public consultation revealed strong resident support for integration with West Hertfordshire.

Service delivery and economic integration

- Eight bus routes and the London Overground Lioness Line connect Bushey directly to Watford
- Walking and cycling between Bushey and Watford occurs along residential streets with complete pedestrian infrastructure, whilst routes to Borehamwood involve longer journeys on rural roads with limited facilities
- Over 1,400 Bushey residents commute to work within the proposed West Hertfordshire area
- Integration enables coordinated transport planning, waste collection, emergency services and infrastructure investment aligned with actual usage patterns.

Democratic alignment
The proposal transfers the existing Hertsmere wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath to West Hertfordshire, whilst keeping the existing Aldenham West ward (and intact Aldenham Parish) within Central Hertfordshire. This approach:

- Avoids fragmenting established parish structures
- Creates more equitable councillor distribution across the three authorities
- Ensures boundaries reflect genuine community identity and functional relationships
- Enhances democratic legitimacy and resident engagement.

Alignment with government assessment criteria
The boundary modification directly supports the government's stated assessment criteria for local government reorganisation:

- **Sensible economic areas**: the change recognises Bushey as part of West Hertfordshire's functional economic area, with over 1,400 residents commuting to work within the proposed unitary authority and integrated retail, transport and business patterns. This creates a coherent economic geography with an appropriate tax base.
- **Right size for efficiency and resilience**: the modification creates more balanced unitary authorities with populations in line with government guidance, ensuring each authority has the capacity to deliver efficiencies and withstand financial shocks without creating undue advantage or disadvantage across the three-unitary structure.
- **High quality and sustainable public services**: integration eliminates service fragmentation by aligning administrative responsibility with functional geography. Services can be delivered more efficiently when boundaries reflect actual settlement patterns, travel routes and community connections, avoiding the inefficiencies of cross-boundary arrangements.
- **Collaborative approach and local engagement**: the modification has political support from all Leaders in Hertfordshire. Public consultation revealed strong resident support, with Bushey residents consistently describing their area as physically and socially closer to Watford than to the rest of Hertsmere.
- **Local identity and cultural importance**: the proposal responds directly to community identity shaped by over 150 years of shared history, infrastructure and daily interaction with Watford. It rights a historical inconsistency by reconnecting communities divided by arbitrary administrative boundaries.
- **Support for devolution**: the boundary change strengthens the platform for devolution by creating unitary authorities based on genuine functional economic areas with coherent governance aligned to how residents live, work and connect.
- **Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment**: boundaries that reflect lived experience enhance democratic legitimacy and enable residents to engage more effectively in local governance, strengthening opportunities for genuine neighbourhood empowerment.

The boundary modification directly delivers the Minister of State's expectations for local government reorganisation by enabling stronger, more strategic local leadership across a coherent functional economic area, creating simpler governance structures by eliminating Bushey's isolation as an administrative island, and delivering greater alignment of public services across the functional area that residents actually use. Most fundamentally, by creating unitary authorities based on genuine community relationships and functional geography rather than arbitrary administrative lines, the modification builds long-term resilience into local government structures, ensuring services can adapt and respond to future challenges more effectively.

In summary
This boundary change rights a historical inconsistency by aligning administrative boundaries with the lived reality of residents. It strengthens alignment to local government reorganisation criteria whilst utilising a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconnect a community divided by arbitrary administrative boundaries. The modification enhances prosperity, improves services and strengthens democracy across the sub-region for decades to come.

The Secretary of State is respectfully requested to approve this modification request as part of the statutory change process.

1. THE PROPOSITION (MHCLG CRITERION 1)

A FUTURE-FOCUSED, LOCALLY EMPOWERED HERTFORDSHIRE

This proposal marks the beginning of a new chapter for Hertfordshire, one that builds confidently on the strong foundations of the current system of local government and responds positively to the challenges set down by government and the complex demands of public service delivery today.

Our vision for the future is bold: to create three strong, agile unitary authorities – West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire – each with the scale to deliver where it matters, but with the flexibility and local focus to empower every individual and every community. This is not a 'lift and shift' of old models. It is a future-facing transformation that will be safe and legal from day one, providing a stable foundation on which to build a more ambitious, responsive and forward-thinking system of local government. It will be big enough to be efficient and small enough to be local.

The three-unitary model for Hertfordshire is rooted in place, designed for prevention and built to deliver prosperity for every community. Each new authority, more so with the boundary modification, is aligned with established patterns of commuting, business clusters and housing markets, ensuring decision making is responsive and logical at a local community and economic level. This approach guarantees clear accountability and more efficient services aligned to the needs of communities, supported and energised by political leaders who understand the unique challenges and opportunities of each area.

The model better aligns natural geographies and groups services more effectively. It will protect and strengthen local identity and community relationships and services will be delivered at a more local level. Distances to administrative centres will be minimised and will be based around existing communities.

There are a number of well-established shared services based on these geographical areas, many of which can easily be adapted and expanded to incorporate the new authorities.

This model is designed to deliver directly on key national policy priorities. Progressive and agile, it will anticipate and adapt to rapid technological, environmental and demographic change. It aligns with Treasury Spending Review principles[1] for public service reform: integrating services so that they are organised around people's lives; improving long-term outcomes through a focus on prevention; and devolving power to local areas with services designed with, and for, people. It supports the 10-Year Health Plan for England[2], with its shift of emphasis to community-based care and prevention as central to health service sustainability. It complements Cabinet Office initiatives, such as Community Help Partnerships, to support adults with complex needs at a neighbourhood level. It supports the Department for Work and Pensions economic inactivity agenda[3] by enabling local flexibility to adapt support to different community circumstances. Finally, it aligns with the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper[4] by enabling local focus on sector strengths and the skills needed to support employment.

Hertfordshire's three-unitary model represents far more than administrative reorganisation, it is a platform for fundamental transformation in how public services connect with and serve local communities. By aligning governance with the places people identify with, the functional economic areas where they work and do business, and the transport corridors that shape opportunity, this proposal creates the conditions for inclusive, sustainable prosperity.

We recognise there is no one-size-fits-all solution for empowering our communities. Each locality is unique, with its own identity, challenges and ambitions. That is why each new Unitary Authority will develop its own target operating model, shaped by local voices and needs, but informed by our strategic ambition. Our approach is to trial, refine and implement, piloting new forms of democracy by active participation, supporting town and parish councils and codesigning solutions with the voluntary and community sector.

We will use scale where it delivers real value, to support reducing demand on complex statutory services, while ensuring that decision making and service design happen locally, remaining closer to residents. Integrated, multidisciplinary teams will work from local service hubs based around neighbourhood footprints, focusing on early intervention and prevention, reducing crisis interventions and delivering better outcomes for all.

[1] Spending Review 2025, HMT, June 2025
[2] Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England, DHSC, July 2025
[3] Get Britain Working White Paper, DWP, September 2025
[4] Post-16 Education and Skills, HM Government, October 2025

Prevention is not an add-on; it is the foundation of our model. Rather than retrofit neighbourhood working on to existing structures, we will build it into our governance, culture, systems and ways of working from day one. By identifying risks early and codesigning solutions with communities, we will support vulnerable residents before problems escalate, reinvesting savings into frontline provision and building long-term resilience.

Our ambition is to make community empowerment a lived reality, not just an aspiration. Every resident will have the opportunity to shape their place and future, through mechanisms like participatory budgeting and digital democracy platforms. We are committed to reaching those voices seldom heard, to removing the common barriers to participation and building community capacity and confidence.

To deliver this vision, we are seeking a new partnership with government; one that recognises our ambition and provides the funding and devolved powers needed to make it a reality. The three-unitary model provides a firm foundation for devolution, combining strategic leadership with deep local roots, to unlock the full potential of Hertfordshire's people and places.

The three-unitary model is ambitious, inclusive and resilient, demonstrating what is possible when structural change and service transformation are planned together with purpose. It places people at the heart of decision-making, empowers communities through locally responsive leadership, and unlocks prosperity by aligning services with the places people live, work and do business. With prevention at its core and scale applied where it matters, the model creates the conditions for sustainable growth and a future-ready Hertfordshire, where every community can thrive, and no one is left behind.

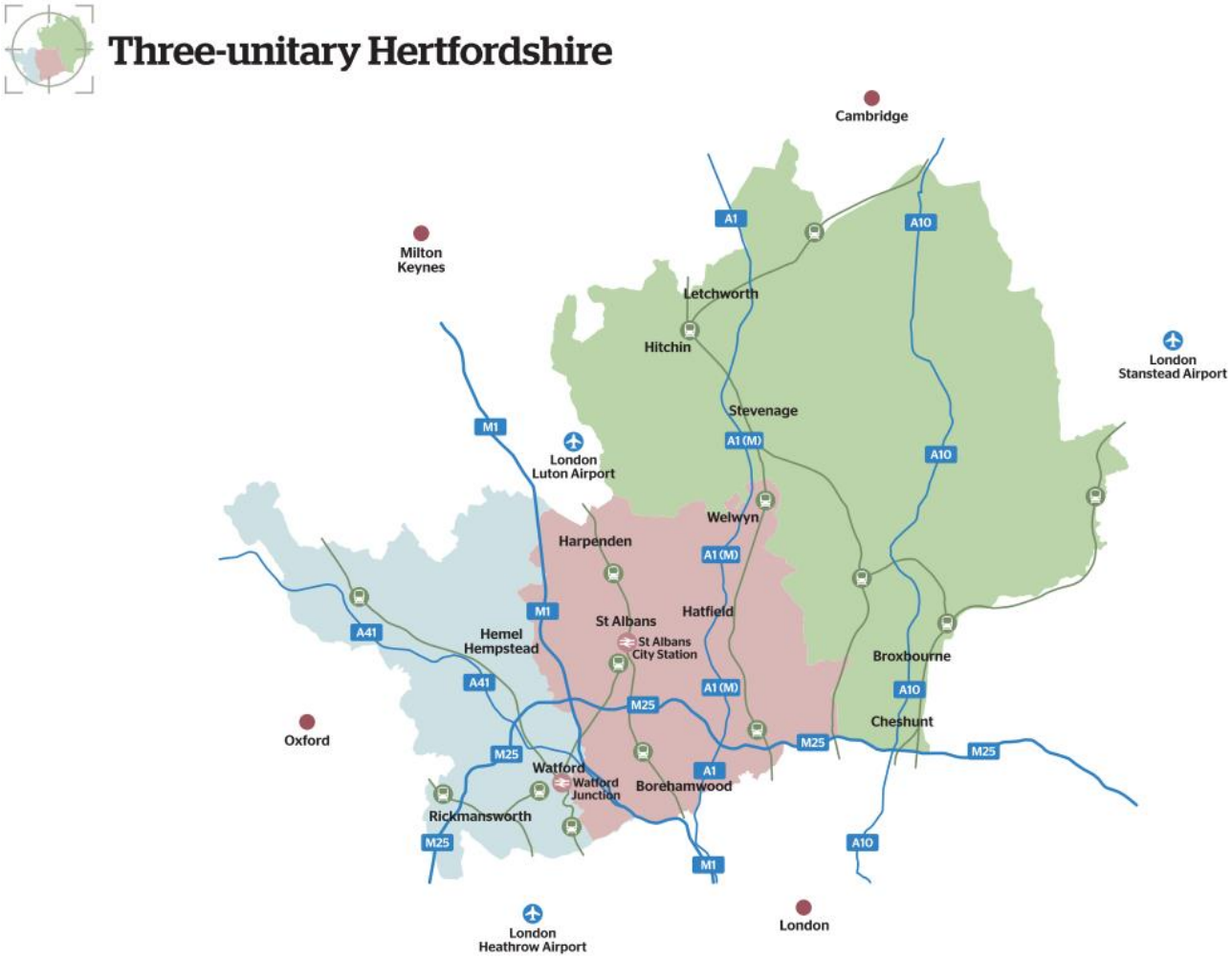
ONE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT: HERTFORDSHIRE'S THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES

Hertfordshire's strength lies in its diversity of landscape, history and civic identity. The proposal to establish three new Unitary Authorities, West Hertfordshire, Central Hertfordshire and Eastern Hertfordshire, directly reflects the county's authentic sense of place and the lived experiences of its people.

This model marks a transformative step for Hertfordshire, replacing the complexity of the current two-tier system of 11 councils, with a streamlined single tier. Each council is rooted in a coherent and functional economic area, ensuring that the realignment, demonstrated by the modification request, is not merely administrative, but a strategic transformation that brings local government closer to how people live, work and do business.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S CONTEXT SUPPORTS THE THREE-UNITARY APPROACH

Surrey's reorganisation into two unitary authorities demonstrates the viability of larger-scale local government reform. Hertfordshire's proposal builds on similar principles of financial resilience and simplified governance but is designed specifically for our county's strengths and circumstances. Operating from a position of financial stability, Hertfordshire can prioritise optimal scale that balances strategic capability with community connection. The three-unitary model provides the critical mass needed for excellence in complex statutory services, particularly adult social care and children's services, while ensuring each authority remains closely aligned with distinct economic areas and community identities. This configuration delivers the financial sustainability and governance simplification essential to any unitary model, while maximising local responsiveness and democratic accountability for Hertfordshire's 1.2 million residents.



ROOTED IN PLACE

The populations of the three proposed unitary areas enjoy a diverse mix of lifestyle benefits, each offering distinctive blends of countryside landscapes, vibrant towns and rural villages. This variety supports economic success by helping businesses attract and retain skilled workers who value both career opportunities and quality of life. Each area provides attractive places to live and work, with access to green spaces, leisure and cultural amenities, historic environments and modern urban facilities that meet the needs of diverse communities and contributes to quality of life.

The proposed councils are shaped by the historical development of settlements, industry, transport and constitutional boundaries that give Hertfordshire its character and identity. The county has served for centuries as a key interface between London and the counties beyond, a role that continues to define its economic geography and civic culture. The reorganisation proposal is informed by this legacy, ensuring that identity with place and sense of belonging are respected and preserved, whilst at the same time enabling future prosperity. Appendix 2 sets out the statistical evidence that demonstrates how the Bushey modification aligns to the place-based approach taken by the three unitary model.

ALIGNED WITH FUNCTIONAL ECONOMIC AREAS

Travel-to-work patterns, business clusters and transport infrastructure all demonstrate the economic coherence of the proposed authorities. Each area is defined by distinct economic ecosystems and specialist sectors, all poised to make a significant contribution to future growth and the delivery of the government's Modern Industrial Strategy.[5] Additionally, the

[5] The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025, DBT, June 2025

unique mix of infrastructure and housing development in each area directly supports the government's 10-year Infrastructure Strategy.[6]

The three proposed Unitary Authority areas, strengthened by the proposed modification, each benefit from a distinctive combination of strategic transport connections, underpinning their economic strengths and enabling the development of key growth sectors. These corridors not only support access to skilled labour, customers and supply chains, but also enable communities to reach essential services and employment opportunities within their localities, reflecting established economic geographies.

BUILT TO DELIVER PROSPERITY

Hertfordshire's heritage fuels rather than constrains ambition: the same innovative spirit that created Letchworth Garden City and established world-class studios, now drives enterprise in life sciences, creative industries and digital technology. The three-unitary model harnesses this confidence, providing governance rooted in place and identity, whilst also equipped to deliver transformational growth.

Each Unitary Authority is built around coherent economic geographies that reflect real patterns of sectoral specialisation, business clustering and labour markets. This structure directly supports the government's Modern Industrial Strategy by enabling focused investment in high-value sectors where Hertfordshire demonstrates global competitiveness. It also reflects the government's ambitions for post-16 education and skills, with each area home to high performing Further Education (FE) colleges or universities which deliver against this agenda to meet the needs of residents, employers and contribute to economic growth.

The three-unitary model brings together recognisable geographies to achieve scale and critical mass in key sectors. West Hertfordshire will concentrate support for creative industries, professional and business services and emerging data centres. Central Hertfordshire will coordinate interventions for research and development, digital technology and logistics. Eastern Hertfordshire can leverage its position within the UK Innovation Corridor to connect world-leading life sciences clusters, advanced manufacturing and defence. By creating governance structures that match functional economic areas, each authority can implement targeted interventions that respond to sectoral needs whilst operating at sufficient scale to attract national and international investment.

ACCELERATING HOUSING SUPPLY

The delivery of 120,000 new homes over the next 10–15 years requires governance operating at strategic scale with clear accountability. The three-unitary model provides this capacity through major projects already planned or underway across each area, supported by alignment between housing growth, transport infrastructure and employment opportunities. Each area demonstrates commitment to housing delivery at scale through transport-led regeneration, new garden communities and urban renewal projects that integrate homes with employment, education and green infrastructure.

Each Unitary Authority will produce a detailed Local Plan allocating specific sites, working within the framework set by the Strategic Authority's Local Growth Plan and Spatial Development Strategy. The three-unitary model creates the necessary coherence to attract investment whilst ensuring development respects local character and responds to community needs; an approach that directly supports the government's housing targets and the National Planning Policy Framework's emphasis on sustainable, well-connected communities.

PARTNERSHIPS TO DELIVER REGENERATION

The three-unitary model provides a strong foundation for advanced joint ventures and investment vehicles, enabling the attraction of institutional capital alongside public sector resources. Building on the successful experience of

[6] UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy, HMT, June 2025

Hertfordshire authorities, where several effective joint ventures are already in place, this model draws on proven approaches and existing expertise in partnership working. Each unitary authority has the scale to form equal partnerships with developers, housing associations and institutional investors, typically through corporate joint ventures or limited liability partnerships. Land assets are transferred into the joint vehicle and matched by equivalent private sector capital, ensuring a balanced and mutually beneficial relationship.

Recent government programmes, such as the £2 billion social housing investment initiative, increasingly prioritise partnerships between investors and local authorities, particularly for projects ready for immediate development. The three-unitary structure is well placed to meet these priorities, offering pooled land assets across former district boundaries, development insight and capability, and the Strategic Authority's ability to negotiate on equal terms with major projects. This model enables local authorities to access specialist regeneration skills while retaining equal control over developments, sharing both risks and rewards. Strategic capacity is enhanced, supporting the effective negotiation and delivery of complex projects.

A key strength of these partnership models is their ability to support place identity and community engagement through strategic allocation of responsibilities. Local authorities typically lead resident engagement and consultation, developers contribute planning and construction expertise, and community partners ensure local voices shape decisions such as site plans and architectural design. This helps developments reflect local character and principles like healthy place-making and the prevention of adverse health outcomes. Leading regeneration projects show how combining private capital, public land, and community insight can create vibrant, sustainable communities with a strong sense of place. The scale enabled by the three-unitary geography supports a cohesive strategy, preserving neighbourhood connectivity and ensuring inclusive, community-led development and long-term stewardship.

CASE STUDY: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS ACCELERATING HOUSING AND REGENERATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire councils are already delivering what many authorities aspire to, strategic partnerships that accelerate housing delivery and unlock millions in private investment.

Three Rivers District Council is partnering with Countryside Properties and Home Group to deliver the £150 million South Oxhey Initiative, a mixed-use regeneration providing 514 new homes (private and affordable), retail space including a supermarket, high-quality public spaces, improved station access and a market square for community events. The scheme is creating employment and training opportunities alongside new housing, demonstrating how partnership approaches transform established communities at scale.

Watford Borough Council has built an exceptional track record through flexible joint ventures. The award-winning Riverwell project with Kier plc has transformed a contaminated brownfield site, delivering over 1,600 mixed-use homes (including affordable housing), 156,000 square feet of light industrial space, extensive public realm and infrastructure supporting the redevelopment of Watford General Hospital. A partnership with Mace Group is regenerating the town centre to deliver 100s of homes, a health hub and vibrant civic spaces.

Dacorum Borough Council has established the Dacorum Investment Partnership with The Hill Group as an equal partnership to accelerate affordable housing delivery and drive major regeneration across the borough. The Hemel Place project is revitalising Hemel Hempstead town centre into a thriving culture and leisure hub with new homes, commercial spaces and leisure opportunities.

Stevenage Borough Council is partnering with Mace for long-term town centre renewal. Within 18 months of formalising the partnership, planning approval was secured for SG1, a 14.5 acre redevelopment delivering homes, retail, leisure facilities and a public sector hub.

Dacorum, Hertsmere and Watford have all established joint ventures with Watford Community Housing to deliver new housing, including significant social housing, on underutilised council land and brownfield sites. These initiatives are delivering hundreds of new homes, proving the model's effectiveness for affordable housing delivery.

The lesson is clear: councils that establish equal partnerships early, maintain strategic control whilst leveraging private sector capability, and focus on long-term transformation rather than quick transactions consistently outperform traditional approaches.

For Hertfordshire's three-unitary authorities, these partnerships demonstrate what becomes possible with enhanced strategic capacity and streamlined decision-making. The three-unitary model enables authorities to pool land assets across wider geographies, negotiate with major developers from positions of strength and attract the scale of investment that transforms communities. The track record exists, the three-unitary model scales this success county-wide.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY AND TACKLING INEQUALITY

Despite Hertfordshire's economic strengths, a significant number of foundational roles that are lower paid exist, exacerbating affordability pressures and creating barriers to opportunity. Significant pockets of deprivation persist across all three areas and require targeted interventions.

The new authorities will implement targeted skills interventions aligned with the Get Britain Working and the Post 16 Education and Skills white papers, investing in digital skills and literacy to ensure workers can adapt to technological change, particularly the rise of AI. They will work with universities, colleges and employers to address labour shortages, tackle economic inactivity and create pathways into high-value employment in growth sectors. Each authority will align skills provision, employment support, transport access and housing delivery in ways that address the specific barriers

facing disadvantaged communities. The new authorities will each be served by a FE college, allowing for local focus on skills development and securing post-16 opportunities for young people. Strong partnerships with and across local colleges will support young people at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) into education and employment as part of the focus on prevention. This place-based approach, operating at sufficient scale to attract government funding and employer investment, can deliver the transformative change essential for inclusive growth.

ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY AND NET ZERO

Each Unitary Authority is positioned to drive the transition to net zero whilst ensuring levels of sustainable growth that protect and enhance environmental quality. The governance structure aligns with transport corridors, enabling integrated planning for sustainable transport, housing, employment and energy infrastructure.

All areas bring distinctive contributions: clean growth and green technology development in innovation quarters, sustainable transport promotion along major rail corridors, and environmental stewardship balancing development with protection of biodiversity and agricultural land. The three-unitary model combines the governance capacity essential for implementing sustainability strategies at scale with the ability and agility to remain responsive to local environmental characteristics and community priorities. The three authorities can coordinate planning across housing, transport, employment and energy infrastructure in ways that a unified structure enables, whilst the Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) ensures county-wide coherence on issues including climate adaptation, biodiversity and resource management.

DESIGNED FOR PREVENTION

Each Unitary Authority will embed neighbourhood-level public service reform from the outset, working to establishing integrated teams that bring together council services including, social care, housing, community safety, early help and community development with partners from the NHS, police, housing associations and the voluntary sector. These teams will be organised around neighbourhood footprints aligned with NHS Primary Care Network (PCN) boundaries, ensuring seamless coordination between health and social care. Crucially, this approach is universal across all neighbourhoods, creating a robust infrastructure that flexes to meet local circumstances and strengthen operational health relationships.

Operating at the scale of functional economic areas enables each authority to deploy specialist expertise, develop sophisticated insights into neighbourhood needs, and maintain the financial resilience required for sustained investment in prevention. At the same time, neighbourhood teams remain close enough to communities to build trust, understand local contexts, and support a shift from council-led to community-led approaches, empowering residents to shape their own futures. This balance between strategic scale and local responsiveness makes the three-unitary model the optimal foundation for transforming public services across Hertfordshire.

STRATEGIC CAPACITY, LOCAL CONNECTION

The three-unitary model creates the right proportional relationship between local and strategic governance, avoiding both the imbalance of unitaries that are too large when compared to the strategic area, and the fragmentation of smaller, more numerous authorities. Each Unitary Authority will have the scale to be resilient and effective from the outset, with populations ranging from approximately 350,000 to 475,000 that will grow towards and beyond 500,000 as housing delivery progresses across major projects. This ensures sufficient capacity to deliver complex local services, attract and retain skilled staff, achieve operational efficiencies and withstand financial shocks, but also close enough to communities to understand and respond to local needs.

This is local government reorganisation pursued with vision and ambition, a model designed not just for today, but for the decades ahead.

DEFINING PLACE

WEST HERTFORDSHIRE: POWERING BRITAIN'S CREATIVE, DIGITAL AND GREEN FUTURE

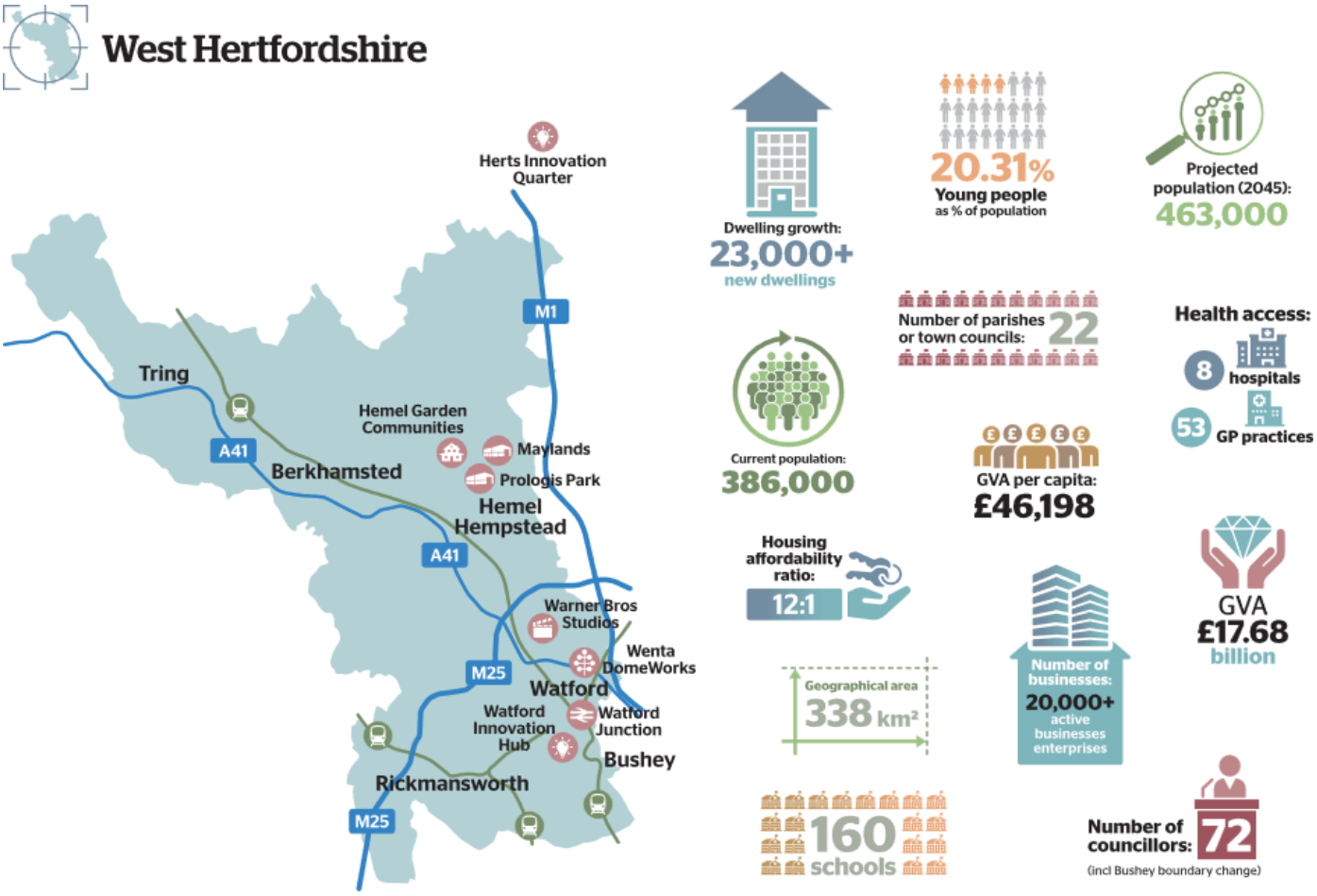
West Hertfordshire is a dynamic economic powerhouse, home to over 20,000 businesses and with a population projected to reach nearly 463,000 by 2045. Anchored by the M25, A41 / West Coast Main Line and M1 corridors, the area combines the thriving urban hubs of Watford and Hemel Hempstead with the rural beauty of the Chilterns, offering exceptional connectivity to London, the Midlands and the North West. The Metropolitan Line underground and London Overground services provide rail connectivity to the capital, and the area also has strong connections via the M25 towards London Heathrow airport.

The clearly defined transport corridors within West Hertfordshire ensure the area enjoys strong commuting patterns both within the area and towards London, particularly from Watford and Three Rivers, where an average of 42% of commutes are into the capital. Outside London commuting, Watford, including Bushey, and Three Rivers share a reciprocal relationship of being each other's top commuting destination and both areas have strong commuting outflows towards Hemel Hempstead and the wider Dacorum area.

The area's economic strengths align directly with the government's Modern Industrial Strategy. Creative industries flourish here, led by Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, a global centre for film and media production that has generated over £2bn in investment to date, with the Harry Potter franchise, including the hugely successful studio tour, also proving a major driver for UK tourism. Forming the heart of a wider creative cluster that extends to the east and west, this represents one of the UK's most significant concentrations of film and TV production capability outside London. Planning permission has been granted for the Langleybury Film Hub which, along with the expansion of Warner Bros. Studios, will continue the history of significant private investment into the sector in West Hertfordshire. Professional and business services locate around Watford, with major employers including KPMG, TJX Europe and Epson driving productivity growth. Croxley Business Park is a leading M25 business location with fast-growing strategic and regional importance. Northwood Headquarters is the UK's principal military HQ site and home to five operational HQs for 2,000 personnel.

The established digital and technologies ecosystem around Hemel Hempstead is now attracting additional investment from major data centres, positioning West Hertfordshire at the forefront of AI and digital infrastructure development. Whilst facilitating growth in AI and digital innovation, this sector requires careful strategic planning to manage resource and land implications. Hemel Hempstead's Maylands Business Park advances clean growth and sustainable infrastructure, aligning with net zero ambitions and a green jobs strategy. Prologis Park supports advanced manufacturing and logistics, with firms like Biomel and Vitabiotics serving national supply chains.

West Hertfordshire's regeneration potential is vast. Projects like Watford Junction and Hemel Garden Communities, which also straddles Central Hertfordshire, will deliver thousands of new homes and jobs, supporting both urban densification and family-friendly neighbourhoods. Watford Junction will deliver 3,000 homes and 7,000 jobs, and Hemel Garden Communities will provide family-friendly homes integrated with employment space and green infrastructure, creating some 10,000 new jobs. Together, these projects will deliver in the region of 10,000 new homes, directly supporting the government's national target of 300,000 homes annually.



However, affordability remains acute, with average prices at £475,000 and an affordability ratio of 12:1 (based on existing borough boundaries). Eight neighbourhoods[7] rank within the top 20% most income-deprived in England. In addition, the rise of AI could significantly impact professional and business jobs in Watford and Hemel Hempstead, requiring proactive investment in digital skills and literacy.

The new Unitary Authority will provide the scale and focus to accelerate affordable housing delivery, implement targeted interventions aligned with the government's 'Get Britain Working' plan, and harness sectoral clustering benefits. West Herts College, with its campuses in Watford and Hemel Hempstead, will support young people to develop the skills needed by local businesses, preventing them becoming NEET, and work with Job Centre Plus and the Jobs and Careers Service to help adults develop the skills needed to secure employment. Local initiatives such as the Watford Innovation Hub and Wenta's Enterprise Centre, being expanded to become the DomeWorks, actively help build entrepreneurial capacity and upskill the workforce. By creating an innovation district connecting Watford's historic economic core with Hemel Hempstead's growth areas, and by leveraging clustering around the clean growth agenda, film and TV production, professional services and data centres, the new authority can act as a facilitator for the exchange of knowledge. It can also achieve the scale essential to compete internationally, whilst addressing inequalities and ensuring workers in lower-paid foundational roles can access opportunity and affordable housing.

West Hertfordshire's connectivity supports growth and provides access to jobs and skills. A three-unitary model would enable a greater focus on urban mobility and modal shift within major towns like Watford and Hemel Hempstead, where high population density and good rail connectivity create opportunities for cycling networks connecting residential areas to stations and town centre regeneration, prioritising pedestrians. It would also enable a focus on supporting existing commuting patterns from more rural locations towards major employment areas through on-demand and improved bus

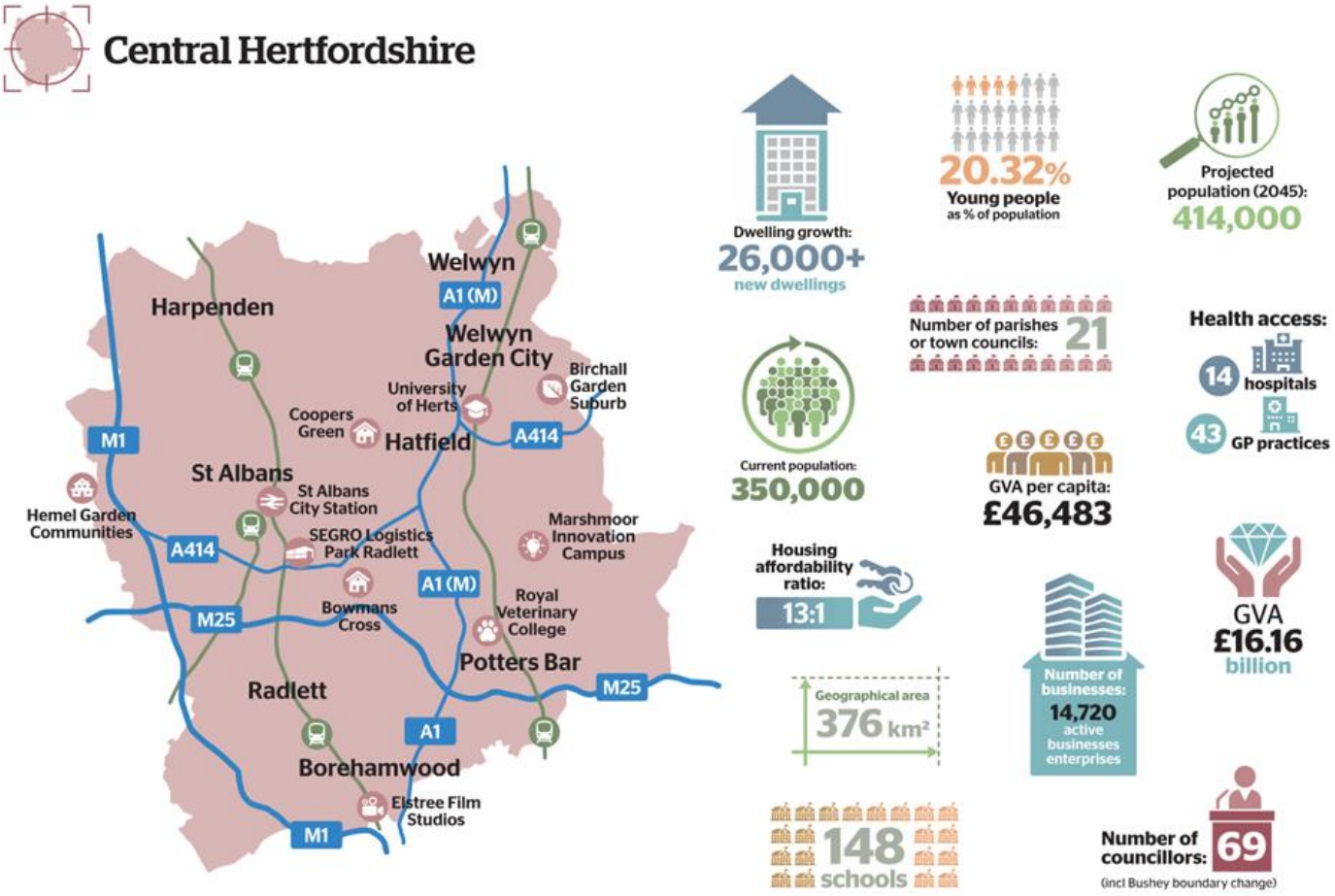
[7] Primary Care Network (PCN) neighbourhoods

services. West Hertfordshire is uniquely placed to advance government goals for accelerated housing delivery, decarbonisation of the transport network and innovation-led economic growth.

CENTRAL HERTFORDSHIRE: DRIVING INNOVATION, ENTERPRISE AND OPPORTUNITY

Central Hertfordshire is polycentric in nature, with strong connections to London, but also linked to Luton airport by the M1 / Midland Mainline corridor and to Yorkshire and the North-East by the East Coast Main Line. Its position along the M1 corridor positions the area at the heart of the London-Luton-Milton Keynes arc and make it a centre of innovation and enterprise with distinctive strengths in research and development, digital technology and logistics, with a population projected to exceed 414,000 by 2045.

Hertsmere has the strongest commuting relationship with London of all of the Hertfordshire districts with nearly 59% of commutes being into the capital. Outside London commuting, all three areas have strong commuters flows with every area being within the top three commuting destinations of the others, excluding London. This is reflective of the polycentric nature of the area and the economic cluster this creates.



Its towns, St Albans, Borehamwood, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, blend historic economic cores with planned communities, combining quality of life with economic opportunity.

The area exemplifies the government's vision for a knowledge-driven, high-wage economy. The University of Hertfordshire, designated a University Enterprise Zone, drives research commercialisation, supports start-ups and builds innovation clusters, providing the skills pipeline essential for high-value sectors. Their enterprise focus encourages business engagement and investment to help their staff develop higher level skills in priority sectors, utilising the Growth and Skills Levy, to help maximise business productivity and contribute to Central Hertfordshire's economic growth. Major employers, including Tesco and Ocado, along with the Royal Veterinary College, act as anchors for local strength in logistics, distribution and life sciences. Digital and technology sectors concentrate in St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield, with

59.2% of the population of the area educated to Level 4 or above and weekly earnings at £817.97, both significantly above national averages. The area is attracting investment in new technology as illustrated by the recent planning approval of a state-of-the-art data centre in South Mimms, an 85-acre campus near the M25 and the Elstree grid connection.

The Marshmoor Innovation Campus will provide modern commercial space and innovation facilities, attracting high-growth businesses and supporting essential knowledge exchange between academia and industry. SEGRO Logistics Park Radlett, a nationally significant freight hub along the A414 corridor, reinforces established strengths in the logistics sector, presenting an opportunity to focus on decarbonisation of the wider logistics network including zero-emission freight vehicles and infrastructure, consolidation centres reducing urban delivery traffic and rail freight connections. Film and TV production clusters around Elstree and Borehamwood, benefit from proximity to London, whilst life sciences and manufacturing capabilities are developing in Welwyn Hatfield. This diversity of sectors provides economic resilience and opportunities for cross-sector innovation, including AI and digital technology applications across traditional sectors.

The Sky Studios Elstree North project will deliver 10 extra stages and expand the current Borehamwood complex to 22 stages across 65 acres and 470,000 sq ft. Construction is scheduled to start in 2026 and will create around 600 jobs. The expansion will also grow the Sky Up Academy Studios, offering training and career pathways for 11–18-year-olds.

New settlements at Hemel Garden Communities, Bowmans Cross and Coopers Green will provide garden communities integrating housing with employment, education and green infrastructure, and Birchall Garden Suburb delivers urban regeneration whilst respecting heritage. These projects, aligned with transport corridors, support government housing targets and create sustainable, well-connected communities. However, affordability pressures remain acute, with average house prices at £559,000 and an affordability ratio of 13:1 – amongst the highest nationally – creating challenges for residents and businesses recruiting staff, particularly in lower-paid foundation sectors.

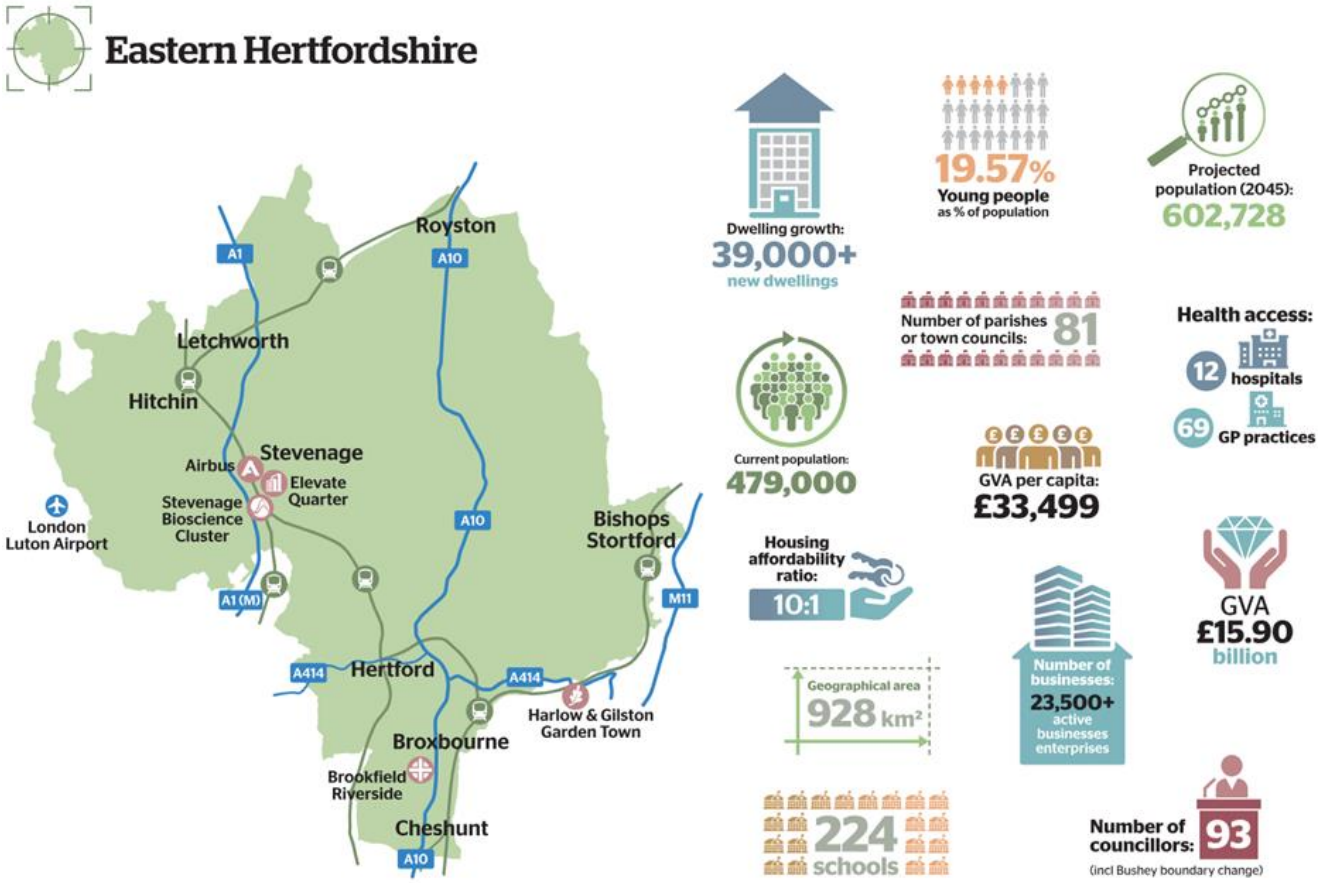
Despite economic strengths, pockets of deprivation persist. New and garden towns like Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield exhibit greater separation between work and home life, compared to historic centres like St Albans, creating additional challenges for residents accessing employment.

The new Unitary Authority will enable responsive, locally focused leadership that can deliver interventions tailored to community needs. By working with the University of Hertfordshire, Oaklands College, businesses and communities, the authority can implement targeted skills programmes aligned with the Get Britain Working and the Post-16 Education and Skills white papers, address labour shortages, tackle economic inactivity and invest in digital skills. By enabling sectoral clustering and knowledge exchange across its network of towns – connecting St Albans' visitor economy, founded on its rich Roman heritage and historically significant Cathedral, with Welwyn Hatfield's dynamic manufacturing and life sciences and Borehamwood's globally renowned creative industries – Central Hertfordshire can unlock the scale and critical mass essential for international competitiveness and ensure the benefits are felt across all communities.

EASTERN HERTFORDSHIRE: LEADING LIFE SCIENCES, ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Eastern Hertfordshire, with a population set to surpass 600,000 by 2045, is positioned to become a global leader in life sciences, advanced manufacturing and digital innovation. Strategically aligned with both the A1(M) / East Coast Main Line corridor and the A10 / M11 routes to Cambridge, Stansted Airport and the East of England, the area sits at the heart of the UK Innovation Corridor, combining internationally significant economic assets with urban centres and rural landscapes.

Eastern Hertfordshire is generally less reliant on London commuting than the other Hertfordshire areas (less than 25%), with the exception of Broxbourne. The area enjoys strong internal commuting relationships, particularly between Stevenage and North Hertfordshire, with each area being the top commuting destination for one another within the Eastern Hertfordshire area. Broxbourne and East Herts also hold strong commuting relationships with one another, but also outside of the area to locations such as Harlow, Uttlesford and Epping Forest.



The area's economic strengths directly support the government's life sciences ambition and defence priorities. Stevenage hosts the UK's largest cell and gene therapy cluster, with the Stevenage Bioscience Cluster providing world-class facilities for early-stage companies and the Elevate Quarter offering a mixed-use innovation district that integrates commercial space, housing and community facilities. Expertise in life sciences and the defence sectors are represented by major employers, including GSK and Airbus, providing high-value employment and supporting extensive supply chains. Advanced manufacturing and life sciences companies concentrate in the towns to the north of the region, creating networks that facilitate knowledge exchange and growth in productivity, whilst defence sector specialisms in Stevenage support critical national capabilities.

Southern areas around Broxbourne demonstrate significant strength in the digital and technology sectors. Google's £5 billion data centre investment in Broxbourne represents one of the largest private investments in UK digital infrastructure, positioning Eastern Hertfordshire at the forefront of AI and cloud computing capabilities. Broxbourne's strategic location on London's edge, combined with excellent transport connectivity, supports logistics and distribution serving regional and national markets. The area's SME base and rural economy add diversity and resilience, with strengths in agri-tech, rural enterprise and market towns providing employment across dispersed geographies.

Eastern Hertfordshire's two FE colleges play a major role in supporting economic growth, with North Herts College hosting the £2.5m Airbus Defence and Space Centre for STEM, which will help deliver skills needed for future growth of a UK priority sector. Along with Hertford Regional College, they are also helping prevent young people becoming NEET and helping economically inactive adults gain the skills needed for employment.

Major projects demonstrate commitment to delivering growth at scale. Harlow & Gilston Garden Town will provide over 10,000 new homes integrated with employment space, education, transport infrastructure and green networks. Brookfield Riverside will deliver a riverside community combining housing with leisure and commercial space, plus urban renewal in Stevenage and Hitchin will regenerate town centres and provide new housing that respects local heritage.

With average house prices at £394,000 and an affordability ratio of 10:1, Eastern Hertfordshire offers relative affordability, though pressures remain significant, given lower-paid foundational roles. Educational attainment varies significantly: some communities achieve greater than 50% educated to Level 4 or above, whilst attainment falls to 30.1% in Stevenage and 40.9% in Broxbourne. This variation creates inequality of opportunity and limits residents' ability to access high-value employment and constrains business recruitment.

The new Unitary Authority will deliver targeted interventions that enhance skills, employment and digital access through collaboration with industry, education and communities. This includes programmes aligned with 'Get Britain Working', investing in digital skills for AI and technological change, addressing economic inactivity and creating pathways into employment in growth sectors. A three-unitary model enables Eastern Hertfordshire to focus on rural transport resilience and last-mile connectivity critical for dispersed communities, addressing challenges through demand-responsive transport in rural areas, community transport solutions for isolated villages, EV charging in rural locations and integration of rural services with main transport hubs. By connecting Stevenage's life sciences and defence strengths with Broxbourne's digital capabilities and advanced manufacturing clusters to the north, Eastern Hertfordshire can unlock the scale, strength and combined expertise to compete on the global stage, whilst ensuring all communities benefit from growth and maintain the distinctive character that makes the area exceptional for living, working and investing.

2. SCALE, EFFICIENCY AND CAPACITY (MHCLG CRITERION 2)

STRATEGIC SCALE AND PROPORTIONATE STRUCTURE

As a guiding principle, the government has set out that unitary areas should cover a population of around 500,000, with the Strategic Authority covering a population of approximately 1.5 million. Three Unitary Authorities working alongside a MSA for Hertfordshire provides the optimum model.

Hertfordshire currently has a population of 1.2 million, and with future growth by 2045, will deliver the population principles outlined by government. As evidenced in the following table, it is forecast that by 2045 West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire unitary areas will grow broadly proportionately to closely align with the government's principles for devolution and a single-tier of local government:

	Current population	**Forecast population (2045)**
West Hertfordshire	392,247	462,887
Central Hertfordshire	356,193	413,737
Eastern Hertfordshire	487,750	602,728
Total	**1,236,191**	**1,479,352**

Under a three unitary model, each Unitary Authority will have the scale to be resilient and effective from the outset. The scale of the model provides sufficient capacity to deliver complex local services, attract and retain skilled staff, achieve operational efficiencies and withstand financial shocks, protect discretionary services, whilst remaining close enough to communities to understand and respond to local needs. The model eliminates fragmentation, builds critical mass for sectoral clustering, enables strategic infrastructure investment, and provides the capacity for substantial prevention programmes that address needs early on, before they become crises.

This is governance that is both deeply rooted and boldly ambitious, respecting what makes Hertfordshire's diverse communities distinctive and equipping them to seize the opportunities of a rapidly changing economy. Working in partnership with a MSA, the three Unitary Authorities will deliver responsive, place-based leadership to help every resident and business in Hertfordshire recognise their potential and thrive.

BALANCE OF NEED AND PROVISION ACROSS THE THREE UNITARY AUTHORITY AREAS

The data demonstrates carefully balanced distribution of provision and need across the three new unitary authorities, ensuring each has the resources to address pockets of greater need within their footprint without creating unsustainable financial or service delivery pressures.

DEPRIVATION: SHARED CHALLENGE

The three authorities show very balanced overall deprivation levels within a narrow three-percentage-point range. No single area carries disproportionate burden. Critically, across nine individual deprivation domains, no authority consistently appears as most or least deprived. West shows particular challenges in living environment quality and income deprivation but lower barriers to housing and services. Central demonstrates higher crime-related deprivation and income deprivation affecting older people but lower educational and employment challenges. Whilst Eastern experiences the highest employment and education deprivation but lower income deprivation affecting children.

This distributed pattern means each authority faces distinct challenges requiring tailored local responses, whilst none carries overwhelming concentration of disadvantage that would compromise financial sustainability.

Area	Need	West	Central	Eastern
Deprivation - percentage of lower layer super output areas in most deprived hertfordshire decile.	Index of multiple deprivation	9%	9%	12%
	Income	12%	8%	11%
	Employment	9%	6%	14%
	Health deprivation and disability	12%	9%	9%
	Education, skills and training	10%	6%	13%
	Barriers to housing and services	6%	10%	13%
	Crime	8%	11%	11%
	Living environment	13%	8%	10%
	Income deprivation affecting children	9%	10%	11%
	Income deprivation affecting older people	11%	12%	8%
Adult care services. Rate per 100,000 population aged 18-64	New requests for support	1,253	1,153	1,151
	Assessments (adults)	390	354	395
	Assessments (carers)	213	172	189
	Statutory adult care plan reviews	783	678	745
	Adults in long term nursing	8	15	16
	Adults in long term residential	41	83	36
	Adults in long term homecare	87	92	91
	Adults in long term supported living	242	215	175
	Adults with a long term direct payment	324	283	308
Adult care services. Rate per 100,000 population aged 65+	New requests for support	12,008	10,578	11,529
	Assessments (adults)	7,082	5,492	5,458
	Assessments (carers)	1,059	984	1,223
	Statutory adult care plan reviews	8,310	7,014	8,667
	Adults in long term nursing	376	333	435
	Adults in long term residential	745	662	688
	Adults in long term homecare	1,421	1,192	1,440
	Adults in long term supported living	167	125	83
	Adults with a long term direct payment	690	571	495
Children's services. Rate per 1,000 population aged 0-17	Referrals to children's services social care	5.2	4.6	5.2
	Assessments	4.4	4	5
	Children in need	4.7	4.4	4.1
	Child protection plans	2.1	2	2.8
	Children looked after	3.6	3.6	3.7
	Education & health care plans	51.4	48.1	61.3
Free school meals. Rate per 1,000 pupils	Number of pupils eligible	158	147	169
Children looked after. Rate per 10,000 children	Children looked after	35.6	36.1	37.3
SEND. Rate per 10,000 children	Children with an education & health care plan	514.1	481.2	612.5
Early help	Total children in fostering for adoption	938	811	1178
	Number of young carers	101	127	130
Homelessness	Households in temporary accommodation	508	424	410

ADULT SOCIAL CARE: COMPARABLE PRESSURES

Demand for adult social care amongst working-age adults demonstrates marked consistency, with new requests clustering within a narrow range. Assessment activity is similarly consistent, indicating comparable gateway pressures across all authorities.

Substantial variation appears in how care is delivered rather than in underlying need levels. Rates across nursing care, residential care, home care, and supported living indicate different historical service models and provider markets rather than fundamental differences in need.

For older adults, demand variation remains within manageable parameters approximately thirteen per cent difference. All three authorities will face substantial but broadly comparable demand. Variations in delivery models represent genuine opportunity for shared learning whilst retaining autonomy to respond to genuine local differences.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: CONSISTENCY IN CORE DEMAND

Core children's social care activity demonstrates striking consistency. Referral rates show minimal variation, with the proportion of Children in Need varying by less than one child per thousand. Most significantly, rates of children looked after are virtually identical across all three authorities, demonstrating comparable levels of acute need.

SEND provision shows more variation, with Eastern demonstrating notably higher rates. The three-unitary model creates opportunity to understand these variations and ensure equitable access.

Free school meal eligibility shows modest variation, reinforcing the pattern: each authority faces meaningful challenge, but none carries unsustainable burden. All three authorities will require robust, well-resourced children's social care departments with specialist expertise.

HOUSING: COMPARABLE CAPACITY

There is balanced provision of council and registered provider housing stock. Critically, each authority includes significant Council retained stock, ensuring all three possess Housing Revenue Account capability and direct delivery experience. Temporary accommodation placements remain similar across all three authorities. Pressures present consistently but challenges manifest differently, reflecting national pressures on affordable housing. The three-unitary structure provides the best platform to respond across the entire county enabling both locally tailored approaches and strategic coordination on major housing delivery programmes.

A BALANCED MODEL ENABLING SUSTAINABLE DELIVERY

The three-unitary model achieves carefully balanced distribution of provision, need and service demand. Deprivation is distributed across all three areas, with different authorities experiencing higher levels in different domains rather than one carrying overwhelming disadvantage. Adult social care demand, children's social care activity, and looked-after children rates show manageable variation rather than stark differences.

The balanced distribution means each authority can independently raise the Council Tax revenue necessary to support pockets of greater deprivation within their footprints, without requiring cross-subsidisation between authorities or dependency on redistribution mechanisms. This creates genuine financial resilience and local autonomy.

The three unitary model achieves an ideal configuration: sufficient balance that each authority is financially sustainable and capable of meeting need, whilst preserving sufficient distinction that locally tailored approaches remain appropriate and valuable. This balance provides the foundation for the prevention focused community empowered service transformation at the heart of the three unitary model.

	Provision / Metric	West	Central	Eastern
Health	NHS Health and Care Partnership Neighbourhoods	2	3	5
	Hospitals	8	14	12
	Primary Care Networks	11	8	10
	GP Practices	53	43	69
	GP practices per 10,000 people	1	1	1
Education	Further Education Colleges	1	1	2
	Further education college campuses	2	1	6
	Schools with key stage 5	23	24	31
	Total schools	160	148	224
	Schools per 1,000 children	1.8	1.9	2.2
	Number of special schools	8	8	10
	Total special schools per 10,000 pupils	0.9	1.0	1.0
Waste & Recycling	Number of Recycling stations	4	5	7
	Number of Waste Transfer stations	11	7	14
Adult Social Care	Residential/Nursing settings	73	94	82
	Residential/Nursing settings per 10,000 adults	2.4	3.4	2.1
	Homecare / supported living settings	93	106	121
	Homecare / supported living settings per 10,000 adults	3.0	3.7	3.3
Children's Social Care	Children's homes and residential special schools	8	12	31
	Children's homes and residential special schools per 10,000 children	0.9	1.5	3.0
	Children's homes and residential special school places	32	47	185
	Children's homes and residential special school places per 10,000 children	3.7	5.9	17.8
DWP	Job centres	2	3	4
Voluntary Sector	Council for Voluntary Service locations	2	3	2
Police	Police neighbourhood teams	2	2	2
	Police stations	7	6	8
Fire	Fire stations	8	9	12
	Fire stations per 10,000 people	2	3	3
Housing	Total Registered Provider and Local Authority Housing Stock	26,686	36,134	27,908
Community	Leisure centres	8	12	11
	Leisure centres per 10,000 people	2.1	3.5	2.3
	Libraries	15	15	16
	Libraries per 100,000 people	4	4	3
	Number of civic offices	8	5	9
	Number of cemeteries & crematoria	11	6	12
	Registry offices	2	2	4
	Registry offices per 100,000 people	5	6	8

FINANCIAL CASE

Restructuring Hertfordshire's local government into three new Unitary Authorities delivers a financially sustainable model that achieves early payback, generates substantial recurring savings, creates capacity for transformational investment in prevention and service improvement, and protects discretionary services.

By year five (2032/33), the model will deliver recurring annual net savings of between £30 million and £38 million. Over ten years, cumulative net savings reach £181 million to £258 million. The transition costs of £91 million to £111 million will be fully recovered within four to six years. Critically, this model achieves financial independence without reliance on external equalisation or emergency government support.

Three Unitary Authorities represent the optimal configuration, delivering sizeable efficiency gains while mitigating disaggregation costs and maintaining the scale necessary for specialist services and strategic investment. This model will enable investment in transformation aligned with our ambition for place, prevention and prosperity for every community.

THE FINANCIAL MODEL AT A GLANCE

- **Transition costs:** £91 million to £111 million (phased to 2032/33)
- **Payback period:** 4 to 6 years
- **Annual recurring savings by Year 5:** £30 million to £38 million
- **10-year cumulative benefit:** £181 million to £258 million
- **Funding approach:** Self-financed through existing reserves, asset realisation, and flexible use of capital receipts.

TRANSITION COSTS

The total investment required to establish three new unitary authorities ranges from £91 million to £111 million, with most one-off investment costs being incurred in 2028 / 29. These one-off costs cover:

- IT disaggregation and consolidation: £46 million to £66 million (phased through to 2032 / 33)
- Programme management: £16.5 million (through to 2028 / 2029)
- Redundancy and severance: £12 million (phased through to 2030 / 31)
- Legal work, estates reconfiguration, communication, and specialist support: £13 million (through to 2028 / 2029)
- Contract novation and renegotiation: £4.4 million (through to 2028 / 2029).

The implementation strategy deliberately phases these costs over three years or more, running through to 2032/33. This approach maximises savings while using controlled consolidation to avoid excessive disaggregation that would create multi-system duplication and long-term technical debt. The phased approach to redundancy protects institutional knowledge during the critical transition period.

RECURRING SAVINGS

Annual recurring savings build progressively over the implementation period, reaching between £30 million and £38 million by year five (2032 / 33):

- Staff rationalisation: £25 million to £28 million annually through phased implementation from 2030 / 31
- Democratic and governance reorganisation: £3.6 million annually
- Improved procurement, contract management, and facilities: £18 million to £21 million annually.

These savings are partially offset by recurring costs including some diseconomies of scale, totalling £7 million to £13 million annually. The net result is £30 million to £38 million in annual recurring savings, as efficiencies occur.

STRATEGIC RATIONALE: WHY THREE AUTHORITIES

The three-unitary configuration is not arbitrary. It represents the optimal balance across multiple dimensions: scale, complexity, efficiency, and local connection. This configuration delivers superior financial outcomes compared to both the current two-tier system and alternative unitary models.

OPTIMAL SCALE FOR DISAGGREGATION

Three authorities strike the optimal balance for managing disaggregation complexity. County-wide systems covering IT, HR, and Finance can be efficiently split three ways without creating excessive technical debt. More than three authorities would multiply implementation costs and create unsustainable duplication; fewer could introduce operational risks that might compromise service delivery.

Critical tasks including asset splits, pension allocations, grant distribution, and contract management all become tractable at this scale. The implementation can proceed at a controlled pace, allowing three organisations to be safely established without overwhelming programme management capacity.

MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY GAINS

Each authority achieves sufficient scale to sustain specialist capabilities without duplication yet remains small enough to avoid unwieldy bureaucracy. This critical mass enables investment in digital transformation, cyber resilience, and service modernisation that smaller authorities would struggle to afford.

Streamlined governance delivers further savings through reduced democratic overhead, clearer accountability, and faster decision-making. Service integration eliminates the handoffs and coordination costs inherent in the two-tier system, creating synergies across housing, planning, social care, public health, and economic development.

LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial sustainability extends beyond annual budgets. Each of the three authorities will maintain reserves sufficient to absorb unexpected shocks from demographic changes, policy shifts, or economic downturns. This financial headroom enables investment in transformation without forcing cuts to frontline services.

After transition costs are recovered, the authorities will generate growing annual surpluses that fund ongoing transformation in digital innovation, prevention programmes, and workforce development rather than being absorbed by operational pressures. This creates a sustainable dynamic where efficiency gains enable reinvestment in better outcomes.

The model is self-sustaining without dependency on external equalisation or emergency government funding. Each authority has sufficient tax base and economic diversity to weather local variations, creating genuine resilience.

EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY

As detailed elsewhere in this proposal, the three-unitary model achieves a balanced distribution of deprivation and affluence across all three authorities. This balance is strategically significant from a financial perspective, as it enables each council to independently raise the funds necessary to support pockets of greater need within their respective footprints without creating dependency on redistribution mechanisms or cross-subsidisation between authorities.

The graphs in the technical papers illustrate the cumulative net budget position for each unitary authority after the first five years of reorganisation, combining all baseline modelling assumptions including inflation, assumed Council Tax increases, and the impacts of local government reorganisation. When compared across alternative configurations, the three-unitary model demonstrates the most equitable budget position avoiding the financial imbalances that would characterise either more fragmented or more consolidated alternatives.

This equity of financial capacity provides each authority with genuine autonomy to respond to local priorities whilst ensuring that no single authority faces disproportionate fiscal pressures that would undermine service delivery or require external intervention.

STRATEGIC BENEFITS: INVESTING FOR TRANSFORMATION

The recurring savings generated by reorganisation will be strategically deployed to strengthen services and improve outcomes. This is not about implementing cuts or managing decline but about achieving transformation through building financially sustainable services that invest in prevention, respond to emerging needs, and continually improve outcomes.

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The three-unitary model provides sufficient scale to maintain specialist capacity in children's safeguarding, SEND provision. Each authority will be large enough to sustain senior posts and specialised teams while avoiding the fragmentation that would increase costs and reduce quality. The phased transition protects expertise and institutional knowledge, ensuring continuity through reorganisation.

PREVENTION AND DEMAND REDUCTION

Larger authorities can pool resources to fund targeted prevention programmes, invest in upstream health interventions, and maintain sophisticated data systems and specialist preventive staff. The return on prevention investment accrues across multiple systems as residents maintain independence longer, require less acute intervention, and avoid crisis points that trigger expensive support.

In children's social care, early help reduces statutory intervention and expensive placements. In adult social care, reablement maintains independence and delays residential care. Better housing quality, employment support, and addressing social isolation prevent hospital admissions and reduce health service demand. Youth services and community safety programmes reduce policing and criminal justice costs.

While savings from prevention and demand reduction have not been included in financial modelling, the recurring benefits compound over years and decades, creating a level of financial sustainability that efficiency savings alone cannot deliver.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Each authority will have sufficient resources to implement modern, cloud-based platforms that replace aging legacy infrastructure, ensure cyber resilience, and meet data protection standards. Automation capabilities will free staff from repetitive tasks to focus on high-value work requiring human judgment. Predictive analytics will enable early identification of emerging needs, while resident-facing digital services will improve accessibility and satisfaction.

The costs of this modernisation programme have not been included in financial modelling, but each authority is expected to be large enough to sustain robust IT platforms and ongoing investment, avoiding the continued reliance on any outdated systems or expensive shared service arrangements that might limit flexibility.

TARGETED INVESTMENT IN HIGH-NEED AREAS

Smaller, strategically focused authorities enable locally agile decision-making that improves spend efficiency by ensuring investment aligns with actual need rather than uniform service models. Scale provides the resources to make meaningful investments in SEND, adult care, and prevention, while local knowledge ensures those investments are effectively targeted to achieve maximum impact per pound spent.

MANAGING DISAGGREGATION RISK

The successful disaggregation of county-wide systems represents the single largest risk in reorganisation. The three-unitary model manages this risk through appropriate scale that makes technical and organisational challenges tractable, controlled consolidation that avoids excessive disaggregation and multi-system duplication and phased implementation that provides time to manage complex changes properly.

FINANCIAL HEADROOM AND RESERVE STRATEGY

Strong reserve balances across the three authorities provide essential capacity to absorb unexpected shocks from demographic changes, policy reforms or economic downturns without immediately cutting services or raising Council income beyond planned levels. This financial headroom enables investment in transformation initiatives that take time to generate returns and creates ability to respond to new demand pressures as they emerge.

This approach avoids the vulnerability of smaller or less balanced unitary models that lack reserves to weather significant challenges, forcing reactive rather than planned responses.

REINVESTMENT STRATEGY

The recurring savings generated by reorganisation will be strategically deployed across three priority areas:

PREVENTION INFRASTRUCTURE

Early help and family support services, mental health and wellbeing programmes, falls prevention and reablement for older adults, housing support and homelessness prevention, youth services and positive activities, and community development to build local capacity.

DIGITAL AND INNOVATION INVESTMENT

Modernised IT platforms replacing aging infrastructure, data analytics and AI capabilities for decision-making and predictive intervention, automation to free staff for complex work requiring human judgment, and cyber security to protect sensitive resident data.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Professional development and training, clear career pathways and progression opportunities, leadership development programmes, targeted recruitment and retention in hard-to-fill specialisms, and wellbeing and support for staff. A skilled, stable, and motivated workforce is essential for delivering transformation, and the recurring financial surpluses provide capacity to invest in people without squeezing frontline budgets.

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SAVINGS

While the financial model demonstrates strong recurring savings and early payback, successful delivery depends on managing implementation risks and capturing additional transformation opportunities beyond those currently modelled. The three-unitary configuration provides inherent advantages in managing these risks whilst creating capacity to pursue further efficiencies.

MANAGING KEY FINANCIAL RISKS

The modelled savings assume successful delivery of pre-vesting MTFS savings through 2027/28, controlled inflation aligned with baseline assumptions, and full realisation of benefits from reorganisation being delivered on schedule. The surplus position shown in year five provides essential headroom to absorb potential variations in any of these areas. The three-unitary authority model will enable councils to maintain sufficient reserves to manage unexpected shocks whilst continuing planned investments in prevention and transformation. The implementation approach outlined elsewhere reduces execution risk by avoiding simultaneous system disaggregation and allowing controlled consolidation of technology platforms.

ADDITIONAL TRANSFORMATION OPPORTUNITIES

The modelling captures only those savings arising directly from reorganisation itself. Significant additional opportunities exist through ongoing transformation once authorities are established. The three-unitary authority model provides the agility to redesign services swiftly, embed prevention at scale but also remain responsive to local need. Strategic asset rationalisation across the enlarged estate and accelerated digital adoption will generate further recurring benefits. Adult social care presents opportunity, with benchmarking indicating that authorities of this scale achieve better productivity across working age and older adult services through integrated commissioning and partnership delivery models.

MAXIMISING FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

Several additional levers can improve the financial position beyond baseline modelling. Business rates retention gains, currently not assumed in projections, could support transition costs or accelerate payback if retained through a transition period. Council tax base growth above the conservative 0.8% baseline assumption would generate material additional revenue as new authorities drive housing delivery. Asset disposals from estate rationalisation will provide capital receipts to offset implementation costs. Housing Revenue Accounts that join the unitaries can contribute proportionally to setup costs whilst creating opportunities for innovative accommodation solutions that reduce social care expenditure.

GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

The model demonstrates financial independence without requiring external equalisation or emergency support. However, specific government support could accelerate benefits realisation: capitalisation directions to spread one-off costs over multiple years, digital transformation funding to support ICT modernisation, funding for ambitious prevention pilots, extended business rates retention to bridge the transition period, and clarity on Fair Funding Review impacts to enable long-term planning. These measures would enhance an already sound financial case rather than rescuing an unviable proposition.

The three-unitary model creates the optimal platform to capture these additional opportunities whilst managing implementation risks effectively. The combination of sufficient scale for strategic investment, local agility for rapid transformation, and strong reserves for resilience ensures that financial sustainability extends well beyond the modelled projections.

ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The three-unitary financial model directly supports government objectives across multiple policy areas:

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Early payback within four to six years, recurring surpluses without additional government funding, self-sufficient operation independent of external support, and £181 million to £258 million in taxpayer value over ten years.

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

Resources to invest meaningfully in prevention and early intervention, digital transformation for modern and efficient service delivery, integration of services around residents' needs, and evidence-based investment in interventions proven to improve outcomes while reducing costs.

CONCLUSION

Three Unitary Authorities represent the optimal financial configuration for Hertfordshire, balancing scale and local connection to deliver maximum value. The model provides:

- Strong recurring surpluses of £30 million to £38 million annually by year five
- Cumulative ten-year benefit of £181 million to £258 million
- Early payback within four to six years
- Financial resilience through strong reserves and headroom
- Capacity for prevention investment that reduces long-term demand
- Strategic capacity for innovation and partnership working
- Local accountability through authorities that understand their communities
- Self-sufficiency without dependency on external support.

This is not about implementing cuts or managing decline. It is about achieving transformation through building financially sustainable services that can invest in prevention, respond to emerging needs, and continually improve outcomes for residents through the 2030s and beyond.

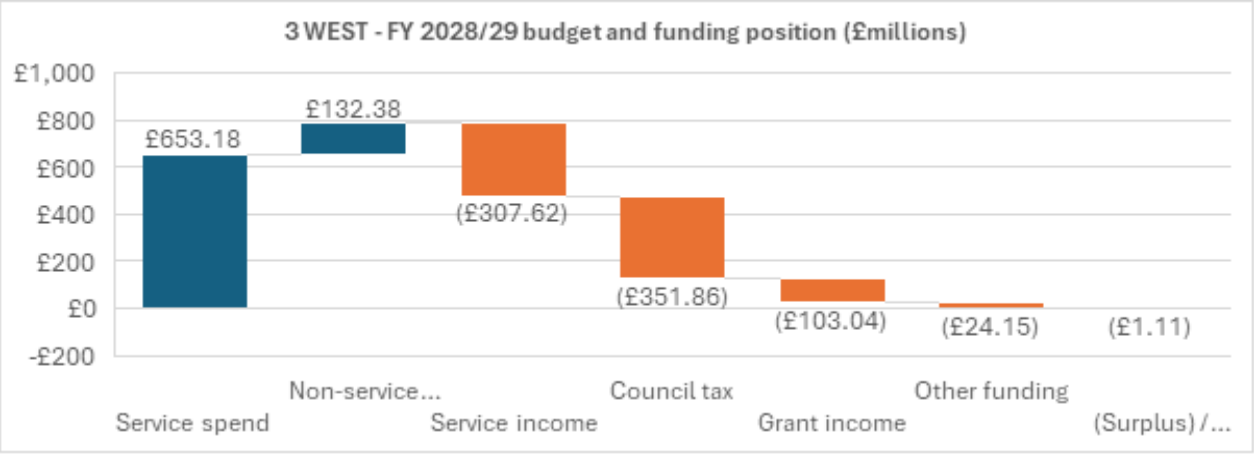
The detailed technical modelling that accompanies this strategic summary provides the complete evidence base, including scenario analysis and year-by-year projections that demonstrate how this vision will be delivered in practice. Together, these documents provide a complete financial case that combines strategic vision with technical rigor, demonstrating why three unitary authorities represent the sustainable, strategic, and financially sound choice for Hertfordshire's future.

NEW UNITARY AUTHORITIES – MODELLED BUDGETS AND FUNDING POSITION FOR YEAR ONE (2028 / 29)

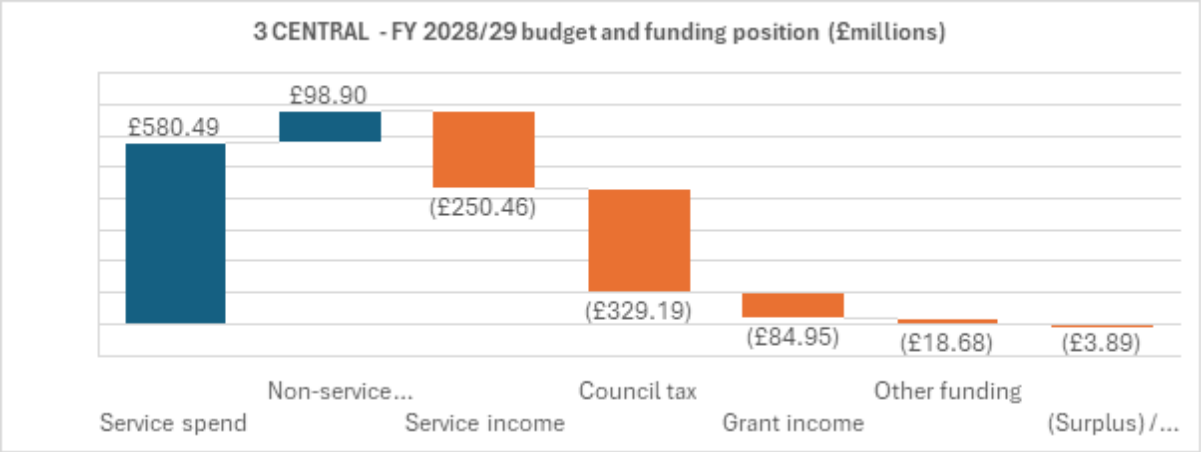
The graphs below show the anticipated year one budget for each proposed new unitary authority, excluding the initial costs and savings from LGR. On current assumptions and to different extents, new authorities will begin with opening surpluses or deficits based on modelled demand and service expenditure, the likely funding of each area and the capacity of each area to generate council tax.

As noted above, this modelling does not reflect the future impact of the Fair Funding Review, beyond that assumed within current authorities' Medium Term Financial Strategies, which is likely to change both the quantum and distribution of resource within Hertfordshire and may have an impact on the financial resilience of future unitary organisations.

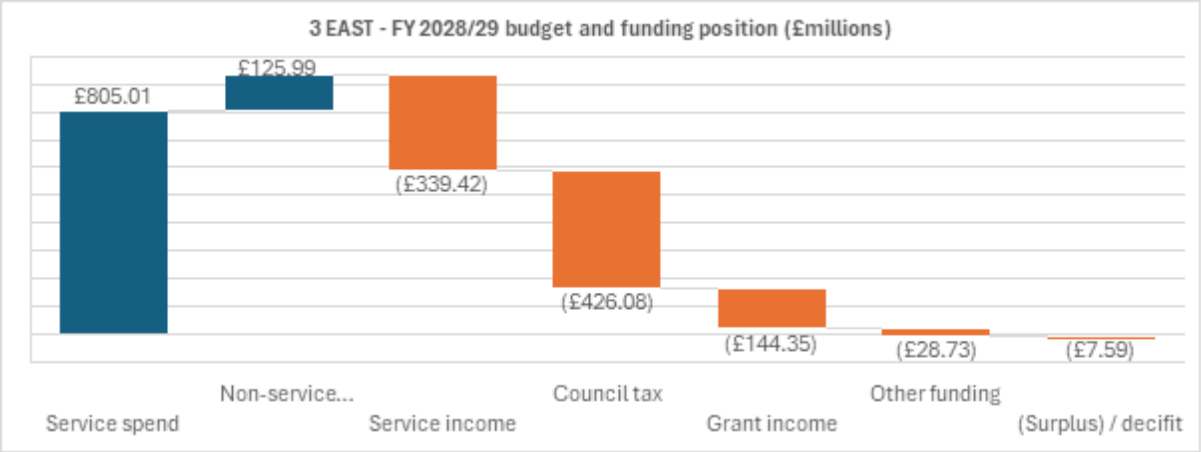
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 3 WEST



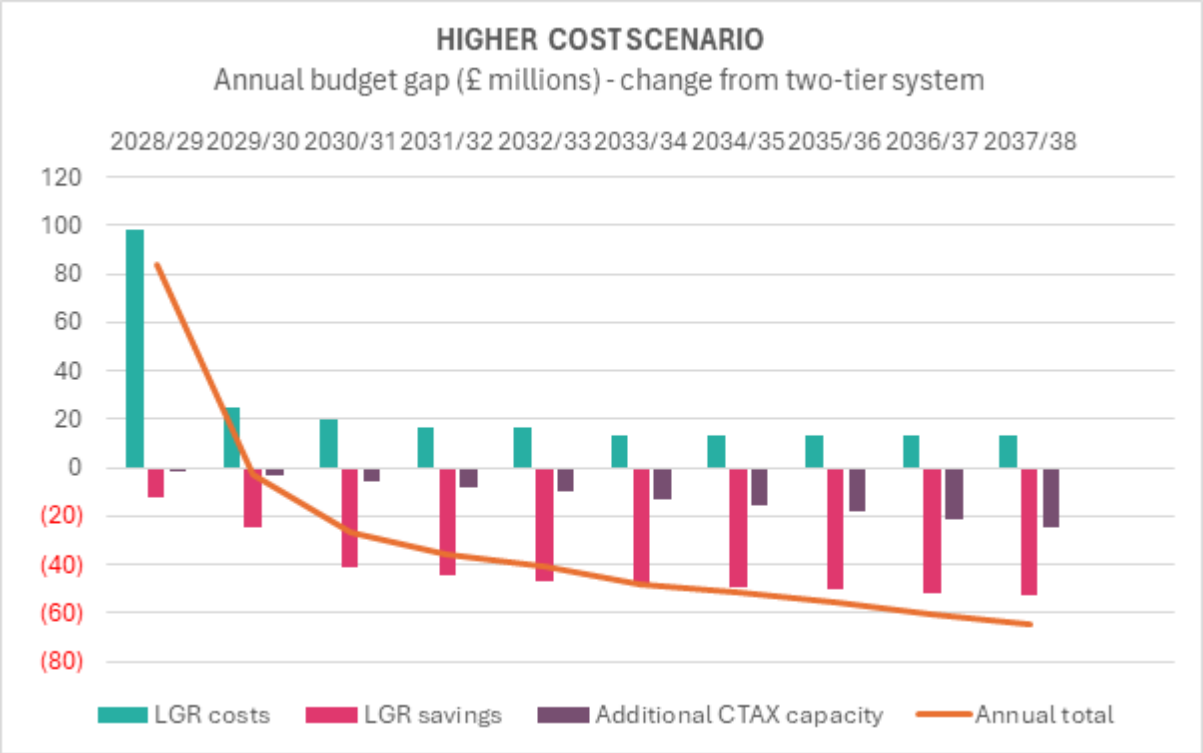
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 3 CENTRAL

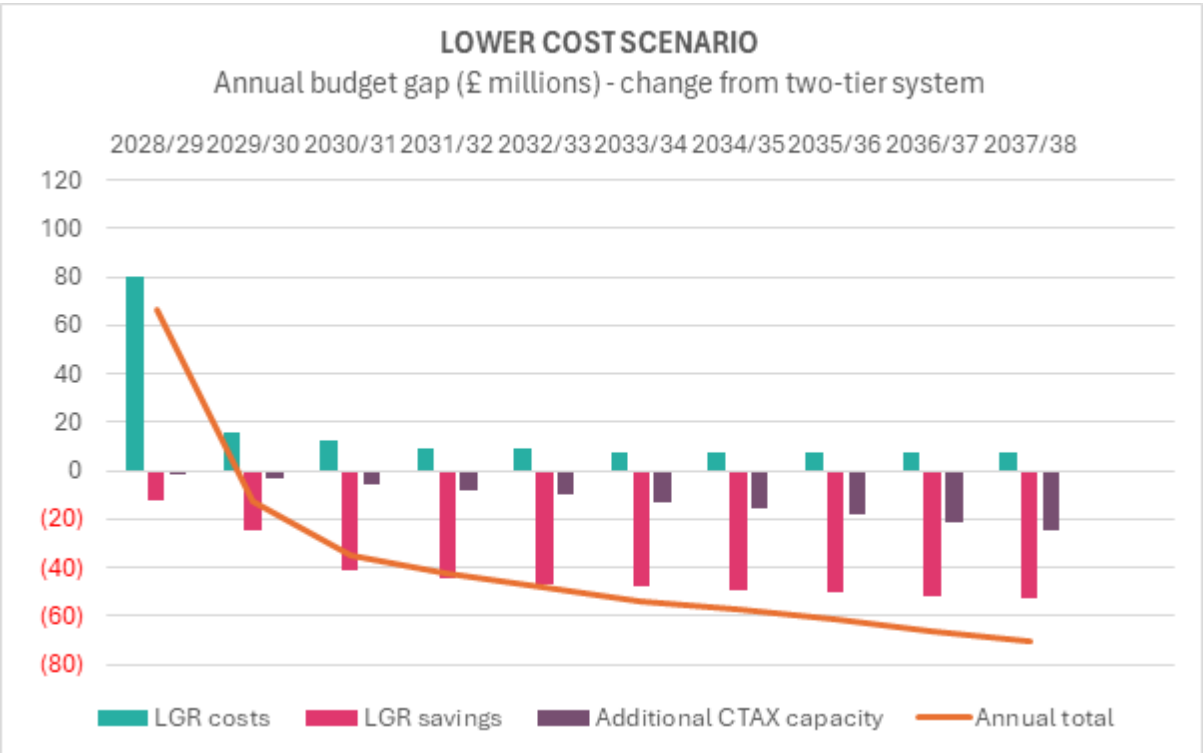


YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 3 EASTERN



PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE TWO-TIER BASELINE OVER TIME



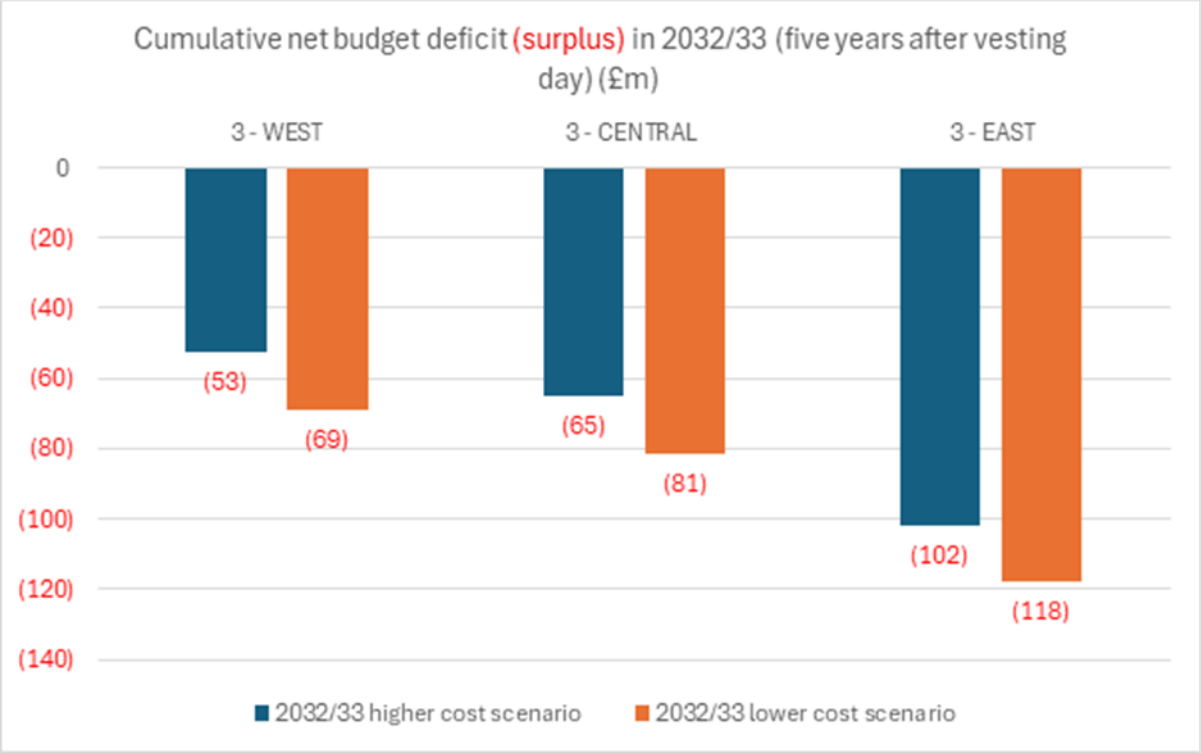


These two graphs show the in-year difference from the two-tier baseline that is delivered by LGR under this option. The modelled two-tier baseline is shown as zero, and the estimated impacts of LGR are shown as increases or (decreases) from that baseline. The key finding is that despite significant up-front costs, implementing this option would make Hertfordshire better off overall than the two-tier baseline in both the lower and higher-cost scenarios. Breaking down each line individually:

- **LGR costs** – this line adds together one-off costs (e.g. programme management) and recurring costs (e.g. duplicating management teams for social care). The majority of one-off investment costs will be incurred in the first year of LGR in 2028 / 29, and after five years only recurring elements of cost remain.
- **LGR savings** – this line shows the total recurring savings that are delivered by LGR (e.g. by removing duplication). These savings are higher than recurring costs so that a net annual saving is generated.
- **Additional CTAX capacity** – this line shows the maximum extent to which future unitary authorities would be able to raise additional Council Tax over and above the two-tier baseline should they wish to do so, without breaching referendum limits. In practice, this will be a decision for future authorities themselves.
- **Annual total** – this line shows the aggregate movement from the two-tier baseline forecast under this option, adding up all of the above.

As set out in the summary table above, adding up positive and negative movement from the baseline over time means that, overall, Hertfordshire would be better off as a result of this option in 2031 / 32 in the lower-cost scenario and 2032 / 33 in the higher-cost scenario.

MEDIUM-TERM POSITION OF INDIVIDUAL UNITARY AUTHORITIES OVER TIME



This graph combines all baseline modelling assumptions including inflation, assumed council tax increases and the impacts of LGR to show the cumulative net budget position for each unitary authority after the first five years of LGR. The set of baseline assumptions that we have used indicate that all models will be in a surplus position after this period, with increases in Council Tax assumed to be at 4.99 % (2.90% Council tax + 2% adult social care precept) in line with government funding assumptions. In our baseline assumptions this increase drives higher funding than the cost of services as driven by inflation, combined with the investment costs of delivering LGR and resulting savings. Further sensitivities have been modelled to test this position, and the surpluses will be quickly eroded if, for example:

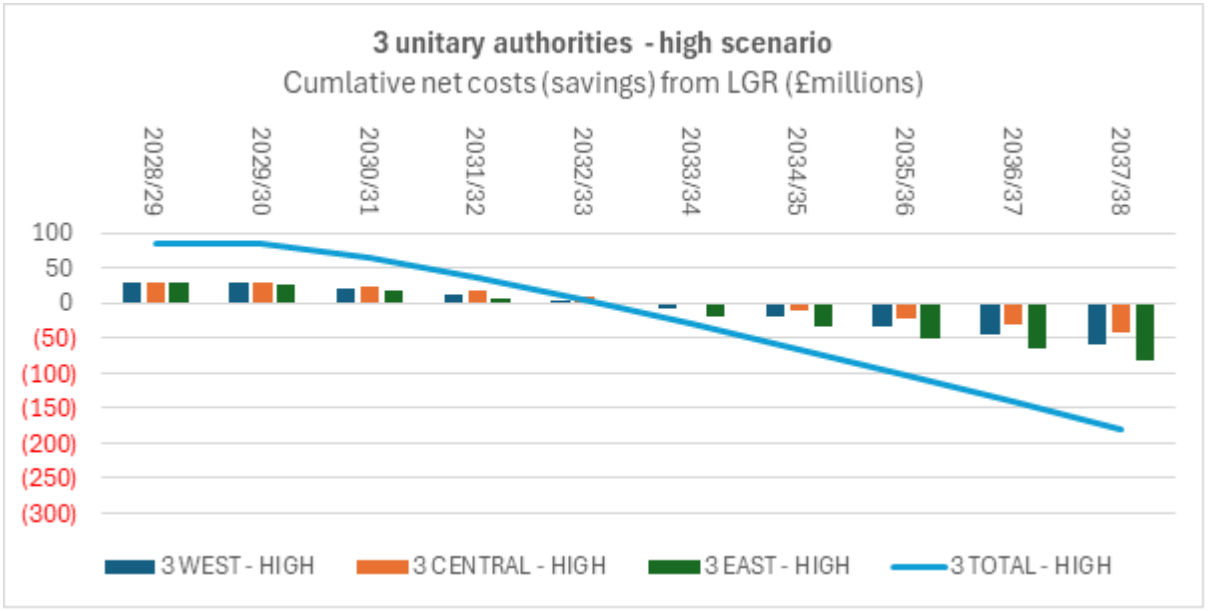
Further sensitivities have been modelled to test this position, and the surpluses will be quickly eroded if, for example:

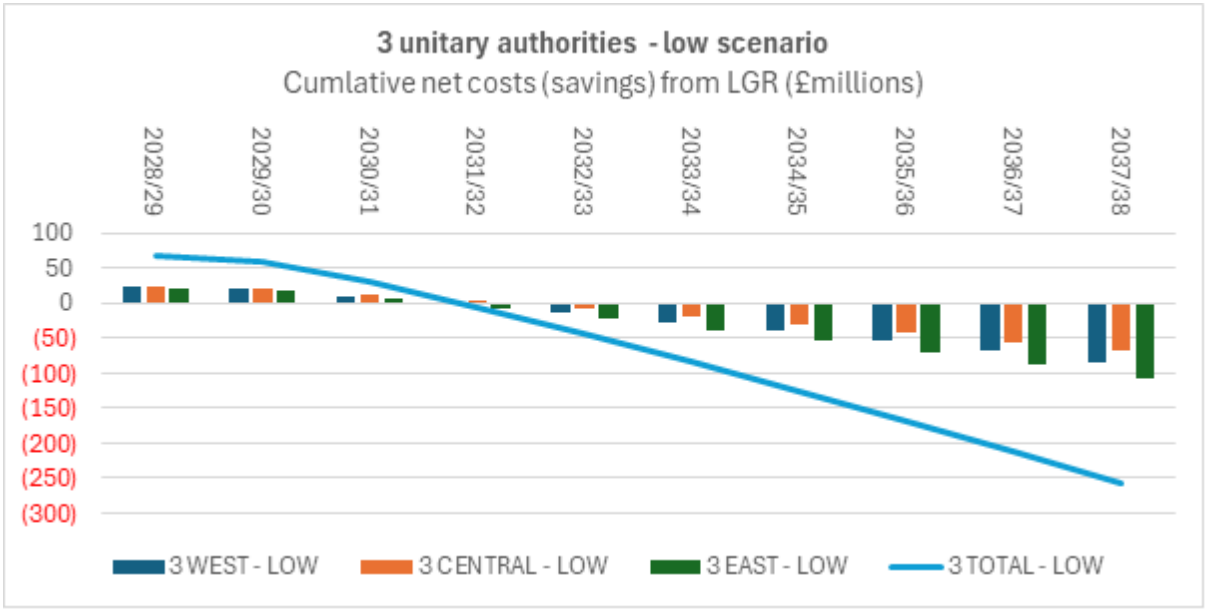
The significant savings planned in the 2025-26 to 2027-28 period (pre-vesting day) are not delivered in full, contributing to a more challenging opening position for new authorities.

- Inflation occurs at a higher rate than is assumed in our modelling.
- New authorities decide to increase council tax at a lower rate than the default assumed here, which is in line with government assumptions on future funding.
- There is any slippage in delivering the anticipated benefits from LGR.
- Further unexpected shocks occur.

The surplus shown above indicates that the 3-unitary model is likely to have some level of resilience in the event of any (or a combination) of the above occurring.

COSTS AND SAVINGS FROM LGR





These graphs show cumulative net costs and savings from LGR over time for individual unitary authorities, with detailed assumptions included below.

CUMULATIVE NET COSTS / (SAVINGS) FROM LGR – HIGHER COST SCENARIO

£m	2028 /29	2029 /30	2030 /31	2031 /32	2032 /33	2033 /34	2034 /35	2035 /36	2036 /37	2037 /38
3 West - HIGH	29	29	22	13	3	(8)	(20)	(32)	(45)	(58)
3 Central - HIGH	29	30	24	17	9	(1)	(11)	(21)	(32)	(42)
3 Eastern - HIGH	28	27	18	7	(6)	(20)	(35)	(50)	(65)	(81)
3 Total - HIGH	**85**	**86**	**64**	**37**	**6**	**(29)**	**(65)**	**(103)**	**(141)**	**(181)**

CUMULATIVE NET COSTS / (SAVINGS) FROM LGR – LOWER COST SCENARIO

£m	2028 /29	2029 /30	2030 /31	2031 /32	2032 /33	2033 /34	2034 /35	2035 /36	2036 /37	2037 /38
3 West - LOW	23	20	11	(1)	(13)	(26)	(40)	(54)	(69)	(83)
3 Central - LOW	23	21	13	3	(7)	(19)	(31)	(43)	(55)	(68)
3 Eastern - LOW	22	18	7	(7)	(22)	(38)	(55)	(71)	(89)	(107)
3 Total - LOW	**68**	**59**	**30**	**(5)**	**(43)**	**(83)**	**(125)**	**(168)**	**(213)**	**(258)**

LGR COST AND SAVINGS DETAILED ASSUMPTIONS

The table below shows cost and savings assumptions in detail, identifying the areas in which a range has been accepted by partners. For further detail see Appendix A in the accompanying "spine" document.

	LGR costs and savings (£ m)									
Assumption	**2028 /29**	**2029 /30**	**2030 /31**	**2031 /32**	**2032 /33**	**2033 /34**	**2034 /35**	**2035 /36**	**2036 /37**	**2037 /38**
One off-costs										
IT disaggregation (HIGH)	28.0	8.2	4.6	3.5	3.5					
IT disaggregation (LOW)	16.3	4.7	2.7	2.1	2.1					
IT consolidation	18.7									
Programme management	16.5									
Contract novation and renegotiation	4.4									
Estates and facilities - reconfiguration	1.4	1.4								
Communication and rebranding	1.3									
Staff relocation	1.9									
Specialist support and advice	5.5									
Transition cost - redundancies	7.1	2.4	2.4							
Total one-off costs (HIGH)	**84.8**	**11.9**	**7.0**	**3.5**	**3.5**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Total one-off costs (LOW)	**73.0**	**8.5**	**5.1**	**2.1**	**2.1**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Recurring costs										
Additional costs of scale	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Diseconomies of scale (HIGH)	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7
Diseconomies of scale (LOW)	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0
Total recurring costs (HIGH)	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**
Total recurring costs (LOW)	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**
Recurring savings										
Staff savings	(8.1)	(15.8)	(24.2)	(24.7)	(25.2)	(25.7)	(26.2)	(26.7)	(27.2)	(27.8)
Democratic and governance reorganisation	(1.1)	(2.1)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)
Direct cost savings	(3.2)	(6.7)	(13.8)	(16.0)	(18.4)	(19.0)	(19.6)	(20.2)	(20.8)	(21.5)

BALANCE SHEET - BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking of the consolidated balance sheets of new organisations against existing unitary authorities was undertaken by an independent organisation in March 2025. This comparison is based on our unmodified proposal (i.e. without changes to boundaries), but the results give a clear indication of the likely position of modified authorities.

	Net Assets	URR	URR+DSG	CFR	Debt gearing
3 West	TOP	TOP	TOP	3RD	TOP
3 Eastern	TOP	2ND	2ND	2ND	2ND
3 Central	TOP	2ND	2ND	3RD	TOP

Existing and future Hertfordshire authorities have relatively stable balance sheet financial health when compared with all existing unitaries. In this exercise they were compared to unitary authorities (excluding Mets and London Boroughs). The table above shows the results by quartile.

Net assets – all three proposed unitaries would be in the top quartile.

Usable Revenue Reserves – all three unitaries will hold usable reserves at a level above the median, with 3 West in the top quartile.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit – currently low when compared with other areas, but forecasting much greater deficits in future which will impact the resilience of all three unitaries.

Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) – the one area with consistently low performance for all three unitaries. There are a handful of exceptions, driven by East Herts and Broxbourne.

Debt gearing - all three unitaries show above median levels in respect of debt gearing.

OTHER KEY FINANCIAL RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Please refer to Appendix A of the spine document for a further list of specific risks and assumptions that are relevant to this option. In particular:

- Some existing costs and budgets will transfer to the Strategic Authority such as the Fire service. These have not been included in the financial model at this stage due to the complexities of splitting out budgets and resource. No additional running costs have been assumed for the Strategic Authority within the financial model.
- Existing MTFS savings – If the savings assumed to be achieved by vesting day are not delivered, this would reduce the projected baseline position and may require the new authorities to identify additional savings beyond those expected from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- It should also be noted that, while annual savings are included in the MTFS up to 2027 / 28, non-LGR savings (to address underlying funding gaps) have already been incorporated into the financial model.
- Savings – while a prudent approach to savings has been adopted, it is not yet possible to fully determine which savings are cashable and which may be non-cashable—for example, where expenditure is funded by ring-fenced grants. Therefore, although expenditure may be reduced in some cases, there could be limitations on how those savings can be used.
- MTFS forecasts – as outlined earlier the financial models assume that cost increases – especially in Social Care and SEND, are lower in the years after LGR than in the years preceding it. Council Tax increases are also assumed at the 4.99% (2.99% council tax + 2% adult social care precept) every year in line with government assumptions on funding.

- Shared service arrangements – Hertfordshire has a track record of successful shared services. It has been assumed for the purposes of the financial case that shared service arrangements will continue where long-term countywide contracts exist, such as for Highways and Waste Disposal. Without these arrangements, the additional costs linked to disaggregation could rise.
- DSG Deficit / HNB – the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant funds education for children with SEND, including special schools, independent placements, and additional support in mainstream settings.
- Rising demand for SEND provision has led many councils to overspend, as grant funding has not kept pace with costs. The government's 'statutory override' allows councils to exclude these deficits from their accounts, but the financial shortfall remains. The override has been extended to March 2028 while longer-term reforms are developed.
- The County Council forecasts a cumulative DSG deficit of £255 million by March 2028, with annual overspends expected to continue. The outcome of national reforms will be critical to the financial sustainability of all three structural options. Any remaining HNB deficit would need to be divided between the new authority or authorities, creating a risk that an unfunded deficit could be transferred.
- Pay harmonisation – no assumptions have been made in relation to pay harmonisation within the financial model although it is recognised that pay harmonisation will occur over several years. Whilst staff will initially move into the newly formed authorities taking their existing terms and conditions (including salary) under TUPE transfer, over time staff are likely to move on to the new organisations' terms and salary levels
- Borrowing – If alternative funding sources are insufficient to cover transition costs, borrowing may be required. Borrowing costs have not been included in the financial model at this stage and could reduce projected savings and the baseline funding available
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – the HRA sits outside of General Fund revenue expenditure. Although the four HRA's in Hertfordshire receive support services/Cost of democracy from the General Fund the impact on HRA's for one off, on-going costs and savings has not been included within the financial business case
- Assets disaggregation – has not been accounted for within the financial model but this potentially poses risks at a later stage in terms of ensuring the transfer of assets and their corresponding revenue streams and or liabilities does not inadvertently worsen the financial position and sustainability of the new authorities. Disposal of surplus assets may help to defray the costs of reorganisation.
- Shared services – whilst some shared services are already in existence across for example Audit, Fraud, Procurement and Building Control, across Hertfordshire, these may no longer align geographically with the new authority boundaries. This may pose additional costs in relation to:
    - Disaggregating shared systems or contracts that are no longer aligned geographically.
    - Potential duplication of effort or investment if new, separate services are required.
    - Loss of economies of scale once shared arrangements end.
- However, in other cases existing shared services will not require disaggregation and there may be opportunities to expand these and create greater economies of scale.
- Companies and other entities – where they exist this may cause additional complexity in aggregating and disaggregating balance sheets and asset valuation or else amending governance and ownership arrangements. As a result, additional specialist support may be required. This is assumed to be covered by the existing allocation of specialist support within the one-off costs.
- Shadow authority costs – it has been assumed that the costs of the shadow authority can be covered by existing budgets and one-off costs and the contingency where required. These are unlikely to have a material impact on the financial assessment of alternative unitary options being considered, nor on their ongoing financial sustainability.

3. SUPPORTS DEVOLUTION ARRANGEMENTS (MHCLG CRITERION 5)

FROM PARTNERSHIP TO POWER: BUILDING HERTFORDSHIRE'S DEVOLUTION FRAMEWORK

The reorganisation of Hertfordshire into three new Unitary Authorities, creates the foundation for a transformational shift in local leadership and delivery. This model brings together the strategic scale of a county-wide vision with the local responsiveness of unitary governance, creating a framework designed to deliver.

As noted previously, Hertfordshire's strengths align directly with the government's Modern Industrial Strategy priorities. Well connected to both London and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the county stands as a major economic powerhouse, with a GDP per capita amongst the highest of any comparable authorities. The three-unitary model provides the clarity, coherence and capacity needed to unlock the full potential of devolution, positioning Hertfordshire at the forefront of the government's devolution ambition.

This is not about redrawing boundaries. It is about turning shared ambition into measurable outcomes for every community across the county; reimagining what a modern, confident Hertfordshire can achieve: planning growth and transport as one integrated system, connecting people to skills and opportunity, driving innovation across a diverse economy and leading the transition to a sustainable, net-zero future.

DISTINCT ECONOMIC IDENTITIES, UNITED STRATEGIC PURPOSE

Hertfordshire's economic strengths are matched by persistent structural challenges. West Hertfordshire's creative and professional and business services growth is tempered by affordability pressures and social exclusion. Central Hertfordshire reflects a high-performing knowledge economy, yet faces severe housing stress and pockets of deprivation. Eastern Hertfordshire leads in life sciences and digital infrastructure, but its relative affordability conceals deep educational inequalities and a vulnerable foundational workforce. These regional contrasts, outlined previously, highlight the need for targeted, place-based strategies that bridge opportunity and inclusion.

WHY THREE UNITARIES: THE OPTIMAL MODEL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

The three-unitary configuration delivers at a level that fewer or multiple authorities would struggle to achieve. The model balances scale with proximity, creating authorities large enough to think and act strategically, yet close enough to communities to understand and respond to local needs.

The three-unitary model is an optimal approach as it:

- **Aligns with Hertfordshire's functional economic geography.** The three areas correspond to real transport corridors and economic clusters. The road and rail networks that define and traverse each area are not arbitrary lines and reflect how people live, work and travel.
- **Creates the right scale for strategic delivery without losing local connection.** Each Unitary Authority will serve between approximately 350,000 and 479,000 residents rising significantly by 2045, large enough to employ specialist staff, manage complex projects and deliver at pace, but not so large that they become remote or disconnected from communities. A smaller unitary configuration would create areas too large to maintain distinct place identities, with the risk of tensions between different communities, whilst more Unitary Authorities would fragment capacity, duplicate strategic functions and retain many of the coordination problems we are seeking to resolve.
- **Provides balanced representation at the MSA**. Three constituent authorities offer even representation around the MSA table, ensuring no single area dominates decision making. This structure allows diverse perspectives, rural in some areas, urban and suburban in others, different political traditions and varied economic strengths to inform strategic choices. Each authority becomes a strong anchor institution that can represent its communities effectively while collaborating on county-wide priorities.

- **Provides effective partnerships**. Three strong Unitary Authorities offer clear contacts and scalable, locally informed solutions for organisations like the NHS, emergency services, education providers and major businesses.
- **Reflects how Hertfordshire works.** The three Unitary Authority areas have coherent identities. People identify with these areas. They make sense to residents, businesses and partners.

The three-unitary model is not a compromise; it is the optimal solution. It creates authorities of sufficient scale to deliver transformational change, balanced with sufficient proximity to understand and respond to community needs. When combined with a MSA, this structure unlocks the full potential of devolution.

POWERING OUR WORLD-CLASS ECONOMY AND INVESTING IN SKILLS

Hertfordshire's economic diversity creates a powerful platform for strategic, place-based investment. The three-unitary model allows each council to lead regeneration aligned with local economic strengths, while the MSA provides coordination, funding streams and strategic alignment through a comprehensive Hertfordshire Local Growth Plan and Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

With powers to create Investment Zones and Mayoral Development Corporations, the MSA would hold the levers to deliver growth at scale. The three unitaries ensure sufficient local focus to support delivery and successful operation of major growth opportunities in each area.

This partnership approach ensures investment is focused where it matters most, leveraging Hertfordshire's economic diversity to attract national and international capital while retaining strong local leadership. By connecting sectoral clusters, linking Watford's creative corridor with Stevenage's life sciences strengths and Broxbourne's digital and AI capabilities, Hertfordshire can unlock the critical mass and scale essential to compete at an international level.

BUILDING A WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE

A thriving economy relies on a workforce equipped for the industries of tomorrow. The three-unitary model enables skills provision to be tailored to local economic strengths and challenges, while the MSA ensures strategic alignment and access to devolved funding through the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and Adult Skills Fund.

With support from the MSA, each Unitary Authority will develop local skills hubs providing routes into training and employment aligned with key sectors:

- **West Hertfordshire Skills Hub**: professional and business services, creative industries (film / TV production, post-production, digital content), digital skills and AI literacy to address automation impacts, clean growth technologies.
- **Central Hertfordshire Skills Hub**: life and veterinary sciences, logistics and supply chain management (including decarbonisation), innovation and entrepreneurship (leveraging University of Hertfordshire Enterprise Zone), creative industries at Elstree and Sky Studios, addressing education deprivation in Borehamwood and Hatfield.
- **Eastern Hertfordshire Skills Hub**: cell and gene therapy, advanced manufacturing and defence sector capabilities, digital infrastructure and AI / cloud computing, agri-tech and rural enterprise, pathways from lower educational attainment areas into high-value sectors.

Hertfordshire's sectoral specialisms, including advanced manufacturing and digital technologies, are ideally positioned to create one of the government's proposed new Technical Excellence Colleges, further strengthening local growth and opportunities. Through the MSA, these local initiatives are unified by the LSIP, ensuring a consistent, inclusive approach to workforce growth that meets employer needs and creates opportunities for residents. Targeted programmes aligned with the government's 'Get Britain Working' will reduce economic inactivity through integrated employment and skills support,

create pathways from foundational sectors into higher-value employment and address barriers faced by residents in deprived areas.

BUILDING THE RIGHT HOMES IN THE RIGHT PLACES

Hertfordshire faces acute housing affordability challenges, as enumerated above, that require both strategic and local responses. With plans for considerable housing growth, the three-unitary model enables a joined-up approach to growth built around natural transport and economic corridors. Each Unitary Authority area is large enough to shape ambitious local growth, whilst delivering on strategic housing and infrastructure objectives set by the MSA through an ambitious Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

Through the SDS, and utilising powers to call in strategic sites or create Mayoral Development Corporations, Hertfordshire can optimise the opportunities in housing delivery and urban regeneration.

The three-unitary model ensures delivery builds on Hertfordshire's excellent track record of collaborative working on strategic housing growth opportunities, like Hemel Garden Communities and Harlow-Gilston Garden Town, to maintain community engagement and sustain momentum. Critically, the model also provides the right balance of capacity and local knowledge to directly deliver affordable housing within communities. Each of the three areas can develop clear programmes for affordable housing delivery on non-strategic sites, identifying opportunities that would otherwise be missed without the local expert knowledge this model provides.

Taking inspiration from the government's Small Sites Aggregator pilots, the three unitary areas within Hertfordshire can take a proactive role in the delivery of housing. Being of a similar scale to the current pilot areas of Lewisham, Bristol and Sheffield, this model provides a unique opportunity to work with SME builders and local tradespeople across Hertfordshire to support local housing delivery. The three unitaries provide organisations of the right scale to deliver new homes through a portfolio approach that benefits the local economy, while having the resources to work alongside a MSA to leverage the powers and funding required to deliver at scale. Together these initiatives form a county-wide ecosystem for sustainable growth, where housing, infrastructure and jobs are planned and delivered in balance.

CREATING A MODERN, CONNECTED TRANSPORT NETWORK

Hertfordshire's transport network is the economic backbone of the county. Positioned strategically, the county's connectivity is vital but suffers from congestion, fragmentation and underinvestment. The three-unitary model reflects key transport corridors and creates local delivery capacity to invest in and maintain the network, while the MSA provides strategic oversight to create a truly integrated transport system.

As the single Local Transport Authority, the MSA would take on responsibilities for bus franchising, rail integration and planning for strategic active travel networks, developing a unified Hertfordshire Transport Strategy that connects major roads and rail lines into a coherent system. Delivering east-west connectivity across the county will be a strategic priority for the MSA. Funding from Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), similar to that charged in London, can help deliver the strategic transport infrastructure needed to address this long-standing barrier to growth.

DECARBONISATION: STRATEGIC AND LOCAL INTERVENTIONS

Delivering net-zero requires both local innovation and regional development. Decarbonising the transport system, improving air quality and meeting climate goals requires strategic and local interventions. The three-unitary model embeds sustainability at the core of delivery, bringing the ability to focus on place-specific issues, whilst the MSA provides the strategic reach and investment levers to accelerate decarbonisation and climate resilience across the county.

This joined-up vision, with the MSA and three new authorities, will deliver an approach that strengthens north-south and east-west connectivity, reduces carbon emissions, unlocks growth, improves accessibility and removes barriers that have limited inclusive economic opportunities in Hertfordshire for decades.

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM BUILT FROM NEIGHBOURHOODS OUTWARD

As outlined elsewhere in detail, the three-unitary model embeds integrated neighbourhood teams that link housing, social care, health, policing, wellbeing and community safety at a local level. The MSA can support the three Unitary Authorities to deliver their ambition for system-wide reform, uniting place, prevention and prosperity for Hertfordshire.

MOVING FROM POSSIBILITY TO POWER

This approach gives Hertfordshire the scale to think bigger and the structure to deliver smarter. It is a model designed not only to meet today's challenges, but to unlock the full potential of devolution tomorrow, providing the essential connection between local vision and regional power.

It sets out a clear route to a MSA built on strong foundations: three authorities leading delivery at place level, working together under a single strategic umbrella that amplifies their collective impact. This is how Hertfordshire moves from possibility to power, to a shared platform for growth, innovation and leadership.

The three-unitary model will unleash ambition for growth across Hertfordshire, empowering people and places. It is about aligning ambition with delivery, combining local energy with strategic intent, ensuring that every community benefits from the opportunities devolution brings. A structure that can invest in the right things, in the right places, at the right time and do so with clarity, confidence and purpose.

Each of the three unitary areas brings its own character to the table. Together these areas represent Hertfordshire's full economic and cultural spectrum. Each brings unique strengths. Each faces distinct challenges. And each deserves local leadership that understands its communities and local needs while being empowered to deliver transformational change at scale. The three-unitary model provides exactly that.

When combined with a MSA, this structure unlocks powers that can reshape Hertfordshire's future: powers over housing, transport, skills, economic development and climate action that will enable us to move at pace and respond to our communities' ambitions.

4. HIGH-QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE SERVICES (MHCLG CRITERION 3)

DESIGNING TOMORROW, TODAY

The accompanying spine document establishes how Hertfordshire's new councils will be safe, legal and operational from day one, providing the secure foundation on which transformation can begin. Set out below is what the three-unitary model will achieve from that point: a shift from stabilising the present to shaping the future.

The creation of three confident, connected and capable authorities provides the platform to deliver services that are not only efficient but transformative, structures that enable prevention, technology that empowers people, and cultures that turn ambition into action. We recognise that services such as social care, housing and public health operate within statutory frameworks that set clear expectations and parameters, frameworks that rightly prioritise safeguarding, quality and equity. While these duties limit the scope for radical transformation of core functions, they do not constrain our ambition to deliver them better: with greater prevention, stronger integration and deeper community connection. It is where vision becomes delivery; where reorganisation translates into better lives, stronger communities and a more confident Hertfordshire, built by people who believe that public services can and should create lasting change.

By uniting ambition with community connection across West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire, the authorities will transform local government into a dynamic catalyst that, through leadership, innovation, prevention and growth, empowers all three areas to thrive and shape their own prosperous futures.

Whilst organisational structures provide the framework, it is people who bring that framework to life. Their engagement, innovation and commitment are what make transformation real and lasting. Yet structure matters, not for its own sake, but for what it enables. A people-first culture, essential to prevention, sustainable growth and innovation, does not happen by accident, it must be intentionally designed and enabled. The three-unitary model provides that configuration: large enough to invest in the sophisticated capabilities that define modern public service but also connected enough to remain grounded in community understanding.

This transformation rests on a fundamental principle that will shape everything that follows; prevention works, but only when structure enables it. The three-unitary model creates that structure.

WORKING TOGETHER: THE ONE HERTFORDSHIRE ALLIANCE

The three-unitary model delivers prevention through autonomous authorities, each large enough to lead, yet connected enough to collaborate. Autonomy does not mean isolation. The One Hertfordshire Alliance, comprised of leaders of critical services, adult and children social care, public health, education and SEND, will provide a framework to coordinate seamlessly around shared priorities, markets and resources to deliver equity and opportunity for every resident. It will evolve from ensuring day one safe and legal critical service delivery to a strategic partnership that supports continuous improvement and a platform for key countywide partnerships.

This framework provides the gateway to transformation at scale and as a coherent voice for Hertfordshire to work with Central East Integrated Care Board, the MSA, the wider east of England region and central government on key issues such as SEND demand. This will take forward current foundations and successful practice in social care in Hertfordshire to support new models of service delivery including exploration of shared service delivery, where appropriate to do so.

Joint frameworks will enable market shaping and specialist provision that ensures equity in critical areas such as foster care, SEND provision, children's homes and public health commissioning. Shared digital platforms will create interoperability without uniformity, allowing each authority to develop its own intelligent digital core whilst connecting to countywide infrastructure. Integrated workforce planning will build resilience, share expertise, and create career pathways that span all three councils.

Cross-boundary service models will ensure residents experience seamless support regardless of administrative boundaries. Shared investment and funding for innovation, transformation and resilience will pool resources for change that benefits everyone.

The One Hertfordshire Alliance exemplifies the approach of the three-unitary model: autonomy with alignment, partnership by design, built on trust, mutual benefit and a shared commitment to prevention and prosperity across every part of Hertfordshire.

PREVENTION AS THE FOUNDATION – WHY IT MATTERS

The three-unitary model creates the optimal structure for prevention to succeed: large enough for strategic public sector integration, systems relationships and data capability, small enough to connect with neighbourhoods and community assets. It is the catalyst for transforming public services to proactive, community-centred support that builds resilience and improves lives.

There is a strong economic case for prevention. Research by the Local Government Association, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, and IMPOWER demonstrates that for every £1 invested in prevention, councils save more than £3 in future social care costs[8]. Nearly half of high-cost interventions, including statutory child protection, hospital admissions and residential care placements could have been avoided through earlier, integrated support.

National analysis indicates a £4bn - £5bn potential productivity gain from improving the Local Government–NHS interface,[9] with even greater benefits when focusing on prevention. Local studies show that 40% to 60% of demand in complex health and care systems can be influenced. Case studies highlight opportunities to prevent, reduce, or delay long-term care in 78% of adult cases and to provide earlier support in 81% of children's cases.[10] Early Integrated Neighbourhood Team pilots, such as those in East Birmingham, have already demonstrated positive results, including fewer GP visits, reduced hospital stays, and less need for long-term care packages.[11] The three-unitary authority model aims to match or surpass these outcomes.

Prevention works when investment targets evidence-backed interventions that address root causes: early years support, falls prevention and reablement, tackling loneliness and social isolation, housing retrofit and healthy homes and employment and skills pathways. These interventions reduce demand, maintain independence, enhance wellbeing and generate prosperity. The three-unitary model structure enables operational delivery.

WHY PREVENTION REQUIRES THIS SCALE

The three-unitary model creates the foundation for effective neighbourhood-based service delivery. In the NHS 10-Year Plan, neighbourhoods are the cornerstone of integrated care, based on natural geographies, population distribution and need.

The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) will merge into the new Central East ICB in April 2026 (covering Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, and Hertfordshire), fundamentally reshaping strategic commissioning across a broader geography.

Existing Primary Care Networks (PCN's) provide the springboard for new "single neighbourhood provider" contracts delivering enhanced multidisciplinary services that coordinate GPs, community health, social care and voluntary sector teams serving populations of 30,000 to 50,000.

[8] Earlier action and support: The case for prevention in adult social care and beyond, LGA, November 2024
[9] IMPOWER analysis using 2025 INDEX tool
[10] Based on recent IMPOWER case reviews with a London Borough
[11] Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS FT, July 2025

These neighbourhoods then cluster at a Place Board level which then coalesce at Unitary Authority level. At this level, clusters of PCN's link to care providers such as, health and care partnerships, acute hospitals, care homes, mental health, local government and voluntary organisations to make shared assessments of local need, plan how to use collective resources and join up what they offer beyond traditional health and social care services.

Directors of adult social care, public health and children's services hold significant legal duties to protect people and are the gateway to a range of local government functions and resources that can be deployed to neighbourhoods to build a prevention first approach, and scale and embed preventative work already underway.

Policing Vision 2030[12] emphasises prevention-focused policing integrated with multi-agency partnerships, aiming to address factors such as mental health, homelessness, domestic abuse, adult and youth vulnerability. The three-unitary model enables Police neighbourhood teams to align with PCN footprints, building genuine relationships with partner agencies and communities whilst reducing inefficient demand through coordinated, multiagency support rather than emergency response. The model already aligns with updated Police neighbourhood structures. Regardless of the end destination of the LGR work, the Chief Constable has confirmed that he will ensure that policing can work effectively in the community partnership.

The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise organisations (VCFSE) sector champions prevention because it aligns with their core mission to strengthen communities. Yet crisis-driven commissioning marginalises them through short-term grants rather than strategic partnership. By embedding prevention as the operating principle, the three-unitary model offers long-term investment in community capacity and positions VCFSE as equal partners in design and delivery.

This configuration responds to demographic pressures, particularly the growing elderly population in Hertfordshire, forecasting a 40% increase in over 65s, a 47% increase in over 85s and a 78% increase in dementia prevalence by 2040. SEND demand is growing at 12-15% per annum in line with national averages meaning a new model of delivery is required to enable financial sustainability and better outcomes.

Prevention requires coordinated multi-agency support, integrated governance structures that enable seamless collaboration across all levels of the system from neighbourhood delivery to working with government.

Neighbourhoods and Integrated Care Systems are critical constants for long-term reform to enable prevention and the long-term financial sustainability of public services.

Through neighbourhood working, prevention becomes tangible, where risk is identified early, support is wrapped around families from all disciplines; health, care and local government genuinely connecting at the frontline. This model of neighbourhood working delivers reduced costs, fewer hospital admissions and improved health outcomes, as demonstrated by case studies across England.[13] This approach also aligns to DCN Guidance; Building the Best Places for Families and Children[14] and the government's Family First Partnership approach.[15]

The three-unitary structure provides alignment to the NHS 10-Year plan, creating the stable platform for joint commissioning, shared data systems and coordinated workforce planning. This will deliver care within community settings, transitioning from analogue to digital systems while fostering innovation, and emphasise prevention.

As the following table demonstrates, this is the scale where strategic public sector integration meets neighbourhood delivery, creating authorities which are large enough for data capability, specialist commissioning and system partnerships, but also small enough for community connection, local knowledge and democratic accountability. By aligning with neighbourhood infrastructure and positioning strategically for the emerging Central East ICB footprint, the three-unitary model supports delivery of the NHS 10-Year Plan.

[12] Policing vision 2030, Strategic Policing Partnership Board, March 2023
[13] Neighbourhood health – case studies of good practice, NHS England, March 2025
[14] Building the Best Places for Children and Families, DCN, July 2025
[15] Families First Partnership programme, DfE, March 2025

	Population			
Guidance	**Systems**	**Place**	**Local governance arrangements**	**Neighbourhoods**
MHCLG (Devolution Guidance)	1.5M (Strategic Authority)	500K (Unitary Authority)	Criterion 6 – Provide detail on Neighbourhood based governance	N/A
NHS (Designing Integrated Care System guidance)	1-3M (Integrated Care System)	250-500k	N/A	30-50k
3UA Proposal	3.3M (Central East ICB) 1.5M (Strategic Authority)	413-600k (Unitary Authority)	30-120k (Place Boards)	30-50k served by community hubs

Future Resident Journey: Margaret and George

Margaret (82) and **George (85)** live in a semi-detached home in East Hertfordshire. Margaret has early-stage dementia and George has mobility issues and a history of falls. They are proud, independent, and have lived in their community for over 50 years.

1. Early identification and outreach

Shared data systems from health, social care, housing and benefits using predictive AI technology identify Margaret and George as high-risk for hospital admission and care home placement. This trusted, transparent use of data reflects the system's prevention-first design: learning from people, not just about them.

A member of their local neighbourhood team, aligned to the Primary Care Network footprint, receives this alert and visits them to conduct a home safety assessment and cognitive screening. The officer is part of a multidisciplinary team that includes NHS staff, social workers, housing officers, and voluntary sector partners, a One Workforce, operating seamlessly across organisational boundaries.

2. Coordinated support plan

A single key worker is assigned to Margaret and George, eliminating the need for multiple referrals, embodying Hertfordshire's integrated front door approach, one assessment, one plan, one relationship.

The key worker develops a joined-up care plan that includes falls prevention interventions (grab rails, stair lift, non-slip flooring), memory café sessions and dementia-friendly activities at the local community hub, weekly check-ins from a volunteer befriender, and remote monitoring via wearable devices linked to NHS systems. Data flows securely between agencies, allowing early intervention rather than crisis response.

3. Neighbourhood team integration

Margaret and George's care is coordinated by a co-located team operating within their neighbourhood footprint. This team includes a dementia nurse specialist, a housing adaptations officer, a community safety officer, and a voluntary sector coordinator.

Together, they ensure Margaret's cognitive needs and George's physical risks are addressed holistically. This is Hertfordshire's neighbourhood delivery model in action, bringing together previously separate functions through the aggregation and disaggregation of services to deliver joined-up, human-centred support. The team meets monthly to review progress and adapt the care plan, using shared data and professional insight to continually learn and improve.

4. Community hub engagement

Margaret and George begin attending their local community hub, which offers in-person support and peer groups, drop-in sessions for benefits advice, and digital access to health and wellbeing advisors.

The hub becomes a lifeline, reducing isolation and providing trusted, local support. As a flagship of the place-based delivery model, it brings together public, voluntary and digital services under one roof, turning service points into social spaces. Margaret joins a reminiscence group, while George participates in a falls prevention exercise class. Both feel more connected, supported, and part of their community again.

5. Voluntary sector as equal partner

Local charities and faith groups are embedded in the neighbourhood model, not just as providers but as co-designers. Margaret and George benefit from a dementia-friendly walking group run by a local charity, a volunteer driver service for hospital appointments, and a community-led "safe homes" initiative that checks on vulnerable residents during winter.

6. Ongoing prevention and evaluation

Margaret and George's outcomes are tracked not by service usage, but by avoided crises. Their admissions to hospital reduce, their wellbeing improves, and their independence is maintained.

Through the Place Board, representing health, housing, and community partners, anonymised data and resident feedback are used to shape future services. This closes the loop between insight, learning and action, demonstrating how Hertfordshire's new model is designed not only to deliver services but to evolve and lead.

HOW THE MODEL WORKS: CONNECTED PLACES, STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Prevention at this scale requires structural configuration that operates with strategic sophistication whilst maintaining intimate community knowledge. Transformation only succeeds when staff know their communities deeply enough to see the person behind the data, the family behind the statistic and the opportunity behind the challenge.

The three-unitary model achieves this balance. Each authority is large enough to invest in AI-driven digital capability, employ specialist expertise and operate at sufficient scale to command credible partnerships, but is also small enough for staff to retain the local knowledge that makes those capabilities meaningful. Skills pathways can reflect local employment landscapes. Prevention strategies can be tailored to how specific communities experience need.

This is not a compromise between competing priorities. It is the optimal design: sophisticated enough to compete at scale, connected enough to understand lived experience and financially resilient enough to invest in prevention.

THE OPTIMAL CONFIGURATION

Each Unitary Authority coordinates 8 to 11 PCN neighbourhoods, benchmarked to similar comparable authorities in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire.[16]

- **West Hertfordshire**: 463,000 population; 11 neighbourhoods.
- **Central Hertfordshire**: 414,000 population; 8 neighbourhoods.
- **Eastern Hertfordshire**: 603,000 population; 10 neighbourhoods.

  (2045 populations estimates)

At 8 to 11 neighbourhoods per authority, Hertfordshire achieves the critical balance and scale to work across and with the wider integrated care system.

This optimal range enables each authority to maintain direct relationships with strategic public sector partners, lead Health and Wellbeing Boards, coordinate multidisciplinary teams across a manageable footprint, operate population health management systems that stratify risk and target interventions, align community assets and voluntary sector infrastructure with neighbourhood geographies, command a credible voice within the new Central East ICB and Strategic Authority. Critically, Section 75 partnership agreements as created by the NHS Act 2006 will enable budgets to be pooled between local health and social care organisations and authorities to deliver greater impact.

PREVENTION IN PRACTICE: WHAT CHANGES

The three-unitary structure enables a fundamental shift to proactive prevention:

- **Shared data** integrates across health, social care, education, housing and policing to identify residents at risk 6 to 12 months before crisis occurs, enabling intervention when support costs less and works better.
- **Key workers** coordinate one plan across multiple services, eliminating fragmented referrals. One professional holds accountability for ensuring the right support wraps around the family.
- **Multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams** co-located across PCN footprints bring together health, social care, policing, housing, education and VCFSE, working collaboratively with shared accountability for community outcomes and maximising a family first approach. Services are co-designed at local level, shaped by the unique culture and specific needs of each neighbourhood, with team members possessing deep understanding of their communities to tailor support effectively.

[16] North Northamptonshire (407,000 population; 9 neighbourhoods), West Northamptonshire (406,000; 8 neighbourhoods), and Buckinghamshire (553,000; 14 neighbourhoods)

- **Community hubs** provide physical and virtual spaces for accessible support, such as drop-in sessions and virtual peer support tailored to each community, overcoming geographical barriers to ensure everyone can access help.
- **VCFSE organisations** are embedded as equal partners, leading community-led solutions with community assets, befriending schemes, peer support networks, faith groups, sports clubs and residents' associations mobilised as the first line of support, with statutory services as enablers.
- **Needs-led, strengths-based support** replaces risk-based thresholds, building on community assets. Support continues for as long as needed, not just until immediate crisis is resolved.
- **Shared accountability** measures success by how many avoid needing services, not how many access them and a need to move from traditional hospital performance indicators.[17] Joint commissioning across health, social care, housing, education, VCFSE and policing creates accountability for population outcomes, with evaluation built into every programme and Place Boards connecting neighbourhood delivery to strategic governance.

By intervening earlier and providing coordinated support across a range of services e.g. via Healthy Hubs, demand for statutory services decreases because people receive the right help at the right moment. Communities experience greater resilience. Individuals and families are less likely to reach crisis point.

[17] Making care closer to home a reality, The Kings Fund, Feb 2024

Future Resident Journey: Aisha

This journey demonstrates the system's commitment to co-design, empowerment and value through prevention, putting trust, voice and lived experience at the heart of transformation.

Aisha, who has cerebral palsy and learning disabilities, faced major challenges when she turned 18 and transitioned from children's to adult services. The loss of school support left her uncertain, and finding housing added further stress. These changes increased her anxiety, made her behaviour harder to manage, and led to feelings of isolation. The journey below reflects how this would be different in the future.

1. Early identification and transition planning

As Aisha approaches 18, her children's social worker flags her upcoming transition using Hertfordshire's integrated life-course pathway. This begins at age 14, ensuring no cliff edge. The Neighbourhood case worker proactively reviews her case through a multi-agency transition panel including adult social care, housing, health, and SEND services to map future care options. Her Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) automatically triggers an adult social care assessment using shared data, no duplication, no retelling her story. A personalised transition plan is initiated 12 months before her 18th birthday, ensuring continuity across services.

2. Neighbourhood-based support coordination

Aisha is assigned a lead professional from her local neighbourhood team, aligned to the Primary Care Network footprint, who becomes her single point of contact. This team, part of Hertfordshire's One Workforce model, brings together professionals across traditional boundaries to undertake legally required assessments and design support around the person, not the process. This team includes a social worker, housing officer, a learning disability nurse, a community occupational therapist, a benefits officer and a voluntary sector advocate. Together, they co-produce a support plan with Aisha and her family, ensuring her voice is central. The team works collaboratively across children's and adult services, health, housing, benefits and education to deliver seamless support.

3. Housing and independence pathway

Recognising Aisha's need for accessible housing, the team identifies and adapts a supported living placement one year in advance. The housing officer ensures the property meets her physical needs, while the voluntary sector advocate helps Aisha understand her tenancy rights and responsibilities. This anticipatory approach, using shared intelligence and pooled budgets, avoids crisis-driven placements and demonstrates how the three-unitary model enables scale for planning, but flexibility for personalisation. Aisha's independence is supported from day one, with wrap-around assistance designed to grow as her confidence does. This proactive approach avoids crisis-driven placements and ensures Aisha's independence is supported from day one.

4. Skills, employment and community connection

Aisha is enrolled in a local skills programme tailored for young adults with disabilities. Her day opportunities are co-funded through pooled budgets from education, social care, and health, a practical example of integrated commissioning and shared accountability. She attends sessions at the community hub, which offers peer mentoring, social activities and digital literacy support. She also begins working one day a week in a local café enabled by the VCS and attends a specialist college two days a week. The hub is inclusive and empowering, helping Aisha build confidence and friendships. After completing her college course, she goes on to get a permanent role working in the local café continuing to build community connections.

5. Seamless service continuity

Thanks to the Neighbourhood Team, Aisha's children's service records are seamlessly transferred to adult services. There is no duplication, no re-assessment, and no need to retell her story. Her health and care plan is digitally accessible to all relevant professionals, ensuring joined-up working and consistent support.

6. Empowerment and co-design

Aisha joins a youth advisory panel that helps shape services for young adults with disabilities. Her lived experience informs future service design, and she participates in participatory budgeting sessions to allocate funding for inclusive community projects. Her family describes the transition as "a smooth bridge, not a terrifying jump." The integrated approach reduces family stress, improves Aisha's outcomes, and costs 35% less than traditional, fragmented transitions.

These changes in practice, multidisciplinary teams, key worker coordination, VCFSE partnership, shared accountability, all depend on three critical enablers: effective, ethical and innovative use of data, people and infrastructure. The three-unitary model provides the scale to invest in shared expertise, interoperable systems, and a unified approach to analytics

that provides a bridge between prevention, growth and innovation, delivering change that is intelligent, trusted and human.

Shared integrated enterprise architecture and infrastructure, not isolated systems are critical. Each unitary will operate a local digital core, anchored in community needs. This model promotes innovation, ensures alignment with Government Digital Service standards, and allows scalable use of new technologies across the county.

Data-driven decisions will connect prevention, growth and inclusion. Through secure, open data platforms, residents can understand performance, participate in shaping services, and see the real impact of public investment. Predictive insights will link housing, health, employment, and education and will turn information into action. This will enable early intervention and resource optimisation, through identifying homelessness risk, matching residents with jobs, or optimising housing locations, transforming how decisions are made and how outcomes are delivered.

BUILDING THE DIGITAL CORE

The three-unitary model is designed to establish a robust enterprise-level infrastructure core that seamlessly connects people, systems and insights, but is sufficiently flexible for each authority to tailor its use to the needs of its communities and neighbourhoods. Hertfordshire's technology framework will follow the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) Technology Code of Practice, though it is anticipated that some initiatives will evolve over time. Certified public cloud environments would be adopted to provide the flexibility, resilience and cost efficiency required, in line with the G-Cloud framework. This cloud-first, hybrid-ready approach is intended to ensure that systems remain adaptable and robust.

Security measures are being aligned with the NCSC Zero Trust Architecture principles and the Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022-30. This means that, once implemented, every connection will be verified and monitored, ensuring a zero-trust security model is in place. There is also an ambition to interconnect shared services through Application Programming Interfaces, enabling reuse and collaboration between the different unitaries and promoting open standards and interoperability.

A strong commitment to data governance and ethics will ensure compliance with UK GDPR and the National Data Strategy, guaranteeing data reliability, privacy and trust. These foundational elements will support hybrid working, intelligent automation and real-time analytics across all service areas. Ultimately the success of this transformation will be measured by the outcomes it delivers in terms of improved decisions, faster delivery and a more empowered workforce, rather than by the technology itself.

This local intelligence makes prevention deliverable, identifying risk earlier, coordinating support seamlessly and targeting interventions where they have greatest impact. It also fuels inclusive growth, providing the insight to align housing, skills, transport and investment around the real needs of people and places. This is technology in service of people, enabling smarter services, thriving neighbourhoods and prosperous, connected communities across Hertfordshire. The three-unitary model creates the scale to build that foundation once and use it well: unified where it adds value, local where it makes the difference.

OUR PEOPLE

Technology and data build capability, people turn it into progress when they are empowered, skilled and supported by cultures that champion innovation. The three-unitary model creates the conditions for this, with councils large enough to invest in digital capability and professional development, but local enough for people to feel connected to their communities and see the difference they make. Public service reform re-engineers local government around three enablers: digital intelligence, human connection and shared purpose. The three-unitary model will be digital first but human always, using technology and real-time data to streamline processes and create seamless resident experiences, while maintaining empathy, inclusion and trust.

Public service reform will challenge the status quo, replacing outdated practice with joined-up design that reflects how people live their lives. Staff will be trusted to identify what no longer works, co-design new solutions and innovate around shared outcomes. Structures will be agile by design, with flexible governance that adapts quickly to changing demand, demographics and technology. Decisions will be evidence-led, guided by data and resident feedback, with AI-powered analytics enhancing, not replacing, professional judgement.

Partnerships will empower multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams to make decisions where knowledge is deepest and relationships strongest. Equity in access will ensure every community benefits, supported by culturally competent practice and a workforce that reflects Hertfordshire's diversity.

Prosperity shared by all defines growth that benefits everyone. The three-unitary model enables this by aligning economic development, housing, skills and transport around the specific opportunities of each place, recognising that prevention and growth are two sides of the same coin. Economic development becomes a prevention strategy, linking affordable housing, skills pathways and regeneration to long-term wellbeing, ensuring prosperity uplifts both towns and rural areas.

Services will be designed around residents' lived experience, with frontline staff empowered to advocate for them. Financial sustainability will come through transparency, honest dialogue and investment in prevention and transformation rather than short-term efficiencies. Above all, the three-unitary model will build one workforce, a culture of collaboration, empowerment and pride, where staff experience change happening with them, not to them, supported by leadership that enables rather than controls. This is people-first transformation: councils large enough to create opportunity and progression, but which remain local enough for every colleague to see their impact and every community to feel it.

THE ENGINE OF DELIVERY – INTEGRATED BACK OFFICE

The back office is not a support function. It is the operational engine of local government. In the future, services such as finance, HR, ICT, procurement and governance must operate collaboratively. Transformation will be enabled by building integrated enterprise architecture that consolidates systems, streamlines and automates processes, and embeds analytics into everyday management.

This model replaces duplication with standardisation and data silos with intelligence. Platforms will integrate process automation, case management, and insight tools that provide transparent performance dashboards and operational forecasting.

A people-first culture, prevention-focused practice and intelligent use of technology all depend on one further foundation: a modern, integrated back office which turns ambition into action. Whilst frontline services shape outcomes for residents, it is the systems, processes and people behind them that determine how quickly, efficiently and effectively those outcomes are achieved.

The creation of three new authorities provides the opportunity to design this foundation coherently, aligning people, process and technology from the outset. The three-unitary model gives the critical mass to invest in shared digital architecture, common data standards and intelligent automation, while retaining the local flexibility to adapt systems to the needs of communities and neighbourhoods. Fragmentation gives way to connection, duplication to collaboration. This joined-up foundation releases capacity. accelerates decision-making and enables staff to focus where they add most value, on prevention, growth and human connection.

Evidence reinforces this direction. Over half of councils (58%) report a digital skills gap, showing that capability, not technology, remains the biggest barrier to transformation.[18] Effective use of data and AI enhances productivity, reduces duplication and improves outcomes for both staff and residents, particularly when digital literacy is shared across the

[18] Local Government Workforce Survey: Research Report, Local Government Association, 2023

workforce rather than confined to technical teams. Investment in digital capability becomes a retention strategy, giving staff the confidence, autonomy and purpose to shape how services evolve.

In the three-unitary model, the back office becomes the adaptive core of the organisation. Services operate as one connected system, powered by automation, analytics and shared intelligence. Routine processes are streamlined and self-managed; predictive tools surface insights that guide investment, workforce planning and early intervention. Real-time data flows between back office and frontline, ensuring decisions at every level are informed, transparent and responsive.

THREE LEARNING, ADAPTIVE ORGANISATIONS

The three-unitary model will operate as a connected, learning organisation, one that captures insight, anticipates risk and reshapes processes dynamically. Shared intelligence across the system will create feedback loops that improve service quality, financial control, and community experience.

By aligning technology with purpose and embedding good governance, Hertfordshire's councils can become models of digital maturity in line with A Blueprint for Modern Digital Government,[19] organisations that are intelligent, trusted, and above all, person-centred.

Three unitaries make this possible at scale. It provides the resilience and shared investment to modernise systems once while keeping accountability and service insight close to place. Transforming the back office first creates the stability, scale and capability needed for every other part of the system to thrive. It is the invisible infrastructure that connects prevention with growth, links digital ambition to human insight and turns strategic intent into everyday practice across Hertfordshire.

WHAT IT DELIVERS FOR RESIDENTS

Prevention works when structure and its supporting infrastructure enable it. Safe landing through implementation of detailed transition plans on day one is non-negotiable and forms the essential foundation upon which we will build transformation. Critical services will transfer seamlessly, preserving all statutory functions and frontline relationships to ensure uninterrupted statutory compliance and continuity of casework. This stability creates the solid platform from which we can innovate and improve. Building on this secure base, we will embed an integrated front door within each unitary as a single point of access to safeguard our most vulnerable residents; transforming how we deliver services from the ground up. What matters most is what this delivers to our residents:

Adult social care will transform from a service of support into a system of independence and opportunity, where prevention is embedded at every level and through collaboration residents' rights protected. Residents will receive person-centred care and support rooted in their neighbourhood where prevention, independence and choice are at the core, aligned to the government's vision to put 'People at the Heart of Care'.[20] Every resident will receive the right support at the right time, in the right place, enabling individuals to live independently, safely and well within their communities. The robustness and focus on day one transition plans will be maintained to ensure ongoing support and care for our residents as services evolve. This preventative approach is not about avoiding or reducing care and support when it is needed, it is about delaying when provision is needed and by reducing those who need high levels of support the quality of service can be maintained.

Neighbourhood teams will provide single points of contact, coordination and connection. Community hubs will expand face-to-face support such as falls prevention and blood pressure checks, alongside cutting-edge technological advances providing digital platforms for medical information to be shared with NHS staff.

[19] A Blueprint for Modern Digital Government, Cabinet Office, January 2025

[20] People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform white paper, Department of Health and Social Care, December 2021

Building on Hertfordshire's 'Good' Care Quality Commission rating, its 'Connected Lives' approach, and the pioneering 'Connect and Prevent' transformation programme, the use of predictive analytics and AI will mature into a unified data platform. This will enable seamless data integration to proactively identify risks, intervene earlier, and personalise support. As a result, hospital admissions will decline, integrated and co-produced services will become standard practice, and community-led models will be the norm. Maintaining the robustness and focus on day one transition plans is critical, and it is crucial to ensure quality ongoing support and care for our residents as our services evolve. The three-council model will position the new authorities for readiness to transform, a preventative approach that is not about avoiding or reducing care and support when it is needed. Instead, it aims to delay the provision of such care. By reducing the number of individuals who require high levels of support, we can ultimately enhance the quality of service provided for those most in need.

Children's social care builds on the strength of high-performing services with a future model of prevention and early intervention to advance the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Completion of the current programme to develop new care homes and increase bed capacity will help to meet demand and manage costs. Future provision will be supported through integration with housing initiatives. Foster care services will be coordinated across Hertfordshire to promote fairness and consistency in both delivery and incentives.

Multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams will improve outcomes and experiences, providing a holistic care model for families. Children's voices will be louder and greater by embedding them at the heart of continuous improvement to co-design services.

The authorities will act as ambitious corporate parents, ensuring children and families receive coordinated, accessible support through a single agency and place-based care integrated by neighbourhood teams, making it easier to navigate support and benefit from the principles of Family Safeguarding.

This is not about doing the same at a different scale, it is about maintaining and retaining a skilled and settled workforce by giving them the opportunity to reshape how children's services are delivered.

Through digital transformation, predictive analytics and real-time insight, practitioners will have the autonomy and tools to work smarter and closer to families, using technology to strengthen, not replace, professional judgement. The model provides stability, consistency and a sense of place and belonging in the foundational years of a child's life, supporting every child to thrive.

Education and SEND faces significant pressure locally and nationally to build an inclusive education system. Within this context, the three-unitary model will deliver an inclusive and equitable system that places children and families at the heart of service design, with early intervention, prevention and neighbourhood provision at its core. This will build on the work of the SEND Local Area Partnership and SEND Academy, which are delivering a programme of improvements and skills development.

Informed by the voices of children, carers and families, health, education, housing and social care will come together as a single agency to co-design and produce SEND and education provision. SEND officers placed in neighbourhood teams will be visible and approachable, working in close collaboration with therapists, health visitors, neighbourhood teams and parent forums.

Early identification and multi-agency coordination will drive timely, effective support. The three-unitary model will deliver equitable and balanced school provision, with an appropriate number of schools, pupil referral units and special schools distributed across each authority area as the platform for wider improvement.

Families will spend less time navigating bureaucracy and more time benefiting from tangible support and positive outcomes where they live.

Hertfordshire's education system is one of its greatest strengths, with over 90% of schools rated good or outstanding and pupil attainment consistently above national averages from Key Stage 2 through to GCSE. This success is built on

strategic coordination, strong school improvement support through HFL Education (a school-owned company), and a collaborative 'family of schools' culture that spans maintained schools and academies across all phases.

Under a three-unitary model, each new authority would become the local education authority for schools within its boundaries. The challenge is maintaining the strategic coherence and collaborative culture that has driven Hertfordshire's success, whilst avoiding fragmentation that could undermine school standards or create inequity for children and families.

Maintaining strategic coherence Several education functions operate most effectively at scale and require coordination across the three authorities. School improvement services would continue through HFL Education, with all three authorities commissioning from this proven model to maintain consistency and quality. Place planning requires a county-wide view of demographic trends and capacity to avoid inefficient provision and ensure children can access good local schools. Admissions need coordinated fair access protocols, particularly for vulnerable children and those requiring specialist placements. The 'family of schools' culture depends on networks and partnerships that often span multiple authority boundaries.

Housing and homelessness services will consolidate into three Strategic Housing Authorities capable of acting on prevention. By aligning operational services in neighbourhood teams and embedding wider services within and informed by communities, early intervention and Family Safeguarding becomes achievable. Integration enables prevention that addresses root causes rather than managing consequences.

Demands on temporary accommodation will reduce and critically families will not experience further trauma, parents are supported to create safe environments for their children; to maximise income and seek employment, children remain in their family home without school disruption; at least one authority with retained housing stock and an active development programme, providing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capacity and strong partnerships with registered providers. Merging assets and expertise removes fragmentation and creates the scale to deliver more affordable homes, accelerate supply and reduce homelessness. Additionally, community-led housing models will benefit from this scale to move from pilot to practice, enabling locally driven solutions that have the potential to strengthen place and prevent crisis.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Public health will be embedded within each Unitary Authority to ensure consistent leadership while maintaining local responsiveness. In addition to delivering statutory functions, it will provide strategic intelligence and leadership to embed a preventative model that improves population health, reduces inequalities, and proactively manages public health risks.

Working at both neighbourhood and system levels, Public Health will play a central role in neighbourhood teams and Place Boards, using evidence to identify local needs, shape targeted interventions, and inform commissioning across Hertfordshire. It will lead coordination with health partners, convene statutory partnerships, and collaborate closely with the VCFSE sector to co-design and deliver services that reflect community and cultural intelligence.

Crucially, Public Health will act as the link to the wider Integrated Care System (ICS) and MSA and population health management, ensuring that local insights inform strategic decisions and that outcomes are improved through joined-up, place-based approaches.

Transport and infrastructure will create a connected system that links people, places and opportunity: safe, sustainable, inclusive and resilient. The move to three unitaries will transform how services are delivered, replacing fragmented, duplicated arrangements with a cohesive model built around real travel patterns, growth corridors and community priorities.

Residents will engage with a single, accountable authority for repairs, maintenance and enforcement, supported by transparent, data-driven systems that improve responsiveness and trust. Empowered neighbourhood teams and Place

Boards will shape local design, from safe routes to schools and community hubs to active travel, air quality, biodiversity and climate resilience, ensuring infrastructure reflects the way people live.

Innovation and technology will underpin every stage of delivery, driving smarter asset management, reducing waste and creating a transport system that enables prevention, supports growth and builds confidence across Hertfordshire's communities.

All other county, district, and borough functions will be unified around the principles of prevention, place and prosperity. Where scale offers improved outcomes, shared services will be explored; where local decision-making is essential, sovereign authority will be respected.

This flexible approach, balancing aggregation and disaggregation, creates opportunities to shape services in line with these principles. Libraries, museums, theatres, community centres and educational facilities will evolve into community hubs, providing access to learning, health services, and digital inclusion. These hubs will also act as gateways to skills development and employment pathways, tailored to each authority's unique economic strengths and ensure resident / user quality of life is maintained.

Parks, open spaces, and leisure services will become focal points for community cohesion, public health, and civic pride. Economic development functions will align with locally relevant growth strategies, working in partnership with a MSA. Planning services will be responsive to distinct market conditions. Existing partnerships, such as Better Business for All, will offer a unified platform for accessing regulatory services. The Hertfordshire Waste Partnership has the potential to serve as a strong foundation for integrated delivery, achieving efficiencies and resilience while maintaining local focus.

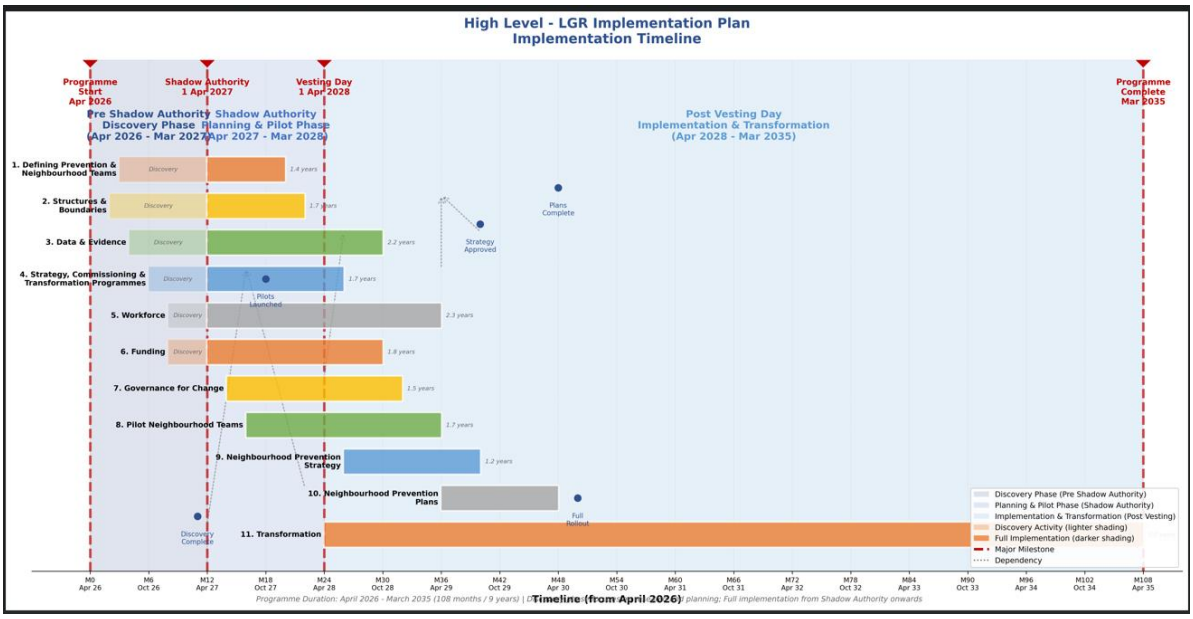
Harmonised service standards, developed with current and future partnerships, will ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability across all three authorities. At the same time, each authority will retain the flexibility to shape local services, economic development, skills programmes, and growth strategies around their specific sectors and opportunities.

Residents will have clarity about who delivers which services and confidence in a system that is consistent, efficient, and people-centred – connecting prevention with prosperity and ensuring that both social wellbeing and economic opportunity are rooted in the needs and potential of local communities.

FROM VISION TO DELIVERY

This is Hertfordshire's moment to move from managing systems to shaping futures. The creation of three confident, connected and capable authorities provides the platform to deliver services that are not only efficient but transformative; structures that are rooted in place, designed for prevention and built to deliver prosperity. Technology will empower people and cultures that turn ambition into action. It is where vision becomes delivery; where reorganisation translates into better lives, stronger communities and a more confident Hertfordshire, built by people who believe that public service can and should create lasting change.

To bring this vision to life, we are seeking government support and funding to enable us to maximise the collective impact of local government, health services and our voluntary and community sector. Our goal is to unlock prevention and prosperity, prepare for devolution and play a key role in improving population health and prosperity. We have identified two or three pilot neighbourhoods focused on highest-need cohorts, including frail elderly, those with complex conditions and families. By implementing an integrated neighbourhood prevention approach, we aim to build and pilot this model of working for a fuller roll out as set out in the programme below, with a full plan in Appendix 4.



The delivery of this approach is dependent on securing appropriate funding, without this, the programme will require significant revision with implications for readiness and transformation capability particularly during the pre-shadow and shadow authority periods:

Pre-shadow and Shadow periods (April 2026 - March 2028): Programme is reliant on funding from either central government or LGR Joint Committee which will be established when the Structural Changes Order comes into effect. This funding is essential for discovery, planning, and pilot activities.

Post-vesting period (April 2028 onwards): Funding flows through the new unitary authority budgets, providing greater certainty for transformation activities.

CHAMPIONS OF THE COMMUNITY

The three-unitary model comprises 234 Councillors (three per division of the current Hertfordshire County Council, aligned with Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance) distributed across:

- **West Hertfordshire**: 72 Councillors (24 divisions x 3)
- **Central Hertfordshire**: 69 Councillors (23 divisions x 3)
- **Eastern Hertfordshire**: 93 Councillors (31 divisions x 3)

These numbers reflect careful consideration of LGBCE guidance on strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership, and are made more equitable by the Bushey boundary modification request (see also Appendix 1). The proposal balances executive scrutiny, electoral equality and Councillors' broader responsibilities to constituents and outside bodies.

EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION AND CIVIC IDENTITY

Three Councillors per division enables shared workload and improved constituent representation, whilst aligning with LGBCE guidance that councils exceeding 100 members risk becoming unwieldy, and with diluted accountability. This model avoids disruptive post-vesting-day boundary changes that would confuse residents navigating the reorganisation. Proposed numbers align with 90% of single-tier authorities that operate with 40-95 Councillors.

Three new authorities will strengthen democratic representation whilst amplifying resident and community voices. The average ratio of 3,800 residents per Councillor is comparable to recent Unitary Authorities (4,016) and substantially lower

than the current County Council, creates stronger connections between residents and local government, enhancing community empowerment at every level.

Built predominantly on existing district boundaries, with the exception of the Bushey boundary change, the approach respects strong civic identities and reflects established community shapes, and the three unitaries create clear, recognisable electoral arrangements. This familiarity of approach optimises potential turnout for the 2027 Shadow Authority elections and brings clarity and more confidence to voters, to help retain and build sustained engagement and enfranchisement.

Balanced population representation ensures fairness and equity for everyone. By using not just administrative boundaries but place-based boundaries residents already know, the proposal delivers democratic institutions that are familiar, responsive and designed to safeguard local identity whilst enabling a smooth transition. This approach directly supports the government's commitment and the three-unitary authority commitment to neighbourhood empowerment, ensuring communities have genuine influence over decisions that affect them.

The reduction of 283 Councillors across Hertfordshire delivers efficiency and savings aligned with government priorities, without compromising democratic engagement or local representation. With approximately 167 committee seats, each Councillor will hold two to three committee roles (ratio of 1.8 – 2.4), allowing them to discharge their duties, including committee attendance, constituent casework and local representation, without the role becoming the preserve of full-time politicians. The smaller geographic coverage eliminates the need for multiple committees (such as Development Management) in each authority.

REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR COMMUNITY

Investment in Councillor training, technology and data access will equip elected members to lead effectively. A highly skilled, visible team of representatives will amplify resident voices on the issues that matter most to them, whilst strengthening community empowerment through better-informed decision making.

Better support and accessibility will encourage wider participation, including younger people and those who might not otherwise consider public office as an option available to them. This will attract diverse candidates who truly reflect Hertfordshire's communities, ensuring representation remains inclusive and rooted in lived experience.

ASSURANCE

The tiered operating model of the three-unitary authority proposal establishes sophisticated risk management, balancing distributed decision making with transparent oversight, fully embedded within governance arrangements. Each level takes responsibility for appropriate risks:

- **Neighbourhood teams:** operational and service delivery risks.
- **Unitary Authorities:** strategic risks across services and geographies.
- **Hertfordshire-wide structures:** shared risks spanning local boundaries, where necessary.
- **MSA**: enterprise-level risks from devolved powers, major investments and county-wide priorities.

This framework ensures no authority is overburdened, whilst creating coherent risk ownership across tiers. Multiple reinforcing accountability streams, designed to avoid duplication whilst strengthening oversight, will deliver resilience and agility for prevention-first, community-connected services that build long-term public confidence.

Assurance operates through three complementary channels:

- **Democratic assurance,** via Place Boards, and neighbourhood working linked with transparent performance dashboards, keeps communities at the heart of oversight and enables genuine community empowerment in service design and delivery.

- **Professional assurance** through peer review, shared learning networks, open risk conversations and joint quality frameworks that safeguard standards whilst encouraging innovation.
- **Regulatory assurance** by adapting statutory frameworks to collaborative delivery, ensuring coordinated inspection, proportionate regulation and independent external audit, overseen by a designated Governance and Audit Committee.

These interlocking safeguards form a tested and credible model that will secure high-quality services for Hertfordshire's residents and provide the stability, discipline and confidence necessary to manage complex transition successfully. The new authorities will start on a strong footing, capable of sustaining excellence whilst genuinely empowering communities to shape their own futures.

5. MEETS LOCAL NEEDS AND INFORMED BY LOCAL VIEWS (MHCLG CRITERION 4)

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT: LISTENING, LEARNING AND SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Residents, partners and businesses want simpler, more accountable local government that stays connected to communities whilst having the scale to lead on prevention, prosperity for all and innovation.

The proposed three-unitary model provides the platform for smarter, earlier intervention, stronger local leadership and long-term sustainability, a system built not just to manage today, but to shape Hertfordshire's future. Stakeholder and resident feedback on the modified proposals were clear:

KEEP SERVICES LOCAL, RESPONSIVE AND JOINED-UP

Residents and partners were united in valuing local knowledge and relationships. Health, care and voluntary sector representatives expressed the view that strong neighbourhood intelligence is essential to prevention and early intervention, with one partner emphasising that "strong place-based partnerships with good engagement from district and borough councils are essential to delivering integrated health and care outcomes." As another partner said, "It only works when the people designing services understand the people who use them."

Community groups also pointed to duplication and confusion created by the current system, "buck-passing between tiers," as one resident described it. Voluntary sector representatives stressed that "any reorganisation must protect and build upon these relationships." Across all voices, the message was the same: reorganisation must make life simpler for residents, not more distant.

PROTECT COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND LOCAL VOICE

Hertfordshire's diversity is one of its key assets. Residents want reorganisation that reflects the way people live, work and identify with their local areas – that is why the Bushey boundary modification is proposed. Cultural organisations argued that "civic identity and local pride are vital to public trust, people need to see themselves in their council." Similarly, voluntary sector representatives spoke of the need to retain "distinct community voices that reflect local heritage, diversity and networks."

Residents strongly agreed, with typical comments including: "It's important that every town keeps its sense of identity – people are proud of where they live." Many recognised the three-unitary approach as a natural fit with these daily patterns, with West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire each reflecting functional geographies, transport links and shared communities. As residents put it: "Three unitaries recognise Hertfordshire's three natural regions and keep local decisions local," and "We need something resilient but still local – three councils feels about right."

Focus group participants reinforced this view, agreeing that: "Three unitaries are preferred for balancing accessibility and relational services e.g., social care, maintaining community identity." This perspective was reinforced by the feedback from one Youth Panel, which brought together young people aged 14 to 18 to discuss how future local services could better reflect their needs and aspirations. Nearly 40 students participated in an active and thoughtful dialogue, emphasising that while they recognise the importance of financial resilience in local government, it is equally vital for them to have a meaningful voice in shaping how their communities are run. When asked to vote on the preferred model for future governance, an overwhelming majority of students expressed clear support for the three-unitary authority approach.

Stakeholders also supported this rationale, noting that boundaries should align with how people live their daily lives. As one explained, “The 3UA option most closely matches how people live their lives day to day.” Another described the approach as “reflecting community reality rather than administrative convenience.”

Respondents also highlighted the regional significance of getting this structure right. Stakeholders pointed out that a unified approach across three strong authorities will help Hertfordshire remain competitive within the London-Cambridge-Oxford corridor and wider southeast economy. A coordinated structure supports consistent planning for infrastructure, skills and growth, strengthening the county’s ability to attract investment and deliver sustainable development.

DELIVER VALUE FOR MONEY AND LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

Businesses and partners emphasised that overlapping roles between tiers waste resources, particularly in planning, licensing, estates and back-office functions. They called for streamlined, accountable structures that free investment for frontline delivery. As one stakeholder noted: “Three unitaries offer the scale to achieve efficiencies through shared procurement, aligned strategies and better technology.”

Residents linked reorganisation to fairness and efficiency: “We want our money spent on services,” with another adding that, “three unitaries would make it clearer who is responsible for what.”

Stakeholders also connected efficiency with environmental sustainability, arguing that larger, coordinated councils could deliver countywide climate strategies, unified waste management and integrated sustainable transport planning. They viewed reorganisation as an opportunity to make every pound and every decision work harder for local outcomes, whilst accelerating progress toward shared environmental goals.

The three-unitary model responds by combining sufficient scale for efficiency with mechanisms to reinvest savings into frontline services and strategic priorities like climate action. It delivers resilience through shared functions whilst ensuring accountability remains local and transparent.

MODERNISE, INNOVATE AND GROW

Reorganisation was widely seen as a chance to reset local government for the future. Respondents wanted digital access that is consistent across services, faster decision-making and councils that use data intelligently to anticipate need.

Young residents in particular called for visible results from reorganisation: “Larger authorities could deliver coordinated growth, such as new towns,” and “Cleaner streets, better parks, and stronger youth provision.” Focus groups added that reorganisation could lead to “simplified access via a one-stop shop model, reducing resident confusion (valued by young people especially).”

Business and community partners saw the same potential: joined-up governance that makes Hertfordshire easier to invest in and better positioned for sustainable growth. As one business representative stated, “Three unitaries will create consistency and clarity for investors and developers, helping Hertfordshire remain competitive.”

Stakeholders agreed that the new authorities could unlock innovation through shared systems, digital transformation and integrated planning. The three-unitary framework enables this by aligning strategic policy across wider areas whilst maintaining flexibility for local adaptation.

BUSHEY WITHIN WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

Engagement also addressed specific boundary questions, notably the inclusion of Bushey within West Hertfordshire authority. Responses clearly demonstrated support for this alignment, with residents citing shared identity and practical connections with neighbouring communities.

One said, *"I support three Unitary Authorities, it correctly recognises that Bushey belongs within the west authority alongside Watford, Three Rivers and Dacorum. Bushey's identity and daily life links are with Watford and the A41 provides a clear natural boundary from Borehamwood/Elstree."*

Another resident observed, "*From my postcode, it is only around 2.1 miles to Watford town centre compared to almost 3.8 miles to Borehamwood town centre. This reflects everyday reality: Bushey is physically and socially closer to Watford, with stronger daily links in shopping, transport, and community life."*

This evidence reflects the value residents place on boundaries that match lived experience and functional geography. The three-unitary authority proposal provides flexibility for such refinements, ensuring new authorities align with how people identify their communities.

HOW THE PROPOSAL RESPONDS

The feedback from residents and stakeholders shaped every part of the proposal. It confirmed that reorganisation must not only simplify structures, but also change the way services are delivered, making prevention, growth and innovation the foundations of how Hertfordshire works.

Place and prevention mean keeping the local relationships and intelligence that partners value most. The three new authorities will embed neighbourhood-based working through Place Boards and community partnerships, ensuring that services are designed and owned locally. This approach turns prevention into a shared mission, identifying needs early, tackling root causes and connecting people to support before crisis hits. Cross-agency collaboration with education, policing and health will be strengthened by operating across coherent local footprints, enabling partners to 'join up prevention and early intervention across systems.'

Prosperity answers the call for resilience and long-term value for money. By consolidating where scale matters, in planning, housing, transport and the economy, the three authorities will unlock investment, strengthen local economies and reinvest efficiencies back into communities. A unified strategic approach ensures that growth benefits every area, not just the fastest growing ones.

Innovation delivers on residents' demand for modern, accessible and transparent services. Reorganisation provides the opportunity to build shared digital infrastructure, data platforms and customer access systems that make it easier for residents and businesses to engage with their council. Innovation also extends to new ways of partnering, across health, education, policing and the voluntary sector, creating smarter collaboration around people and places.

MAINTAINING TRUST, ACCESS AND CONNECTION

Stakeholders were clear that reorganisation must strengthen, not weaken, existing partnerships. Hertfordshire's collaborative culture, across councils, the NHS, police, education and the voluntary sector, is a great strength. Health sector representatives emphasised: "Local relationships are going to become even more pertinent as neighbourhoods become more prominent within the health and care system." Cultural partners stated, "Watford Cultural Leaders Group has made a big difference, this needs to be preserved and enhanced to ensure valuable momentum is not lost."

The proposal safeguards these strengths by anchoring neighbourhood-level engagement into the new structures, ensuring partners remain visible and trusted in every community. Each authority will maintain community hubs, place boards, community engagement channels to preserve direct access and democratic accountability. As residents emphasised, "If councils listen locally and involve communities, people will support change." Councillors will remain rooted in their areas, empowered with the tools and data to represent residents effectively.

Stakeholders also raised valid concerns about potential remoteness and service continuity. Residents emphasised: "We need clear local contacts and visible Councillors," and "People need reassurance that bins will still be collected and care visits won't be disrupted." The three-unitary authority model addresses these concerns directly. Each authority will

ensure every community retains strong representation and accessible points of contact, avoiding the remoteness of larger unitaries whilst achieving better coordination than the current two-tier system. As one respondent summarised, “Three is a practical and deliverable solution, less disruptive than four or more and more responsive than one.”

A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The message from engagement is unequivocal: Hertfordshire is ready for change but not change that loses sight of people and place. Residents want local government that works smarter, acts earlier and plans ahead. Partners want coherence and shared purpose. Businesses want clarity and speed.

The three-unitary authority model meets all these expectations. It creates authorities that can lead and innovate, whilst also remaining close enough to people and places to listen and respond. It replaces duplication with collaboration, silos with shared intelligence and short-term fixes with prevention and growth. As participants summed it up: “Three unitaries strike the right balance, big enough to be efficient, but not so big that they lose local accountability,” and “Three is the best compromise – it recognises Hertfordshire’s natural regions and keeps local decisions local.”

Through place, prevention and prosperity for all of Hertfordshire, this proposal delivers exactly what residents and stakeholders have asked for: a simpler, stronger, more locally connected Hertfordshire that is ready to shape the future together.

6. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (MHCLG CRITERION 6)

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: A TRANSFORMATIVE VISION FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Community empowerment drives Hertfordshire's future. The three-unitary authority model embeds empowerment in democratic structures that share real power, build community capacity, and elevate resident leadership. Hertfordshire will create a radically different governance model. Communities won't just influence decisions, they'll make them. Resources will flow to their priorities.

The three-unitary approach builds community capacity and sparks democratic innovation at every level. Reorganisation becomes democratic renewal through genuine partnership with residents, delivering tangible outcomes. The evidence is clear: communities with strong social connections, active voluntary sectors, and genuine decision-making power achieve better wellbeing, stronger economies, lower crime, better health, and greater resilience.[21]

The three-unitary authority approach creates the conditions for transformative community empowerment. It works through democratic principle and practical outcomes, rebuilding trust while harnessing community knowledge, capacity, and leadership. This transformation delivers efficiencies: research shows a £3.50 return per £1 invested in community capacity.[22]

A MULTI-TIERED ARCHITECTURE FOR COMMUNITY POWER

The Hertfordshire Five-point Strategic Plan gives communities greater influence and control over local decisions. The three-unitary authority model delivers this strategy through design principles that shift power to communities, not just consult them. These principles guide every decision.

Four interconnected pillars deliver this vision: Local Democratic Forums, town and parish councils, the VCFSE, and Councillors. The three-unitary model design principles underpin these pillars, turning strategy into action and making community empowerment real across Hertfordshire.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S FIVE-POINT STRATEGIC PLAN

As set out in the core document, the strategic plan builds on existing networks, leveraging current successes to achieve greater impact. It encourages inclusive democratic participation, integrates prevention-focused services and promotes asset-based community development. By addressing the social determinants of health, it enhances equality and wellbeing, while driving local prosperity through economic empowerment.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Community empowerment will evolve in the three new Unitaries by creating ways of working that embed genuine power sharing and local decision making. Design principles will guide every decision about structures, processes and resource allocation to test commitment and avoid tokenism:

- **Subsidiarity –** Taking decisions as locally as possible, with communities controlling issues directly affecting them. Strategic frameworks at unitary level, with power over local priorities flowing downwards.
- **Genuine power-sharing** – Communities decide, rather than advise. Forums control meaningful resources through participatory processes with decision-making power over service design and delivery.
- **Multiple entry points** – Value all participation, formal structures, community organisations, informal neighbourhood activities, creating multiple pathways for voice and leadership.

21 Rapid evidence review of community initiatives, DCMS, updated June 2022
22 The Impacts of Scaling Social Infrastructure Investment, Frontier Economics, May 2025

- **Progressive community leadership** – Move from council-led to community-led approaches, so communities increasingly drive agendas and shape futures.

THE FOUR PILLARS

PILLAR ONE: LOCAL DEMOCRATIC FORUMS – PLACE BOARDS

Approximately 15 Place Boards will operate as Local Democratic Forums across the three Unitary Authorities, providing place leadership aligned with community identities. These Boards operate at the scale where people experience their daily lives – where they shop, where their children attend school, where they use services and know their neighbours.

Under the three-unitary model, this number and scale strikes the right balance: large enough to retain strategic oversight of the neighbourhoods they serve, yet maintaining the place identity and community connection essential for genuine empowerment. They are explicitly designed for place and people, not artificial boundaries, adapting flexibly to reflect what residents identify with as their neighbourhood.

Place Boards are designed to work in partnership with, not replace or duplicate, existing town and parish councils. In rural areas where parish councils already provide effective hyper-local governance, Place Boards will operate at a neighbourhood cluster level, providing strategic coordination and access to resources that complement parish-level activity. In urban areas with no parish structure, Place Boards fill convene and connect community anchor organisations and partners operating in those areas, building on the success of the One Watford Place Board (included as a case study elsewhere in this document) and the Stevenage Development Board.

Place Boards align with the government's English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill, positioning Hertfordshire at the forefront of democratic innovation. They will build genuine connections and facilitate community confidence in the new Unitary Authorities from day one.

A FUNDAMENTAL EVOLUTION IN LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Place Boards represent a fundamental evolution from traditional area committees, embedding genuine power-sharing:

Dimension	Traditional Area Committee	Place Board
Decision-making	Advisory or limited delegation	Real delegated powers over budgets and services
Membership	Councillors with some co-optees	Multi-agency partnership with equal standing
Community engagement	Consultation-focused	Co-design, co-creation, ongoing participation
Empowerment	Variable, often limited	Opportunities in relation to community ownership of assets and commissioning
Agility	Moderate, fixed processes	Adaptive to the local area
Integration	Limited cross-agency work	Full integration with health, police, housing partners
Accountability	To parent council	To community and council, with direct representation
Scope	Defined area, fixed themes	Flexible, responsive to local context, prevention focus
Innovation	Traditional, sometimes slow to change	Designed for innovation and continuous improvement

This structural shift demonstrates the three-unitary model's commitment to transforming not just structures, but the fundamental relationship between councils and communities.

GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP

Place Boards will operate with a strong link to the Cabinet of each authority, ensuring democratic accountability at leadership level. Membership includes Councillors alongside representatives from the NHS, police, housing associations, the VCFSE sector, town and parish councils, and anchor institutions. This will create multi-agency forums where diverse voices hold equal weight in decision-making.

Representation from key public sector organisations also presents opportunities for efficiency and alignment, with Place Boards potentially serving multiple functions such as the Community Safety Partnership Responsible Authority Group or the Local Health Partnership Board, reducing duplication whilst strengthening coordination.

Place Boards will be delegated real power, moving beyond traditional advisory functions to genuine decision-making authority. They will:

- Commission local services within agreed frameworks and thresholds, determining which services operate in their area and how they are delivered
- Determine community asset transfers below defined thresholds, giving direct control over which community organisations receive support and access to community facilities
- Allocate revenue and capital budgets to reflect local priorities, setting local standards within strategic frameworks established at unitary level
- Co-design service delivery working with council teams, partners and communities to shape how local services operate most effectively, rather than accepting one-size-fits-all approaches imposed centrally

This shift of power increases responsiveness, improves coordination between health, policing, housing and voluntary sectors, and makes accountability clearer for residents. Participatory budgeting will be a central but not exclusive focus. Each Place Board will provide capacity for local problem-solving, bringing together residents, Councillors, service providers and community organisations to collaborate on neighbourhood issues.

Place Boards will utilise shared data from health, housing, education, policing and social care partners to identify emerging needs and support early intervention. This prevention-focused approach targets support before issues escalate, reducing demand on acute services whilst improving outcomes for residents.

Underpinning each Place Board will be existing and evolving engagement arrangements – neighbourhood forums, resident networks, sector partnerships and community panels. Each area will select and adapt the most effective tools for their unique community contexts, ensuring engagement is both inclusive and responsive to local voices. This approach allows each Place Board to draw upon proven methods best suited to their communities whilst remaining open to innovation.

Community co-design has been central to developing the Place Board model. VCFSE partners have emphasised that "the LDF must be adaptable so structures can operate in ways that best suit local communities and needs", a principle embedded in the design approach. Rather than imposing a rigid template, each Place Board will have flexibility to customise governance arrangements, meeting frequencies, engagement methods, and priority-setting processes to match local context.

GEOGRAPHIC EQUITY AND TAILORED APPROACHES

The three-unitary geography enables Place Boards to be configured with geographic coherence, clustering areas with similar settlement patterns and needs. This allows powers and resources devolved to Boards to be tailored appropriately,

recognising that urban Place Boards will face different challenges and opportunities to more rural boards where town and parish councils already provide strong hyperlocal governance.

This differentiation ensures equity of impact rather than uniformity of approach, with each Place Board empowered to operate in ways that complement existing local democratic structures rather than competing with or duplicating them.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Local governance will enable neighbourhoods to manage services within agreed standards, influence strategic decisions through consultation and co-design, and operate transparently through:

- Clear financial frameworks and delegation thresholds
- Robust oversight mechanisms connecting to unitary governance
- Regular community review and feedback loops
- Public reporting on decisions, spending, and outcomes
- Accountability both upward to the unitary council and outward to the communities they serve.

IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH PILOTS

The model will be tested and refined through an initial pilot phase in three areas representing diverse community contexts. These pilots will:

- Test the delegation frameworks and decision-making processes in real-world conditions
- Identify and resolve operational challenges before wider rollout
- Generate evidence of what works in different community contexts
- Build confidence and demonstrate impact to support expansion across all three unitary authorities.

Pilot Place Boards will co-design critical elements of their operation:

- Local priorities linked to council corporate policies but grounded in hyperlocal data and community voice
- Governance footprint with opportunity to simplify local structures by bringing existing forums, networks and working groups under the Place Board umbrella to enhance rather than duplicate local voice
- Engagement mechanisms exploring deliberative sessions, community assemblies, targeted outreach to under-represented groups, and youth participation
- Modular functions tailored to local needs within the overall framework.

This co-design approach ensures Place Boards are shaped by communities, not imposed upon them.

A second phase during the shadow authority period will test Place Board models in different contexts, ensuring the approach works effectively across Hertfordshire's diverse geography. This phased approach enables comparison, ensures equity, and drives transformation across all communities – urban and rural – before full rollout at Vesting Day.

Learning from these pilots will inform the bespoke framework for full implementation, ensuring Place Boards are resilient, responsive, and genuinely transformative from Vesting Day.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Place Boards will be evaluated against clear outcomes that demonstrate genuine community empowerment:

- Neighbourhood decision-making: Number of residents engaged in priority-setting; percentage of local budget co-designed with communities; community satisfaction with influence over local decisions

- Trust and legitimacy: Trust in local governance; attendance at Place Board meetings and engagement activities; geographic spread of participation
- Prevention and early intervention: Increase in preventative activity; reduction in demand on acute services; multi-agency collaboration on early-help approaches; time-to-resolution on local issues.

This evidence-based approach ensures accountability whilst supporting continuous improvement across all Place Boards.

PILLAR TWO: TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS AND COMMUNITY ANCHORS

Existing town and parish councils, alongside recognised community anchor organisations, such as community centres, family hubs and sports clubs, form the foundation of hyperlocal governance and service delivery. These organisations often command strong trust and local knowledge and can be highly responsive to changing circumstances.

Building capacity within councils and community anchors empowers localities to take on greater responsibility. Focusing on governance, financial management, and effective service delivery enhances both asset and service management. Strong governance ensures transparency and accountability, while robust financial management underpins long-term sustainability. Improved service delivery makes communities more agile and resilient. Under the three-unitary authority model, there is a clear commitment to supporting these community organisations to broaden their roles and contribute more effectively.

PILLAR THREE: VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY, FAITH AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

The VCFSE sector represents community empowerment's lifeblood. These organisations sit closest to needs, command the highest trust and deliver impressive impact per pound. The government recognises this contribution, seeking to reset the relationships through the Civil Society Covenant to harness the sector's "dynamism, innovation and trusted reach" for growth and better community outcomes.

Success requires reimagining the relationship between the VCFSE and the three authorities. To optimise these relationships, we will develop VCFSE Accords in recognition of their vital role as partners in leadership, delivery design and community-facing activity.

DRAFT THREE-UNITARY AUTHORITY HERTFORDSHIRE VCFSE ACCORD

Commitment	From UAs	From VCFSE sector	Timeline
Funding security	• 3-year agreements (not annual) • Annual grants • Payment advance / monthly not arrears • 12-month notice if changes	• Collaborate, avoid duplication • Shared learning • Transparent impact reporting • Sustainability planning • Quality self-regulation	Post Vesting Day
Strategic voice	• VCFSE on all Place Boards (full members) • Representatives on strategic partnerships • 12-week consultation minimum • Coproduction policies / services • Voice in budget priorities	• Report to wider sector • Constructive challenge • Frontline evidence shared • Active participation • Honest feedback	Vesting Day representation Quarterly forums Annual assembly

Commitment	From UAs	From VCFSE sector	Timeline
Infrastructure	• Funding / Unitary for infrastructure orgs • Building access nil / nominal cost • Shared back-office systems • Professional development • Digital support	• Support small groups • Peer mentoring • Knowledge exchange • Volunteer support • Evaluation capacity	Funding post Vesting Day. Systems April 2029 Ongoing development
Commissioning	• Pipeline 18 months ahead • Lots tailored to value. • 20% social value weighting • Light processes under £100k • Payment 30 days (target 14)	• Proportionate responses • Honest capacity assessment • Collaboration not competition • Quality standards • Innovation willingness	Pipeline post Vesting Day Reforms 2028–29 Quarterly updates
Place-based	• Neighbourhood Officer partnership • Asset transfers with revenue support • Co-location opportunities • Joint external funding bids	• Support underserved areas • Anchor institutions • Community settings delivery • Reach excluded groups • Support resident leadership	Asset framework Oct 2028 Co-location ongoing

PILLAR FOUR: COUNCILLORS AS COMMUNITY LEADERS

With the three-unitary authority model, the scale of operations allows for a deeper understanding of local areas. This enables Councillors to embrace their roles as community leaders (in partnership with executive), championing the voices and actions of their communities, and strengthening relationships.

Through active participation in Place Boards and unitary decision-making processes, Councillors ensure that residents' voices and community priorities are incorporated into strategic decisions, connecting communities with resources and assisting grassroots organisations in navigating complex systems. To underpin this approach, it is essential to upskill both the workforce and Councillors so they can effectively function as enablers rather than directors.

IMPLEMENTATION

We recognise that transforming community empowerment from an aspiration into a tangible reality requires concrete structures, clear expectations and dedicated resources. During the transition period from 2026-28, we are committed to developing the operational frameworks that will enable our four pillars to deliver meaningful change from Vesting Day. Our approach is built on codesign with communities, learning from pilot initiatives, and ensuring operational readiness before launch.

Our transition programme focuses on five interconnected critical work areas that will lay the foundations for effective community empowerment:

Work Area	Activities	Deliverables	Timeline
Structures & boundaries	Collaborate with communities and VCSFE to map boundaries respecting identity; explore	• Community-informed boundary maps	Pre Vesting Day: Pilot approaches

Work Area	Activities	Deliverables	Timeline
	constitutional models granting decision-making power; pilot approaches with volunteer communities; finalise transparent, inclusive, scalable framework	• Constitutional models with genuine powers • Pilot evaluations • Final governance framework	Pre Vesting Day: Mapping / models Post Vesting Day: Finalisation
Service portfolios	Service mapping councils / communities; create tiered framework (manage directly / scrutiny-influence / set priorities); pilot frameworks selected areas; refine for county-wide rollout	• Comprehensive service mapping • Tiered framework document • Pilot area evaluations • Refined rollout plan	• Pre Vesting Day: Mapping / framework • Pre Vesting day: Pilots • Post Vesting Day: Refinement
Funding mechanisms	Develop Community Investment Fund business cases; explore external vehicles (investment trusts); design participatory budgeting processes; create delegation frameworks balancing autonomy / accountability	• Investment Fund business cases • External funding options analysis • Participatory budgeting design • Delegation frameworks	• Pre Vesting Day: Business cases/design • Post Vesting day: Mechanisms established
Capacity & support	Councillor training / Officer support / dashboards / tools / communities of practice; VCFSE Accord / protocols / funding mechanisms; Neighbourhood Officer training / protocols / frameworks community development / codesign	• Comprehensive training programmes • VCFSE Accord signed • Officer development resources • Support infrastructure operational	• Pre Vesting day: Development • Vesting day: Delivery begins • Post Vesting Day: Full operation
Data & accountability	Develop integrated intelligence systems multi-agency data; establish privacy / ethics frameworks; build community data literacy; define success metrics / baseline; design accessible reporting formats	• Integrated data systems • Privacy / ethics frameworks • Data literacy programmes • Metrics / baseline established • Reporting templates	• Pre Vesting Day: Systems / frameworks • Post Vesting Day: Implementation / training

The approach incorporates codesign with communities, draws on lessons from pilot projects, and focuses on ensuring operational readiness prior to April 2028.

SEIZING THE MOMENT

Hertfordshire has a rare opportunity to place real community power at the heart of local government. The challenges are clear: public trust is low, and traditional structures no longer meet resident expectations for genuine influence and responsive partnership. Bold action is essential.

A multi-layered approach; Place Boards, town and parish councils, and the voluntary sector, gives communities real decision-making power, not just voice. From day one, investing in community capacity and embedding empowerment into council culture will unlock local leadership, innovation, and shared ownership of outcomes.

This vision requires letting go of outdated models, trusting communities to lead, and supporting participation when resources are stretched. The rewards are substantial: stronger relationships, more resilient communities, better outcomes, and renewed democratic purpose.

7. TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION, DESIGNING VISIONARY SERVICES FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

At the heart of the government's ambition for Local Government Reorganisation is the need to deliver high quality and sustainable services and community empowerment, all underpinned by meaningful public service reform. The three-unitary model for Hertfordshire responds directly to this ambition, and the approach to transition is purposefully designed to ensure that the imperative to achieve "safe and legal" outcomes does not crowd out transformational thinking.

THE CHALLENGE: BALANCING COMPLIANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

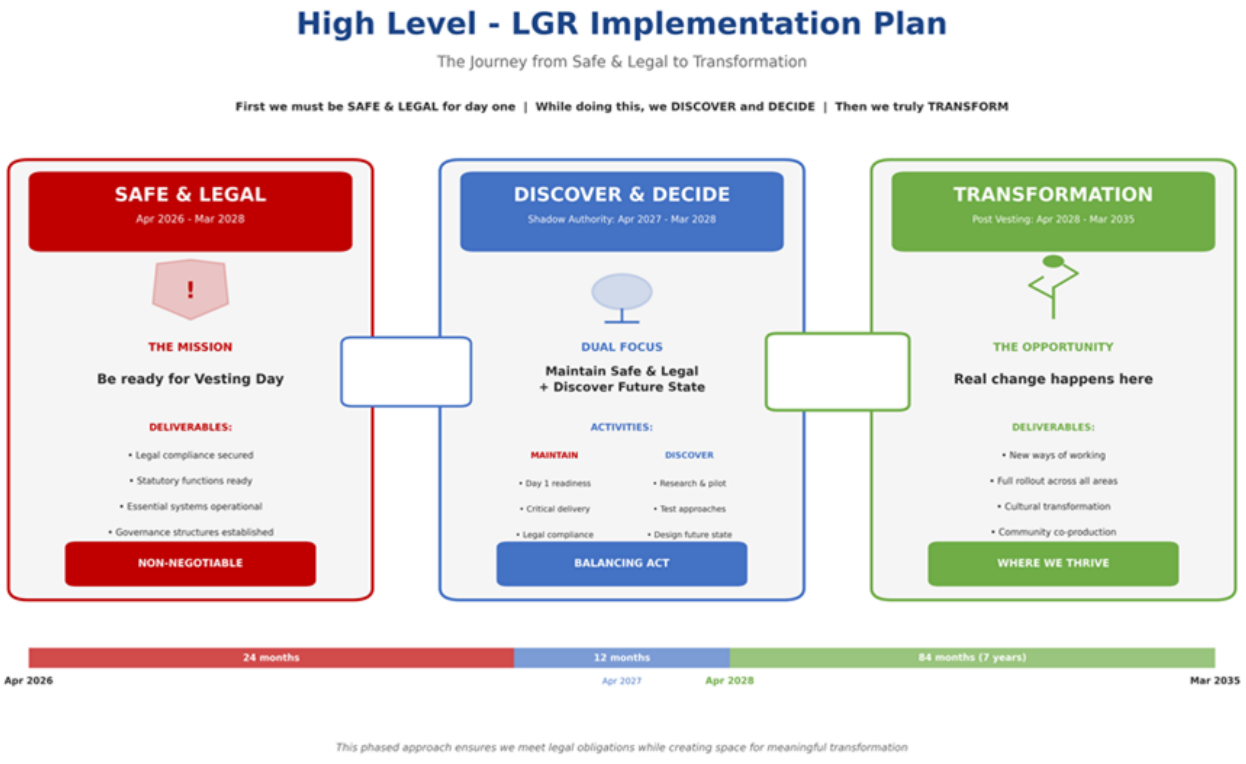
Experience from previous reorganisations demonstrates a consistent pattern; without deliberate protective measures, operational pressures inevitably consume all available capacity, reducing ambition to mere structural consolidation. The urgent demands of legal compliance, system migration, and operational continuity create a gravitational pull that draws resources, attention, and leadership focus away from transformational work. The result is reorganisation that changes structures but not outcomes; a missed opportunity that communities experience as disruption without improvement.

OUR APPROACH: DESIGNED FOR TRANSFORMATION

The three-unitary model addresses this risk head-on through an implementation approach that treats transformation not as an aspiration for "later," but as a core requirement from day one. This is achieved through four interconnected mechanisms that protect and advance transformational thinking throughout the transition period.

THE IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY

The visual below illustrates our phased approach, showing how we balance the essential requirements of compliance with the equally important work of transformation:



This phased journey ensures that compliance work and transformational thinking proceed in parallel, with each phase building the foundation for the next. Safe and legal delivery is achieved not at the expense of transformation, but as the platform upon which transformation can thrive.

FOUR MECHANISMS TO SAFEGUARD TRANSFORMATION

Four intentional mechanisms work together to ensure transformation remains central throughout the transition period:

1. DUAL GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

The programme structure deliberately separates transactional delivery from transformational design, ensuring neither crowds out the other. This dual architecture operates as follows:

Transactional workstreams: Dedicated capacity focuses exclusively on operational continuity, legal compliance, and system migration. These workstreams ensure the critical foundations are secured, the "safe and legal" baseline that enables the new authorities to operate from day one.

Transformational workstreams: Operating in parallel with protected capacity and resources, these workstreams develop new service models, digital capabilities, partnership arrangements, and ways of working that will define how the new authorities deliver public services.

Structured integration: Regular touchpoints ensure the two streams inform each other: transformation designs must be implementable within the timeframes and constraints of transition, while transactional decisions must not inadvertently lock in old ways of working.

2. PROTECTED CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

Planning explicitly ringfences resources for transformation activity throughout the transition period. This recognition that building new capabilities requires sustained capacity that cannot be sacrificed to immediate operational pressures is fundamental to the programme's success.

Protected capacity includes:

- Dedicated programme capacity for service redesign and new model development across all service areas
- Resources for community and partner engagement to co-design new approaches
- Investment in staff development and cultural change programmes that equip teams for new ways of working
- Early adoption funding for digital platforms, data systems, and enabling infrastructure
- Protected time for pilot programmes and testing of new approaches while transition proceeds.

Without this explicit protection, transformation capacity would be gradually eroded as operational pressures mount. By building protection into the programme structure from the outset, we ensure that transformation is resourced as fully as compliance.

3. EXPANDED VESTING DAY READINESS STANDARDS

The definition of ‘safe and legal’ has been deliberately expanded beyond basic operational continuity to include transformational readiness. This crucial redefinition changes what it means to be ready for Vesting Day.

The three new authorities will not simply maintain existing services in new structures; they will be poised to operate differently from day one.

Vesting day readiness criteria therefore include:

Baseline requirements:

- Operational continuity for all statutory services
- Legal compliance with all regulatory and statutory duties
- Financial systems and controls in place
- Staff employment transferred and payroll operational
- Essential ICT systems functioning

Transformational readiness:

- New service delivery models designed, piloted, and ready for implementation
- Partnership arrangements and integrated working protocols established with key partners
- Community engagement frameworks in place with clear mechanisms for resident voice and influence
- Digital platforms and data systems enabling modern, efficient service delivery
- Workforce equipped with skills, tools, and support for new operating models
- Performance frameworks aligned to outcomes, not just outputs.

By embedding transformation into the definition of readiness, we ensure it is not treated as optional or deferred. Being ready for Vesting Day means being ready to operate differently, not just ready to operate.

4. PHASED IMPLEMENTATION WITH LEARNING

Rather than attempting immediate wholesale transformation that would overwhelm transition capacity, the programme adopts phased implementation that protects space for experimentation, learning, and adaptation.

This approach works through three stages:

- **Discovery phase (pre-Shadow Authority):** Light-touch research, stakeholder engagement, and mapping establish the foundation for transformation without overwhelming pre-shadow period capacity. This phase is about understanding current state, identifying opportunities, and building the evidence base, not delivering wholesale change.
- **Pilot phase (Shadow Authority):** Selected pilot programmes test new service models and ways of working while transactional work proceeds. These pilots generate evidence, build capability, and create momentum. Critically, they allow for learning and course correction before wider rollout, reducing risk and improving quality.
- **Scaled implementation (post-vesting):** Armed with evidence from pilots and freed from the immediate pressures of vesting preparation, transformation scales systematically across services and geographies over a 7-year period, with continuous learning and adaptation built into the process.

This approach ensures transformation begins during transition rather than waiting for some distant "business as usual" state. It creates momentum, builds confidence, and generates tangible examples of what transformation looks like in practice, critical for maintaining commitment as transition pressures mount.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE: TRANSFORMATION AS BASELINE, NOT ASPIRATION

These four mechanisms reflect a fundamental principle that distinguishes this implementation approach from traditional reorganisation: safe and legal delivery is the baseline, not the ceiling of ambition.

The three-unitary model is designed to achieve both operational security and transformational change, recognising that without deliberate structural protection, the former will inevitably consume the latter. This is not naive optimism; it is deliberate design informed by learning from previous reorganisations where transformation was consistently lost to operational pressures.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

In practical terms, this approach manifests in several concrete ways:

- Programme governance structures with equal standing for transformation and transactional workstreams, ensuring transformation has a voice at every decision point
- Budget allocations that protect transformation funding even when operational pressures create competing demands
- Performance frameworks that track both operational readiness and transformation progress, making both equally visible to programme leadership and stakeholders
- Communication strategies that tell the transformation story alongside the transition story, maintaining focus on the "why" as well as the "how"
- Decision-making criteria that explicitly consider transformational impact, not just operational efficiency
- Workforce engagement that emphasises new possibilities and opportunities, not just structural changes.

These are not aspirations; they are commitments built into the programme design from the outset.

REIMAGINING FROM DAY ONE

Implementation of the three-unitary model is not simply about moving from eleven councils to three. It is about using that structural change as the foundation for fundamentally reimagining how local government serves communities across Hertfordshire.

Crucially, that reimagining begins on day one of the transition period, not after it**.** Through dual governance architecture, protected capacity, expanded readiness standards, and phased implementation, the programme ensures that transformation is not sacrificed to the pressures of transition, but proceeds alongside it.

The result will be three new unitary authorities that are not only operationally sound and legally compliant, but fundamentally different in how they work, with communities, with partners, and internally. They will be modern, efficient, responsive, and outcome-focused from the moment they come into being.

CONCLUSION

Hertfordshire is a place of economic dynamism, rural beauty and strong connections to the capital, where ambition, enterprise and community spirit run deep. It now stands at a defining point: a rare opportunity not just to reorganise services, but to redefine what local government can achieve. Yet without the right structure, that potential cannot be fully realised.

The three-unitary authority model is the answer. Whilst the base three-unitary proposal could stand alone, the modified model creates authorities large enough to invest, innovate and influence, yet close enough to understand every neighbourhood and ensure opportunity reaches every community. This is not an arbitrary choice. It reflects extensive engagement with residents and builds on how people already live, work and connect across Hertfordshire, following natural geographies. It keeps communities central whilst providing the dynamic system, clarity and capacity the county needs to shape tomorrow's opportunities.

This proposal is built on a powerful truth: prevention and prosperity are inseparable from place, but both need an enabling structure to succeed. The three-unitary model delivers exactly that - clarity of purpose, coherence of leadership and capacity for impact. It creates organisations capable of attracting investment, growing local economies and putting people before process.

Success depends on collaboration. The three authorities - West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire - will operate with shared intent. Together they create the scale, maturity and credible voice needed to unlock devolution. This positions Hertfordshire to secure the transport, skills and economic powers that will drive transformative change and long-term prosperity.

At the heart of this model are Hertfordshire's communities. Each authority will remain locally connected, building the relationships that make services work and the understanding that drives continual improvement. Every resident will see the difference: one council to contact, one place to go, clearer accountability. Rather than distancing people from their councils, this model preserves cherished local identity whilst creating the scale needed for responsive, effective and efficient services.

This is what the three-unitary authority model achieves: a system designed for prevention and prosperity, powered by partnership, built on place and driven by ambition. It gives Hertfordshire the structure, scale and shared purpose to deliver growth, resilience and opportunity for every community. Not as an aspiration, but as a commitment to results. This means faster housing delivery, more effective prevention services, stronger negotiating power with developers, and the financial sustainability to protect frontline services for generations to come.

This opportunity will not come again. The choices made now will shape Hertfordshire for decades, either limiting what is possible or unlocking the county's full potential. At this historic moment, we have the chance to create something exceptional. The three-unitary authority model, rooted in our people, designed for prevention, and built to deliver prosperity, gives Hertfordshire the means to move forward with confidence. It builds on existing realities and is unequivocally the right choice for Hertfordshire's future.

APPENDIX 1 – TABULAR SUMMARY OF LGR PROPOSAL FOR 3 UNITARY AUTHORITIES MAPPED AGAINST MHCLG CRITERIA

Criterion	1. Foreword	2. The Proposition	3. Scale, efficiency & capacity incl Finance	4. Supports devolution arrangements	5. High-quality & sustainable services	6. Meets local needs & informed by local views	7. Community empowerment	8. Transition & Implementation	9. Conclusion	*Appendices*
Criterion 1 - A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government										
a) Sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area		✓	✓	✓					✓	
b) Sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs		✓	✓	✓						
c) 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) 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.			✓	✓			✓			
Criterion 2 - 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		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	

Criterion	1. Foreword	2. The Proposition	3. Scale, efficiency & capacity incl Finance	4. Supports devolution arrangements	5. High-quality & sustainable services	6. Meets local needs & informed by local views	7. Community empowerment	8. Transition & Implementation	9. Conclusion	*Appendices*
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) How an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from - existing budgets; flexible use of capital receipts to support transformation; invest-to-save projects			✓							
Criterion 3 - prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens										
a) New structures will improve local government and service delivery and avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services				✓	✓	✓			✓	
b) Deliver public service reform leading to better value for money				✓	✓	✓				
c) Impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety				✓	✓				✓	
Criterion 4 - work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views										
a) Evidence meaningful and constructive local engagement						✓				

Criterion	1. Foreword	2. The Proposition	3. Scale, efficiency & capacity incl Finance	4. Supports devolution arrangements	5. High-quality & sustainable services	6. Meets local needs & informed by local views	7. Community empowerment	8. Transition & Implementation	9. Conclusion	*Appendices*
b) consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance						✓			✓	
c) Evidence of local engagement, explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed						✓				
Criterion 5 - New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements										
a) 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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution				✓					✓	
c) Ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.				✓						
Criterion 6 - enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment										
a) make sure that communities are engaged							✓		✓	

APPENDIX 2 – BUSHEY

THE CASE FOR CHANGE – BUSHEY'S INTEGRATION INTO WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The three Unitary Authority model for Hertfordshire (3UA) is based on the building blocks of district areas. However, the Secretary of State is asked to consider implementing the proposal with a modification request as part of the statutory change process to alter the existing boundary between Watford Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council, enabling the wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath (herein referred to as 'Bushey') to be integrated into the future West Hertfordshire administrative boundary, noting that the existing ward boundaries are coterminous with the Aldenham parish boundary but not existing County division boundaries. The map appended at Appendix 2A illustrates the proposed boundary change, which allows the existing Aldenham parish to remain within the proposed Central Unitary Authority.

This document presents a detailed justification for the proposed boundary change that will better align administrative boundaries with community identity, service delivery and economic integration.

INTRODUCTION

The proposal to transfer Bushey from the Borough of Hertsmere to West Hertfordshire is rooted in the recognition that true community identity is shaped by the lived and shared experiences and daily interactions of residents, rather than by arbitrary administrative boundaries.

Local government reorganisation creates the opportunity to correct misalignment in the part of West Hertfordshire known as Bushey, by ensuring that governance structures mirror the social, economic and cultural relationships that characterise Bushey's community life.

The opportunity for the Secretary of State to facilitate this modification request as part of the Statutory Change Order presents a significant opportunity to bring local government arrangements into harmony with community reality. The realignment will help secure better outcomes for current and future generations by placing community identity at the heart of local governance.

With a population of 28,411 (Bushey North: 8,004; Bushey St James: 7,700; Bushey Park: 7,280; Bushey Heath: 5,427), Bushey currently sits as an isolated enclave in south-west Hertsmere (see Appendix 2A), physically separated from the rest of the district by the M1 / A41 corridor and substantial greenbelt (over two miles to Borehamwood). In contrast, Bushey shares deep-rooted historic, social, economic and infrastructure ties with Watford (less than 0.5 miles of greenbelt separation) that make its integration into West Hertfordshire both logical and beneficial (see Appendix 2B).

The proposed boundary change strengthens public services and financial sustainability, reflects genuine community identities and interests, enables effective and convenient local government and delivers value for money. Most importantly, it aligns administrative boundaries with the lived reality of residents and the functional geography of the area. For that reason, it has political support from existing Leaders in the areas that will make up the future Central and West Hertfordshire Unitary Authorities. In short, this modification request is made because it strengthens alignment to the LGR criteria whilst righting a historical inconsistency, utilising a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to enact the will of local residents and re-connect a community divided by administrative boundaries.

COMMUNITY IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Bushey's community identity has been shaped by its relationship with Watford since the 19th century. By the Victorian era, Bushey was firmly embedded within the Watford district through shared postal services and railway infrastructure. The London and North-Western Railway connected Bushey directly to Watford and London, establishing an economic interdependence and commuter flows that persist today.

Between 1860 and 1960, Bushey underwent significant transformation, with its population rising from 856 in 1801 to over 24,000 by the mid-20th century. This growth was directly shaped by Watford's industrial expansion, with many Bushey residents working in Watford's brewing, printing and manufacturing sectors. The development of council housing in Bushey during the interwar period was explicitly tied to Watford's population pressures and planning strategies.

Governance structures have long reflected this historical integration. Under the Local Government Act of 1894, parts of Bushey were included in the Watford Urban District, later forming Oxhey Ward. This administrative overlap enabled joint planning and service delivery, establishing patterns that continue to define community interaction.

CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Today's community patterns overwhelmingly demonstrate Bushey's orientation towards Watford rather than Hertsmere. A 2018 Retail and Leisure study surveying Bushey residents revealed:

Centres visited by Bushey residents:

- Watford: 97.6%
- Bushey: 74.4%
- Bushey Heath: 71.8%
- Borehamwood: 65.3%
- Radlett: 31.9%

Most visited centres:

- Watford: 55%
- Bushey: 15.5%
- Bushey Heath: 12.7%
- Borehamwood: 11.3%
- North Watford / St Albans Road: 2.2%

These figures demonstrate that virtually every Bushey resident visits Watford town centre, and it is by far the most frequented destination, significantly exceeding even local centres within Bushey itself.

Socially and culturally, Bushey residents have long participated in Watford's civic and cultural life. From early 20th-century civic celebrations, such as the 1935 Silver Jubilee, to shared access to cultural amenities including cinema, arts and public events, the communities are closely intertwined. The influence of Watford's artistic heritage extended into Bushey through institutions like the Herkomer Art School, which attracted artists and students from across the region.

Today residents routinely cross boundaries for transport, schooling, healthcare, leisure and cultural activities. Bushey benefits directly from Watford's vibrant retail, hospitality and entertainment offer whilst also giving back: contributing to Watford’s character as a diverse and inclusive urban area. In line with the LGR criteria, there is therefore a compelling community and economic argument for this modification request to be considered and approved.

EDUCATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Educational patterns further reinforce these close community ties. As of Spring 2025:

- 1,829 pupils attending schools in Bushey have home addresses in Watford, nearly 29% of Bushey's 6,351 total pupils.
- Only 18% of Bushey's pupils come in from across the rest of Hertfordshire in comparison (excluding Bushey and Watford).
- 9.5% of pupils living in Bushey attend schools in Watford.
- 11% of pupils living in Watford attend schools in Bushey.

Furthermore, the schools across Watford, Three Rivers and Bushey already form part of the South West Herts Schools Consortium for secondary school transfer and this, along with the cross-boundary education patterns above, demonstrates deeply embedded, cohesive community relationships that transcend administrative boundaries.

RESIDENT PERSPECTIVES

Public consultation on local government reorganisation in September 2025 revealed strong support among Bushey residents for integration with West Hertfordshire. Residents consistently described Bushey as physically and socially closer to Watford than to Borehamwood or to the rest of Hertsmere, citing shorter distances, stronger daily links and a shared sense of community identity. Representative comments include:

"I support three unitary authorities, it correctly recognises that Bushey belongs within the West authority alongside Watford, Three Rivers and Dacorum. Bushey's identity and daily life links are with Watford, and the A41 provides a clear natural boundary from Borehamwood/Elstree. This adjustment reflects community reality while keeping disruption minimal."

"I have always felt a much closer connection to Watford than to Borehamwood or the rest of Hertsmere."

"From my postcode in Bushey it is only around 2.1 miles to Watford town centre, compared to almost 3.8 miles to Borehamwood town centre. This reflects everyday reality: Bushey is physically and socially closer to Watford, with stronger daily links in shopping, transport and community life."

These perspectives underscore that the proposed boundary change reflects lived experience, convenience and genuine community identity, rather than imposing artificial administrative divisions and presents the Secretary of State with a unique opportunity to right a historical inconsistency.

EFFECTIVE AND CONVENIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CLEAR AND IDENTIFIABLE BOUNDARIES

The current boundary creates an anomaly: Bushey sits as an isolated island within south-west Hertsmere, physically separated from the rest of the district by significant barriers. The opening of the M1 motorway in the 1950s created a substantial physical severance between Bushey and Borehamwood, reinforced by over two miles of greenbelt to the east. This compares with less than 0.5 miles of greenbelt between Bushey and Watford, where urban areas flow together more naturally with minimal physical separation.

The proposed boundary change would create a clear, logical and easily identifiable boundary along the M1 / A41 corridor, a major transport infrastructure feature that already functions as a natural dividing line. This alignment would eliminate the current administrative anomaly and establish boundaries that reflect actual physical geography and settlement patterns.

SERVICE DELIVERY ALIGNMENT

The amended boundary would significantly improve service delivery patterns by aligning administrative responsibility with functional geography. Currently Bushey's physical orientation towards Watford creates practical challenges for service integration with Hertsmere, whilst its separation from the rest of the district complicates coordinated delivery.

Walking or cycling between Bushey and Borehamwood involves longer travel times along rural national speed limit roads with limited pedestrian infrastructure (footpaths often only on one side). In contrast, travel between Bushey and Watford occurs along residential streets with urban character and complete pedestrian infrastructure. Bushey flows seamlessly into Watford's residential areas of Watford Heath and Oxhey with little to no physical severance.

This connectivity is reinforced by:

- **Rail**: the London Overground Lioness Line, with Bushey Station serving as a key node, terminating at Watford Junction.
- **Bus**: eight routes operating between Bushey and Watford (routes 142, 258, 306/306A, 347, 885, 336, 346, 602).
- **Road**: strong connections enabling easy access for residents and service vehicles.

Integrating Bushey into West Hertfordshire would align service delivery with these existing travel patterns, enabling:

- More efficient waste collection and street maintenance aligned with natural access routes.
- Coordinated transport planning reflecting actual usage patterns.
- Integrated emergency service deployment from natural response locations.
- Joint infrastructure investment aligned with functional geography.
- Coherent planning for growth and regeneration across a unified area.

This alignment eliminates the need for complex inter-authority agreements and enables more responsive, convenient service delivery for residents.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Economically Bushey functions as part of Watford's functional economic area. The 2021 Census revealed that over 900 Bushey residents commute to Watford for work, probably an underestimate due to the impacts of COVID-19 on working patterns. In total, over 1,400 Bushey residents commute to work within the proposed West Hertfordshire area. By comparison, just over 900 commute to the central area, with fewer than 600 working in Hertsmere specifically.

Many Bushey residents are employed in Watford’s major sectors such as health, education, the creative industries and in professional services. This economic link is further reinforced by Bushey’s local businesses, which depend on Watford’s larger market and infrastructure to thrive. The close relationship between the two areas extends beyond employment and commerce; they share key strategic priorities, including growth, regeneration and sustainability.

Integrating Bushey into West Hertfordshire via approval of this modification request would enable a more coherent and impactful approach to joint planning and investment. By aligning administrative boundaries with the functional economic geography, planning, infrastructure investment and business support can be coordinated more effectively. This would ensure that resources are targeted where they are most needed and allow both areas to benefit from shared opportunities for growth and development.

DEMOCRATIC ALIGNMENT

The proposal is to amend the boundary, as per Appendix 2A, to realign the existing Hertsmere wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath so that they fall within the West Hertfordshire Unitary Authority. It is proposed that the existing Aldenham West borough ward of Hertsmere remains in the future Central Hertfordshire Unitary

Authority. This is because the current County division boundaries are not coterminous with existing borough ward boundaries and the existing Parish Council Ward of Aldenham is aligned with the borough ward boundaries rather than County division boundaries. Aligning the boundary change to borough ward boundaries subsequently means that the entirety of the existing Aldenham Parish Council ward area can remain intact under the Central Hertfordshire Unitary. This proposal avoids fragmenting a well-established parish structure, with consequences for governance, financial arrangements and community cohesion.

STRONG PUBLIC SERVICES AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

STRATEGIC COHERENCE

Bringing Bushey and Watford together within West Hertfordshire offers a strategic opportunity to enhance prosperity across the sub-region. Watford will play a pivotal role as a key economic and service centre in West Hertfordshire, with strong transport links, a thriving business community and a successful regeneration track record. Integrating Bushey will enable a more coherent and joined-up approach to public service delivery, allowing both areas to benefit from:

- **Shared infrastructure**: coordinated investment in transport, digital connectivity and community facilities aligned with actual usage patterns.
- **Integrated service delivery**: health, education, social care and environmental services planned and delivered across a unified functional area.
- **Strategic investment**: stronger case for regional and national funding through a unified vision for growth and resilience.
- **Coordinated planning**: coherent approach to housing, employment and regeneration, reflecting functional relationships.

ENHANCED SERVICE QUALITY

For Bushey residents, integration into West Hertfordshire would provide:

- Greater access to Watford's employment opportunities, cultural amenities and high-quality services.
- More responsive local governance aligned with actual community connections.
- Investment and planning decisions reflecting genuine travel-to-work, education and retail patterns.
- Preservation of Bushey's distinct identity within a broader administrative framework.

For West Hertfordshire as a whole, the integration would:

- Create a more balanced and sustainable Unitary Authority.
- Enable more efficient resource deployment across the functional economic area.
- Strengthen democratic representation and county-wide equity through better alignment of boundaries with community identity.
- Support inclusive growth and reduce inequalities through coordinated strategy.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The boundary change enhances financial sustainability through:

- **Operational efficiency**: aligning service delivery with natural geography reduces costs associated with complex cross-boundary arrangements, duplicate infrastructure and inefficient service patterns. Services such as waste collection, street maintenance and public transport can be planned and delivered more efficiently when boundaries reflect actual settlement patterns.

- **Strategic investment**: a unified approach to planning and regeneration across Bushey and Watford creates better opportunities to secure strategic funding from regional and national sources. The stronger economic case for investment in a coherent functional area enhances the return on public spending. Transport improvements, digital infrastructure and community facilities can be planned holistically, rather than requiring complex, cross-boundary coordination.
- **Resource optimisation**: integration enables more effective sharing of specialist resources, facilities and expertise across the functional economic area.
- **Economic development**: joint economic strategy across a unified functional economic area creates better conditions for business growth and job creation. This strengthens the tax base and reduces demand for public services through improved prosperity.
- **Administrative simplification**: eliminating artificial boundaries reduces the need for formal inter-authority agreements, joint committees and complex governance arrangements for service delivery. This reduces administrative overhead and enables faster, more responsive decision making.
- **Democratic engagement**: boundaries that reflect genuine community identity and functional relationships enhance democratic legitimacy and engagement. Residents participate more effectively in governance when boundaries align with their lived experience and community connections.
- **Long-term sustainability**: the boundary change creates more resilient and sustainable unitary authorities by ensuring administrative areas reflect actual settlement patterns, economic geography and community relationships. This enhances capacity to respond to future challenges and opportunities.
- **Section 151 Officers**: whilst the case for value exceeds financial assessment, the Section 151 Officers of Watford Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council have nevertheless confirmed that the proposed boundary change delivers value for money. In their analysis, they have established that the adjustment will not have a negative impact on the financial modelling underpinning the overall Hertfordshire Local Government Reorganisation proposal.

EQUITABLE AUTHORITY CONFIGURATION

The boundary change also improves the overall configuration of unitary authorities. The existing Bushey North and Bushey St James wards become the new Bushey North division, whilst the existing Bushey Park and Bushey Heath wards become the new Bushey South division, both within the West Hertfordshire Unitary area. The remaining area of the current Bushey divisions, which currently fall within the Aldenham West ward of Hertsmere will form part of the new Watling division, within the Central Hertfordshire Unitary area. See Appendix 2C. With Bushey subsequently integrated into West Hertfordshire, the councillor and division distribution becomes more equitable:

- **West Hertfordshire**: 72 councillors (24 divisions x 3)
- **Central Hertfordshire**: 69 councillors (23 divisions x 3)
- **Eastern Hertfordshire**: 93 councillors (31 divisions x 3)

This represents a balanced distribution, yet avoids creating an authority that approaches the LGBCE's threshold of concern regarding council size, whilst ensuring all three authorities have the capacity for effective strategic leadership.

LEGAL POSITION

In a letter to the Leaders of Hertfordshire Councils on 5 February 2025, Jim McMahon, the then Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, invited Leaders and Chief Executives to work together to develop a proposal for a single tier of local government for the county, and proceeded to set out the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and timeline for this process.

In particular, the following matters relating to boundary change were required to be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

1. 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.
2. 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, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

It was made clear, therefore, that whilst maintaining existing boundaries may be the default starting position, provision is made for departing from those boundaries where justification can be made on the grounds of public service and financial sustainability.

It remains the view of the councils that approval of this modification request will significantly strengthen the opportunities relating to the three unitary model, and this has been clearly evidenced, as required, within the request. Noting advice from MHCLG that the local government reorganisation is operating within the framework of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, we understand that the Act does not allow for boundary changes to form part of any base proposal. As such, MHCLG has confirmed that any modification request to the Secretary of State to amend existing boundaries should accompany a 'base proposal' developed using existing boundaries. In doing so, it was advised by MHCLG that any modification request should cover the boundary alteration request as well as strong justification for it, covering the benefit to public services and financial sustainability against any costs or complexities of implementation. This modification request meets these requirements.

Furthermore, the 3UA proposal sets out our assessment against the LGR criteria and so this modification request, as required, notes how that assessment against the criteria differs from the proposal so that the benefit of the proposed boundary change can be sufficiently assessed by the Secretary of State.

CONCLUSION

The case for integrating Bushey into West Hertfordshire is compelling across key criteria:

- **Community identity**: historical development, contemporary interaction patterns, educational connections and resident perspectives consistently demonstrate that Bushey's community identity is oriented toward Watford, rather than Hertsmere. The proposed boundary change reflects the lived reality of communities, rather than administrative convenience.
- **Effective local government**: the boundary change creates clear, identifiable boundaries along natural features (the M1 / A41 corridor) and aligns service delivery with functional geography. This enables more efficient, responsive and convenient public services for residents.
- **Public services and financial sustainability**: integration enables strategic coherence, enhanced service quality, operational efficiency and better investment returns. It creates conditions for inclusive growth and long-term sustainability across the functional economic area.
- **Value for money**: the boundary change delivers value through service efficiency, infrastructure investment, economic development, administrative simplification and democratic engagement, while creating more resilient and sustainable unitary authorities. Indeed, we do not believe it practical to achieve the same change via a future Principal Area Boundary Review because this would significantly increase transition costs and limit the scope for public sector transformation in the initial years of a new unitary council.

Most fundamentally, this boundary change recognises that communities are defined not by administrative lines on maps, but by the daily interactions, relationships and connections that shape residents' lives. Bushey's integration into West Hertfordshire ensures that the new unitary structure reflects and serves these genuine community bonds, creating governance that is locally responsive and strategically capable.

This once-in-a-generation opportunity to align administrative boundaries with community reality will enhance prosperity, improve services and strengthen democracy across the sub-region for decades to come and it is respectfully requested that the Secretary of State, in full consideration of the compelling narrative, approves this modification request.

KEY DATA SUMMARY

Population (2022 mid-year estimates, ONS)

- Total Bushey population: 29,330
- Bushey North: 14,629
- Bushey South: 14,701
- Projected growth to 2040 (detailed projections available)

Travel to work (2021 Census)

- Over 900 Bushey residents commute to Watford
- Over 1,400 Bushey residents commute to proposed West UA area
- Just over 900 commute to Central UA area
- Fewer than 600 commute to Hertsmere specifically

Education (Spring 2025)

- 1,829 pupils attending school in Bushey have home addresses in Watford (29% of 6,351 total pupils)
- 18% from rest of Hertfordshire (excluding Bushey and Watford)
- 9.5% of pupils living in Bushey attend school in Watford
- 11% of pupils living in Watford attend school in Bushey

Retail and leisure (2018 Survey – most recent survey)

Centres visited by Bushey residents:

1. Watford: 97.6%
2. Bushey: 74.4%
3. Bushey Heath: 71.8%
4. Borehamwood: 65.3%
5. Radlett: 31.9%

Most visited centres:

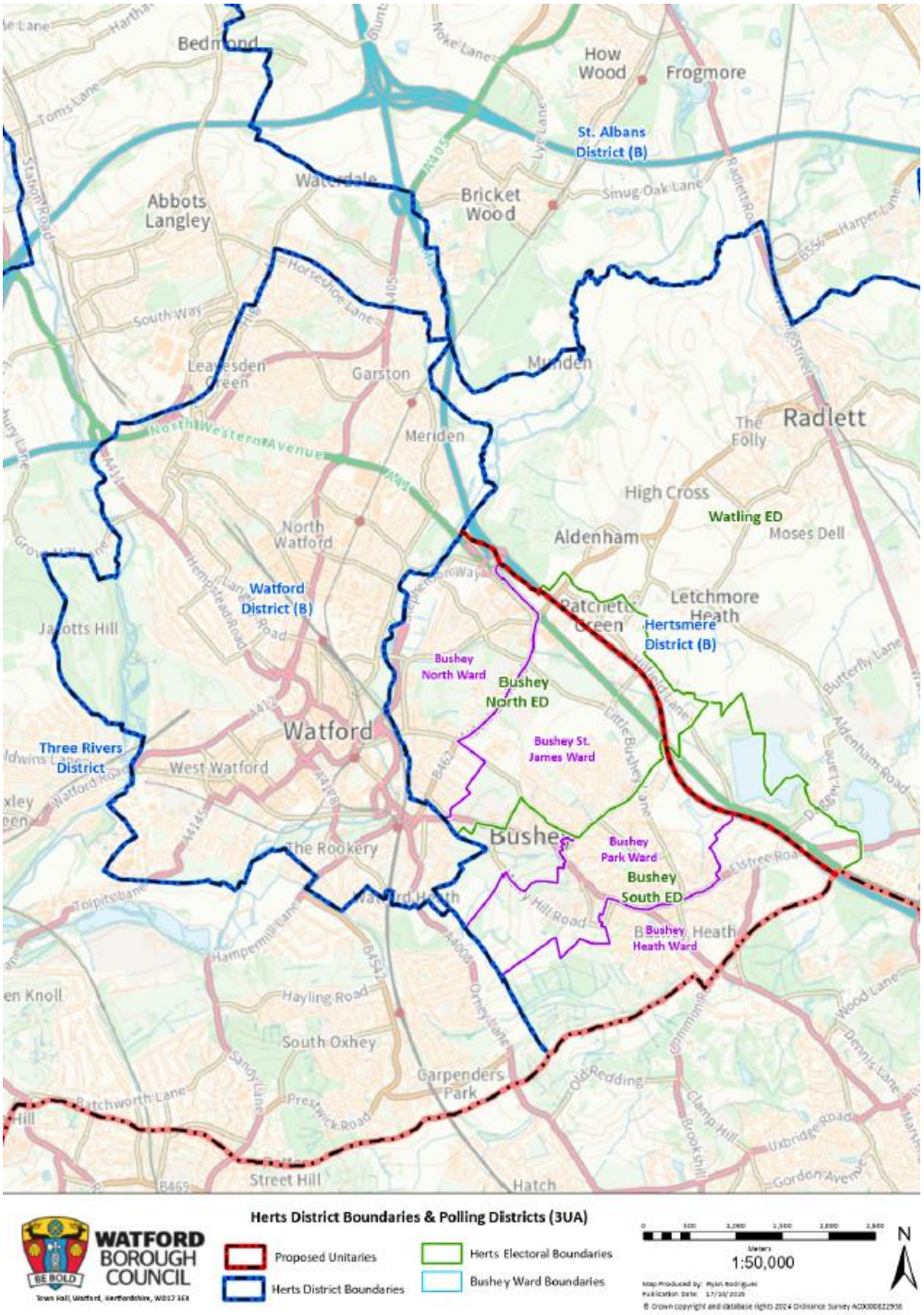
1. Watford: 55%
2. Bushey: 15.5%
3. Bushey Heath: 12.7%
4. Borehamwood: 11.3%
5. North Watford / St Albans Road: 2.2%

Transport infrastructure

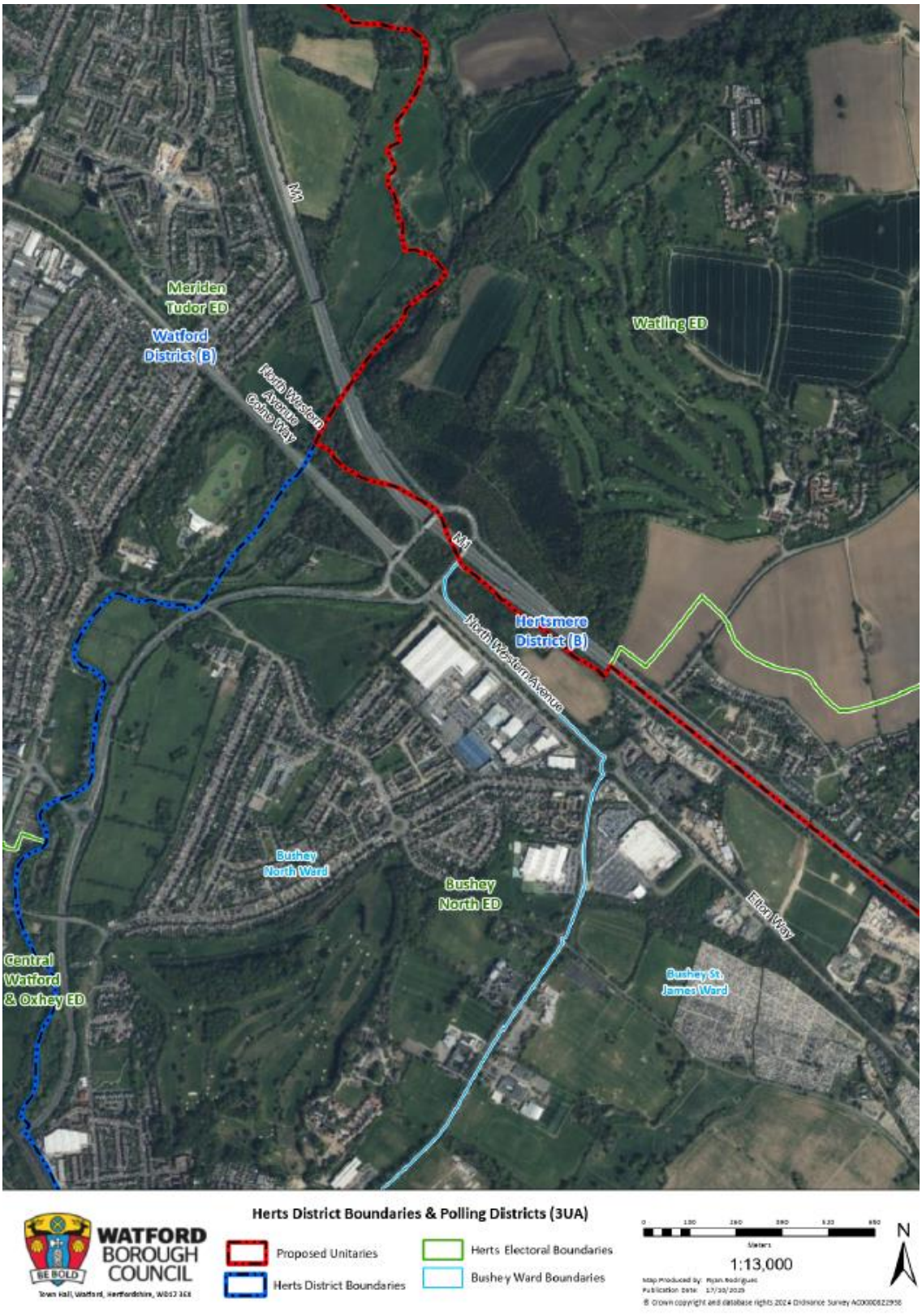
- Rail: London Overground Lioness Line (Bushey Station to Watford Junction)
- Bus routes connecting Bushey and Watford: 142, 258, 306/306A, 347, 885, 336, 346, 602
- Green belt separation: Over 2 miles to Borehamwood vs less than 0.5 miles to Watford
- Distance: Approximately 2.1 miles from Bushey postcodes to Watford town centre vs 3.8 miles to Borehamwood town centre

APPENDIX 2A MAP OF EXISTING WATFORD AND HERTSMERE BOUNDARIES

Please note: The red line represents the new unitary boundary, running along existing Bushey ward boundaries, coterminous with parish boundaries. The green line shows the existing county boundary which will be realigned through the approval of this modification request.

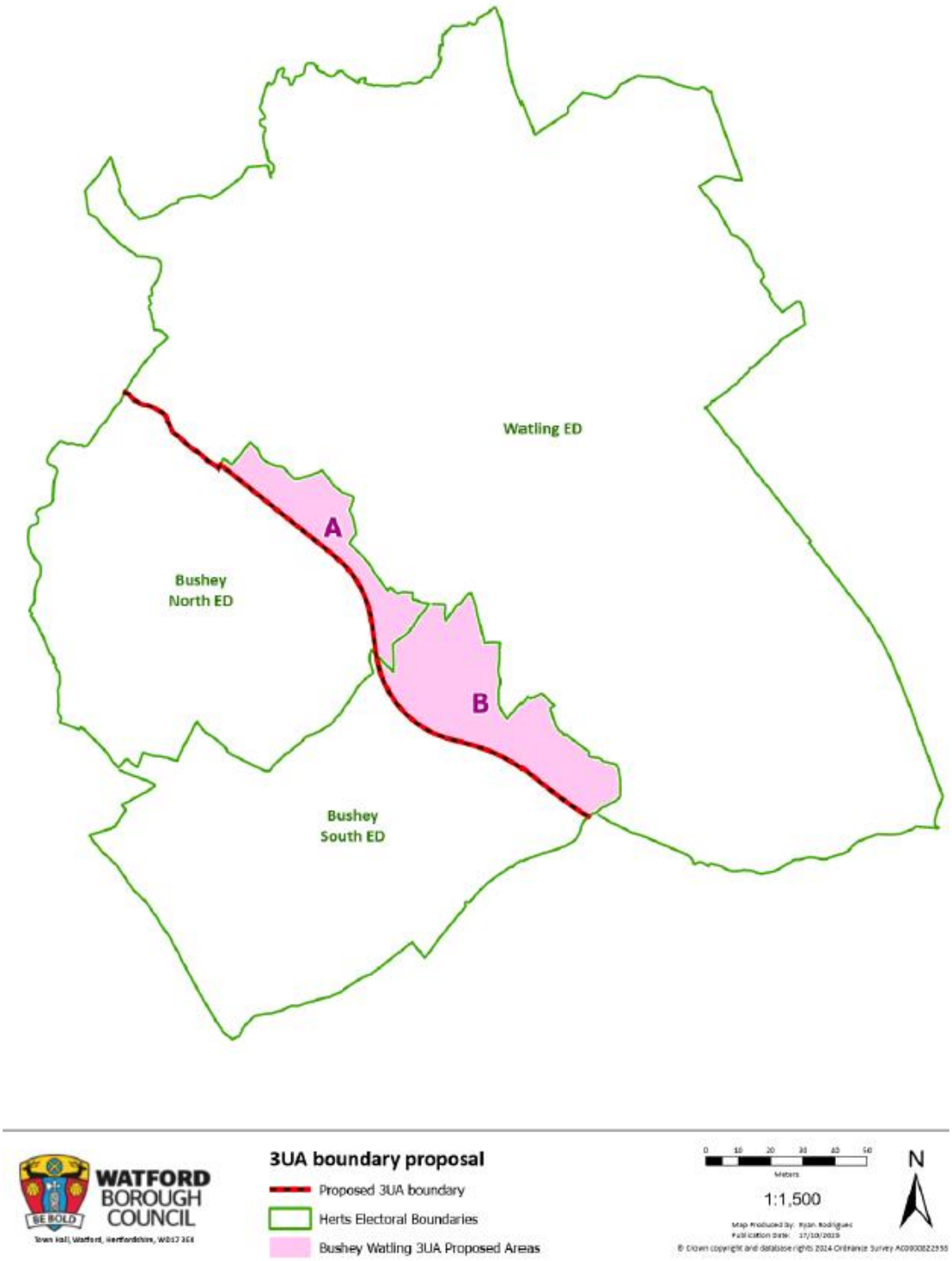


APPENDIX 2B AERIAL VIEW OF EXISTING WATFORD AND HERTSMERE BOUNDARIES



APPENDIX 2C - REMAINING AREA

A and B represent the remaining area of current Bushey divisions, which will be in the new Watling division, within the Central Hertfordshire Unitary Authority



APPENDIX 3 – HEMEL GARDEN COMMUNITIES

The Hemel Garden Communities programme plans for housing and employment growth, including urban regeneration within Hemel Hempstead and an expansion of 11,000 homes to the north and east of the current town. This development goes beyond the existing Dacorum Borough Council boundary into the St Albans City and District Council area. The development involves 455 hectares in Dacorum and 519 hectares in St Albans, together with 53 hectares of new employment space. The plan is connected with the regeneration of Hemel Hempstead, and upon completion, it will be necessary to ensure the integration of new and existing communities with Hemel Hempstead, in terms of identity and local government administration.

Although delivery is at an early stage, both Dacorum and St Albans have worked in close collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council and other stakeholders to develop a joint Delivery Board and Delivery Strategy – the programme is an exemplar of cross-boundary working between local government partners. The emerging local plans for each of these areas support this opportunity to deliver the co-ordinated expansion of the existing town of Hemel Hempstead, with housing delivered on a relatively even distribution across each area on completion of the programme in 2050. Under a three-unitary solution these established joint working arrangements will continue to flourish between West and Central Hertfordshire, with delivery turbo-charged through the support of the new Strategic Authority.

Towards the completion of the programme there will be a need to ensure the new expansion is unified with existing communities under the shared identity of Hemel Hempstead and fully aligned and integrated with the existing town. This alignment will optimise local service delivery and strengthen community cohesion.

Under the proposed three-unitary solution, collaborative efforts between West and Central Hertfordshire will ensure that this expansion is delivered seamlessly, establishing long-term place-based governance. To achieve this a thorough boundary review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is anticipated towards the end of the development programme, and this will be required to ensure that ward structures appropriately reflect evolving community needs and strengthen growth opportunities in West Hertfordshire.

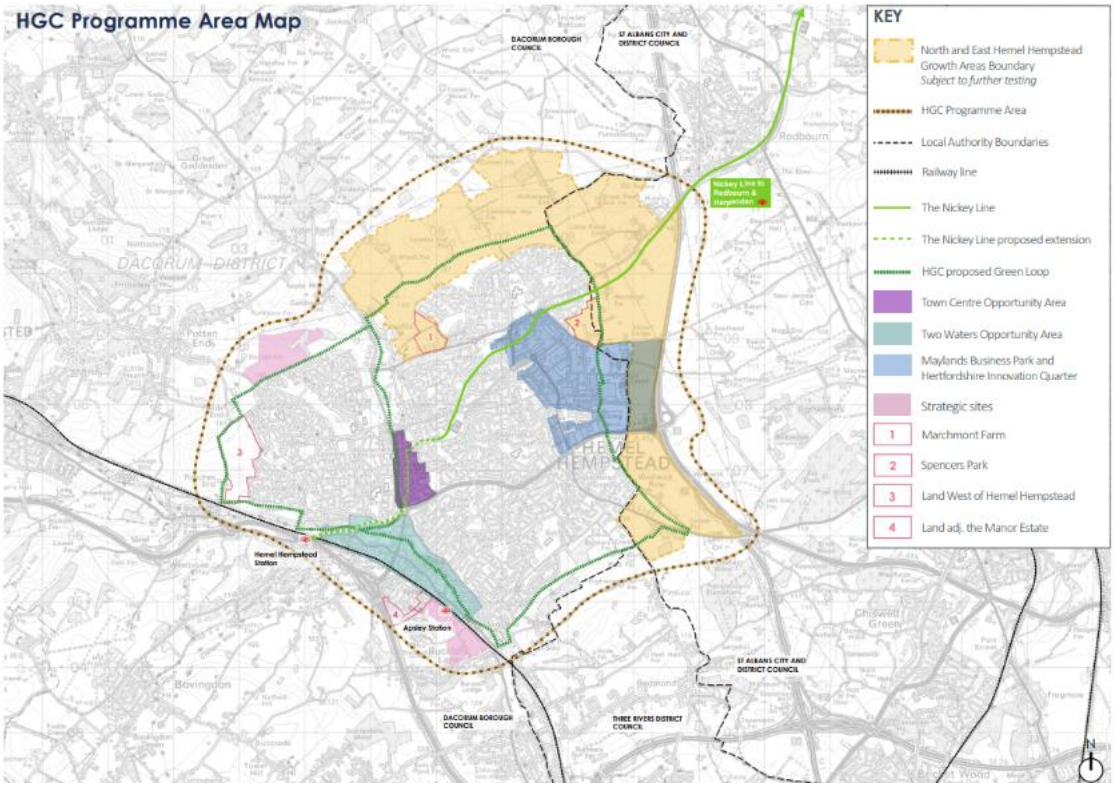


Figure 1 - Hemel Garden Community Delivery Statement March 2025

APPENDIX 4 – NEIGHBOURHOOD PREVENTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

	Activities	Deliverables	Timeline	Key Dependencies & Risks Status
1. Defining Prevention and Neighbourhood Teams	• **DISCOVERY PHASE:** Conduct initial stakeholder engagement to understand current landscape • **DISCOVERY PHASE:** Undertake benchmarking exercise with comparable local authorities • **SHADOW ONWARDS:** Facilitate multi-agency workshops to co-design Hertfordshire prevention approach • **SHADOW ONWARDS:** Develop clear definitions of prevention tiers and neighbourhood team operations • **SHADOW ONWARDS:** Establish guiding principles for team composition and integrated delivery	• Discovery Report on current state and best practice • Vision and Target Operating Model document • Strategic vision for prevention • Operating principles and values • Team composition and roles • Performance framework and success metrics	**Discovery: Apr 2026 - Mar 2027** **Full Work: Apr 2027 - Aug 2028**	• Securing commitment from all partner organisations • Alignment with ICS neighbourhood strategy • Managing expectations around pace of change • Discovery phase must inform shadow authority planning
2. Structures and Boundaries	• Map existing administrative boundaries across all partner organisations • Analyse population data, deprivation indices, and community identity • Facilitate workshops to develop boundary options (30,000-50,000 population) • Undertake impact assessment of boundary options • Engage communities and members on proposed boundaries • Develop transition plan for moving to proposed structures	• Proposed Neighbourhood Model Boundaries Report • Comparative analysis of boundary options • Maps showing proposed neighbourhoods with demographics • Coterminosity analysis with partners • Whole System Approach Framework • Impact assessment and transition plan	**Discovery: Apr 2026 - Mar 2027** **Full Work: From Apr 2027**	• Political sensitivity around boundary changes • Tension between ideal coterminosity and pragmatism • Impact on existing staff and services • Partner agreement on boundaries
3. Data and Evidence	• Collate existing needs assessments, JSNA, Public Health reports • Analyse demographics, health inequalities, social care demand at neighbourhood level • Map current service utilisation, costs, and outcomes • Identify data gaps and commission additional analysis • Develop neighbourhood profiling methodology • Create evidence summaries for each proposed neighbourhood	• Neighbourhood Evidence Packs for each area • Population demographics and projections • Health and wellbeing profiles • Social care demand and spend analysis • Community safety profiles • Community assets mapping • Service utilisation data and identified priorities	**Discovery: Apr 2026 - Mar 2027** **Full Work: From Apr 2027**	• Data sharing agreements between partners • Quality and consistency of data • Capacity within analytical teams • Making evidence accessible and actionable • GDPR compliance
4. Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation Programmes	• Comprehensive stocktake of current strategies across all partners • Map all commissioned services, contracts, and delivery programmes • Identify transformation programmes impacting neighbourhood teams • Facilitate analysis workshops: stop, start, scale decisions • Develop high-level strategic plan for neighbourhood alignment • Undertake risk assessment of contractual and financial implications • Engage service providers and communities on proposed changes	• Gap and Opportunity Analysis • Matrix of current commissioned services • Duplication and gap analysis • Stop/start/scale recommendations • Strategic Alignment and Commitments Map • High-Level Risk Assessment • Mitigation strategies	**Discovery: Apr 2026 - Mar 2027** **Full Work: From Apr 2027**	• Complexity of mapping multiple organisations • Contractual constraints limiting flexibility • Financial pressures driving short-term decisions • Provider market concerns • Legal review requirements
5. Workforce	• Map existing workforce across all partners for neighbourhood teams • Analyse current staff locations, roles, skills, terms and conditions • Model workforce requirements for proposed teams • Undertake gap analysis between current and required workforce • Engage with staff, trade unions and HR leads • Develop workforce transition principles (TUPE considerations) • Identify training and development needs for new ways of working	• Workforce Mapping Report • Current workforce analysis by neighbourhood • Skills, capacity, and gap analysis • Workforce modelling for target teams • Workforce Transition Plan • TUPE and employment implications • Training and development requirements • Recruitment and retention strategy	**Discovery: Apr 2026 - Mar 2027** **Full Work: From Apr 2027**	• Staff anxiety and resistance to change • Employment law and TUPE complexity • Recruitment challenges in key roles • Different terms and conditions • Trade union consultation requirements • Retention of key staff during transition
6. Funding	• Map all current funding streams supporting prevention activity • Analyse funding allocation geographically and by service type • Model funding requirements for proposed neighbourhood teams • Identify opportunities for pooled budgets and aligned funding • Engage partners on funding principles and governance (S75) • Develop business case for pilot neighbourhood teams • Explore national pilot funding opportunities • Design funding governance model enabling local flexibility	• Funding Mapping and Analysis • Comprehensive map of funding by source and value • Funding requirements modelling • Partner Funding Engagement Report • Pooled budget proposals • Section 75 development roadmap • Pilot Funding Business Case • Expected outcomes and ROI	**Discovery: Apr 2026 - Mar 2027** **Full Work: From Apr 2027**	• Partner willingness to pool/ align budgets • Financial pressures limiting investment • Complex funding conditions • Accountability and governance concerns • Success of national funding bids • Time for Section 75 agreements

7. Governance for Change	• Review existing governance arrangements across partners • Design governance model for neighbourhood, locality, and strategic levels • Develop draft Section 75 agreements for integrated commissioning • Establish programme governance for development phase • Develop criteria and process for selecting pilot neighbourhoods • Create business case and approval papers for pilots • Secure approval from decision-making bodies for pilot funding	• Draft Governance Model • Governance structure and terms of reference • Decision-making framework • Draft Section 75 Agreements • Pilot Neighbourhood Proposal • Selection criteria for ~3 pilot areas • Implementation timeline and evaluation framework • Pilot Funding Approval secured	**Shadow Authority (Apr 2027 - Mar 2028)**	• Legal arrangements for new Unitary Authority • Partner commitment to formal governance • Complexity of Section 75 development • Political and organisational approvals • Resource for governance infrastructure • Timing of decisions
8. Pilot Neighbourhood Teams	• Establish project management for pilot neighbourhoods • Co-design detailed operating model with local stakeholders • Recruit and deploy staff with appropriate induction • Establish local neighbourhood partnerships • Implement integrated IT systems and data sharing • Deliver training: strengths-based practice, integrated working • Launch pilots with clear communication • Establish monitoring and evaluation framework • Capture learning, challenges and adaptations • Undertake formal evaluation at key milestones	• Pilot Neighbourhood Team Implementation • Fully operational teams in ~3 neighbourhoods • Monitoring and Evaluation Reports • Progress against objectives • Quantitative data on activity and outcomes • Staff, partner and resident feedback • Impact case studies • Recommendations for wider rollout • Cost-benefit analysis	**Shadow Authority (Apr 2027 - Mar 2028) 6-12 month pilot**	• Recruitment and retention of staff • IT systems and information governance readiness • Partner engagement in pilot areas • Managing expectations during pilot • Sufficient time for meaningful evaluation • Changes required based on learning
9. Neighbourhood Prevention Strategy	• Establish co-production process with diverse stakeholders • Review evidence base, best practice, and pilot learning • Facilitate co-production workshops for vision and priorities • Draft Neighbourhood Prevention Strategy • Undertake formal consultation with stakeholders • Revise strategy based on consultation feedback • Develop implementation plan including rollout phasing • Secure formal approval through governance • Confirm funding commitments from partners • Develop communication and engagement plan for launch	• Neighbourhood Prevention Strategy • Vision for prevention in Hertfordshire • Strategic priorities and outcomes framework • Neighbourhood team model • Partnership commitments and governance • Implementation roadmap • Performance and evaluation framework • Strategy Implementation Plan • Confirmed Funding and Resources	**Post Vesting Day (Apr 2028 - Mar 2035)**	• Meaningful co-production takes time • Balancing ambition with financial constraints • Securing funding commitments • Alignment with ICS and partner strategies • Political approval and support • Managing implementation expectations
10. Neighbourhood Prevention Plans	• Establish neighbourhood planning process with methodology • Form neighbourhood planning groups with diverse representation • Share evidence packs and facilitate local analysis • Undertake community engagement and asset mapping • Co-produce neighbourhood prevention plans • Ensure plans are specific, measurable, and achievable • Identify local priorities and actions • Incorporate learning from pilots • Link plans to strategic priorities and commissioning • Secure sign-off through neighbourhood partnerships	• Neighbourhood Prevention Plans for each area • Neighbourhood profile and evidence summary • Community-identified priorities • Agreed outcomes and success measures • Detailed action plan with responsibilities • Resource allocation • Governance and accountability arrangements • Community engagement approach • Annual review and refresh process	**Post Vesting Day (From Apr 2028) Annual refresh**	• Capacity of teams and partners to lead planning • Quality of community engagement • Ensuring plans are meaningful not bureaucratic • Aligning local and strategic priorities • Maintaining momentum across multiple areas • Plans as living documents not one-off
11. Transformation	• Operationalise governance across all neighbourhood partnerships • Roll out neighbourhood teams across all areas based on pilots • Complete TUPE transfers and organisational changes • Implement comprehensive workforce development programme • Develop neighbourhood team leaders for multi-agency management • Establish communities of practice for shared learning • Implement cultural change programme: collaboration, learning, innovation • Implement integrated IT systems and shared care records • Build data analytics capability for evidence-based decisions • Develop performance dashboards and digital inclusion initiatives	• Fully Operational Governance Structures • Complete Neighbourhood Team Rollout • Digital Infrastructure for integrated working • Embedded Culture Change • Performance Management Framework operational • Continuous Improvement Processes • Section 75 agreements implemented • Staff wellbeing and support mechanisms • Career pathways within neighbourhood teams	**Post Vesting Day (Apr 2028 - Mar 2035) 7 year transformation**	• Sustained leadership commitment • Investment in workforce and digital • Managing change fatigue • IT system integration challenges • Information governance complexity • Maintaining momentum over time • Financial pressures impacting investment • Demonstrating impact to sustain commitment

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE

PROPOSAL FOR FOUR UNITARY AUTHORITIES

V3 draft - last saved 6th November 2025

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Implementation considerations ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

MHCLG criteria	MHCLG sub-criteria (summarised)	Section(s)
Criteria 1 Sensible geography	a) Sensible economic areas and tax base	- Implications for place - Scale, efficiency and capacity: - Unitary scale & population size
	b) Sensible geography that meets housing supply and local needs	- Implications for place
	c) Robust evidence and analysis	- Implications for place
	d) Clear description of structures and intended outcomes	- Implications for place - Scale, efficiency and capacity: - Unitary scale & population size
Criteria 2 Efficiency and resilience	a) & b) Guiding principles on population sizes	- Scale, efficiency and capacity: - Unitary scale & population size
	c) Efficiency and VFM	- Scale, efficiency and capacity: - Financial information
	d) Managing transition cost	- Scale, efficiency and capacity: - Financial information
	e) BV intervention / EFS – not relevant f) Debt – not relevant	N/a
Criteria 3 High Quality public services	a) Improving services	- High quality & sustainable services: - Service delivery models and public sector reform
	b) public service reform	- High quality & sustainable services: - Service delivery models and public sector reform
	c) Impacts on critical services	- High quality & sustainable services: - Services safeguarded for those who need them most.
Criteria 4 Local Identity	a) Local collaboration	- Covered in spine proposal
	b) Local identity, culture, history	- Implications for place
	c) Local engagement	- Meets local needs and informed by local views
	a) Existing case – not relevant	N/a

Criteria 5 Supporting Devolution	b) 'unlock devolution'	- Implications for place: - Enabling devolution
	c) Population ratios and timelines	- Implications for place: - Enabling devolution
Criteria 6 Community Empowerment:	a) Community engagement	- Community empowerment
	b) Building on existing arrangements	- Community empowerment

THE PROPOSITION (MHCLG CRITERION 1)

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSAL

COMBINING THE SCALE TO DELIVER WITH THE AGILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS OF COUNCILS ROOTED IN PLACE

This proposal presents a vision for four new unitary authorities in Hertfordshire that will transform local government services, unlock the potential of our people and places, and enable our communities to flourish. Local government reorganisation is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rethink how councils can best serve our communities, responding to what matters most to local people, enabling inclusive growth that benefits residents, delivering improved local services, and working closely with communities to respond to the challenges of the future.

To do this, at the heart of this vision are three clear commitments to residents:

- Councils with the insight and capacity to shape services around the needs and priorities of their communities, based in geographies that local communities relate to and with local knowledge embedded in decision-making and design.
- Councillors who are visible and connected, championing local priorities and ensuring residents' voices influence decisions.
- Authorities designed at the right size to deliver high-quality, efficient services today and to scale as Hertfordshire grows. They are large enough to sustain specialist capacity and share functions where this adds value, yet close enough to stay responsive, accountable and efficient.

This proposal is written on the basis of the modified 4UA configuration as we judge the modified arrangement to be the strongest option for Hertfordshire. We believe the base 4UA configuration also meets the government criteria to a lesser degree, which is why this submission focuses on the modified boundaries. We have adopted the modified configuration because it achieves a better balance of starting populations across the four authorities, presents more coherent geographies that reflect how people live, travel and work, and aligns more closely with the criteria. Our rationale is set out throughout this proposal. For the comparison of the base and modified proposals, see the Spine: Modification of Existing Boundaries (pages 32 to 37), Evaluation of options against MHCLG criteria (pages 40 to 46) and Appendix B: Modelling numbers used for councillor assumptions (pages 137 to 144).

The four unitary (4U) model strikes a balance between scale and local identity. Each council is large enough to deliver essential services yet small enough to stay rooted in its communities. It can be delivered in a way that is safe and legal on day one while building capability to transform how services are designed around people's needs. Boundaries follow how people live, travel and work, which allows joined-up planning across housing, transport and employment and ensures services are coordinated.

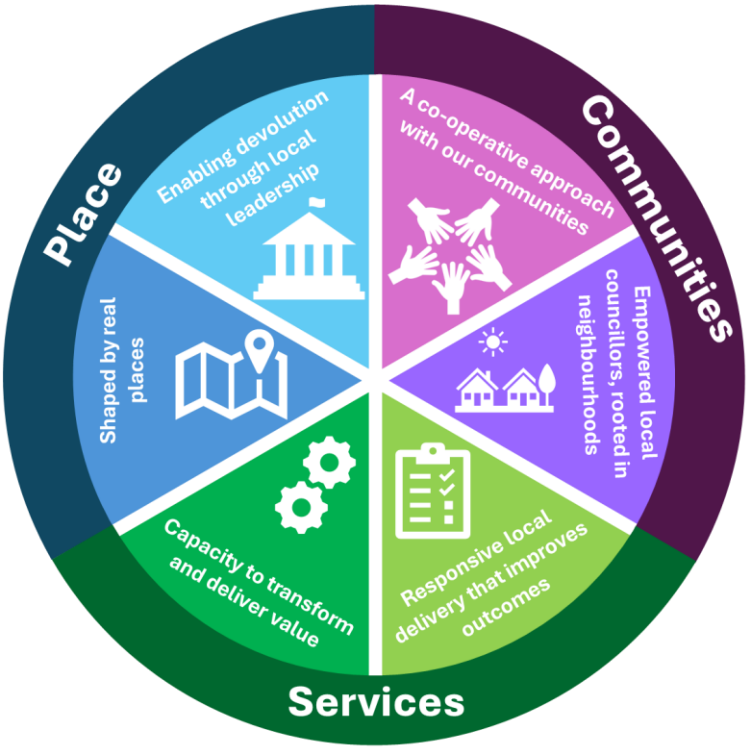
Sector analysis from the District Councils' Network (*DCN Analysis of existing unitary authorities: bigger isn't better, October 2025*) shows that councils at this scale are closer to residents and deliver better value for money per resident on core outcomes. The broad pattern is clear, greater scale alone does not correlate with improved performance or financial resilience.

Our vision is designed to build on how the county contributes to the Government's plan for change, aligning national ambitions with the practical levers councils hold over planning, transport, skills, housing and the local environment so

deliver visible improvements in people's daily lives. Four balanced unitaries combine proximity and pace, strengthening community representation in place-shaping and economic growth, providing resilience so councils can adapt to future challenges without compromising service quality, and enabling strong partnership with a Strategic Authority to drive county-wide priorities.

The following sections demonstrate how this model supports shared ambitions, responds to the challenges facing Hertfordshire and delivers local and national priorities:

- Unlocking growth and opportunity through **place-based leadership**
- Empowering **communities** with more accessible and accountable local institutions
- Delivering integrated, **prevention-focused public services** that improve outcomes



PLACE - UNLOCKING GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACROSS HERTFORDSHIRE

This proposal strengthens the ability of local government to lead and deliver place-based regeneration, economic development and housing. By creating four councils with a clear focus on local identity, the model supports a deeper understanding of place.

Councils are designed around real places, not administrative boundaries on a map. They take into account connectivity, work and housing, so choices on housing, land use, transport and employment fit the grain of each area.

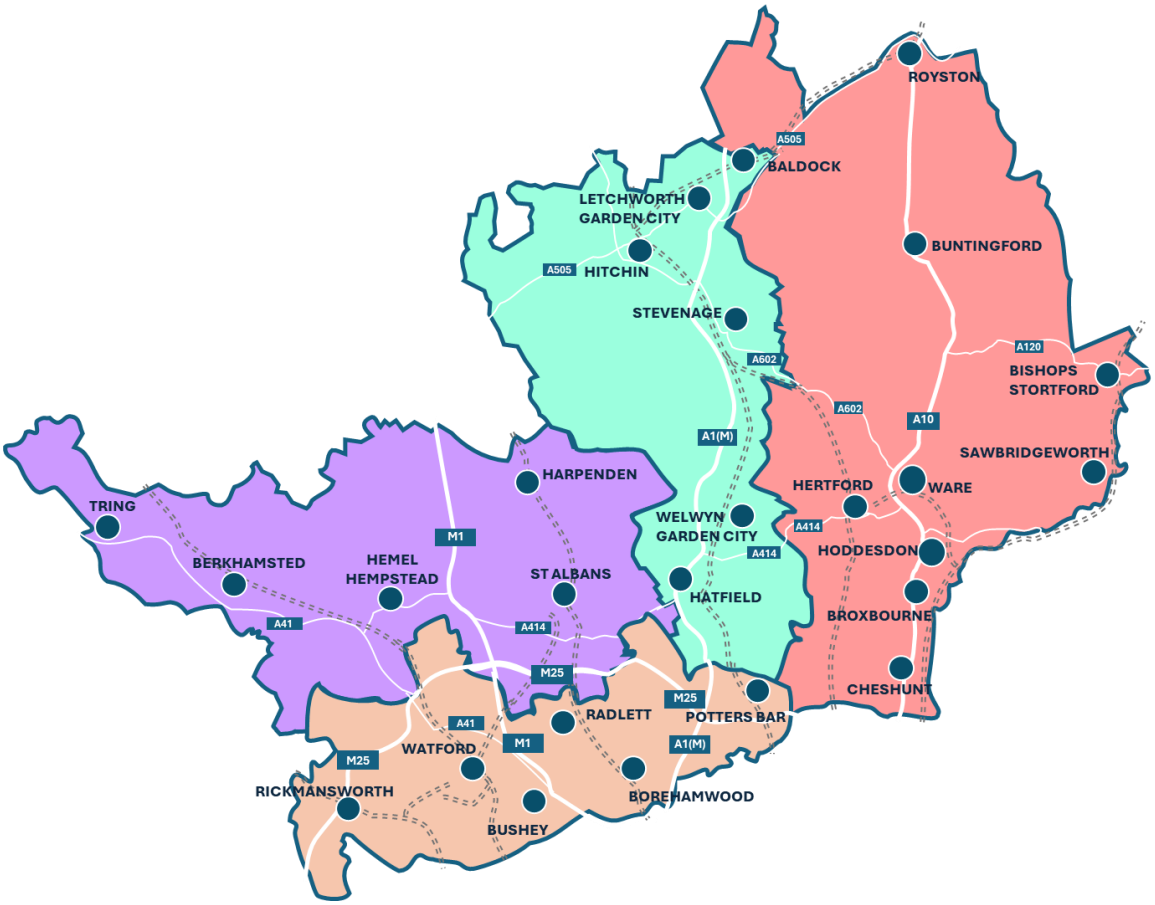
The approach is also the best choice for future partnership with a Strategic Authority. Local leadership across four distinct areas augments the broader remit of a Strategic Authority, allowing effective local tailoring of policy, practice and interventions based on the needs of different communities.

The four unitary model directly advances the Government's Plan for Change, especially the missions to boost economic growth and accelerate housebuilding. Councils built around real places align local plans with transport, utilities and employment land, identify deliverable development schemes, and plan infrastructure so new homes and jobs are delivered together. The approach strengthens accountability for housing delivery, builds capacity to deliver accelerated schemes, and keeps decisions close to communities.

1. SHAPED BY REAL PLACES

Hertfordshire's communities are shaped by how people move, work and live.

Starting from place and community means each new council has a credible organisation size, each serving populations between 290,000 and 321,000, and with and growth of between 351,000 and 391,000 expected by 2045.
It supports responsive delivery tailored to local needs and priorities, embedding local knowledge in decision making and service design. It focuses targeted investment in infrastructure, regeneration and community development where it will unlock the greatest benefits. It is the right size for Hertfordshire today and remains scalable as the county grows, remaining the right size for the Hertfordshire of the future.



Public services in Hertfordshire already operate across a range of footprints. Some services work county wide, others use large localities, and many are delivered through local teams rooted in towns and neighbourhoods. Recent national and local changes underline the need for flexibility, from the clustering of Integrated Care Boards to adjustments in Jobcentre Plus footprints. The new councils will form deep partnerships and keep clarity for residents and partners about who does what.

This approach is founded on unitary authorities built around place that remain close enough to their communities to stay connected and deliver local priorities, and large enough to deliver well.

2. ENABLING DEVOLUTION THROUGH LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Hertfordshire is ambitious about its future and we are strongly supportive of implementing a mayoral combined authority at the earliest opportunity for a county of around 1,200,000 residents and approximately £49 billion in GVA. A directly elected Mayor will provide the mandate and tools to turn shared intent on growth, housebuilding, skills and clean energy into delivery residents can see in their towns and neighbourhoods.

Four unitary councils are the right arrangements to support a Strategic Authority because they operate at a complementary scale, giving balanced representation and clear accountability. Each council is large enough to lead major programmes, small enough to stay connected to its places and providing strong, place-based delivery. They bring deep knowledge of local markets, assets and communities, so countywide missions for growth, housing, transport, skills

and net zero can be translated into credible programmes in each area. As each of the proposed authorities are of a similar size, this fosters a fair and balanced partnership, strengthening regional leadership and collective decision-making.

With that partnership in place, early mayoral priorities should focus on what funding and freedoms can make happen fastest and at scale:

- **Build more affordable, sustainable homes, aligning with Homes England funding streams**
- **Back innovation-led growth**
- **Create skills and opportunity for local communities**

COMMUNITIES - SUSTAINING LOCAL IDENTITY THROUGH VISIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE COUNCILS

This plan keeps decision-making close to the people it serves. Four mid-sized unitaries, built on recognisable places and ward-based representation, make councils visible, reachable and answerable. Residents can see who is responsible, how to influence decisions and where to go for help.

Local democracy is also strengthened through empowered councillors rooted in their communities. Retaining a ward-based model with fair elector ratios and practical geographies keeps casework manageable and representation visible. With a single tier of accountable leadership, residents know who to contact and councillors have the authority to get things done.

These proposals are shaped by what residents told us. Everyday services ranked highest with residents, especially infrastructure, waste and recycling, and parks and green spaces. Engagement also showed clear concern about councils becoming less connected to communities, with 57% of respondents highlighting this as a priority, and a strong desire to retain local identity and responsiveness. This feedback has fundamentally shaped our proposals: four councils rooted in recognisable places, ward-based representation that keeps accountability close, and simpler, clearer routes into help so residents know who is responsible and how to influence decisions.

3. A CO-OPERATIVE APPROACH WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

The four unitary model keeps local government close to the people it serves and, by design, needs a less complicated and less formal approach to community empowerment would be needed for a larger authority. Councils are rooted in recognisable places, so decision-making stays close to communities and without requiring additional governance by default.

Instead, it offers new councils a range of options to work with voluntary and community organisations, neighbourhood networks, local institutions and businesses. This includes citizens' panels and youth councils, targeted forums for under-represented groups, tenant engagement forums, participatory budgeting for small place-based projects, simple digital engagement and co-design.

Neighbourhood working will be a defining feature. Clear lines of responsibility make local partnership activity easier and faster to organise. Existing partnerships will be sustained and extended where they work. This combination strengthens prevention, builds community resilience and increases trust in the everyday decisions that affect homes, streets and services.

It strengthens delivery against the Government's plan for change by supporting an NHS focused on prevention through earlier, place-based action; making streets safer through shared problem solving with residents and local services; widening opportunity by creating flexible ways for people to shape decisions and access support.

4. EMPOWERED LOCAL COUNCILLORS, ROOTED IN COMMUNITIES

This model keeps councillors close to residents and visibly answerable for what happens in their communities. Representation is built around wards because they anchor democracy in local areas. The ward map is shaped by three elements that work together to keep things fair, recognisable and workable:

- **Electoral equality** - Each councillor represents a broadly similar number of electors.
- **Community identity** - Boundaries reflect neighbourhoods, centres and local ties people use.

- **Effective, convenient local government** - Wards are practical to travel and serve, so councillors can be present on the ground with residents and partners.

The local model reinforces the importance of working with residents, partners and communities in local areas, supporting the Government's plan for change by sharpening local accountability for safer streets, enabling earlier help and better wellbeing through neighbourhood-level action, and widening opportunity.

SERVICES - INNOVATIVE AND INTEGRATED SERVICES, SHAPED BY RESIDENTS' NEEDS

Our vision for services is clear: improving lives in ways residents can feel day to day. Residents should receive support that is joined-up, easy to access, and responsive to what matters most. By consolidating the responsibilities of the county with district and borough councils, the four unitary proposal will simplify structures, create clear accountability for residents, and preserve the local insight needed to shape services around communities and their needs.

As with all the proposals put forward in Hertfordshire, the four unitary model achieves cumulative net savings from moving from the current two-tier system. This proposal sets out the financial model used and highlights further levers that new councils can deploy after vesting day to strengthen the position and shorten the payback period, further strengthening financial sustainability and value for money for our residents.

5. RESPONSIVE LOCAL DELIVERY THAT IMPROVES OUTCOMES

The case for change is clear. While there has been an increase of jobs numbers and GVA in Hertfordshire, there are a number of challenges in some communities as skills, transport, and housing do not always line up with opportunity.

For example, aligning housing, social care, employment support and benefits advice into the same organisation removes the fragmentation that can exist between different organisations. Any form of reorganisation would help to resolve these splits by consolidating functions, but the four unitary model goes further by putting this integration where residents experience it through connected neighbourhood teams with an understanding of place and the tools to respond to local challenges.

6. CAPACITY TO TRANSFORM AND DELIVER VALUE

Local public services face rising demand, tighter funding and more complex needs, while residents rightly expect good quality, accessible services that meet their needs. Several national reviews are underway, focussed on Children's Social Care, SEND, the Casey Review, the Fair Funding Review and changes to the Planning and Infrastructure landscape. Ensuring that key services are safe and legal on day one is non-negotiable. At the same time, it is vital that local councils are designed to have the capability to deliver services in local areas and with partners.

There is strong evidence that unitary authorities in the 250,000 to 350,000 range are an effective scale. Analysis by the District Councils' Network finds little consistent link between very large populations and better value for money or stronger performance. In a number of services, smaller or mid-sized councils match or outperform larger ones, and larger bodies have more often sought exceptional financial support relative to their size. We will learn from high-performing authorities of a similar size, including close neighbours such as Milton Keynes and Central Bedfordshire, adopting what works.

The four-unitary structure intends to create new councils with agility to change over time. To safely manage change, robust plans will be in place for the organisations to be safe and legal on day one, with the potential to use some shared services where there is benefit to residents in doing so. Equally, some former district functions may be aggregated where a single service gives residents a better outcome. The test in every case is simple: does this choice improve experience, reliability and outcomes for people and places?

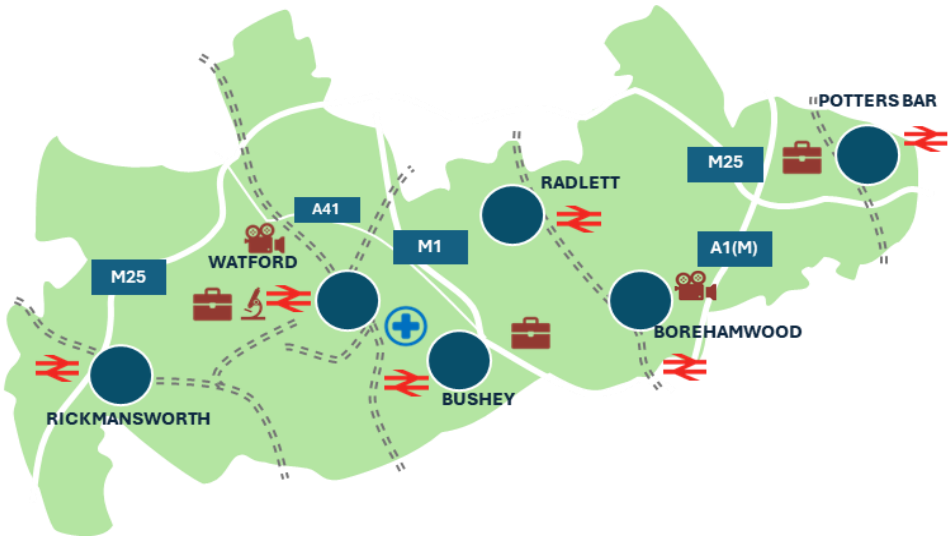
IMPLICATIONS FOR PLACE

Our vision for four unitaries in Hertfordshire is shaped by the lived experience of our residents and communities. Each has a centre of gravity and identity that people recognise in daily life, seen in how residents travel, work, learn and use services. Starting from this lived experience, we propose four new councils that are close to communities and capable of delivering broader strategic priorities. The voice of residents is at the heart of our plan, having expressed their preference for locally connected councils that recognise existing locality differences and historic traditions.

Our proposal for four authorities of comparable size and credible scale, provides a balanced approach bringing the right combination of scale and financial sustainability whilst also keeping identity rooted in place. The overviews that follow set out each area's distinct character, the opportunities it can unlock, and why this geography works.

SOUTH WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

World-class studios at the heart of a creative powerhouse, at the capital's edge



Key	
Settlement	
Train Station	
Hospital	
Life Science	
Business Park	
Film & TV	

Population & Place	
Population (mid-2024)	313,190
2045 Population Estimate	371,000
% Working-Aged	63.20%
Geographical Area	211.46 km^2
Population Density	1,456

Economy & Skills	
GVA	£14,494*
Active businesses	15,655*
Employment Rate	87.31%*
Economic Activity Rate	82.35%
% with L4+ Qualifications	48.40%

Housing Development	
No. of Households	126,378
Housing Affordability Ratio	9.36*
Housing need	2,344*

Democracy & Representation	
No. of Wards	47
No. of Cllrs	89
Population / Cllr Ratio	3,551

Key Assets		Main Settlements	
Key Employment Sites	**NHS Hospitals**	**Settlement**	**Population Size**
Elstree & Leavesden (Three Rivers) - Film & TV	Watford General Hospital	Borehamwood	36,322
BRE (Watford) – Science Park		Bushey	28,416
Watford/Croxley Business Park (Watford) – Business Campus		Potters Bar	22,536
Potters Bar (Hertsmere) – Business Campus		Radlett	10,060
Centennial Business Park (Hertsmere) – Business Campus		Rickmansworth	25,413
		Watford	102,300

South West Hertfordshire has the closest day-to-day links to London while retaining a strong local centre of gravity. Bringing together Watford, Three Rivers and Hertsmere, the area is home to around 313,190 residents today, with growth projected to roughly 371,000 by 2045.

Settlement form is varied. Watford connects with a wider network of towns and suburbs that include Elstree & Borehamwood, Bushey, Rickmansworth and Potters Bar. These centres support active high streets and local employment, with strong civic and community infrastructure. Town and district centres are well connected and provide the social and cultural offer that keeps activity local even as many residents commute.

Place identity remains clear. Watford functions as a regional service centre, complemented by a network of towns and neighbourhoods across Three Rivers and Hertsmere which act as social and economic hubs in their own right. Green Belt landscapes provide a balance between the city and countryside with river valleys and canals, open fields, parks and wide green spaces providing an escape from city living, a place to enjoy time with family and friends, but within easy reach of all the capital has to offer.

The M25, M1, A1 and A41 frame movement within South West Hertfordshire with Watford Junction on the West Coast Main Line and London Overground, Metropolitan and Chiltern services through Three Rivers, Thameslink and Great Northern services through Hertsmere. High-frequency rail into central London and easy orbital access to the wider south of England shape daily life, with labour markets and supply chains that cross the boundary every day. Heathrow and Luton airports are also within close reach. This cluster of major arterial routes provides connectivity beyond the Hertfordshire boundaries to the whole country making the area a focus of inward investment and growth.

Combined Gross-Value Added (GVA) for South West Hertfordshire unitary is £15.744 billion (2023) and growth here is primarily about making the most of well-connected town centres with creative industry clusters including major studios and their suppliers, focused on historic and thriving film and television studios at both Leavesden and Borehamwood and Elstree. Recent investment by Warner Brothers, Sky, Oxygen Studios (at the former British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Elstree site) and at Hertsmere's own Elstree Studios reflects an ongoing commitment to the area and has a positive effect on the local economy, creating jobs and opportunities for the surrounding community.

This sector is complemented by a wider economic mix with strong professional services, biomedical life sciences, public sector employment and a budding avionics specialism developing at London Elstree Aerodrome. The area is attracting investment in new technology as illustrated by the recent planning approval of a state of the art data centre in South Mimms. The centre will be Europe's largest cloud and AI data centre making this part of Hertfordshire integral to meeting the existing cloud shortfall and catering for the anticipated increase in demand. Bringing in £21.4m of business rates once operational and generating £1.1bn pa GVA, this approved data centre will make significant financial contributions to employment, skills and opportunities locally: thus, solidifying the area as a technology and media superhub, and complementing a similar development at Abbots Langley in Three Rivers. The area remains attractive to small businesses who want close links to London and travel options whilst having access to local service centres and receiving considerable small business support. The range of highly regarded independent schools reflects the area's desirability to high net worth individuals and businesses.

Our communities are increasingly diverse with Watford (54.2% of residents are from ethnic minority groups) and Hertsmere (36.9% of residents from an ethnic minority group) being the two most diverse districts in the county with Three Rivers (32.1%) as the fourth most diverse (2021 Census). Hertsmere is also home to the largest Jewish population outside of London. Whilst the locality is generally affluent, pockets of deprivation do exist, bringing with them inequalities in health, educational attainment, housing and life chances for some parts of the community, The South West Hertfordshire Local Housing Needs Assessment identifies a notable need for affordable housing and confirms that this is an important and pressing issue. A South West Hertfordshire unitary would be well placed to address these joint challenges, utilising relationships with local Registered Social Landlords.

The environment of Three Rivers, Watford and Hertsmere is significant in influencing the character of the area and supporting the quality of life of local communities. The landscape is a complex mix of rural and urban areas, woodlands, wildlife habitats, farmland, water features and other land forms. The Rivers Colne, Gade and Chess along with Aldenham Reservoir and Tykes Water, are important resources in terms of landscape, biodiversity and access to open space, and form the basis of a Green and Blue Infrastructure network.

Set alongside the more Chilterns-facing West Hertfordshire, South West Hertfordshire retains a distinct identity. The M25 is the defining seam across the western half of the county, shaping travel choices, service catchments and development patterns. It is this orbital influence, rather than a London identity, which most clearly differentiates South West Hertfordshire and demonstrates why the two areas are best planned and led in their own right.

British Hollywood – Case Study – Investment in Film and Television in South West Hertfordshire

Film and Television have been part of South West Hertfordshire's heritage for over 100 years. Six historic studios including MGM-British, Fairbank (Former BBC Elstree Centre) and Elstree Studios have been based in Hertsmere and many stars of the big and small screen have worked in the borough with film credits including The Shining and world famous franchises like Indiana Jones and Star Wars alongside cult television classics including The Avengers and The Prisoner.
Leavesden Studios, established in 1994 was purchased by Warner Brothers in 2010 and since then has seen investment of over £150 million to create a purpose built, production facility, alongside the world famous tourist attraction; Warner Bros Studio Tour London: The Making of Harry Potter.

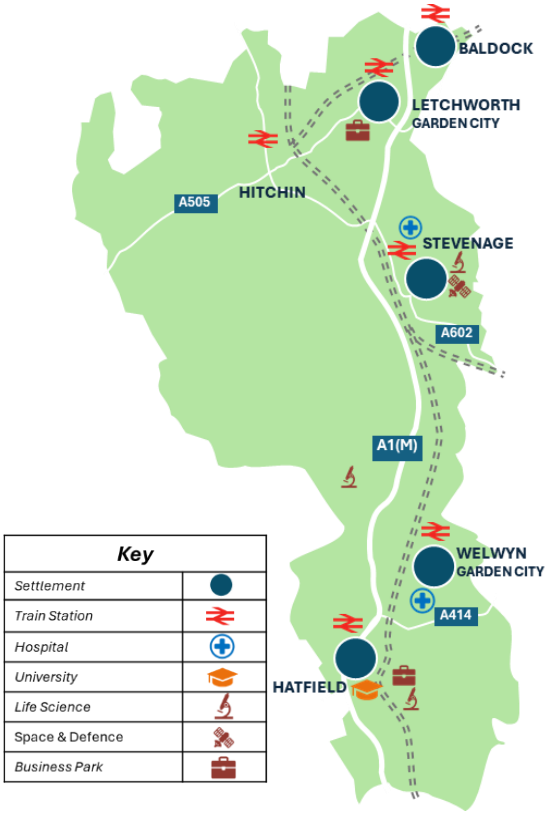
Borehamwood is home to BBC Elstree with the newly refurbished EastEnders set. Following recent approval for investment from Oxygen Studios, the former BBC Elstree Centre, now renamed Fairbanks Studios, will also be

transformed into a modern production facility. The project includes five brand new, state-of-the-art stages, a new landmark creative 'Media Hub', and associated workshops, backlot and staff amenities. The new studios are expected to generate £80 million inward investment per year, support the continued growth of the film and high-end television in the United Kingdom (UK) and creating new jobs and training opportunities.

The Council owned Elstree Studios, home to the original Big Brother and The Crown, is celebrating its centenary year with Strictly Come Dancing and The Chase some of the many well-loved television shows being made on the site. Sky Studios Elstree, which opened in 2023, already has blockbusters Wicked and the latest in the Paddington franchise to its name. On its own, the facility is forecast to deliver £3 billion of production activity within its first five years by Sky, and the recently approved plans for an additional 10 stages are anticipated to enable a further £2 billion of production. The area is also home to the Elstree Screen Arts Academy; a University technical college specifically focused on the creative industry. These sites continue to create jobs and opportunities for the local community and make a considerable contribution to the local economy of South West Hertfordshire.

CENTRAL HERTFORDSHIRE

Garden City heritage, New Town energy and a corridor of innovation



Population & Place	
Population (mid-2024)	320,795
2045 Population Estimate	391,000
% Working-Aged	64.10%
Geographical Area	337 km^2
Population Density	936.72

Economy & Skills	
GVA	£14,494*
Active businesses	15,655*
Employment Rate	87.31%*
Economic Activity Rate	82.35%
% with L4+ Qualifications	48.40%

Housing Development	
No. of Households	126,378
Housing Affordability Ratio	9.36*
Housing need	2,344*

Democracy & Representation	
No. of Wards	47
No. of Cllrs	89
Population / Cllr Ratio	3,551

Key Assets		Main Settlements	
Key Employment Sites	**NHS Hospitals**	**Settlement**	**Population Size**
Gunnels Wood (Stevenage) – Space & Defence, Life Sciences	Lister Hospital	Letchworth Garden City	33,990
Hatfield Business Park (Welwyn Hatfield) – Business Campus	QEII Hospital	Hitchin	35,220
Letchworth Garden City Main Employment Area – Business Campus	**Universities**	Stevenage	90,146
Marshmoor Business Park, Welham Green (Welwyn Hatfield) - Life sciences	University of Hertfordshire	Welwyn Garden City	51,524
Welwyn Garden City Industrial Area (Welwyn Hatfield) – Business Campus		Hatfield	41,265

The backbone of Central Hertfordshire is formed by a network of historic towns, new towns and garden cities and employment areas along the A1(M) and the East Coast Main Line. The area is home to an estimated 321,000 people today, with growth projected to 391,000 by 2045. Stevenage sits at the centre of the geography, with Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield to the south and Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock forming a strong northern arc. Regular trips for work, study, healthcare and shopping move up and down the corridor, reinforcing a single everyday geography that people recognise.

Rail and road closely align here and that alignment shapes daily choices. Great Northern and Thameslink services link the towns to London, Cambridge and Peterborough, with other local train connections reaching toward the south of the corridor. The A1(M) is the backbone for movement between town centres, campuses and business parks, while most cross-corridor journeys rely on the A414, A602 and A505 due to limited east to west rail options. Commuting patterns reflect this reality; the footprint sits within the Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City Travel to Work Areas (TTWA), so jobs and skills catchments run with the corridor rather than into the Lea Valley.

The settlement pattern is town-based and works in combination. Stevenage is at the centre of this corridor, with Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield forming a closely linked southern pair. Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock complete the northern arc. Planned neighbourhoods, green corridors and compact high streets sit alongside stations, colleges and business parks. There is proud Garden City heritage in Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth, through which their residents continue to identify shape the feel of towns, neighbourhoods and civic centres, while Stevenage and Hatfield's New Town form provide employment space, a range of housing, green spaces and local facilities. Historic towns such as Hitchin provide attractive local services, alongside a number of smaller villages and rural areas across this part of the county.

The economic base is broad and nationally significant. Around Stevenage, a life sciences cluster spans research, scale-up and advanced therapy manufacturing, supported by specialist lab space and an experienced supply chain. Space, defence and advanced engineering add depth through major employers and their contractors. Further south, a strong headquarters economy includes corporate offices in Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, alongside a wide mix of digital, logistics and professional services across the business parks. In the northern towns, Hitchin's independent-led centre supports creative, digital and professional services with a dense base of small firms; Letchworth Garden City's business park host manufacturing, engineering and design businesses alongside food and building products; and Baldock plays a strategic role on the A1 corridor with light industrial and logistics linking into advanced manufacturing supply chains. The result is a corridor that blends Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)-led growth with corporate services and local enterprise, spreading higher value jobs across all of the main towns.

Skills and research capacity are a defining strength and set Central Hertfordshire apart. The University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield is a major presence, with over 36,000 students across the College Lane and de Havilland campuses. The Royal Veterinary College (RVC), the UK's largest and longest established independent veterinary school, has a 230-hectare campus based in Hawkshead Lane Hatfield. Further education and sixth-form provision in the main towns adds breadth, with employer partnerships enabling routes into STEM, construction and professional services, and keeps higher-level opportunities within reach of residents across the corridor.

Case Study - University of Hertfordshire

The University of Hertfordshire is a major anchor for Central Hertfordshire's skills, research and innovation system. It convenes employers and universities, aligning teaching, research and enterprise with local growth.

In September 2024 the University opened the Spectra Building, a £100 million home for engineering and computer science that strengthens STEM teaching, spin-out potential and links with business. Its Estates Vision 2035 sets out renewal, including a new School of Health and Social Work and the creation of a School of Medicine, the first in Hertfordshire, with the inaugural cohort expected in September 2026.

UH sits at the heart of one of the UK's most dynamic life sciences corridors. Within ten miles are firms including GSK, Roche, Eisai, the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst and the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult. These links translate into joint research, placements and employer-designed curricula, building a steady talent pipeline and supporting innovation across biotech, health and advanced manufacturing.

The University is also a committed civic partner. Through the Hatfield 2030+ Place Board it works with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and other stakeholders to shape the long-term transformation of the town centre, focusing on infrastructure, public spaces, housing and the local economy.

Across the Central Hertfordshire footprint, UH helps bridge academia and industry through research partnerships, specialist facilities, incubation space and graduate entrepreneurship. Its programmes strengthen the local workforce, draw investment and support inclusive growth. As Central Hertfordshire develops its wider innovation offer, the University's role as educator, researcher and civic institution positions it to power the next phase of growth.

The jobs outlook reflects these strengths. Current regeneration and investment programmes indicate potential for up to 15,000 additional jobs in and around Stevenage and surrounding areas by 2040, with many of these in STEM roles across

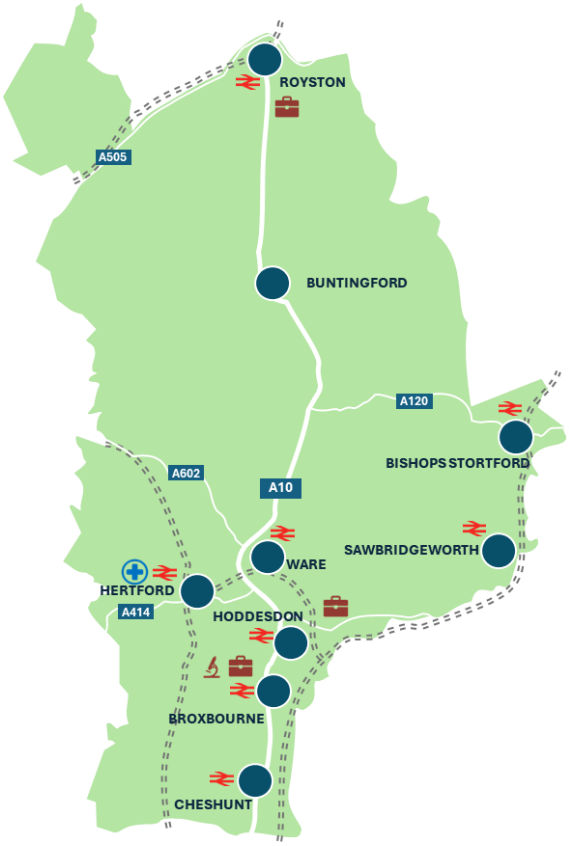
life sciences, advanced manufacturing and engineering. That growth is expected to radiate along the corridor through supply chains and commuting, complementing the headquarters and digital economy further south and the creative-professional base in the northern towns.

Growth and renewal focus on existing centres and stations. In Stevenage, a long-term town-centre programme is reshaping the heart of the town. Proposed improvements to the station arrival area, and opening up new homes, workspace and community prospects in a walkable core. In Welwyn Garden City, the Wheat Quarter is turning the former Shredded Wheat site into a mixed urban neighbourhood beside the station, adding homes, employment space and public realm at a highly accessible location. In Hatfield, a rolling town-centre programme is bringing forward new housing and refreshed public spaces, supported by the scale of employment at the business park. In the north, Hitchin's Churchgate area is advancing on a heritage-led approach to the centre, and planned growth at Baldock provides additional capacity linked to the A1 corridor. Across the unitary, these schemes are paired with street improvements, bus priority and new cycling and walking links so that development strengthens high streets and neighbourhoods rather than outpacing them.

Housing demand is high, including for affordable homes, with local plans providing space for town centre renewal, reinvestment in neighbourhoods and a mix of affordable housing, town centre, and family homes. A mix of market, affordable and key-worker homes will be focused within locations with good access to rail, town-centre services and employment, helping more people live closer to study and work opportunities. With the population expected to rise to around 391,000 by 2045, this approach provides a credible path to new homes and jobs to benefit the communities of Central Hertfordshire.

EASTERN HERTFORDSHIRE

Market towns, attractive countryside, a growing economy and Harlow-Gilston



Population & Place	
Population (mid-2024)	289,774
2045 Population Estimate	366,000
% Working-Aged	62.90%
Geographical Area	721 km^2
Population Density	395

Economy & Skills	
GVA	£7,945*
Active businesses	13,390*
Employment Rate	72.19%*
Economic Activity Rate	81.60%
% with L4+ Qualifications	47.04%

Housing Development	
No. of Households	114,922
Housing Affordability Ratio	9.6*
Housing need	2,040*

Democracy & Representation	
No. of Wards	43
No. of Cllrs	75
Population / Cllr Ratio	3,799

Key	
Settlement	
Train Station	
Hospital	
Life Science	
Business Park	

Key Assets		Main Settlements	
Key Employment Sites	**NHS Hospitals**	**Settlement**	**Population Size**
Park Plaza West(Broxbourne) - Business Campus, life sciences	Hertford County Hospital	Cheshunt	43,680
Hoddesdon Business Park - Business Campus		Hoddesdon	40,630
York Way Main Employment Area Royston (North Herts) – Business Campus		Hertford	28,802
		Sawbridgeworth	8,700
		Bishops Stortford	40,909
		Royston	17,448
		Ware	19,622

The new unitary authority of Eastern Hertfordshire will encompass the current East Hertfordshire District and Broxbourne Borough, which would be supplemented by the ward of Northaw and Cuffley currently in Welwyn Hatfield Borough and the North Hertfordshire District Council wards of Arbury, Ermine, Royston Heath, Royston Meridian, Royston Palace, and Weston and Sandon following the approval of boundary changes, as part of this proposal.

Eastern Hertfordshire has a distinctive local identity offering strong road connectivity via the A10 and good access to the M25. The A10 is a critical transport route that traces the line of the ancient Roman Ermine Street, running almost straight from south to north through the centre of the new authority's area, from London and the M25 in the south up to Cambridge in the north.

Rail access is provided by two mainline routes into London, with Thameslink and Great Northern services running to the capital. The pattern of rail links broadly follows the Ermine Street/A10 corridor. Stansted Airport, which is located around four miles from Bishop's Stortford, is a key driver of the local economy, directly employing residents from within Eastern Hertfordshire. It is also a pivotal component of the UK Innovation Corridor (https://innovationcorridor.uk/), highlighting its strategic importance to the region's economy.

The A414 serves as an important east-west corridor in Hertfordshire, connecting key towns, as well as linking to Harlow in Essex and the M11 motorway. The A120 is another vital east-west link, crucial to connecting Eastern Hertfordshire to Stansted Airport and beyond. However, public transport connectivity east to west is limited, with few direct rail options across the county and most services oriented north to south. Travel to Work patterns in Eastern Hertfordshire show a net commuter outflow, with significant numbers of residents in the south of the area commuting to London, in particular from Broxbourne Borough and Northaw and Cuffley. Outside these southern areas, most of Eastern Hertfordshire aligns with the Cambridge area, rather than the Stevenage and Welwyn Travel to Work area immediately to the west. The Cambridge Travel to Work Area is one of the fastest expanding in England, indicating increasing economic activity and a greater draw for workers from further afield, including from towns in East Hertfordshire such as Royston and Bishop's Stortford.

Eastern Hertfordshire is mainly characterised by market towns and villages in a rural hinterland; only in the south of the unitary area close to the M25 in Broxbourne Borough is there continuous urban development. The largest towns are Bishops Stortford, Cheshunt and Hoddesdon and Hertford. There are no large towns as there are in the other three unitary areas, such as Watford, Hemel Hempstead or Stevenage, and the overall population density is lower than in the other three unitary areas. The A10, a dual carriageway as it runs north from the M25 is reduced to a single carriageway from Bishops Stortford northward. The northern part of the area has a largely rural character, alongside Royston, Buntingford and villages.

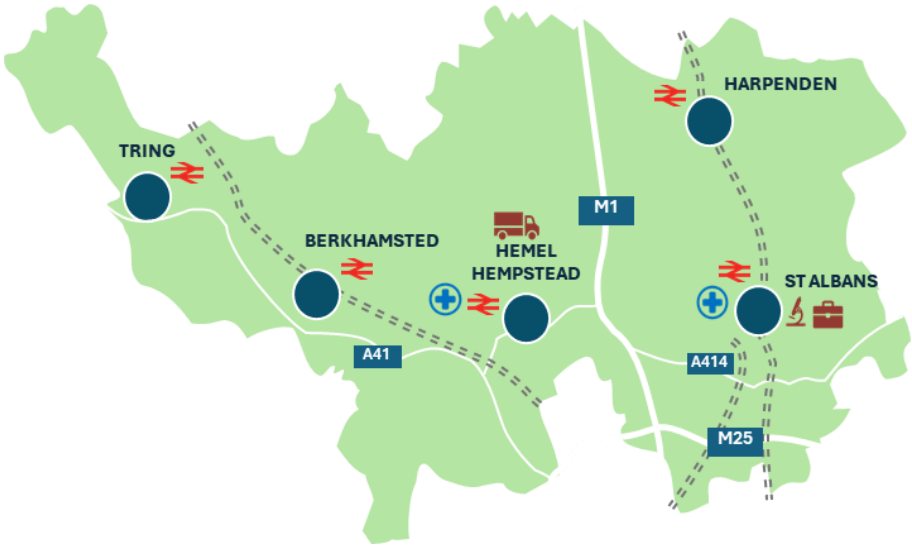
New economic opportunities have been created in Eastern Hertfordshire by the significant growth of the pharmaceutical, biotech and other knowledge-based industries in the region, particularly around Cambridge to the north. Stansted Airport is also a magnet for jobs and has contributed to major growth in Bishops Stortford over the last fifteen years. Eastern Hertfordshire is at the heart of the developing UK Innovation Corridor, linking London and Cambridge with a new Google datacentre in Cheshunt, pharmaceutical companies in Ware (GSK) and Hoddesdon (Pharmaron), as well as the national construction company Volker Fitzpatrick in Hoddesdon. However, the local economy is currently dominated by small and medium sized enterprises. The most significant economic challenges are to improve the availability of superfast broadband in the more rural parts of the unitary area and to develop the skills of the local workforce to take advantage of high-paying new jobs in biotech, pharmaceuticals, engineering and ICT.

Eastern Hertfordshire is widely recognised as a desirable area to live and there is significant demand for housing. There is more availability of land than in other parts of Hertfordshire with large development sites such as Gilston, a new town to be built on the border with Essex next to Harlow, and Brookfield Garden Village in Cheshunt, both of which have secured planning permission. The population is expected to increase by 28% over the next 20 years to reach 366,000. A single unitary authority for Eastern Hertfordshire will be best placed to focus on driving these new housing developments forward.

A new town centre has planning permission at Brookfield within the existing Broxbourne Borough and is expected to be complete by the early 2030s. Being immediately adjacent to the A10, it will conveniently serve the needs of the residents of the Eastern Hertfordshire unitary authority.

NORTH WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

A historic city, heritage towns, Chiltern landscapes and vibrant economy



Key	
Settlement	
Train Station	
Hospital	
Life Science	
Business Park	
Logistics and Distribution	

Population & Place	
Population (mid-2024)	312,432
2045 Population Estimate	371,000
% Working-Aged	63.20%
Geographical Area	211.46 km^2
Population Density	1,456

Economy & Skills	
GVA	£15,744
Active businesses	19,765
Employment Rate	71.13%
Economic Activity Rate	75.37%
% with L4+ Qualifications	57.36%

Democracy & Representation	
No. of Wards	41
No. of Cllrs	79
Population / Cllr Ratio	3,897

Housing Development	
No. of Households	119,768
Housing Affordability Ratio	11.36
Housing need	2,697

Key Assets		Main Settlements	
Key Employment Sites	**NHS Hospitals**	**Settlement**	**Population Size**
BRE (St Albans) – Business Campus, Research Facility	Hemel Hempstead Hospital	Hemel Hempstead	95,961
Maylands Business Park (Dacorum/St Albans) - Logistics and Distribution	St Albans City Hospital	Berkhamsted	21,245
Rothamsted (St Albans) - Life Sciences		Tring	12,427
		St Albans	148,200

The new unitary authority of North West Hertfordshire will bring together the places currently served by Dacorum and St Albans City and District into a single council for the west of the county. Home to around 312,432 residents, it has the scale to plan transport, housing and regeneration coherently while keeping decision-making close to communities.

Settlement form is varied and complementary. An attractive cathedral city sits alongside a major post-war New Town, two market towns and a network of villages and parishes. The principal centres are Hemel Hempstead, St Albans, Harpenden, Berkhamsted and Tring. These places share deep roots, from the historic Hundred of Dacorum to St Albans' Roman city of Verulamium. Town centres across the area mix independent retail with national brands and a growing cultural and hospitality offer. Local plan work and town centre visions are steering renewal to the right places with attention to walkability, public realm and civic space. These centres also act as service hubs for surrounding villages, with secondary schools, health services, leisure venues and active parish and town councils anchoring local civic life.

The Chilterns National Landscape frames the North West of the area, giving a distinctive chalk downland setting that shapes townscape, views and routes. Well known destinations such as Ashridge Estate and Tring Park sit alongside prestigious green spaces like Gadebridge Park, Verulamium Park and the Box Moor Trust commons. A network of paths and former rail alignments provides links between neighbourhoods and stations. Chalk streams, notably the River Ver as well as the Gade and Bulbourne, and the Grand Union Canal create a connected blue-green corridor that supports nature recovery, reduces flood risk and offers traffic-free routes for walking and cycling. Tring Reservoirs and nearby woodlands add to the area's biodiversity and recreation offer. These landscapes also draw visitors year-round, supporting local hospitality and outdoor recreation alongside conservation. Ongoing chalk grassland restoration and access schemes are opening more of the landscape for everyday use, while careful management of the chalk aquifer and river catchments sustains habitats and water quality.

The economic base is broad and resilient. Maylands Business Park is one of the largest employment locations in the region, home to several hundred firms across logistics, construction, advanced manufacturing and related services.

Alongside this sits a strong professional services community and a nationally significant science presence at Rothamsted Research in Harpenden, one of the world's longest running agricultural research institutions. Residents enjoy high quality of life indicators, with above-average incomes, high employment and some of the lowest deprivation levels nationally. Surveys consistently show strong satisfaction with local areas as places to live, underpinned by good schools, health outcomes and access to green space. Smaller employment areas across the main towns support creative services, professional practices and start-ups, complemented by town-centre workspaces and flexible offices that keep jobs close to high streets. Together with a well-established small and medium sized enterprise base, paired with high skillset levels, this proposal provides a balanced economy and a platform for further investment.

New development is being planned in places where transport is frequent and services can grow with it. Hemel Garden Communities will bring about 11,000 new homes and significant numbers of new jobs by 2050, with new schools, primary care capacity, local centres and green routes built in from the start. With the population projected to reach around 351,000 by 2045, town centre renewal and station-area intensification will focus higher density homes and jobs where rail and bus links are strongest, so investment strengthens high streets and neighbourhoods rather than outpacing them. Planned investment includes additional school places, expanded primary care, bus priority and mobility hubs, and new cycling and walking links tying into the Nickey Line and the Grand Union Canal towpaths.

Its shape and daily rhythms are set by two north to south rail corridors; the M1 and A41, with the A414 as the principal east to west spine linking towns across Hertfordshire and to nearby airports. It also connects with the Luton Travel to Work Area, reflecting commuting patterns that are strongly Hertfordshire facing, even with frequent rail into the capital. The West Coast Main Line serves Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring with direct services to London Euston and the Midlands, while Thameslink connects St Albans City and Harpenden into central London. Local stations at neighbourhood scale give fine-grained access for everyday trips, and peak services support frequent commuting. Orbital journeys are well served by the motorway network, with rapid access to Luton and Heathrow via the M1, M25 and rail interchanges. The M25 then forms the seam between North West and South West Hertfordshire, marking the point where day to day catchments tend to run across the county rather than into outer London. The challenge ahead for the new North West Hertfordshire authority will be to manage growth while protecting the area's countryside and ensuring all communities share in the benefits of change.

BOUNDARIES ALIGNED TO SIZE AND COMMUNITY FOOTPRINTS

This section sets out the modified proposal and explains how it differs from the base proposal, which retains existing district and borough boundaries and is set out in the Spine. We judge the modified arrangement to be the strongest solution for Hertfordshire, while recognising that the base 4UA configuration also meets the government criteria to a lesser degree. In summary, the modified configuration:

- Balances starting populations so the four authorities begin as equal partners.
- Provides a better aligned geographic fit that reflects how people live, travel and work.
- Offers the closest overall match to the government criteria, including population and functional geographies.

It is recognised that in order to seek starting populations for each unitary authority of close to 300,000 the proposal requires footprints that require some amendment to the existing district and borough boundaries. We note the Government's Guidance issued on 5 February 2025 that "Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered." We further note the guidance stated, "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, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation." The explanation for the proposed changes is expanded on below, but it is our position that the proposed boundary changes do not add significant costs or complexity, in the context of the wider programme of aggregation and disaggregation of services that will be undertaken across the existing eleven Hertfordshire authorities. The proposed changes are internal to Hertfordshire and do not impact upon wider public services, or other geographical areas.

Following discussion with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), it is our position that the proposed boundary changes can simply be put in place through the Structural Changes Order which creates the new unitary authorities. It is noted that previous Structural Changes Orders included the list of existing wards or divisions which make up the new unitary authority, which means that there is a mechanism to make these changes through simple drafting of the legislation. We acknowledge the feedback

from MHCLG officials that there is a risk to this approach as it has not been tested previously, however our position is that there is a significantly greater risk and implication for the new unitary authorities of delaying these proposed boundary changes to a subsequent Principal Area Boundary Review (PABR) (the alternative mechanism for making the change). Within Hertfordshire we will be undertaking a significant programme of aggregation of existing district and borough council services and disaggregation of County Council services, with significant cost and capacity implications. We are also looking to take the opportunity to transform the delivery of our services, particularly by embedding new technology within the structures of the new unitary authorities. We hope to drive this change programme as efficiently and effectively as possible, to drive productivity and savings. If the four new unitary authorities are created on the existing district and borough footprint, this change and transformation programme will be compromised, as it may be more financially efficient to await the outcome of the PABR before undertaking this work, or alternatively if the work progresses there will be further disruption for the Central and East authorities and further aggregation and disaggregation of services after the PABR is undertaken and implemented. This prolongs the disruption of reorganisation, draws out the uncertainty for staff and councillors and will inevitably impact the new unitary authorities financially.

It is therefore our clear request to Government that the proposed boundary changes are included within the Structural Changes Order so that the new unitary authorities are able to 'go live' with their permanent footprint. We recognise that for a short time (approximately 11 months from May 2027 to April 2028) this could mean councillors from a predecessor authority being members of a different shadow authority to the majority of councillors they sit with, however this will affect a relatively small number of councillors and mechanisms will be put in place to help support those members and mitigate impact.

Summary

Under the modified proposal, Eastern Hertfordshire would include two areas separated from their previous district councils: the wards for the town of Royston and surrounding villages that are currently in North Herts, and the ward of Northaw and Cuffley, which is currently in Welwyn Hatfield borough. These areas fit more naturally within Eastern Hertfordshire than within the proposed Central Hertfordshire unitary area. Mid-2024 starting populations are approximately 290,000 in Eastern Hertfordshire and 321,000 in Central Hertfordshire. The modified configuration enables four authorities to start as equal partners, produces clearer and more coherent geographies for Central and Eastern Hertfordshire, and offers the closest match to the government criteria compared with the base configuration. Both the base and modified configurations are set out in the Spine. The following justification sets out the detailed geographic and place-based reasoning for these changes.

Royston
Royston and the surrounding wards sit more naturally within an authority aligned to the A10 corridor with its strong north to south links to London and Cambridge than to the A1 corridor that shapes Central Hertfordshire. The wards proposed to transfer are predominantly in and around Royston, reflecting the town's role as a hub for the northern part of the area. Historically a boundary town between Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, Royston sits at the meeting point of the A10 and A505, providing access across the county and the wider region. Commuting is reinforced by direct Great Northern services to London King's Cross and to Cambridge, reflecting the dominant north to south movement along the A10 corridor.

Transferring the Royston wards of Royston Heath, Royston Palace and Royston Meridian together with the adjacent rural wards of Ermine, Weston & Sandon and Arbury keeps the town and its hinterland intact and reflects established patterns of travel for work, learning, services and leisure. These wards together account for 25,428 residents on the 2022 mid-year estimates. Service and access patterns already look along the same corridor as East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne, which reduces cross-boundary friction and provides a clearer footprint for local services, commissioning and joint planning. The market town character, commuting flows and economic relationships align more closely with places in Eastern Hertfordshire than with those to the west. While the A505 provides an east to west connection, it is one of several lateral routes across the county and is not as central to movement and access as the dominant north to south routes.

It is acknowledged that whilst the proposal includes Arbury ward being part of the East unitary authority in order to balance population numbers, there is also an argument for Arbury to be part of the Central unitary authority due to its links to Baldock and the A1 corridor.

Northaw & Cuffley
Northaw and Cuffley is a ward with a population of approximately 5,700 residents and is at the very southern boundary of Welwyn Hatfield, as well as being immediately adjacent to both Broxbourne Borough and Hertsmere Borough. The B156 connects Northaw and Cuffley a few miles east to the A10. The village of Cuffley shares a doctor's surgery with the adjacent Broxbourne Borough village of Goffs Oak and the village hall is within the Borough of Broxbourne. Cuffley, Goffs Oak and Northaw share similar economic affluence and connections with Goffs Oak, and some residents from this part of Broxbourne Borough commute to work in central London from Cuffley station. Finally it should also be noted that from 1983 to 2024, Northaw and Cuffley were represented in Parliament by the MP for Broxbourne.

Public service arrangements in Hertfordshire
Four Councils for Hertfordshire provides a solid foundation for enhanced public sector delivery, flexibility to make change happen, alignment with communities and the flexibility to work with a range of public sector, private and community partners. The size, geography and diverse nature of Hertfordshire is reflected in the varied ways that local public services are configured on the ground. Some services operate on a county-wide footprint, some utilise a model of two large locality footprints, and others are based on localised delivery within particular districts and towns. Some strategic services now operate at a level above county administrative areas, and others are deeply embedded in neighbourhood levels. Given the different geographies, scale of the county and diversity of towns and villages, many services continue to operate through a county-wide service but with locally aligned teams.

The four councils proposal and a Hertfordshire Mayoral Strategic Authority recognises there will continue to be complexity and divergence in the organisational design and footprints of other public sector partners, but will seek to engage at the strategic level county-wide, where that can achieve the best outcomes, align closely with the crucial operational footprints of the health sector to ensure we meet the needs of vulnerable residents, and work closely with towns and neighbourhoods reflecting their different needs and opportunities.

The operational service design of public services does not remain static, and it is vital the new councils are designed to be flexible, agile and able to form deep partnerships. In recent months, several other public sector operational changes have been made including the plans to cluster Integrated Care Boards (ICB) into larger regional entities, at the same time, the NHS is strengthening neighbourhood delivery through Primary Care Networks and Neighbourhood Health Plans centred on neighbourhood health centres to develop tailored, preventative, personalised support, with active engagement from councils and local voluntary partners. This neighbourhood focus lends itself to a four councils model that can sustain consistent participation across multiple neighbourhood partnerships. Beyond health, there have been changes to the footprints of Job Centre Plus; and operational changes within Hertfordshire Constabulary to design a structure with two operational areas alongside paired district and borough policing structures. While the Government's devolution framework acts as a catalyst to reduce complexity by enabling co-terminus arrangements through partnership working, there is currently a plethora of very different public service footprints in Hertfordshire. Moving from the two tier system,

with 11 different councils being replaced by four unitary authorities, there is potential to strengthen the relationships and integration with a range of partners all of whom have their own footprint, offering clear interfaces to strategic bodies and close alignment with neighbourhood and place delivery.

For example, in relation to acute hospital care, Hertfordshire has two acute Trusts, North and East Herts Trust, and South West Herts Trust, which operate in those two localities. Many operational Adult Social Care services also operate on an east / west operational footprint providing alignment between services. In the design of the four council model, these operational geographies would remain through two unitary Councils operating alongside the NHS Trusts, and use of shared services where needed. There are examples from other parts of the region, where a health cluster such as the ICB arrangements in Bedfordshire work with four unitary authorities to organise and deliver services and where close working and experience could help inform local design.

Taking into account services used by many young people in Hertfordshire, there are four different Further Education colleges working in different geographic areas which would have a relationship with the new Strategic Authority and the relevant Council in their area(s).

This highlights the need for ongoing flexibility and agility, as Government considers the optimum service arrangements for a range of other public services outside the control of Council, and as the organisations themselves design and deliver services on locality at district or borough, town or neighbourhood level.

Key sector partnerships	**Arrangements**
University of Hertfordshire	Based in Hatfield across two campuses, this university has both a nationwide and local profile.
Royal Veterinary College (RVC)	The RVC operates two campuses, one in central London and one in Hawkshead Lane, Hatfield.
Further Education Colleges	Based on a model of four colleges that stretch across all four directions of Hertfordshire and each new unitary would host an FE college presence. • Oaklands College: Campuses in St Albans and Welwyn Garden City. • Hertford Regional College: Campuses in Broxbourne and Ware. • North Hertfordshire College: Campuses in Stevenage and Hitchin. • West Herts College: Campuses in Watford and Hemel Hempstead. Hertfordshire also hosts The Elstree Screen Arts Academy, a dedicated a university technical college focussed on the creative arts.
Acute Hospitals	Two NHS Trusts, covering North East and South West geographies. The four unitary model would mean that each Trust geography would work with two new unitaries.
Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust	Providing range of community-based health services focussing on both children's and adult services across Hertfordshire, with some services also provided to neighbouring services. The Trust works closely with Primary Care Networks and neighbourhood health centres through emerging Neighbourhood Health Plans to join up prevention and personalised care. Four councils can engage across multiple neighbourhood partnerships while maintaining clear lines into strategic geographies.
Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust	Providing mental health, forensic and learning disability services for children, young people, and adults in Hertfordshire but also into parts of Essex, Buckinghamshire and Norfolk.
Hertfordshire Constabulary	County wide police force that sub-divides the county into a East/West command structure with headquarters in Welwyn Garden City. Beneath this localised neighbourhood policing teams remain in place broadly corresponding to paired local district and borough areas.

Key sector partnerships	Arrangements
Job Centre Plus	Hertfordshire and Essex governance, supported by local delivery teams.
Hertfordshire Futures (former Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP))	Working across the county, with a newly integrated status into Hertfordshire County Council.
Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)	A broad range of different arrangements with many VCS providers rooted in a particular town or location, some operating at district or borough level, or more broadly countywide.
Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue	29 fire stations are strategically placed across the county, with the service covering Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage and Watford, as well as St Albans and anticipated to be provided by the Strategic Authority.

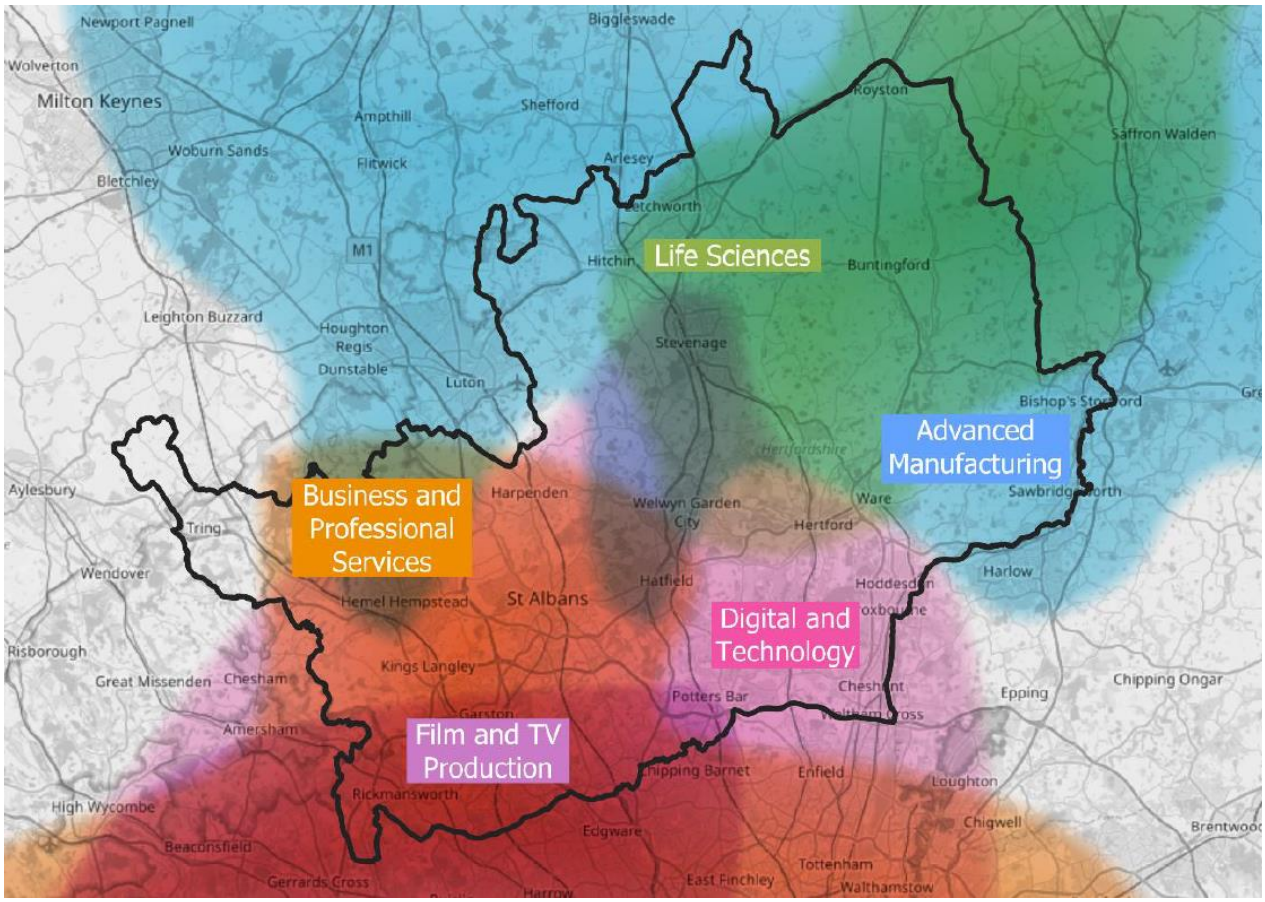
ENABLING DEVOLUTION

Hertfordshire is ambitious about its future and proposes to work closely with Government and our communities to establish a Strategic Authority with a directly elected Mayor to achieve deep and lasting benefits for our residents and communities.

Adopting a four unitary model will support Hertfordshire in its ambition to secure a Strategic Authority for Hertfordshire and to move at pace toward a Mayoral model. Hertfordshire has just over 1,200,000 residents and generates around £49 billion in GVA. It is a substantial economy, with global strengths in creative and film industries, life sciences and pharmaceutical, space and defence, advanced manufacture, agricultural technology and professional services. Hertfordshire is at the heart of the UK Innovation Corridor, a £189bn GVA region of world-wide significance, with northern parts of the county well aligned with the cutting edge Oxford-Cambridge science clusters, strong connections to London, the UK's global powerhouse. The county is home to clear and distinct economic and place geographies, with strong north-south rail and road links connecting key towns with London, but also into different regional economies and economic clusters.

At the same time, the balance between prosperity and affordability is under strain. Median pay has lagged house price growth and there are pockets of deprivation in an otherwise strong set of outcomes, pointing to uneven access to opportunity and services. Demographic change will add pressure, with the 80+ population rising faster than the working age group to 2040, and different challenges impacting parts of the county, from the acute need for town centre regeneration, to unlocking more affordable homes, addressing skills gaps and extending opportunity, and considering the different transport needs across the county.

A model of having four locally rooted authorities, reflecting the strengths and opportunities in their communities and economies, with teams and capacity aligned to local priorities - from regeneration to SME growth, from sustainable transport to culture – will align local delivery with strategic priorities. A single spatial development strategy and investment pipeline can focus growth where it adds most value, protect what residents' treasure and provide certainty for investment. Four councils then translate countywide missions into programmes that reflect local priorities, keeping decisions close to communities and bringing schemes into delivery.



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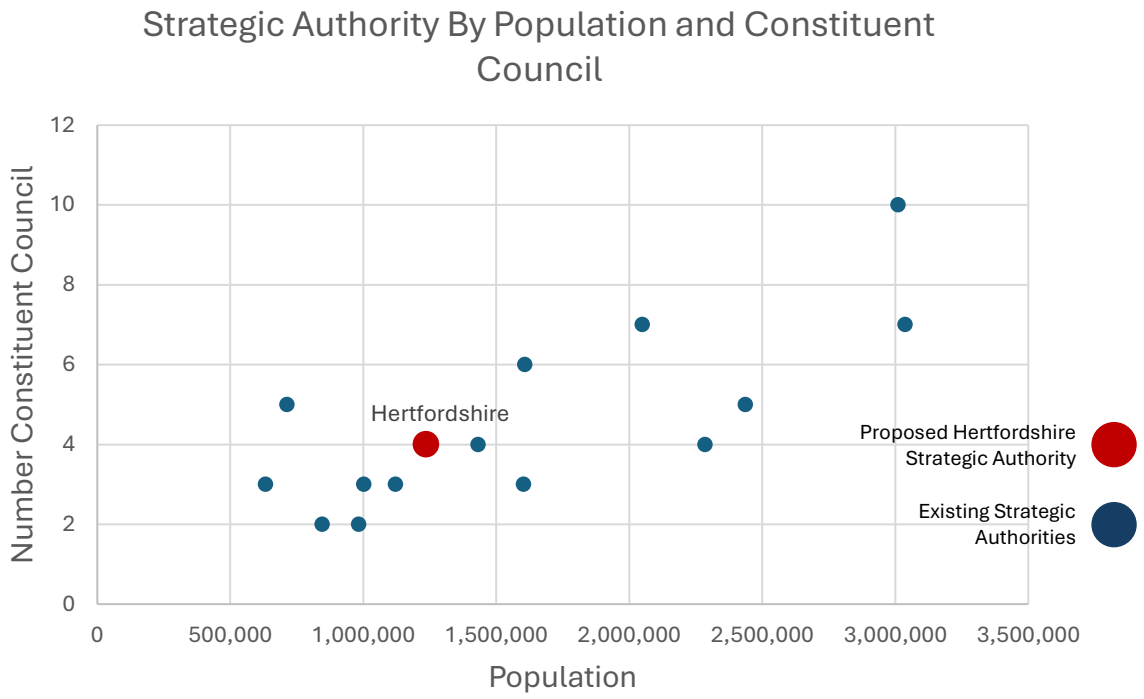
The conditions that shape success differ across our four footprints and require local leadership, deep relationship with businesses and communities, and tailored plans to maximise the positive impacts for our communities. Central Hertfordshire brings university strengths, manufacturing assets, leading life science and defence research and development, as well as town centre renewal opportunities that benefit from innovation and links into the Oxford-Cambridge corridor. The east corridor blends market towns with rural neighbourhoods, and the planned growth of Harlow-Gilston. North West Hertfordshire combines high-performing centres, history, culture, and Hemel Garden Communities, with chalk streams and the Chilterns. South West Hertfordshire hosts a world-class screen and creative economy and a strong service base, with orbital travel patterns that will deliver further, studio-linked employment space, enable renewal of towns and benefit from fit-for-purpose transport. Only by working through four local, place based constituent authorities can a strategic tier fully realise this potential and turn countywide intent into credible, investible delivery in each place.

A four unitary model is the most complementary geography for this approach. Each council sits at around 300,000 people and offer a clear geography for investment, clear sponsorship of sites and centres, and practical accountability for outcomes.

This balance reflects how successful mayoral areas operate. Nationally, most combined authorities work with between three and ten constituent councils. Four partners of similar size align well with that pattern and help ensure balanced representation so no single voice overpowers the others. The strategic tier remains focused on countywide missions and multi-year funding, while four unitary councils keep delivery close to residents and employers. Together, this creates the conditions to raise ambition, speedy decisions and turn devolution into tangible benefits across Hertfordshire.



An Ambitious Agenda for Growth, Innovation & Opportunity
By pursuing a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Hertfordshire we will unlock the full range of benefits set out in the English Devolution White Paper. Our intent is to move at pace to Established Mayoral Authority status. This would enable an Integrated Settlement that brings transport, skills, housing and related budgets into a single multiyear pot, and open the door to trailblazer style enhancements where further funding and functions are devolved in areas of specific strength or need.

Using published information regarding South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority as a benchmark, an indicative 2025/26 annual total from its core devolved streams (the Devolution Investment Fund, the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement and the devolved adult skills budget) is an estimated £186 million, based on averages of published multi-year allocations. This illustration highlights the potential opportunity for Hertfordshire.

Case Study: Barnsley Pathways to Work, scaled through South Yorkshire

- *Barnsley's Pathways to Work created a place based model that links health, skills, and employment support to the realities of local labour markets. It identifies neighbourhoods of need, then builds personalised routes that combine clinical interventions where appropriate, employability support, and brokerage with local employers.*

- *South Yorkshire has scaled these principles through the Get South Yorkshire Working plan and a government backed inactivity trailblazer. The initial package is backed by about £18 million and is designed to work with more than 7,800 people in year one. The model aims to help up to 3,000 people into jobs or to stay in jobs, with a wider ambition shaped by the Barnsley model to support s residents into work over four years. The plan sets out four pathways, Prevent and Protect, Engage and Empower, Secure and Sustain, and Thrive and Elevate, and is governed jointly by the Mayoral Combined Authority, the Integrated Care Board, and local councils.*

- *Investment is targeted at places of need with a clear purpose linked to local sectors and the job market, and progress is tracked through published outcomes and metrics. The model shows how targeted, place based commissioning can reduce inactivity and support business growth at the same time.*

Strategic priorities and the determination to secure better results for communities is not solely a role for the Strategic Authority, as empowered local councils are well placed to use their resources of land, funding, team capacity, partnerships with private sector organisations as well as the community to secure delivery in their area. Whilst priorities will be set through key local strategies and refined by an elected Mayor and local leaders, there are clear headline contributors to growth that will stimulate the economy and enable further localised investment in homes, jobs and skills:

- **Build more sustainable homes that people can afford**
  The country, and Hertfordshire, faces a housing crisis. The high housing costs are impacting on young people and the working age population. In Hertfordshire 16,047 residents are on waiting lists for affordable housing, and 2,523 face the insecurity of living in temporary accommodation. House prices are at an average of £534k. This impacts our communities, wellbeing and our economy, and each of the four unitary authorities can work with partners and their communities to develop responses to that best meet local needs, coupled with strategic support and potentially funding brokered with a Strategic Authority. Additional Mayoral Powers, a Strategic Partnership with Homes England and access to the £39bn additional Homes England funding for the next decade, will scale up the delivery social housing, aligned with other key worker and affordable housing and design standards that ensure new homes are part of sustainable communities.

- **Innovation-led growth in key sectors**
  Concentrate support on key growth sectors, such as space and defence, life sciences, film and television production, logistics and clean energy. With overall direction set in partnership with a new Strategic Authority, the four unitary councils can respond through local tools such land availability and search, inward investment, skills programmes, social value and other interventions to help unlock growth, but also design local schemes so that t local communities benefit directly from jobs, skills and opportunities.

- **Skills and opportunity in every place**
  As we look to the future, it is vital all our communities benefit from being home to cutting edge sectors. Working locally in four unitary areas means the opportunity to co-design courses with employers and offer localised plans to address local demand and remove barriers such as travel, or caring responsibilities so people can start, progress and stay in good jobs.

Working with key local partners and communities, each council will turn them into local plans, bring forward projects with a Strategic Authority, to help secure faster progress on homes, jobs, and skills that benefits communities.

Case Study: Scaling affordable homes through mixed-tenure delivery in Stevenage

- *Stevenage Borough Council is running a housing development programme that puts social and affordable homes first, using private sale and selective land release to cross-subsidise new council housing. More than 620 homes are complete, including 529 council lets of which nearly 100 are let as supported homes. The programme also includes renewal at The Oval, one of the town's original neighbourhood centres, and new independent living that frees up larger family homes.*

- *The funding model blends external grant with reinvested returns. £41,750,000 has been secured in grants, including £20,420,000 for The Oval. The programme has realised £21,200,000 from sales and £7,080,000 from land disposals, and surpluses are recycled into further affordable delivery and the Housing Revenue Account.*

- *Momentum and timeline are clear. A further 284 homes are on site or contracted toward starting on site, tracking toward 899 completions by 2028 and an ambition of 1,000 by 2030. A major strategic land receipt is programmed for January 2027 to support wider community investment.*

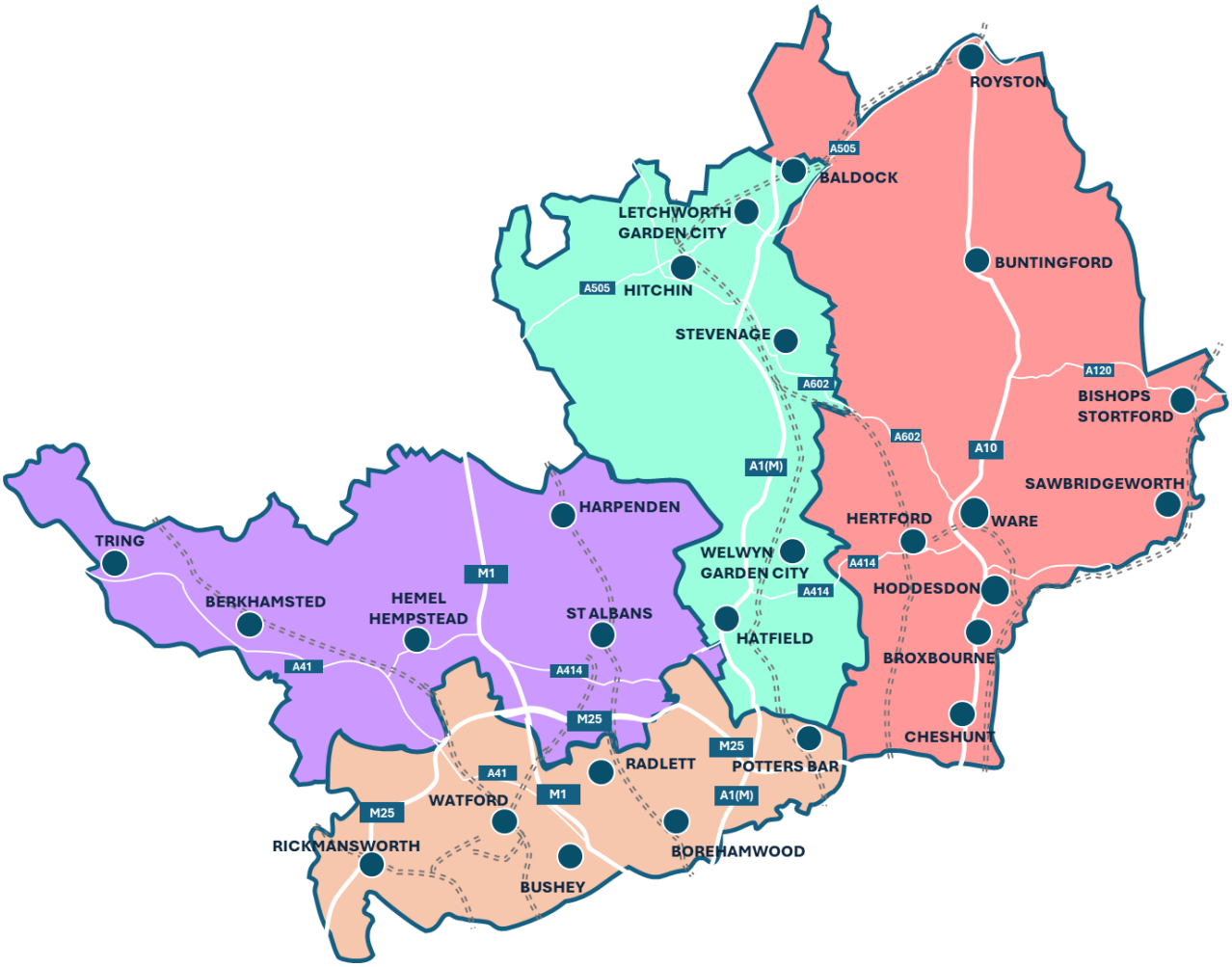
- *The takeaway for a wider footprint is direct. A council-led, mixed-tenure approach can deliver social value at pace and at scale; with a larger unitary footprint and the strategic backing of a mayor's devolved powers, this model could be replicated across Hertfordshire to accelerate high quality, affordable homes. Similar approaches can be brokered via land use and Joint Venture partnerships with Registered Social Landlords, to help deliver much-needed housing.*

SCALE, EFFICIENCY AND CAPACITY (MHCLG CRITERION 2)

UNITARY SCALE & POPULATION SIZE

The English Devolution White Paper set a guiding principle of around 500,000 residents where practicable. However, we believe the right scale for Hertfordshire is determined by how places work, not by a single headline number. Instead, the four unitary model provides clear evidence based reasons that are rooted in place and long-term practicality, and diverge together from differing degrees to reach this figure. The population profiles for each footprint are set out in the table below, using mid-2024 baselines and 2045 projections.

Proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire



Local authority	*Geography (existing districts and boroughs plus boundary changes)*	*Population (mid-2024)*	*Population (2045)*
North West Hertfordshire	Dacorum, St Albans	312,432	351,000
South West Hertfordshire	Hertsmere, Three Rivers, Watford	313,190	371,000
Central Hertfordshire	**North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield** *minus: Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, Weston & Sandon, Arbury (NHDC) and Northaw & Cuffley (WHDC)*	320,795	391,000
Eastern Hertfordshire	**Broxbourne, East Herts** *plus: Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, Weston & Sandon, Arbury (NHDC) and Northaw & Cuffley (WHDC)*	289,774	366,000

Our proposition prioritises three primary reasons that together show why four unitaries is the right scale for Hertfordshire.

- They are designed around natural geography, place and communities that make sense for Hertfordshire.
- They allow for growth over time, adopting footprints that do not dilute place identity and democratic proximity in the decades to come.
- They match or exceed the size and scale of many established unitary authorities, which provides a tangible and replicable blueprint.
- They correspond with sector analysis from the District Councils Network which shows that there is no correlation between a council's size and either its financial sustainability, or its outcomes for residents.

This configuration keeps identity and accountability close to communities while ensuring the capability to deliver the full range of local services and invest for the long term.

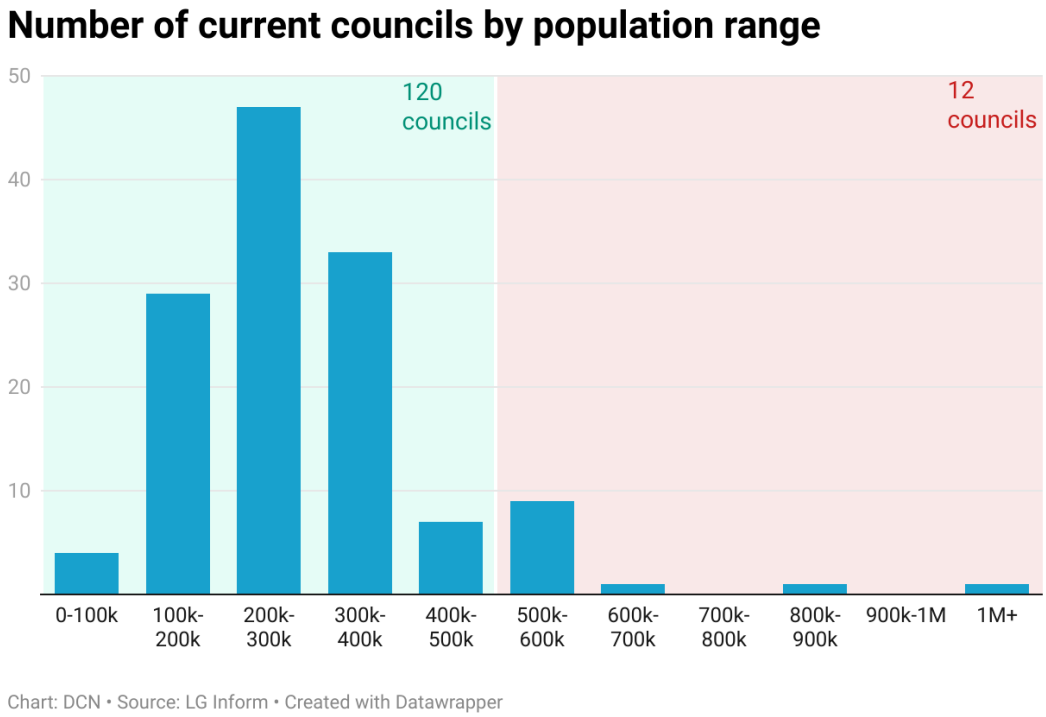
Designed around natural geography, the four footprints reflect how Hertfordshire actually works. Evidence outlined in the Implication for Place section of this proposal, alongside wider analysis, establishes a clear argument for four distinct places in Hertfordshire. Organising services to these everyday maps lets partners align investment by place, sequence regeneration, housing and transport programmes sensibly, and lock local plans to infrastructure delivery. Moving from 11 councils to four is a significant simplification, and eliminates disjointed service delivery while better retaining place identity. It provides the robustness of scale alongside the flexibility to deliver and transform services. Where a Strategic Authority is established, these four councils provide complementary scale. The strategic tier can lead on key strategic issues such as strategic planning, transport, economic growth which should be done once across Hertfordshire, while the four unitaries lead integrated local delivery and place stewardship.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to design authorities that are the best fit not only now, but over the next 50 years. On historic local plan delivery alone, Hertfordshire's population could reach at least 1,500,000 by 2045. Planning reform that accelerates plan making and housing delivery could plausibly push this towards about 1,700,000 in the same timeframe. This starting scale preserves local connection and the capability for complex services, and it remains coherent as growth materialises. By 2045 each council is projected to include a population of at least 350,000. The model is sized to absorb growth rather than be reshaped by it, preventing a drift to large and remote organisations as populations rise.

Comparisons with other unitary authorities, alongside London and metropolitan boroughs, reinforce this perspective. Councils at a similar scope and scale provide a tangible and replicable blueprint for success. The experience of these councils shows that capability, financial resilience and clear local leadership can be combined without sacrificing proximity to communities, and that scale alone does not determine performance.

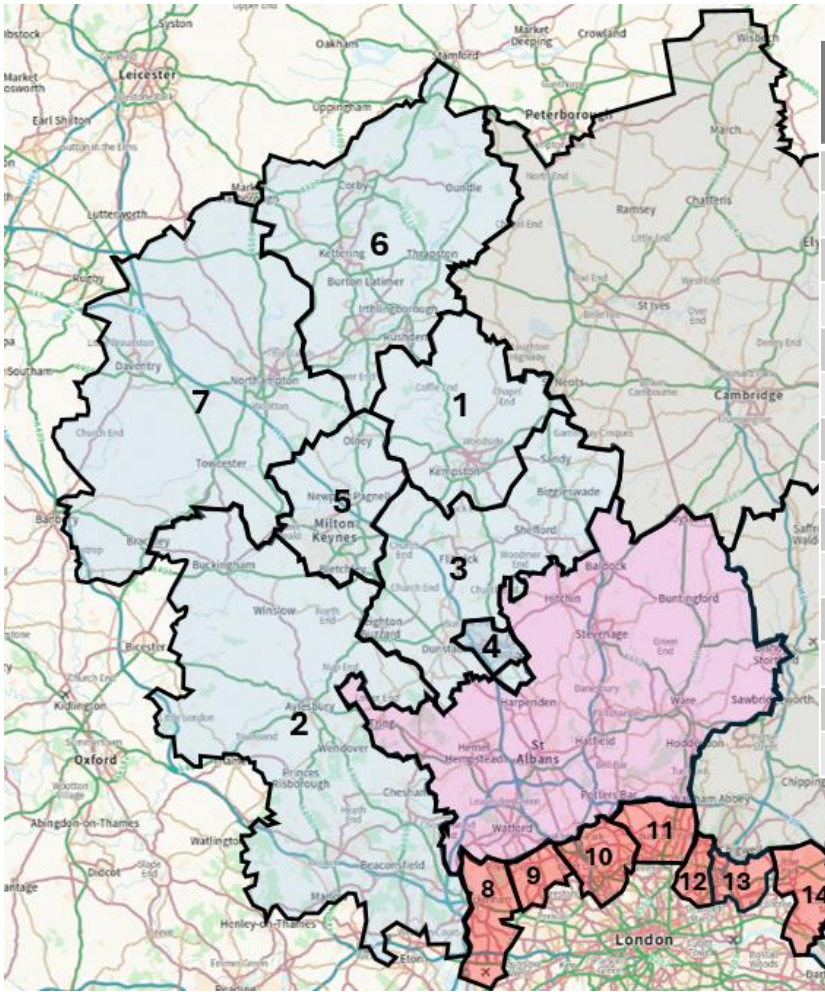
Proposed Unitary Authority	***English unitary authorities (62)***	***London boroughs (32)***	***Metropolitan boroughs (36)***
Central Hertfordshire (320,795)	19th largest	12th	14th
South West Hertfordshire (313,190)	20th	14th	16th
North West Hertfordshire (312,432)	20th	14th	16th
Eastern Hertfordshire (289,774)	23rd	17th	20th

As set out above, national comparisons place four Hertfordshire unitaries in the upper third by population when set against English unitaries, and broadly mid-sized when viewed alongside London and metropolitan boroughs. This is further evidenced by the recent District Councils Network analysis on the relevance of scale, both in terms of cost and performance. Their analysis shows that of all existing single tier authorities, only 12 would be above the guiding principle of 500,000 population set out in the English Devolution White Paper.



Locally, the same pattern holds. Read together on the map above, neighbouring authorities span compact urban unitaries through to larger county-scale bodies. The model advocated here sits comfortably within that spread, aligning with the scale at which partners plan for housing, transport and growth. Near neighbours at similar size, such as Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, offer direct operational comparators in the sub-region, demonstrating how councils of this scale integrate prevention, neighbourhood services and growth delivery while sustaining clear local leadership.

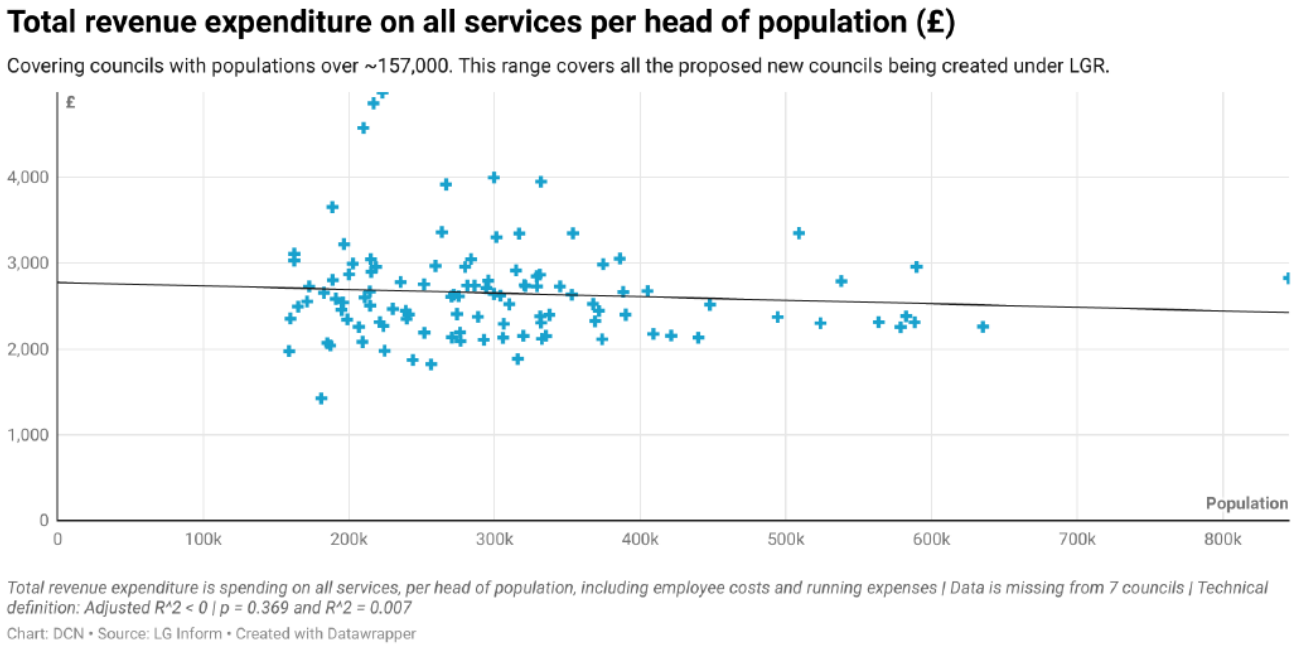
To the east, the Greater Essex submissions as part of the Devolution Priority Programme set out proposals for three to five unitary councils, with populations ranging from 325,609 to 729,062. Our proposal is broadly similar in scale to the Essex five-unitary business case.



	Authority	Mid 2024 Population Estimate
1	Bedford Borough Council	194,976
2	Buckinghamshire	578,772
3	Central Bedfordshire	315,877
4	Luton	239,090
5	Milton Keynes	305,884
6	North Northamptonshire	373,871
7	West Northamptonshire	439,811
8	Hillingdon	329,185
9	Harrow	270,724
10	Barnet	405,050
11	Enfield	327,434
12	Waltham Forest	279,737
13	Redbridge	321,231
14	Havering	276,274

Sector analysis from the District Councils' Network (DCN) tested whether council population is linked to value for money, financial sustainability and service delivery. It compared all 132 English single tier councils using published datasets and regression analysis, controlling for factors such as deprivation and labour costs. In short:

- There is no evidence that councils above 500,000 deliver better value for money, stronger financial sustainability or improved outcomes, and no basis to assume smaller unitaries are less efficient or effective.
- Most relationships between population size and financial or performance outcomes are weak or non-existent.
- Where a relationship appears, modelled outcomes tend to be stronger around the national median of about 275,000, which aligns with the proposed Hertfordshire range of 285,000 to 316,000.



Across England's single tier councils, the link between population size and value for money is weak. Total spend per resident is broadly flat across most sizes and shows an upward trend among councils beyond the mid-300,000s, a tendency rather than a fixed threshold. Larger councils have been more likely to require Exceptional Financial Support, and average Band D bills are higher among councils above 500,000. On performance, most indicators show no meaningful relationship with population, and where a link appears results tend to cluster around the national median scale.

With the evidence in hand, Hertfordshire should design to place, function and sensible geographies, given there no are clear links between financial and service efficiency. Four place-based unitaries of 285,000 to 316,000 population keep leadership and accountability close, and provide the capacity to plan growth and reform.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

CONTEXT

All eleven authorities in Hertfordshire have worked together with an external consultancy to develop a shared financial model and set of assumptions. The process that has been followed and the detail behind these assumptions is set out in detail within the accompanying "spine" document and technical appendix.

Important contextual points to note are:

- Chief Financial Officers of each organisation have used best endeavours to follow a robust methodology and to develop a comprehensive and reasonable set of assumptions for the purposes of assessing the likely impacts, costs and savings arising from local government reorganisation. Significant uncertainties remain in several key areas and further due diligence is required on elements of our proposal, and so the results should be seen as an indication of future impacts rather than a firm prediction.
- Modelling assumptions have been accepted by all eleven organisations, including the use of ranges in key areas as detailed separately.
- The potential impacts of the Fair Funding Review (FFR) have not been reflected in the financial model. The model also assumes no business rates growth or increases in core government grant funding beyond 2027/28. Although CFOs conducted extensive due diligence and engaged a third-party organisation to assess likely effects, the findings were unreliable due to conflicting data and government indications that modelling assumptions will change before FFR is finalised. Initial analysis based on current assumptions suggests FFR will likely reduce overall revenue funding and alter its distribution across Hertfordshire over the medium term, potentially affecting the sustainability of future unitary authorities.
- The scope of our modelling includes financial benefits and savings that arise directly and causally from the process of reorganisation; for example, removal of duplicate management posts and savings from having fewer elections. As a partnership we have not modelled any additional benefits or savings from additional

transformation by new authorities once they have been created, which would have a further impact on the performance of new unitary authorities in practice.

- Our baseline modelling assumption is that new authorities will harmonise the District and Borough element of Council Tax at the taxbase-weighted average and then apply annual uplifts in line with government assumptions on funding. In reality the levels of annual council tax increase will be a decision for future authorities.

HEADLINE RESULTS – FOUR UNITARY AUTHORITIES

The modelling for the LGR submission has been completed with a range of costs for Social Care management costs and ICT costs which have provided a high cost and low cost scenario. The four unitary submission has focused on the lower cost scenario as this more in line with:

- Smaller unitary ICT costs without a combined HR and finance system such as SAP.
- Smaller social care management costs based on the Impower data comparators.

	Higher cost scenario	Lower cost scenario
MTFS – outperforms the two-tier baseline in	2034/35	2032/33
One-off investment costs required to deliver LGR	£120m	£97m
Annual recurring NET savings from LGR by year 5	£11m	£23m
Cumulative net savings from LGR after 5 years	(£89m)	(£15m)
Cumulative net savings from LGR after 10 years	(£1m)	£124m
Payback on LGR savings in	2038/39	2033/34

This summary scorecard shows the overall aggregate performance of the four unitary option. A further breakdown of the performance of individual authorities within this option is included later in this section. On an overall basis the headline results are:

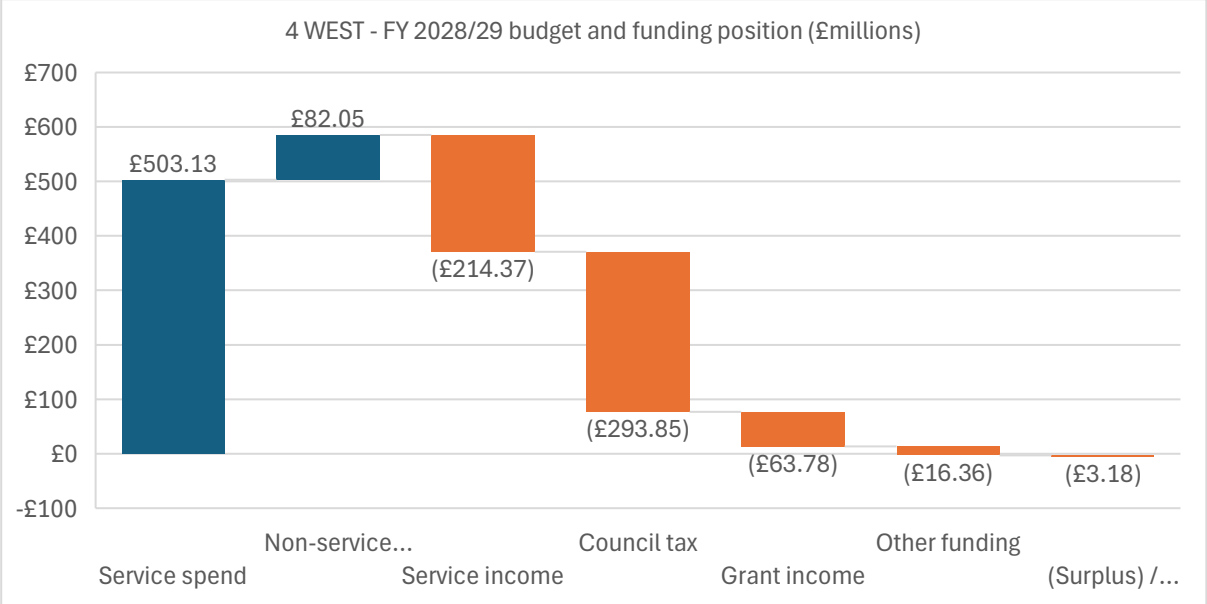
- The four unitary authority option "outperforms" the two-tier baseline in 2032/33 in the lower-cost scenario and 2034/35 in the higher cost scenario. This means that the cumulative net savings from LGR alongside the capacity to raise additional council tax, if future authorities choose to do so, mean that there is greater financial capacity within the system at this point than would have been the case without LGR.
- Estimated up-front investment costs to deliver the four unitary option range from £97m under the lower cost scenario to £120m under the higher-cost scenario. A further breakdown of these cost estimates is provided below.
- By year 5 after LGR, assumed here to be 2032/33, all costs and savings from LGR are fully "phased-in". At this point the four unitary authority model will deliver total recurring annual savings of £11m to £23m split between four authorities.
- Adding up all costs and savings from LGR on a cumulative basis, after five years the three unitary option will still have between £15m and £89m of investment costs "pay off" with these recurring annual savings.
- After ten years, the four unitary model will achieve a total saving of £124m under the lower-cost scenario and will only just be approaching the point of payback in the higher-cost scenario.
- Excluding council tax and focusing just on the "payback" from the costs of investing in LGR, this option "pays back" in 2033/34 (six years after LGR) in the lower-cost scenario, or 2038/39 (eleven years after LGR) in the lower-cost scenario.

NEW UNITARY AUTHORITIES – MODELLED BUDGETS AND FUNDING POSITION FOR YEAR ONE (2028/29)

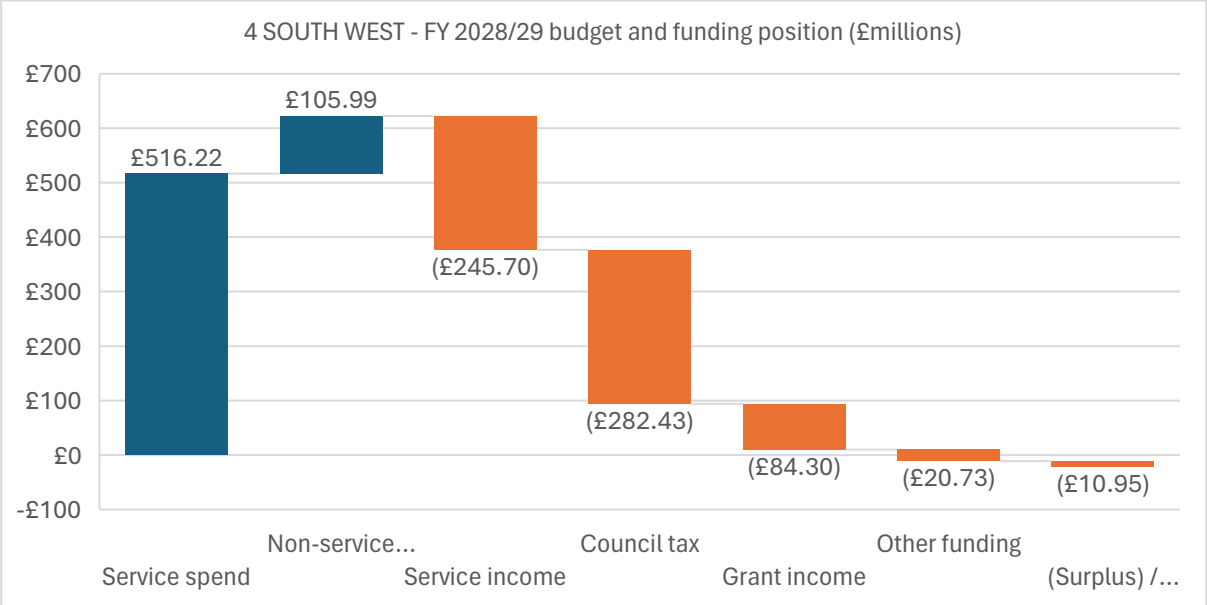
The graphs below show the anticipated year one budget for each proposed new unitary authority, excluding the initial costs and savings from LGR. On current assumptions and to different extents, new authorities will begin with opening surpluses or deficits based on modelled demand and service expenditure, the likely funding of each area and the capacity of each area to generate council tax.

As noted above, this modelling does not reflect the future impact of the Fair Funding Review, which is likely to change both the quantum and distribution of resource within Hertfordshire.

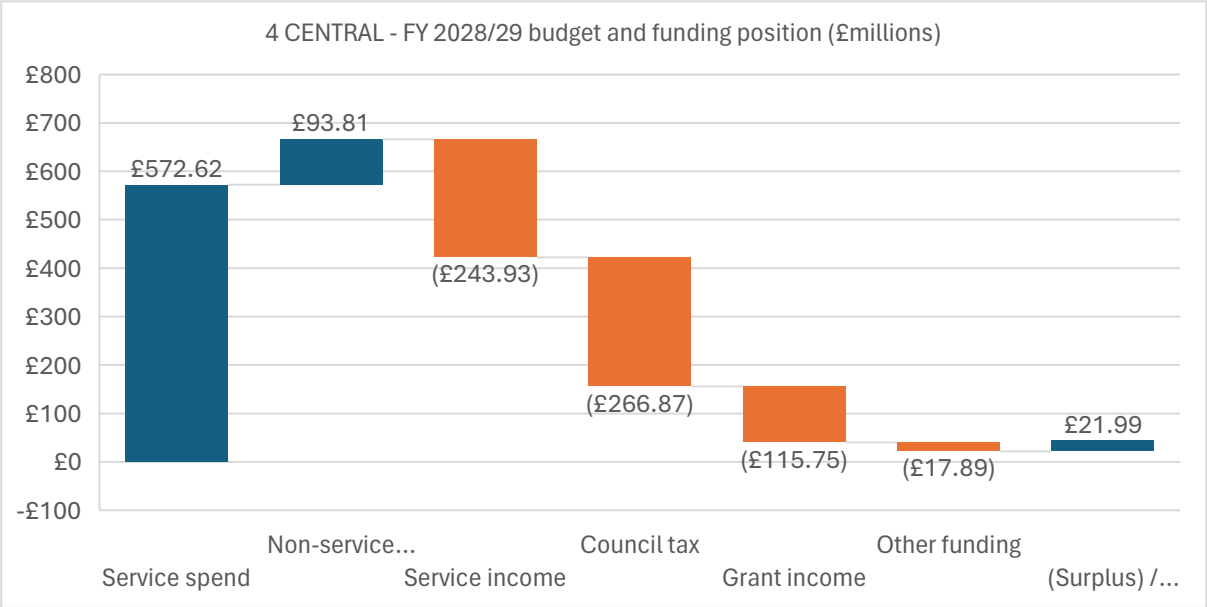
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 WEST



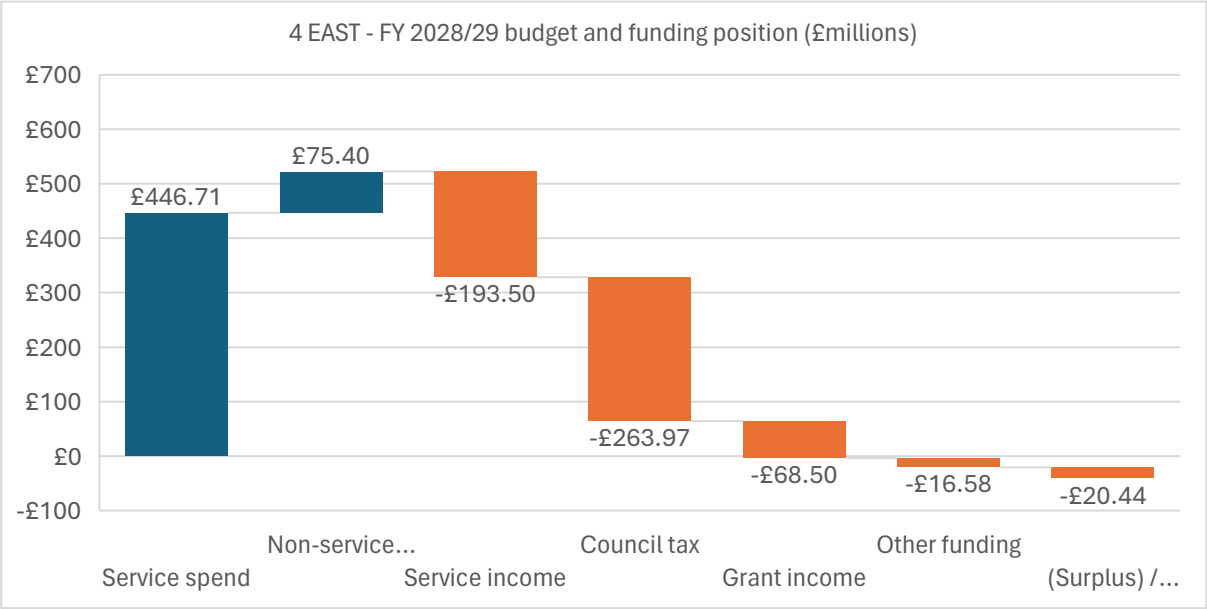
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 SOUTH-WEST



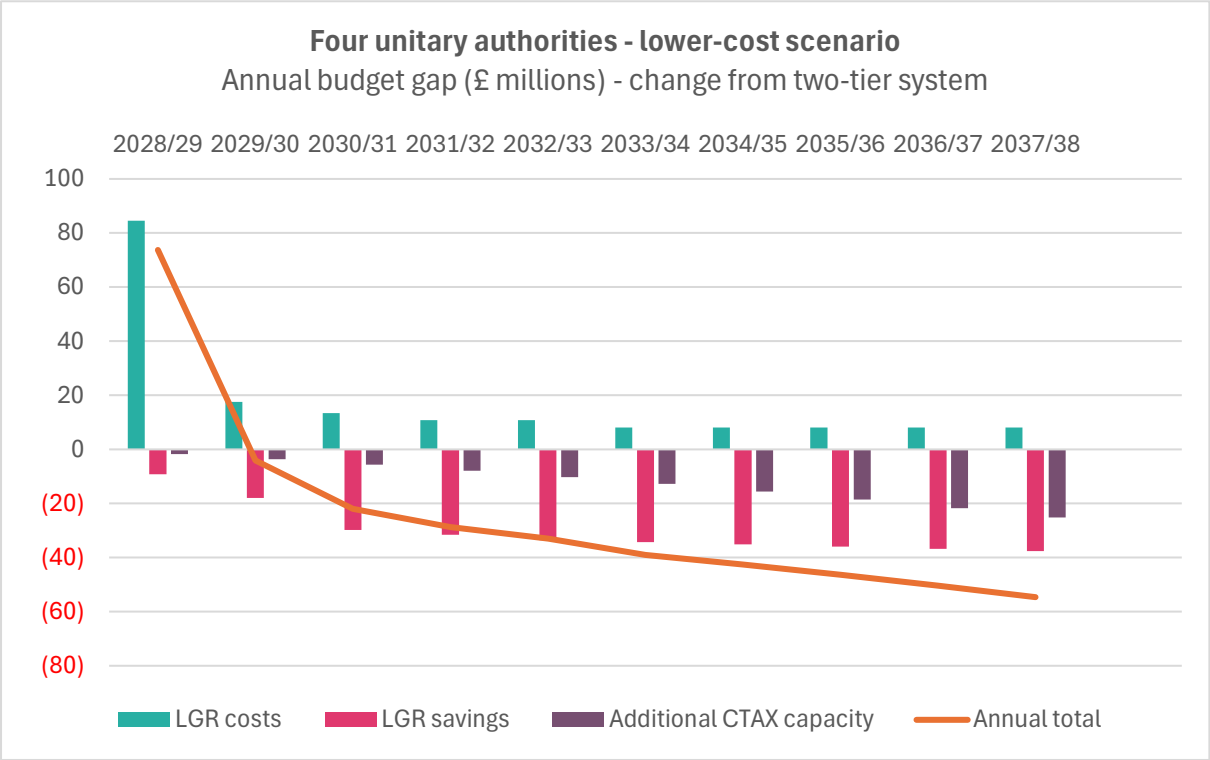
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 CENTRAL

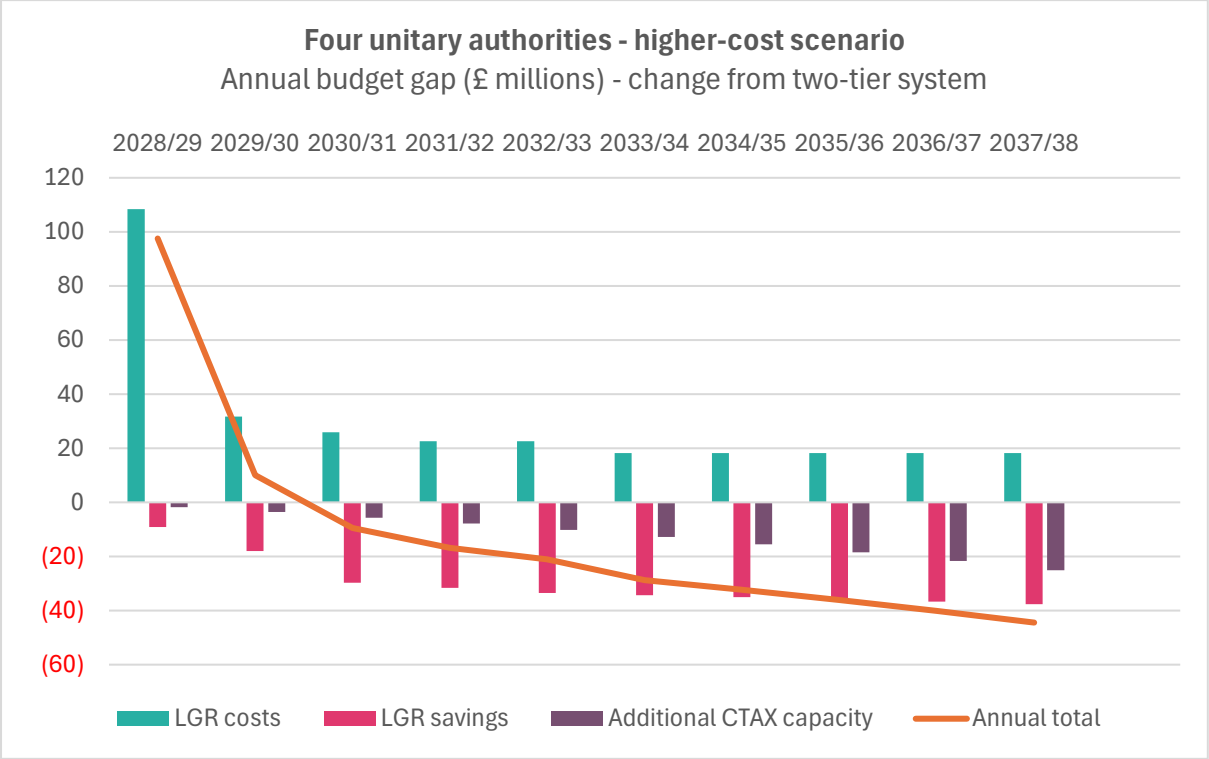


YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 EASTERN



PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE TWO-TIER BASELINE OVER TIME



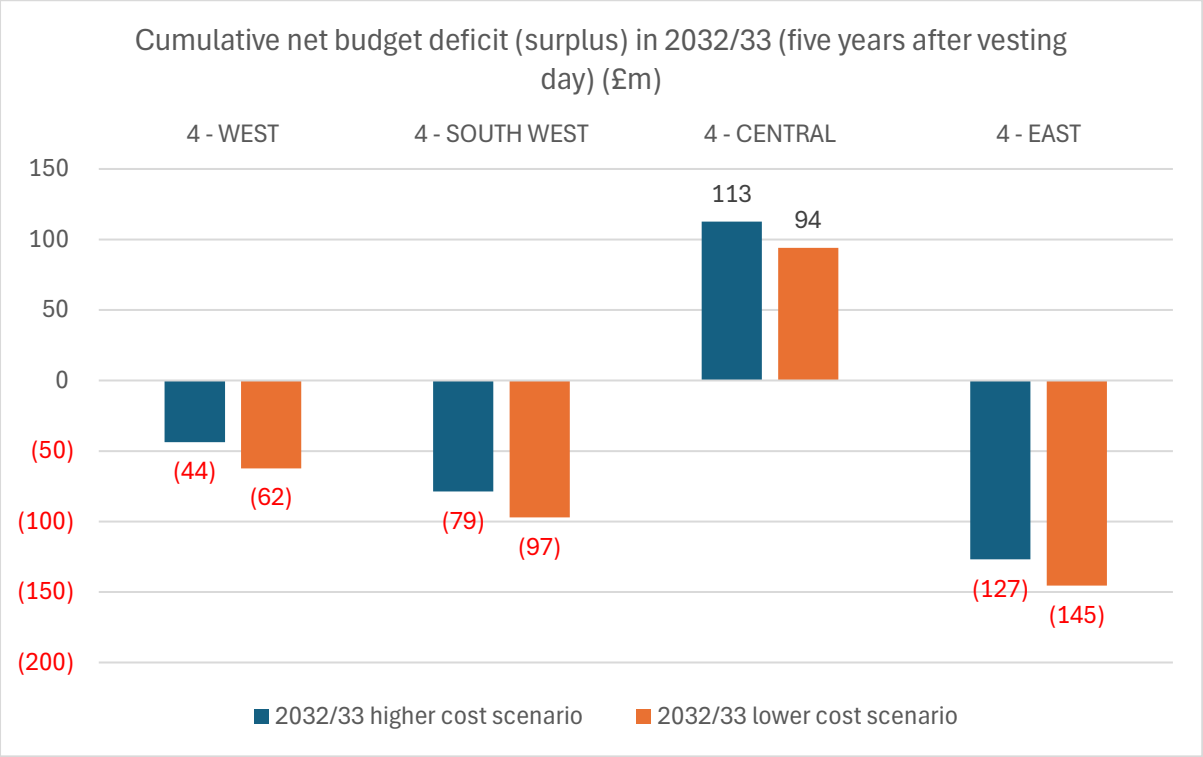


These two graphs show the in-year difference from the two-tier baseline that is delivered by LGR under this option. The modelled two-tier baseline is shown as zero, and the estimated impacts of LGR are shown as increases or (decreases) from that baseline. The key finding is that despite significant up-front costs, implementing this option would make Hertfordshire better off overall than the two-tier baseline in both the lower and higher-cost scenarios:

- **LGR costs** – this line adds together one-off costs (e.g. programme management) and recurring costs (e.g. duplicating management teams for social care). The majority of one-off investment costs will be incurred in the first year of LGR in 2028/29, and after five years only recurring elements of cost remain.
- **LGR savings** – this line shows the total recurring savings that are delivered by LGR (e.g. by removing duplication). These savings are higher than recurring costs so that a net annual saving is generated.
- **Additional CTAX capacity** – this line shows the extent to which future unitary authorities would be able to raise additional council tax over and above the two-tier baseline should they wish to do so. This will be a decision for future authorities themselves.
- **Annual total** – this line shows the aggregate movement from the two-tier baseline forecast under this option, adding up all of the above.

As set out in the summary table above, adding up positive and negative movement from the baseline over time means that, overall, Hertfordshire would be better off as a result of this option in 2032/33 in the lower-cost scenario and 2034/35 in the higher-cost scenario.

MEDIUM-TERM POSITION OF INDIVIDUAL UNITARY AUTHORITIES OVER TIME



This graph combines all baseline modelling assumptions including inflation, assumed council tax increases and the impacts of LGR to show the cumulative net budget position for each unitary authority after the first five years of LGR.

The set of baseline assumptions that we have used indicate that three of the four unitary authorities will be in a surplus position after this period, with increases in Council Tax assumed to be at 4.99 % (2.90% Council tax + 2% adult social care precept) in line with government funding assumptions. In our baseline assumptions this increase drives higher funding than the cost of services as driven by inflation, combined with the investment costs of delivering LGR and resulting savings.

However, on current assumptions 4 Central would begin with a £22m budget deficit driven primarily by a combination of high demand for cost-intensive services which is not balanced by the ability of the area to raise revenue locally alongside the likely level of grant funding. With the additional implementation costs of LGR loaded on top, the net savings delivered

by LGR for this authority and assumed council tax raises would not be sufficient to overcome this challenging opening position within the medium-term.

Further sensitivities have been modelled to test this position, and existing surpluses will be quickly eroded if, for example:

- The significant savings planned in the 2025-26 to 2027-28 period (pre-vesting day) are not delivered in full, contributing to a more challenging opening position for new authorities.
- Inflation occurs at a higher rate than is assumed in our modelling.
- New authorities decide to increase council tax at a lower rate than the default assumed here, which is in line with government assumptions on future funding.
- There is any slippage in delivering the anticipated benefits from LGR.
- Further unexpected shocks occur.

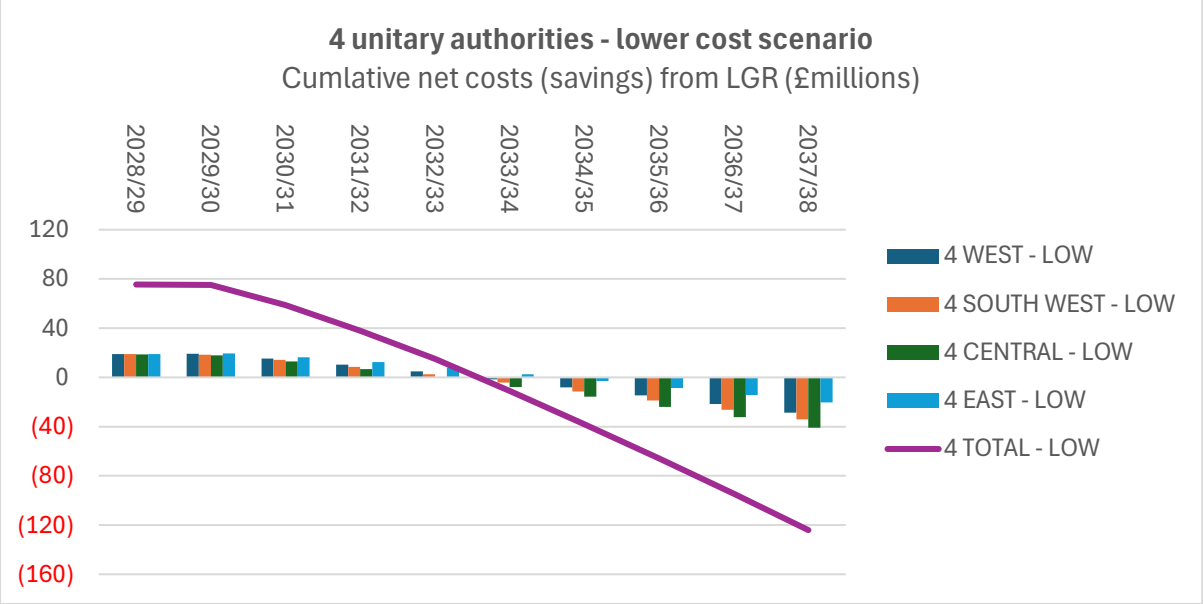
The surpluses shown here for three of the four unitary authorities indicate that there will be some level of resilience in the event of any (or a combination) of the above occurring in these areas, although 4 Central is unlikely to be viable on current assumptions without further interventions.

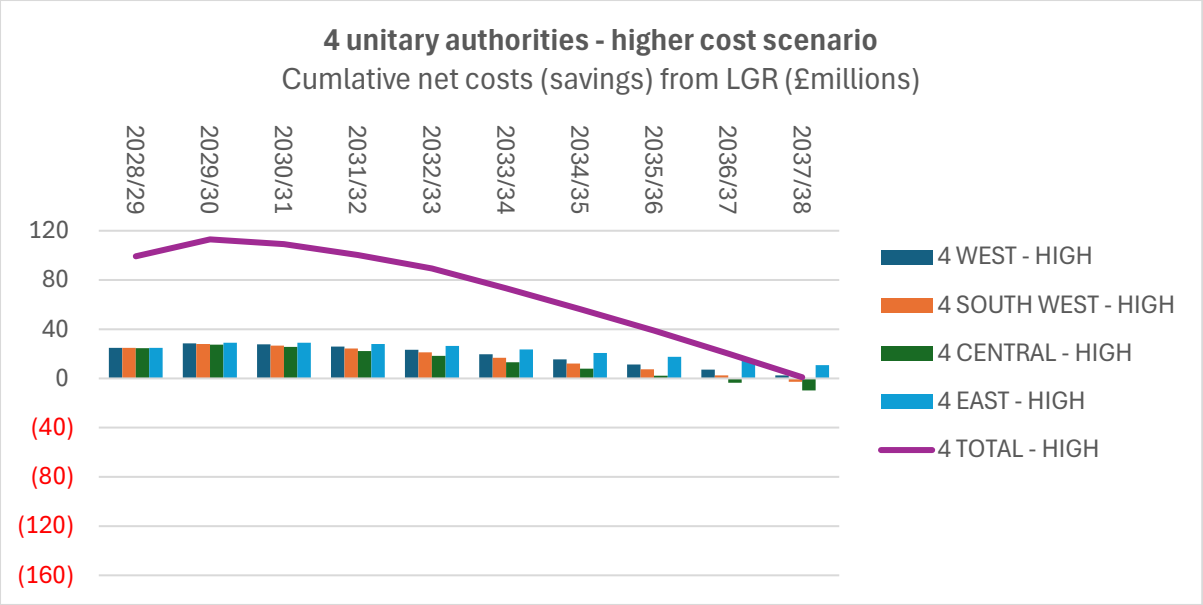
Firstly, the model, although developed, has not considered a number of options that the new unitaries would consider such as transformation, efficiency, additional business rates growth. This is explored below in the 'additional levers to improve financial sustainability' section and highlights the various options available to make sure the 4 Central is sustainable.

Secondly, the model has assumed that circa 28% of the 2025/26 Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) net expenditure relating to resources (finance, ICT etc), central (apprentice levy, contingency) and capital financing costs would be in the central unitaries net expenditure, based on 2025/26 assumed overall weighted funding proportions. These costs will require further analysis as service design/ HCC balance sheet analysis evolves, but taking 3% of these HCC costs equates to circa £5Million in 2025/26 prices.

As noted above, this analysis does not estimate the impact of the fair funding review, which may change the distribution and quantum of resource in Hertfordshire and may affect the viability of future unitary authorities.

COSTS AND SAVINGS FROM LGR





These graphs show cumulative net costs and savings from LGR over time for individual unitary authorities, with detailed assumptions included below.

CUMULATIVE NET COSTS / (SAVINGS) FROM LGR – HIGHER COST SCENARIO

£m	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
4 WEST - HIGH	25	29	28	26	23	20	16	11	7	3
4 SOUTH WEST - HIGH	25	28	27	24	21	17	12	7	2	(3)
4 CENTRAL - HIGH	25	27	26	22	18	13	8	2	(4)	(10)
4 EASTERN - HIGH	25	29	29	28	26	24	21	18	14	11
4 TOTAL - HIGH	99	113	109	100	89	73	56	39	20	1

CUMULATIVE NET COSTS / (SAVINGS) FROM LGR – LOWER COST SCENARIO

£m	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
4 WEST - LOW	19	19	15	10	5	(2)	(8)	(15)	(22)	(29)
4 SOUTH WEST - LOW	19	19	14	9	3	(4)	(11)	(19)	(26)	(34)
4 CENTRAL - LOW	19	18	13	7	(0)	(8)	(16)	(24)	(32)	(41)
4 EASTERN - LOW	19	19	16	12	8	3	(3)	(9)	(14)	(20)
4 TOTAL - LOW	75	75	59	38	15	(11)	(38)	(66)	(95)	(124)

LGR COST AND SAVINGS DETAILED ASSUMPTIONS

The table below shows cost and savings assumptions in detail, identifying the areas in which a range has been accepted by partners. For further detail see appendix A in the accompanying "spine" document.

	LGR costs and savings (£ m)									
Assumption	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
One off-costs										
IT disaggregation (HIGH)	34.9	10.2	5.8	4.4	4.4					
IT disaggregation (LOW)	21.3	6.2	3.5	2.7	2.7					
IT consolidation	18.7									

Programme management	16.5									
Contract novation and renegotiation	4.4									
Estates and facilities - reconfiguration	1.4	1.4								
Communication and rebranding	1.3									
Staff relocation	1.9									
Specialist support and advice	5.5									
Transition cost - redundancies	5.6	1.9	1.9							
Total one-off costs (HIGH)	**90.2**	**13.4**	**7.6**	**4.4**	**4.4**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Total one-off costs (LOW)	**76.5**	**9.4**	**5.4**	**2.7**	**2.7**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Recurring costs										
Additional costs of scale	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Diseconomies of scale (HIGH)	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3
Diseconomies of scale (LOW)	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1
Total recurring costs (HIGH)	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**	**18.3**
Total recurring costs (LOW)	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1
Recurring savings										
Staff savings	(6.3)	(12.1)	(18.2)	(18.5)	(18.9)	(19.3)	(19.7)	(20.1)	(20.5)	(20.9)
Democratic and governance reorganisation	(0.7)	(1.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)	(2.4)
Direct cost savings	(2.2)	(4.5)	(9.2)	(10.7)	(12.2)	(12.6)	(13.0)	(13.5)	(13.9)	(14.3)
Total recurring savings	**(9.1)**	**(18.0)**	**(29.8)**	**(31.6)**	**(33.5)**	**(34.3)**	**(35.1)**	**(35.9)**	**(36.7)**	**(37.6)**

BALANCE SHEET - BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking of the consolidated balance sheets of new organisations against existing unitary authorities was undertaken by an independent organisation in March 2025. This comparison is based on our unmodified proposal (i.e. without changes to boundaries), but the results give a clear indication of the likely position of modified authorities.

	Net Assets	URR	URR+DSG	CFR	Debt gearing
4a.1 Eastern	2ND	2ND	2ND	TOP	2ND
4a.2 West	TOP	3RD	2ND	3RD	TOP
4a.3 South West	TOP	TOP	TOP	2ND	2ND
4a.4 Central	TOP	2ND	2ND	3RD	TOP

Existing and future Hertfordshire authorities have relatively stable balance sheet financial health when compared with all existing unitaries. In this exercise they were compared to unitary authorities (excluding Mets and London Boroughs). The table above shows the results by quartile.

- **Net assets** - all options would see the proposed unitaries in the top quartile with the exception of the West authority in the 4 unitary model.
- **Usable Revenue Reserves** – only option 4a results in an authority having URR levels below the unitary median.
- **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit** – currently low when compared with other areas, but forecasting much greater deficits in future which will impact the resilience of all options.
- **Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)** – the one area with consistently low performance. There are a handful of exceptions, driven by East Herts and Broxbourne.
- **Debt gearing** - all options show above median levels in respect of debt gearing.

OTHER KEY FINANCIAL RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Please refer to appendix A of the spine document for a further list of specific risks and assumptions that are relevant to this option. In particular:

- **Strategic Authority** – some existing costs and budgets will transfer to the Strategic Authority such as the Fire service. These have not been included in the financial model at this stage due to the complexities of splitting out budgets and resource. No additional running costs have been assumed for the Strategic Authority within the financial model.

- **Existing MTFS savings** – If the savings assumed to be achieved by vesting day are not delivered, this would reduce the projected baseline position and may require the new authorities to identify additional savings beyond those expected from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

  It should also be noted that, while annual savings are included in the MTFS up to 2027/28, non-LGR savings (to address underlying funding gaps) have already been incorporated into the financial model.

- **Savings** – while a prudent approach to savings has been adopted, it is not yet possible to fully determine which savings are cashable and which may be non-cashable—for example, where expenditure is funded by ring-fenced grants. Therefore, although expenditure may be reduced in some cases, there could be limitations on how those savings can be used.

- **MTFS forecasts** – as outlined earlier the financial models assume that cost increases – especially in Social Care and SEND, are lower in the years after LGR than in the years preceding it. Council tax increases are also assumed at the 4.99% (2.99% council tax + 2% adult social care precept) every year in line with government assumptions on funding.

- **Shared service arrangements** – Hertfordshire has a track record of successful shared services. It has been assumed for the purposes of the financial case that shared service arrangements will continue where long-term countywide contracts exist, such as for Highways and Waste Disposal. Without these arrangements, the additional costs linked to disaggregation could rise significantly.

- **DSG Deficit /HNB** – the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant funds education for children with SEND, including special schools, independent placements, and additional support in mainstream settings.

  Rising demand for SEND provision has led many councils to overspend, as grant funding has not kept pace with costs. The government's 'statutory override' allows councils to exclude these deficits from their accounts, but the financial shortfall remains. The override has been extended to March 2028 while longer-term reforms are developed.

  The County Council forecasts a cumulative DSG deficit of £255 million by March 2028, with annual overspends expected to continue. The outcome of national reforms will be critical to the financial sustainability of all three structural options. Any remaining HNB deficit would need to be divided between the new authority or authorities, creating a risk that an unfunded deficit could be transferred.

- **Pay Harmonisation** – no assumptions have been made in relation to pay harmonisation within the financial model although noting that any pay harmonisation could result in significantly increased costs

- **Borrowing** – If alternative funding sources are insufficient to cover transition costs, borrowing may be required. Borrowing costs have not been included in the financial model at this stage and could reduce projected savings and the baseline funding available

- **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)** – the HRA sits outside of General Fund revenue expenditure. Although the four HRA's in Hertfordshire receive support services/Cost of democracy from the General Fund the impact on HRA's for one off, on-going costs and savings has not been included within the financial business case

- **Assets disaggregation** – has not been accounted for within the financial model but this potentially poses risks at a later stage in terms of ensuring the transfer of assets and their corresponding revenue streams and or liabilities does

not inadvertently worsen the financial position and sustainability of the new authorities. Disposal of surplus assets may help to defray the costs of reorganisation.

- **Shared services** – whilst some shared services are already in existence across for example Audit, Fraud, Procurement and Building Control, across Hertfordshire, these may no longer align geographically with the new authority boundaries. This may pose additional costs in relation to:
  - Disaggregating shared systems or contracts that are no longer aligned geographically.
  - Potential duplication of effort or investment if new, separate services are required.
  - Loss of economies of scale once shared arrangements end.

  However, in other cases existing shared services will not require disaggregation and there may be opportunities to expand these and create greater economies of scale.

- **Companies and other entities** – where they exist this may cause additional complexity in aggregating and disaggregating balance sheets and asset valuation or else amending governance and ownership arrangements. As a result additional specialist support may be required. This is assumed to be covered by the existing allocation of specialist support within the one-off costs.

- **Shadow authority costs** – it has been assumed that the costs of the shadow authority can be covered by existing budgets and one-off costs and the contingency where required. These are unlikely to have a material impact on the financial assessment of alternative unitary options being considered, nor on their ongoing financial sustainability.

ADDITIONAL LEVERS TO IMPROVE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

In addition to the net savings assumed within the modelling there are a number of levers that can be used to help deliver a financially sustainable four unitary model, reducing the payback period and improving the financial position of all unitaries.

For note while the payback period is longer, the modelling shows that if 2028/29 costs can be met from any of the measures listed below the overall position for the 4 unitaries can be met from the in-year budget, with the exception of the central unitary covering Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield and North Herts. This unitary has a larger part of the County Council demand for Adults and Social than funding assumed and will require a number of the interventions listed below.

- **Lever one – continue the annual savings programme and the transformation of services**
  The English Devolution White Paper recognises that no additional resources will be given to the local government sector as part of this change, consequently, LGR is not a silver bullet that will revitalise the sectors finances. The modelling completed is based on Hertfordshire Districts planned budgets up to and including 2027/28, in that last year there were anticipated savings required of £22.2 million, the modelling doesn't include any further savings requirements. But to manage deficits, Councils have rationalised services and used transformational change, to continue to support the diverse and changing needs of our residents within a decreasing funding envelope. The opportunity of LGR gives further potential for transformational opportunities to continue to make savings that improve services rather than reduce them. So, with a strong record of delivering savings a level of savings to the 2027/28 targets of £22Million could be assumed.

  Unitarisation brings with it new opportunities to streamline and improve services whilst staying at a size that allows connection to community. Smaller unitaries have greater agility to redesign services, embed prevention, and respond to local priorities. Four councils of this scale can collaborate where size adds value, standardise where consistency matters, and still test and adapt new approaches quickly. This combination supports ongoing improvement and innovation, building long-term efficiency and resilience rather than relying solely on savings achieved at the point of transition. Councils will work together into the coming months and years to help deliver savings quicker than the timeline set out in the modelling.

  Design will be by function enabling agile leadership across similar activities to reduce management overheads. Breaking down silo-based working that exists due to current structures, job roles, departments or council will enable benefits for our residents and our teams. By approaching this change in a positive manner focused on transformational opportunities as opposed to savings through targeted cuts, the new councils will support a development culture, encouraging existing staff to expand their current skillsets and diversify into new roles mitigating the need for redundancy in some places.

While fewer, larger unitaries could deliver higher one-off and transition savings, experience from previous reorganisation programmes shows that maximising short-term savings can come at the expense of effective local government. The 4 unitary model can enable change to happen at more agile pace and deliver savings quicker and identify additional transformation change that is not currently within the model because of the potential lower spans of control in smaller councils. Smaller councils will start from a more agile place and therefore are arguably better placed to enact change quicker. As an illustration, saving a further 20 FTE's versus the 139 FTE assumed of 'General staff' would save an additional £1.1Million a year across the four unitaries.

Examples of Transformation opportunities:

- Shared services which there are already a number in Hertfordshire, including Internal Audit, Anti- Fraud, Revenue and Benefits, ICT, procurement and legal to name a few already established that could be expanded. It is for each unitary to decide but for instance sharing social care (east and west) would save £2.9Million per annum based on the lower cost range modelling, this is before opportunities to transform are considered.
- Asset rationalisation and improving asset usage across the enlarged estate
- Use of digital tools

Opportunities to Transform through Adult Social care

Local government reorganisation creates space to secure productivity gains across high needs, working age adults and older adults. Hertfordshire's adult social care starts from a strong base, with a record of delivering savings while sustaining quality, putting the area in a credible position to turn reform into real financial benefits post vesting day. The County Council has already invested significantly in partnership arrangements and integrated models that go beyond traditional structures. Based on this there is already precedent and good foundations in place to look at different delivery target operating models. The analysis that follows uses high-level benchmarking completed by IMPOWER to highlight potential opportunities through comparison with statistical near neighbours. While the immediate focus is adult social care, the same approach can be applied more widely across local services to surface further efficiency opportunities and transformation gain. Figures are illustrative and intended to indicate scale and areas of focus, rather than representing certain budget commitments. In addition, some of the potential gain may be secured through Connect to Prevent programme assumed within the modelling.

Impower Index Savings Potential Range, Compared to Statistical Neighbours	High Needs	Working Aged Adults	Older Adults	Total
Low estimate	£12 million	£9 million	£25 million	**£46 million**
High estimate	£29 million	£21 million	£58 million	**£108 million**

Published data indicates that there are opportunities and particularly for smaller unitaries. National benchmark data indicates that unitary authorities with a population of 350k and below, perform better in terms of key areas of expenditure across Adult Social Care and Children's Services, as depicted in the table below. This is a high-level national benchmark assessment and there would need to be further work to determine the level of savings taking into account regional cost variations.

Average unit costs	S251 LAC unit cost	S251 residential unit cost	S251 SEN unit cost	Nursing unit cost	Residential unit cost	Residential & Nursing unit cost
Population 500-750k	**£1,949**	**£7,406**	**£123**	**£1,087**	**£1,160**	**£1,138**
Population 350-500k	**£1,946**	**£8,465**	**£118**	**£1,151**	**£1,209**	**£1,166**
Population 250-350k	**£1,718**	**£6,772**	**£96**	**£1,006**	**£1,028**	**£1,023**
Population <250k	**£1,759**	**£7,220**	**£100**	**£1,044**	**£1,059**	**£1,048**

- **Lever two – Housing Revenue Impact (HRA)**

  There are four HRAs within Hertfordshire which would sit within two of the four new unitaries. This means set up costs need to be apportioned between the General Fund and HRA as well as savings. While the former puts pressure on HRAs this allows the initial costs to be spread over a bigger reserve base in the Central 4 unitary option. The central

unitary will have two HRAs from WHDC and SBC where a proportion of the Statutory and Tiers 1-3 redundancy cost would be funded from.

Similarly Upper Tier authorities don't have Housing Revenue Accounts which four Lower Tier authorities do in Hertfordshire. Smaller unitaries with lower social care client bases allows not only for closer working in terms of sharing management arrangements but also for accommodation provision for working age adults with disabilities and flexi care options for the elderly, enabling the delivery of savings in both the HRA and social care.

The 4 unitary option means there are 2 UAs that have substantial HRA coverage (2 out of 3 of the District areas in the Central Unitary and all of the North West Unitary) and 2UAs that have no HRA. This gives the opportunity to combine and strengthen HRAs within those 2 unitaries giving economies of scale and improved resilience due to the close proximity of the 4 Unitary stock owning geographies.

- **Lever three – Business Rates (NNDR)**
  The estimated go live date for LGR is 2028/29 which is year three of the Local Government settlement and within that period any gains are retained and can support the funding of one off costs or part fund the budget gap in the early years, furthermore (subject to fair funding revision) if government grant remains fairly static beyond 2028/29 those retained gains will be lost gradually through a three year transition phase. Notwithstanding that gains in Hertfordshire in 2025/26 were estimated to be circa £8Million which are significant and no NNDR gains have been assumed in the modelling for the two, three and four unitary options.

    - *An ask of government is that business rate gains post 2026/27 are retained for a six year period to support the four unitary option until sufficient cumulative savings are achieved*.

- **Lever four - use of Government Funding for one off costs of LGR or Capitalisation Directions to Fund upfront costs and reducing redundancy pressures:**
  In both the high and low ICT/Social care model upfront costs are significant (year 1 £90.1M -£76.5M), so this could be ameliorated by:
    - Grant funding via a fund for ICT costs like the Future Councils digital fund as implementing the new systems will be through the digital lens.
    - Capitalisation could be used to spread one off LGR costs over a longer period with the potential to fund from asset rationalisation and other capital resources.
    - Utilising staff with the relevant skill set to deliver some of the required project management. rather than using consultancy or recruiting new staff would avoid one off costs early on in the Unitary budgets.
    - The model only assumes 5% vacancy rate which by 2028/29 may be higher going into LGR therefore reducing redundancy costs.

- **Lever five- Fair Funding**
  The modelling does not currently include any Fair Funding assumptions as this has proved to be too difficult to model with certainty, furthermore the funding beyond 2028/29 may not decrease with any impact of FF2, it also doesn't increase but remains flat.

- **Lever six- Council Tax taxbase growth**
  The modelled taxbase is built on an average of 0.8% which is based on 2025/26 growth, however with bigger unitaries driving housing growth this gives opportunity to increase the taxbase beyond 0.8%. A 0.2% increase in the taxbase would increase council tax income by £2.2Million.

For reasons set out in the rest of the document we believe that 4 unitary option is the right answer on non-financial factors, so this is how the Government can help make the model work financially. There is scope for some further services (beyond those currently assumed) to be delivered county-wide, which will help generate further savings. And with support with the transition costs through grant funding capital receipts direction, retaining business rates for longer we can deliver a financially viable and sustainable model in Hertfordshire.

HIGH-QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE SERVICES (MHCLG CRITERION 3)

GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC ARRANGEMENTS

The four unitary model is built on the principles of community-based local government. Electoral arrangements should start from the places people identify with, making a ward-based approach the natural fit. Wards are smaller, closer to communities, and better aligned to neighbourhood and place. The structure of local representation will define how communities relate to their council for decades to come, and it must be shaped by what best supports strong, accessible and accountable governance.

A ward-based model offers a more balanced and locally attuned approach designed with the following principles in mind:

- **Electoral equality**
  Councils should aim for each councillor to represent a similar number of electors. The starting point is the agreed council size, which sets an average electors-per-councillor figure. Individual wards should sit close to that average, with any material variances justified by clear evidence.
- **Community identity**
  Boundaries should reflect how places actually work. That means using obvious lines on the ground and recognising local ties that bring people together, such as centres, facilities, parish areas and networks that drive community interaction.
- **Effective and convenient local government**
  Wards should be workable. They need sensible internal links, practical travel within the area, and a size and workload that allow councillors to represent residents, attend committees and engage with partners without being stretched across unmanageable distances or populations.

These principles help ensure that local democratic arrangements are grounded in the places where people live their lives. Wards are typically smaller and more rooted in local identity, enabling councillors to serve recognisable and cohesive areas. Electoral boundaries are not just administrative tools. They influence how well communities are heard, how effectively councillors can engage with residents, and how services respond to local need.

By contrast, divisions were primarily designed to deliver electoral parity. While they are functional for larger-scale representation, they do not always reflect local identity or geographic coherence. In rural areas in particular, strict adherence to numerical equity can produce very large divisions that pose practical challenges for councillors in terms of travel, accessibility and casework. The boundary changes that underpin the 4U model have therefore been developed from wards as the building blocks. Trying to align them to divisions would require sub-dividing seats and cutting across coherent communities, which would weaken equity and place identity. A refined ward-based approach is more likely to strike the right balance between fair representation, community connection and geographic logic, all of which are essential to strong local government.

Starting from wards lets us hold a strong line on electoral equality while respecting community identity and day-to-day geography. It avoids the over-large patches that divisions can create, especially in rural areas, and it supports councillors to be visible, accessible and effective. Where we propose variance from a perfect mathematical average, it is because there is a clear place-based reason to do so, such as a strong boundary feature, a recognised community or practical access within the ward.

Proposed Structure
Councillor numbers across the four proposed unitaries are derived by moving all three member wards to two members, converting several two member wards to single member wards, and retaining existing single member wards. The table below provides the detailed number of councillors, the total electorate and both the average elector to population and councillor ratios for each of the new authorities:

Unitary Authority	Wards	Cllrs	Population	Population / Cllr Ratio	Electorate	Elector/ Cllr Ratio
Eastern	43	75	289,774	3,864	213,769	2,850
North West	45	84	312,432	3,719	228,865	2,725
South West	41	79	313,190	3,964	223,819	2,833
Central	47	89	320,795	3,604	229,379	2,577

This model has been developed after reviewing previous approaches to councillor numbers used when previous unitary councils were formed. Across the 2009 and 2019 to 2023 reorganisations, new authorities commonly retained the existing ward maps for initial elections and calibrated councillor numbers ward by ward to improve electoral equality, rather than applying a uniform rule. That established practice provides strong precedent for our approach of retaining ward boundaries while varying representation to reflect elector ratios. Notably, Bedford Borough's 2009 unitarisation adopted the same principle for its first unitary election, and there are a number of recent examples of implementing a similar approach to the model outlined above.

Committee Capacity & Governance Model
With fewer councillors overall, committee expectations must remain proportionate. Modelling shows that committee seats per councillor across the four councils sit within a tight band, keeping governance workable alongside casework, outside body appointments and parish engagement. The indicative ratios are set out below.

Unitary Authority	Councillors	Committee Seats per Councillor
Eastern	75	2.05
North West	84	1.83
South West	79	1.94
Central	89	2.05

This alignment maintains scrutiny and regulatory capacity while avoiding undue pressure on councillors.

Community Leadership
Councillors are first and foremost local leaders, visible and answerable in the places they represent, maintaining a close connection with residents. Any of the proposed models of local government reorganisation will reduce the total number of councillors across the county, which broadens each member's brief across services, scrutiny, partnerships and neighbourhood engagement. This change cannot be treated simply as a saving. Workloads must remain realistic and the role attractive to the next generation, including people who serve alongside employment or caring responsibilities.

Our design anchors each councillor in a coherent, recognisable ward with fair elector ratios and practical travel, keeps committee expectations proportionate and close to current norms, and equips members with clear schemes of delegation, strong officer support, modern digital tools, and robust locality and neighbourhood governance structures that provide the intelligence and relationships needed to resolve issues quickly and maintain a close connection with residents.

This approach uses wards as the building blocks to balance electoral equality, community identity and workable governance. Councillor numbers are calibrated to preserve access, accountability and contact with residents, and committee demands are kept close to existing practice so workloads remain sustainable. These are interim arrangements, underpinned by strong locality and neighbourhood governance, and a full boundary review will follow vesting day to refine warding in light of growth and community evidence with the clear intent to strengthen local representation further and avoid overburdening councillors.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM (3A&3B)

Our aim is simple: services that are easy to access, consistent in quality, prevention led and accountable. Local Government Reorganisation is the enabler. It aligns organisations to real places, simplifies where joining up helps, and builds the capabilities a preventative system needs.

MHCLG asks proposals to set out the approach to higher risk public services. This proposal does that for Adults Social Care, Children's Social Care, Education, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and Housing and Homelessness. It also describes how we will deliver the everyday front-line services residents see most, and the planning, regeneration and development activity that enables jobs, homes and stronger places.

1 **Resident centred and responsive**
Start from what matters to residents with simple routes. One front door, end to end ownership, plain updates and quick recovery reduce effort, with teams, assets and decision makers close to residents and performance shown openly.

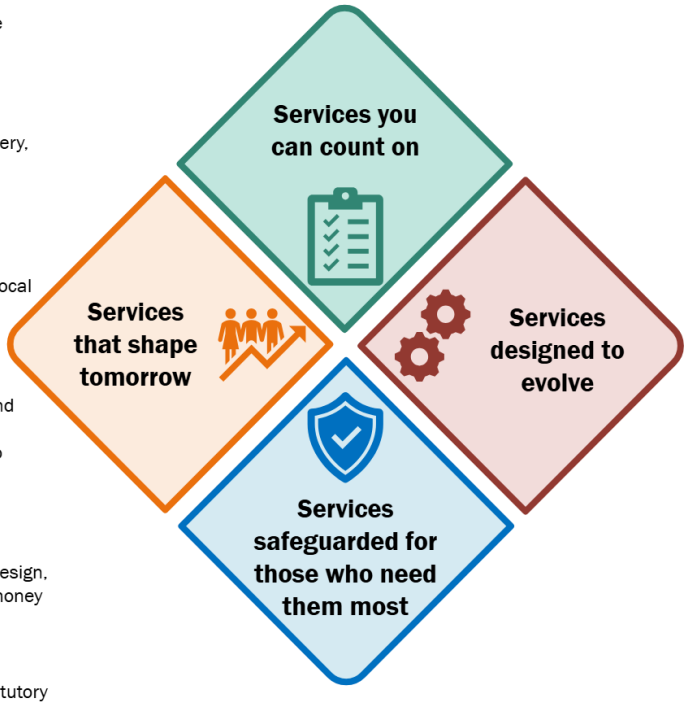
2 **Integrated and preventative**
Join help earlier through co-located teams and clear pathways with key partners and stakeholders. Focus on prevention, reablement and recovery, tracking outcomes and inequalities openly to cut repeats and build independence.

3 **Shared where it makes sense, local where it adds value**
Share specialist capacity by exception through clear inter-authority agreements with standards and review points. Keep relationship work local under one visible standard so residents do not face fragmentation and accountability stays clear.

4 **Data, digital and innovation as the engine of improvement**
Modernise services and invest in core IT where it improves efficiency and outcomes. Shared tools, a resident identity and open dashboards join information, enable light automation and strengthen cyber resilience so teams act sooner and performance is visible.

5 **Redesigned to improve outcomes**
Model councils on high performing unitaries at around 300,000, using proven operating models rather than rescaled structures. Use service design, clear roles and benefits tracking so improvements stick and value for money is visible.

6 **Secure foundations before change**
Keep residents and services protected from Vesting Day. Safeguard statutory services, stabilise contracts and systems, and phase change with clear communications and tested recovery so delivery stays steady and reliable.



The case for change is clear. Jobs are growing, yet skills, transport and housing do not always line up with opportunity. Health inequalities are also widening, with more people living with long term conditions, productivity has stalled and living costs have risen. Councils still spend most money after problems escalate. Two-tier arrangements add duplication, slow decisions and blur accountability. Residents want simple answers: can I get help easily, is my neighbourhood safe and well run, are there fair routes into good work, and who is responsible when things do not join up?

The next section outlines how this comes to life through four priorities:

1. Services you can count on
2. Services that shape tomorrow
3. Services designed to evolve
4. Services safeguarded for those who need them most

Case Study – Hertfordshire Building Control

Hertfordshire Building Control (HBC) was established in 2016 to improve building control services for local authorities across the County by combining teams from initially seven (now eight) separate local authorities into a single, more efficient centre of excellence. Its purpose is to ensure building projects comply with building regulations, protecting the public interest and promoting quality, safe, and sustainable buildings. By consolidating services, HBC provide a more consistent and resilient statutory service to Hertfordshire's communities.

Prior to 2016, small Building Control Teams were employed by each individual District and Borough Council. Each district faced recruitment and retention challenges trying to retain highly skilled and sought after Building Control colleagues. This

led to internal competition for resources between local authorities, high levels of vacancies and increased market force supplements. Combining these teams and transforming ways of working has helped to resolve these issues and ensure we have a service that it fit purpose for the future.

Today, HBC has been recognised as a standard of excellence within the Building Control Community having set the bar for service transformation and customer focus. Upskilling and developing future Building Control talent remains a key focus for the company, with over a third of their workforce engaged in professional learning in 2023. By creating this centre of excellence Hertfordshire Councils have not only saved money, but developed a competent team committed to supporting the most complex of developments across the County. By standardising processes, aligning technology and developing their people, HBC ensures that constructions work across the County is compliant with health and safety regulations, that the interests of property owners are protected and that projects run smoothly and results in high quality sustainable buildings that fit with the needs of each individual area.

SERVICES YOU CAN COUNT ON

These are the services people see and feel every day. Residents judge us first by whether the basics work, how easy they are to access, and how quickly we put things right. They also shape perceptions of value for money and are a constant talking point for elected members. Local Government Association (LGA) tracking shows trust in local services remains higher than in many parts of the public sector, but has fallen over the last decade from an estimated 60% to roughly 50%. Across the UK, productivity is challenging, demand is rising and budgets are tight. The real test is whether public services answer the everyday questions that matter to people in Hertfordshire, from clean streets to safe neighbourhoods and quick, simple routes to getting help.

Scope & context

Key opportunities

Four unitaries for Hertfordshire would bring responsibility and resolution closer to streets and neighbourhoods, removing two tier friction. Choices are made by people who know the area, so issues are owned and fixed. Reliability improves as specifications and supplier arrangements are aligned at contract renewal across four authorities, not 11. Where scale helps purchasing and logistics, the Councils can collaborate. Where responsiveness matters, prioritisation is kept local. This direction supports government's national missions to take back our streets, improve health and spread opportunity by placing capability and accountability closer to place.

Residents get independent local gateways with clear updates. Parks, libraries and leisure are programmed around local demand and linked with Healthy Hubs, so the same assets support inclusion and wellbeing. Environmental health, licensing, trading standards and community safety can operate as a single route with partners, so cases move quickly and residents are not passed around. Open reporting by place helps target effort where it is most needed and shows progress plainly.

Pride in place
Residents notice the basics first. Collections must be reliable, streets clean and parks welcoming. Closely related tasks are coordinated so visible results follow quickly, parks and play are kept to agreed local standards, and leisure offers reflect real patterns of use. When things go wrong, recovery is swift and lessons travel across places.

We will use local insight to time activity to when it matters most, cleansing before weekend peaks, leaf and gulley work ahead of heavy rain, and play inspections tied to school holidays. Parks can host community events and activity sessions that strengthen belonging, with small grants and simple permits to help groups get started. Clear plans for seasonal pressures, heat, storms and fireworks keep centres looking cared for and help neighbourhoods feel safe and well run.

Safer neighbourhoods
Working with unitary authorities, police, housing providers, youth services and the NHS can act together, based around geographies that matter to residents. They will work cooperatively to respond to local priorities, coordinating patrols and neighbourhood operations. This joint working will be augmented through formal Community Safety Partnerships, building on successful partnerships already established across the county, providing a clear spine for accountability.

Local teams will focus on prevention, pairing swift responses with early help from adults' and children's social care, housing and public health so problems are tackled before they escalate. Shared insight will flag repeat locations and vulnerable people, prompting practical support such as tenancy sustainment, debt and employment advice, youth diversion, and mental health or substance misuse outreach. Combined with coordinated neighbourhood operations, this prevention first approach reduces repeat incidents, makes streets feel safer and improves life chances.

Easy access and rapid resolution
Residents expect simple ways to get help, to be understood first time and to see swift, visible fixes without being passed around. With four unitaries rooted in recognisable places, teams know their patches and partners, decisions are taken nearby, and resolution is shorter. Smaller, more agile councils can flex to local need, adjusting priorities quickly and tailoring outcomes to what works in each place. Digital tools and AI will support self service and triage requests to the right people, whilst keeping the option to speak to a person when issues are complex or personal. We will use plain language, offer your preferred channel, avoid asking for the same information twice, and effectively hand over to partners rather than just signposting, so the experience feels quicker, clearer and more personal.

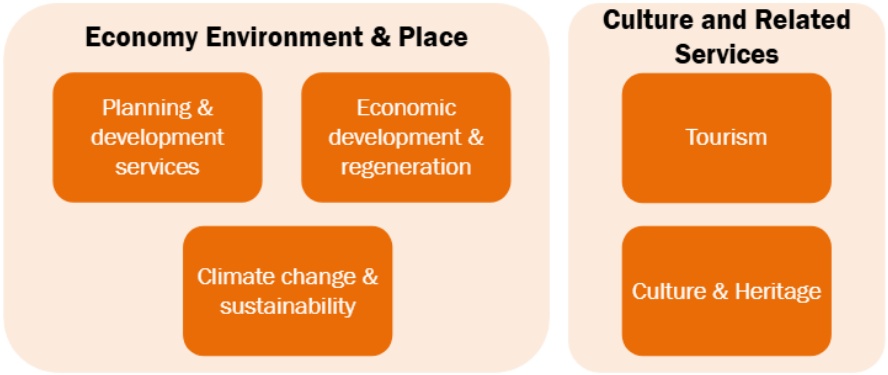
Resident voice
The needs of residents must be at the heart of new unitaries, with their views and ideas shaping provision. Involvement should be easy and timely, in ways that make sense for people. The opportunity is to engage residents in service design through a range of methods from quick pilots to walkabouts, to online testing, and co-production methods for personal or complex services. Bringing together district and county services into local footprints gives the opportunity to find better ways to support individuals, families and communities, through multi-disciplinary working rather than many separate interactions.

SERVICES THAT SHAPE TOMORROW

These are the services that set the direction for homes, jobs and the quality of place. Hertfordshire's economy has grown from about £34 billion in 2015 to about £49 billion today, creating jobs, opportunities and funding for public services. GVA per filled job is strong at around £63,630 versus a UK average of around £61,729, with strengths in life sciences, space and defence, advanced manufacturing, creative industries and green technology. Hertfordshire faces steep housing challenges and local plans to unlock 100,000 new homes including social and Council homes in sustainable, attractive places that people want to live. There remains an opportunity for this to filter down to everyday experience, and too many residents still ask whether services are helping them access good work, secure homes and better transport in their area.

Each of the four unitary councils have very different characteristics, and require different approaches to help secure a bright future for their communities. Each would be best placed to make decisions, with partners and communities, for the future of those places – identifying the best ways to provide homes, communities, job opportunities and an attractive environment.

Scope & context



Key opportunities

With four councils, strategy turns into delivery that fits real places with local delivery plans well aligned with the needs of local business and communities. Evidence is used to target resources by place and enable faster decisions, while local policy choices protect character and work with local communities. Investors see clearer propositions by place, quicker consents supported by repeatable design approaches, and a route to the skills and infrastructure that investment depends on. This supports national missions to kickstart economic growth, make the country a clean energy leader and break down barriers to opportunity.

South Mimms in Hertsmere shows the opportunity. An 85 acre data centre campus near the M25 and the Elstree grid connection is expected to generate around £21 million per year in business rates once operational, support hundreds of construction jobs, and sustain high skilled operational roles over time.

Homes, jobs, skills and sustainability

Each council will set a deliverable pipeline of sites with local design guidance and clear infrastructure milestones, respecting local needs and identity, while working with the Strategic Authority to unlock larger scale opportunities. Growth should widen opportunity. Each area will maintain a pipeline of town centre projects; employment sites and sector priorities linked to training and careers. Local councils are well placed to convene employers, colleges and the university to align routes into priority roles, and to work with the needs of smaller businesses in the distinctive economies of different unitaries. Investment into skills and training can be designed for the different needs of towns and villages, with locally targeted outreach and support needed to connect with particular communities. As the UK is committed to longer-term climate goals and energy supply, new unitary councils will consider the different needs of the areas that they service, from sustainable travel, to retrofit, new design standards and energy efficiency.

Case Study – Watford Town Centre Regeneration

Watford Borough Council is leading a 20 year transformative regeneration programme to revitalise the town centre. The project aims to create a mixed-use environment that supports living, working, leisure and cultural activity while promoting sustainability and active travel. The regeneration will see the development of the Town Hall Quarter, which is a partnership with Mace Developments to deliver new homes, retail and community facilities around the historic Town Hall and Colosseum. This regeneration programme reflects the council's ambition for the town, as well as our commitment to its heritage and creativity. It will revitalise Watford's Museum and Heritage service and secure the future of much-loved local landmarks.

Watford is also a great location for entrepreneurs and growing businesses, which is why a new Innovation and Incubation hub is a key part of the scheme. Bringing it all together will be attractive public spaces and much-needed new homes. The Town Centre Strategic Framework was adopted in 2023, following public consultation. At the time of writing, the marked development has also been approved and the early phases of public realm improvements have been completed. A joint venture has been formed for the Town Hall Quarter, signalling long-term delivery commitment.

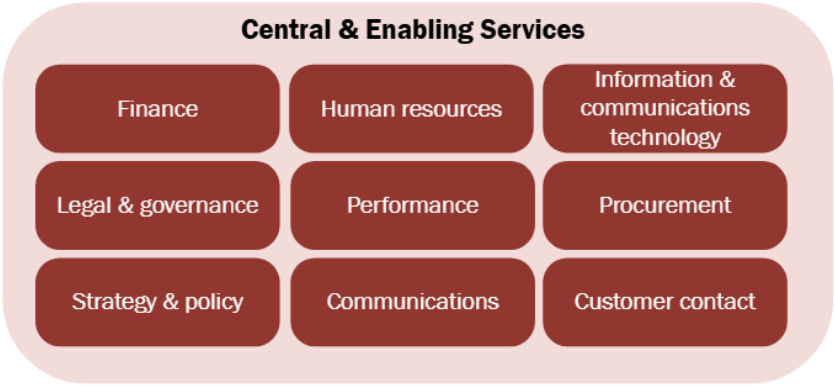
The town centre regeneration programme represents a forward looking approach to revitalising a mid-sized town. Through mixed-use development, community engagement and emphasis on sustainability, the scheme aims to create a resilient and attractive urban centre fit for future generations.

SERVICES DESIGNED TO EVOLVE

We will build services that are reliable from day one and designed to improve year by year. The test is simple, we will directly assess if residents experience clearer updates, faster resolution and smoother contact. Good practice exists, but too often it does not reach every service or every place. Across the UK, productivity is weak, ill health is rising and budgets are tight, so local authorities must do more with less while risk and expectation both increase.

This proposal is founded on the proposal to deliver smaller, more agile councils with the capability to solve problems earlier, exploit new technology like artificial intelligence (AI), use data well and protect essential services while improving the resident experience.

Scope & context



Opportunities to improve

This is a significant change for residents, service users, partners and our teams. It requires a rigorous and well managed approach to transition, with clear plans and broad engagement needed to give confidence to the approaches being taken. The four council model aims to provide agility so that each organisation can adapt to different challenges and opportunities over time. This requires clear leadership and is supported by a steady programme of workforce development, clear roles, supportive supervision, consistent induction and progression routes across services. Apprenticeships and local pipelines will be expanded with colleges and universities, and practical coaching will help teams adopt new tools and embed better ways of working. The focus is stability and confidence, so improvement lifts day to day reliability as well as long term value.

IT, insight and data

Local Government Reorganisation gives the opportunity to develop new approaches, harnessing AI and other technology to better meet the needs of communities. Digital foundations, networks and devices will be modern, secure, reliable and practical. With over 1,300 systems in use across Hertfordshire's Councils, there is a real opportunity for change and improvement, to invest in the right customer experience tools, integration, and new exploring greater automation to help improve customer experience. Bringing together data across different services to focus on the needs of different communities and neighbourhoods can aid prevention, help design and improve services. Data is used to understand local needs, target efforts and check results. Automation handles routine updates so people can focus on judgement and problem solving. Cyber security and recovery are crucial to trust and delivery and at the core of the transition plan. Over time, system separation aligns to organisational need, with data migration and new licences managed through transition plans.

Case Study Broxbourne Borough Council Digital Transformation

Since 2020, Broxbourne Borough Council has used business process re-engineering and digital technology to transform the customer experience and improve efficiency. Beforehand, most Council services were operating with manual and paper-based processes, alongside legacy IT systems. Surveys showed that more than 70% of residents would prefer to contact the Council online. As the first step, all technology in the Council was upgraded to provide a reliable, consistent base. This included Wi-Fi, a new, fast internet connection, software and the introduction of Office 365 across all departments.

Council staff worked with a team from the company Sopra Steria to map the stages and processes used for each type of customer transaction and consulted customers for their perspective. In just twelve weeks, recommendations were made to streamline processes and transform 30 common customer transactions.
Over the next three months a transformed customer experience was delivered, which included a new website incorporating the 30 digitised customer journeys. In the next phase, a further 120 digital services were developed,

transforming the way the Council works end-to-end. Throughout the programme, officers were supported through training into new ways of working.
Customers were now able to self-serve online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for almost all interactions with the Council. To assist customers who preferred to telephone, a strengthened customer service team was enabled to answer more of their queries at first point of contact. The immediate impact was:

- *A third more customers were now serving themselves online*
- *48% reduction in calls to the Council*
- *38% reduction in the transferring of calls, with customers are getting the right answers at first point of contact*

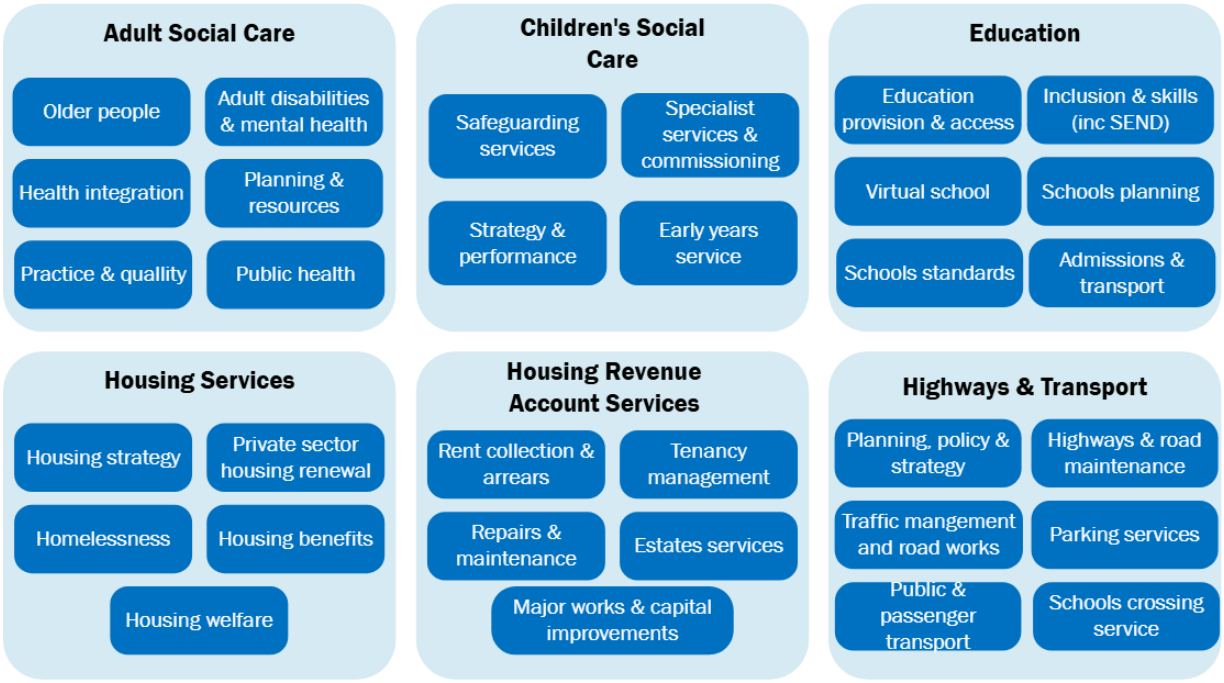
End-to-end digitised customer journeys also freed staff from time-consuming administrative processes, eliminated mountains of paperwork and improved accuracy. When the COVID-19 lockdown came in March 2020, most office-based staff transferred easily to working from home on their council laptops with access to all systems, minimising disruption to service delivery.

SERVICES SAFEGUARDED FOR THOSE WHO NEED THEM MOST

This section sets out how the four unitary councils will protect high risk, statutory services while shifting to prevention and early help. It draws on current demand, proven practice and sector insight to back local teams and community assets, so people get support earlier on housing, debt, employment, health and domestic abuse. The approach aligns with NHS neighbourhood models and builds capacity in towns and villages so more people can live independently.

We will balance local responsiveness with continuity and risk control. Functions will sit at the most sensible scale, and shared where specialism adds value or enables a safe transition. Clear accountability, strong quality assurance and safe and legal day one are non-negotiable.

Services in scope:



We include a particular focus on both Housing and on Highways and Transport because secure homes and a reliable network visibly improve daily life and reduce crisis, while strengthening outcomes across the wider system.

Implementation will run through three phases: Preparation, Transition and Transformation, each with two set milestones. We would start by agreeing the model and building readiness, move to a safe Go Live on Vesting Day with uninterrupted safeguarding and a safe and legal day one, then stabilise and optimise services so benefits are realised over time. The milestones below set clear gates for decisions, accountability and pace.

Phase	Purpose	Milestones
Phase 1: Preparation	Lay the groundwork for reorganisation. Agree the service model, engage stakeholders, baseline operations and shape the medium-term transformation plan.	**Milestone 1:** Submission of proposal –28 November 2025 **Milestone 2:** Ministerial decision and Structural Change Order – TBC 2026
Phase 2: Transition	Move safely from existing structures to the four unitary model, including boundary changes. Stand up shadow arrangements, protect high risk services and complete Day 1 readiness.	**Milestone 3:** Elections for the Shadow Authority – May 2027 TBC **Milestone 4:** Vesting Day for new Unitary Authorities – April 2028 TBC
Phase 3: Transformation	Stabilise, harmonise and then optimise services to deliver better outcomes and the benefits case over time.	**Milestone 5:** Vesting Day + 1 year **Milestone 6:** Vesting Day + 3 to 5 years

Each service chapter sets the ambition, the need and challenge, the practical pillars for change, the three to five year end state, and how the four unitary model unlocks better outcomes with the Strategic Authority while keeping day to day relationships close to residents.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

Adult social care is one of the largest and most financially pressured services delivered by local government. In 2023/24, councils in England spent £25.9 billion on adult social care, yet still overspent budgets by £586 million, the highest in a decade. The Devolution White Paper acknowledges that without reform, the system faces strain due to rising demand, workforce shortages, and fragile provider markets.

Our ambition is to place people at the heart of our work, supporting individuals to live safe, healthy, independent lives with real choice and control. We will build on a preventative, place-based care model that is proactive, personalised, and rooted in community strengths. This will be achieved through stronger integration with health, housing, voluntary and community services, underpinned by excellent practice and robust quality assurance.

For residents, this means more joined-up, preventative care. More localised unitary authorities are best placed to integrate adult social care with housing, community health, and voluntary services at the neighbourhood level, creating multidisciplinary teams that act earlier, reduce duplication, and improve outcomes and tackle potential challenges in rural or deprived areas.

The need, challenges & opportunity

Adult social care is at a critical juncture, both nationally and locally. The Government's white paper, *People at the Heart of Care*, articulates a bold and practical 10-year vision for reform—one that champions independence, personal choice, and support rooted in communities.

This aligns with the Care Act's principles and the Government's reform agenda, including the recent pledge to develop a parallel 10-year plan for social care alongside the NHS. Stability for vulnerable adults must be safeguarded, but flexibility is equally vital, especially as we anticipate the findings of the Dame Casey review and the implications of the Employment Rights Bill, which proposes a negotiating body and fair pay agreements for the sector. The emerging policy direction gives emphasis on person-centred care provides a framework is responsive, inclusive, and sustainable care.

Hertfordshire approaches LGR with a firm foundation, as services are rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission, with strong leadership, effective partnerships, and robust data use. This is positive and highlights the importance of achieving a stable transition, to retain a skilled, compassionate and committed team.

National pressures are intensifying. Inflation is driving up costs, while demand is rising, particularly among people with complex disabilities, autism, and mental health needs. These individuals require personalised support plans that build on their strengths and community networks. In Hertfordshire, over 11,700 people receive adult social care support, yet

provision is uneven. Hertfordshire County Council Market Position Statement for 2023–24 demonstrates that both North and South West and Eastern Hertfordshire rely more on residential and nursing care, while Central Hertfordshire sees higher use of domiciliary care and direct payments. Hertfordshire's Supported living is concentrated in the West, accounting for 57% of provision. The county has 254 care homes (9,893 beds), 76 nursing homes (4,823 beds), 295 domiciliary providers, and 92 supported living schemes.

This is reflected in the snapshot below:

1. Demand Mapping – Total Volumes

- Across Hertfordshire, there are **over 11,700 people** in receipt of ASC support (Working Age + Older Adults).
- Breakdown:
  - **Nursing care**: 916 people
  - **Residential care**: 1,868 people
  - **Domiciliary care**: 3,563 people
  - **Supported living**: 1,846 people
  - **Direct payments**: 3,557 people
- **Domiciliary care and direct payments** dominate demand, reflecting the wider shift to community-based support.

2. Demand Mapping – Percentages

- Demand is **not evenly distributed** across the county:
  - West and East Hertfordshire have a greater share of residential/nursing provision.
  - Central Hertfordshire carries a high share of domiciliary and direct payments.
  - Supported living has a concentration in the **West** (57% of Hertfordshire total).
- This highlights **geographic variation in care models** and demand pressures.

3. Working Age Adults (per 100k)

- **High variability across areas**:
  - Long-Term Supported Living rates are particularly high in some areas (e.g., West and Central).
  - Residential and domiciliary care use differs widely, showing that **local practice and market availability shape care patterns**.
- Some areas exceed Hertfordshire's average rates by **10%+**, highlighting unequal distribution of need and provision.

4. Older Adults (per 100k)

- Domiciliary care is the largest area of provision, but again varies widely (West Central lower than East/South West).
- Residential and nursing care show **marked differences** – e.g., Central with high residential use, East with lower.
- Direct payments uptake is also uneven, pointing to differences in **commissioning practice, market development and user choice support**.

5. Provider Capacity Mapping

Hertfordshire has:

- **254 care homes** (9,893 beds)
- **76 nursing homes** (4,823 beds)
- **295 domiciliary care providers**
- **92 supported living schemes**

However, the average cost of long-term care per person in Hertfordshire is significantly higher—£50,384 annually. This is 18% above the nearest neighbour average (£42,715). These figures suggest that while fewer people are receiving services, those who do require more intensive, sustained, and higher-cost support, potentially reflecting complex needs.

This pattern presents both a challenge and an opportunity. It reinforces the need to invest in earlier intervention, reshape local care markets, and expand personalised, community-based support. Doing so will not only improve outcomes for individuals but also help deliver better value for money. Hertfordshire's emerging Connect and Prevent programme exemplifies this strength, promoting independence and early intervention to reduce long-term expenditure. In doing so this will reduce spend by £25m.

Benchmarking from Peopletoo shows Hertfordshire has lower-than-average demand for working-age adult services but significantly higher costs - £50,384 per person, 28% above the national average. This reflects a higher proportion of individuals with complex needs in long-term care. Market dynamics such as recruitment premiums, travel time, and supply challenges can inflate costs.

However, the system still faces inequalities, particularly in rural access and waiting times. With Hertfordshire's 65+ population projected to grow by 40% by 2043, we must increase the supply of suitable accommodation while containing costs and maintaining quality. LGR offers a chance to address these gaps by targeting resources toward community-based services. In Hertfordshire there is an opportunity continue and extend the 'Connect and Prevent' approach to target and expand early help, reablement, supported living, and step-down capacity.

The proposed four unitary authority model provides the structural opportunity to realise the vision by aligning housing, health, and care at the local level. It enables targeted investment in preventative services, digital innovation, and workforce development, while fostering joined-up commissioning and delivery. Residents benefit from a single point of contact, clearer pathways, and services that are easier to navigate.

How the Four Unitary Model Delivers This Vision

The four unitary model offers the optimal scale to deliver adult social care that is responsive, preventative, and rooted in local communities. New unitary authorities on local footprints will need to target and respond to the distinct needs of their populations, whether that's higher residential and nursing care in the West and East, or greater use of domiciliary care and direct payments in Central. This local insight will need to tailored commissioning and services, alongside other council services and public partners.

The new unitaries will create the right conditions for integrated, place-based care. This includes co-locating adult social care with housing, community health, and voluntary services, enabling multidisciplinary teams to act earlier, reduce handoffs, and improve outcomes.

Crucially, the four unitary model supports a safer, more stable transition for residents. Changes will be phased carefully to maintain continuity of care, safeguarding arrangements, and workforce stability in the early years. A number of shared services are likely to be required to be delivered through a 'Hertfordshire Partnership' where scale adds value, where there is specialism or where there is need to protect vital frontline services.

Service Delivery Model

We recognise that any change in local government structure presents risks of disruption. Our priority is a stable transition, ensuring continuity of care, safeguarding, and workforce stability beyond vesting day. Clear leadership and oversight will manage this change effectively.

The joint local government proposal for Hertfordshire provides a high level plan for how we collectively manage the transition to stable operations of new unitary authorities on day one of operation. This proposal for four unitary councils focuses on two principal themes. The proposal recognises that the previous experience of councils going through local government reorganisations means disruption, and that many areas have looked to implement shared service for vesting day in order to help mitigate this risk, with West Northamptonshire, for example, having over 60 shared services in place on day one.

With a short window to prepare for vesting day, we will prioritise efforts to stabilise and maintain delivery, meeting the needs of vulnerable residents and meeting statutory duties. This may include broad use of shared service arrangements in the first few years of operation, based on a lead provider model centred on the current operational centre in Robertson House and Farnham House and the current Hertfordshire County Council existing operational use of two locality teams.

Public Health and Health and Wellbeing Boards will be central. Each unitary will align prevention with local priorities, integrating adult social care with health, housing, environmental health, and community safety to address risks earlier and closer to home.

Year one to two

In the first year of operation, the organisational design will feature:

Year One to Two	▪ **Local Leadership and Teams** - Each unitary authority will have a statutory Director and dedicated social work teams. In addition, to ensure continuity, a shared service model (based on East/West locality areas) may need to be used initially before transitioning to fully localised teams.
	▪ **Front Door and Core Infrastructure** - Each authority will operate its own front door system, potentially supported by shared ICT and technical support for functions such as direct payments depending on the time required to transition. Locality operations, including prevention hubs and day centres, will be absorbed into each new organisation.

	▪ **Integration and Service Alignment** - Integration with housing, community safety, and other local services will begin immediately to support prevention and unified discharge standards. Public Health will adopt a safe and legal day one configuration, with contracts and governance aligned with NHS partners.
	▪ **Shared Strategic Functions** - Longer-term shared services may include market intelligence, commissioning frameworks, analytics, and innovation. Short-term shared arrangements may cover ICT, digital and data platforms, performance reporting, and cyber security depending on the time available to manage the transition.
	▪ **Local Ownership and Market Development** - Each authority will take ownership of assessments, reviews, safeguarding, and commissioning. Disruption will be mitigated through shared oversight and quality assurance. Alignment with housing strategies will support the development of sustainable homecare and supported living markets.
	▪ **New Accommodation Models** - Will allow for more responsive commissioning, improved market sufficiency, and better alignment with housing strategies. They will support the development of sustainable homecare and supported living options, particularly in areas with high demand and fragmented supply. Integrated approaches also strengthen partnerships with NHS and voluntary sector providers, enabling place-based care and prevention that is locally attuned and financially sustainable.

Year three to five

Service change will not be on the basis of change for change's sake, but take place when a better, safer, model is ready. This means any sharing arrangements via a Hertfordshire Partnership will be kept under review, to ensure stability of services to residents while also the ability to change over time.

Longer-Term Design and Integration

The longer-term vision for adult social care under the four unitary authority model is centred on an integrated and locally delivered system. By this stage, multidisciplinary locality teams will be embedded to help strengthen links across health, housing, and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. Statutory adult social care practice will operate within each authority under a unified practice framework, with shared arrangements retained where they offer benefits in terms of specialism or scale.

Close collaboration with planning, housing development, and specialist teams will unlock opportunities to deliver new forms of accommodation that better meet local needs—enabling more people to remain independent at home. This housing-led approach will be a key enabler of preventative care and community resilience.

Integrated Care and Health Delivery

Redesigning services from the ground up allows the new authorities to prioritise preventative strategies that reduce long-term demand and improve population health. Integration will be driven by locally defined outcomes and supported by areas such as, joint commissioning and planning, potential for pooling budgets and targeted use of data.

Key features of the long term model could include:

Year Three to Five	▪ **Shared strategic functions** - By agreement for market intelligence, sufficiency planning, and specialist commissioning frameworks.
	▪ **Growth in supported living and Extra Care** - Improved homecare capacity, and outcome-based contracts that promote independence and reduce escalation to residential care.
	▪ **Scaling of direct payments, carers' support, and technology-enabled care** - Ensuring more people can remain safely at home with the right help at the right time.

	▪ **Measurable improvements** - In timeliness, continuity, and unit cost, with progress towards benchmarked outcomes for working-age adults and sustained community-based support for older adults.
	▪ **Public Health embedded in neighbourhood prevention plans** - Across South and West, and North and East footprints, with joint outcomes and aligned programmes focused on healthy homes, physical activity, and community wellbeing

Focus on Public Health

The approach that is best for a four unitary model is either a shared service or hybrid model as set out in the main proposal and dependent on the form of the Strategic Authority. Both preserve specialist capacity while keeping prevention close to place. This keeps visible responsibility in each council, with specialist functions delivered once where scale brings quality, training and value.

Sharing specialist capacity is essential to maintain statutory compliance, professional training, oversight and incident response. Within that shared model, the leadership footprint can be configured in two ways and should be considered by shadow authorities during transition. One option is a single countywide Director of Public Health with a unified specialist team serving all four councils. This provides consistent standards, efficient commissioning and a single approach to population health intelligence and workforce development, with staff embedded alongside local adult social care and housing teams in each authority. The alternative is an East and West leadership footprint aligned to NHS Health and Care Partnership geographies. This keeps scale for specialist functions through a shared backbone while strengthening day-to-day links with local NHS partners and neighbourhood delivery, so prevention priorities reflect different needs in each footprint.

This shared leadership approach is proven in practice. In Bedfordshire, the Director of Public Health role is shared across Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, supported by a single specialist team and clear local accountability, demonstrating that a hosted or hybrid model can operate effectively across multiple unitary councils.

On vesting day we will transfer the Public Health Grant and contracts safely, maintain health protection and screening responsibilities, and set interim governance with NHS partners. Over years three to five, Public Health will embed in neighbourhood teams, align outcomes and insight with adult social care and housing, and use shared specialist commissioning only where scale clearly adds value, while keeping visible accountability within each unitary.

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE, EDUCATION & SEND

Children's Services in England provide vital frontline services, including support for those who are most vulnerable or at risk. As Councils approach Local Government Reorganisation, effectively planning for a stable transition that protects vital services to children and young people must be at the heart of the approach.

In the financial year 2024/25, local authorities in England budgeted £14.1 billion for Children's Social Care. This represents a real-terms increase of £1.4 billion (10.7%) compared to the previous year (2023/24). This figure is part of a broader budgeted net current expenditure of £127.1 billion across all local authority services, with children's services continuing to be one of the most significant areas of spend. The increase reflects growing demand and cost pressures, particularly in areas such as residential care and support for children with complex needs.

In 2025/26, 30 councils across England have been granted Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) by the UK Government to help manage severe financial pressures and set legally balanced budgets, with significant pressures facing upper tier councils. This support permits councils to borrow or use capital receipts to fund day-to-day services.

A major driver of financial instability is the escalating cost of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision. National SEND deficits are projected to reach £5 billion by 2026 and potentially £8 billion by 2027. The Government has extended the statutory override, which keeps SEND deficits off council balance sheets until 2028, but concerns remain.

The National Audit Office warns that 43% of councils could be forced to issue Section 114 notices if the override is lifted, underscoring the urgent need for long-term reform and sustainable funding solutions.

Children's Services

Our ambition for Children's Social Care through reorganisation is to create safe, stable systems with clear local accountability and sufficient scale to invest in prevention and early help so that more children stay safely cared for by their family. The aim is to support more children and families earlier, reducing escalation to statutory intervention. For children who need to be in our care and care leavers, our ambition as corporate parents, is to ensure they have homes and trusted relationships that offer love, care, protection, and stability. The aim is that children in care and care leavers receive the help they need to address experiences of adversity and trauma and develop the foundations for a healthy, happy life.

The Government's Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive strategy builds on the Stable Homes agenda, promoting multidisciplinary family help teams, kinship care, and early intervention as the foundation for providing the right support to children who may be at risk or in need of support.

Reports from the District Councils' Network and the Staff College, including the 'Building the Best Places for Children and Families' report advocates for community-rooted services that prioritise prevention, early intervention, and local accountability. The District Councils' Network and IMPOWER's 2025 report, 'The Power of Prevention and Place in New Unitary Councils', highlights examples where smaller authorities have tailored services to local needs, with strategic collaboration in specialist areas and localised delivery for prevention and early help. These examples highlight the potential benefits pooled commissioning, and integrated neighbourhood teams, aiming to balance local leadership with strategic coordination, particularly in safeguarding, residential care, and family support.

Challenges exist across the sector in England, with the National Audit Office highlighting pressures in the market of provision for children's placements with increasing placement costs, and the ongoing need to secure and retain workforce capacity meaning transition must be well planned and managed.

The current position of Hertfordshire's Children's Services reflects a system that performs well against national benchmarks for Children's Services. Hertfordshire's rate of looked-after children remains stable at 36 per 10,000, well below both the England average (70) and statistical neighbours (55), suggesting effective early help and preventative services. However, demand is uneven, particularly in areas such as Broxbourne and Stevenage, potentially related to pockets of deprivation and where there could be benefit in deeper work with community partners to address specific challenges.

Ofsted's latest inspection rated Hertfordshire's Children's Services as Outstanding, citing timely assessments, strong leadership and the positive work of multi-disciplinary safeguarding teams, and stable long-term placements that meet children's needs.

Integrating children's social care more closely with housing, health and community services supports these prevention and corporate parenting ambitions and aligns with wider goals of tackling health inequalities, supporting family resilience, and ensuring every child has the best start in life.

SEND and Education Services

Our ambition for Education and SEND through reorganisation is to build a more inclusive system that identifies and meets need earlier, reduces reliance on out-of-area placements, and ensures children with SEND can thrive in local schools and communities. The goal is to strengthen place-based support, integrate better with health and social care, and provide parents with simpler, more transparent processes. We also aim to grow local specialist provision, modernise systems and case management, and maintain Hertfordshire's strong track record in traded school support.

In setting this vision, partners in Hertfordshire recognise that tor residents, this ambition means a responsive system that meets children's needs earlier. Families will benefit from expanded early years support, smoother transitions for care-experienced and SEND children, and schools that are better equipped to include and nurture every learner. Trauma-informed practices will ensure that professionals understand the impact of adversity and respond with empathy, helping children feel safe and supported in their learning environments.

Education and SEND services in Hertfordshire oversee a school population of around 226,000 pupils. Demand for specialist support has risen sharply: there were 14,473 children and young people supported with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) by July 2025, with annual growth between 12%-15%.

Over 90% of Hertfordshire schools are rated Good or Outstanding. Hertfordshire's schools continue to perform strongly in national benchmarking, with outcomes in core subjects and vocational pathways consistently above national averages. However, there are areas of pressure linked to population growth, rising demand for specialist services outstripping provision, and some differences across different parts of the county. The High Needs Block remains under significant financial strain, with projected spending for 2025/26 reaching £263 million—£52 million more than the funding available, further deepening the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit. Meanwhile, home-to-school transport continues to exert pressure on the budget, with services provided to over 3,100 pupils at an estimated annual cost of nearly £40 million.

Hertfordshire County Council is currently undergoing a reinspection of its Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This follows a previous inspection in November 2023, which identified failings across the local area partnership. The SEND Local Area Partnership (including the council and NHS) has been implementing a comprehensive improvement plan since early 2024. This includes: Enhancing data sharing and governance; Improving EHCP quality and timeliness; Expanding SEND school places (1,000 new places by 2025/26); Redesigning autism and ADHD assessment pathways; Investing an additional £7 million annually into SEND services.

The need, challenge and the opportunity

1. Children's Social Care Volumes – Totals & Percentages

- **Children in Need (CIN)**: 1,181 children – fairly evenly spread but highest in the West (54%).
- **Child Protection Plans (CP)**: 636 children – highest concentration in the East (58%).
- **Children Looked After (CLA)**: 986 children – again more concentrated in the East (53%).
- Implication:
- The East carries a greater share of safeguarding demand (CP & CLA), while the West sees higher early intervention needs (CIN).

2. Children's Social Care Rates per 100,000

- **CIN rates**: Hertfordshire average 4.4 per 100k; fairly even across options.
- **CP rates**: East and Central higher (2.8–3.5 vs avg 2.3).
- **CLA rates**: Central is highest at 5.4 vs avg 3.6, showing disproportionate care demand.

Implication:

- Demand is not evenly distributed – safeguarding risks (CP & CLA) are significantly higher in Central and East, while West/South-West sit closer to or below average.

3. EHCPs (Education, Health & Care Plans)

- **Total volume**: 14,686 across Hertfordshire.
- **Distribution**: East holds the largest share (54% under 2 UAs; 43% under 3 UAs).
- **Rates per 100k**: Hertfordshire average 52.4; Central and East under Option 3/4 have the highest rates (66.9 and 61.3).
- **West and South-West** sit below or around average (44.8–50.9).

Implication:

- East and Central unitaries will face higher pressures around SEND demand and provision planning, requiring robust commissioning and financial planning.

Children's Services

Demand is concentrated in certain localities with higher intensity among a smaller cohort, particularly in the more urban parts of the county and higher levels of demand in the Central area.

Hertfordshire County Council has set a strategic ambition to bring the majority of children's placements in-house by 2028. This move is designed to reduce reliance on external providers, improve placement sufficiency, and ensure better value for money across the system. One further option beyond the current plan to bring 85% of places within county by 2028, is the exploration of the potential to develop in-house buildings and teams, particularly where a robust business case to demonstrate cost reduction and improved outcomes. Where case loads are higher such as in the Central authority, use of HRA land and housing development skills could further support a localised approach to improve experiences for young people and reduce cost.

In addition, there is a case for localised strategies relevant to each local areas. In the central area, demonstrating higher demand, integration with housing, health, and community services is central to this model, enabling wraparound support and aligning with wider goals of tackling health inequalities and supporting family resilience.

Fostering costs remain under particular pressure, currently estimated to be around 19% higher than those of our statistical neighbours. Some districts have limited in-house provision, and in-house fostering placements costing less than 50% of equivalent external placements.

As Hertfordshire transitions to a four-unitary model, there is an opportunity to create a coordinated and compelling foster carer recruitment strategy that leverages the scale and resources of the new authorities. By harmonising financial incentives, such as fostering allowances, skills-based payments, welcome bonuses, home improvement grants, targeted marking and support could secure benefits.

This approach not only addresses the urgent need for more carers but also reinforces the values of community, care, and collaboration at the heart of the new governance model.

SEND

SEND services in Hertfordshire face rising demand, with a sharp increase in Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments and long waits for autism, ADHD, and speech and language support. Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) volumes and complexity is rising faster than overall pupil numbers.

To address these challenges the SEND Local Area Partnership is investing £91 million to create 1,000 new school places by 2026 and has launched a SEND Academy to improve workforce skills. A Priority Action and Improvement Plan focuses on better data sharing, timely EHCPs, and placing children in suitable settings.

Looking ahead, Hertfordshire is developing a new SEND Strategy for 2026–2031, building on current efforts to expand local provision, embed co-production, and improve outcomes. The aim is to create a more responsive, inclusive system that meets the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND across the county.

These issues reflect a national picture, and with a new SEND policy direction anticipated, local systems must be prepared to respond with agility and to manage transition effectively to reduce risks to children, their families, carers and schools.

How the four unitary model delivers this vision

There are different needs across different parts of the county, with some rural access challenges, and pockets of deprivation. LGR offers a chance to address these gaps, through intensified partnership working with other council teams such as housing, employment and skills teams, welfare advice and guidance and community groups, to meet the specific needs of different places.

Children's safety and stability come first. The plan protects uninterrupted casework, secure placements, and clear safeguarding from day one. Each new authority will establish statutory leadership, transparent decision-making, ensuring critical systems operate and children and young people have continuity.

In Hertfordshire the multi-agency approach is seen as strength by Ofsted. The opportunity is to further enhance this approach to early intervention, with the voice of young people, and further integration with district services such as housing, environmental health and community safety.

The four unitary model will be based upon a rigorous plan to manage transition. Changes will be phased carefully to maintain continuity of care, safeguarding arrangements, and workforce stability in the early years. Shared services delivered through a 'Hertfordshire Partnership' model will be retained where scale adds value while frontline delivery becomes more locally rooted, or where there is benefit in managing stability of vital services. This approach balances strategic collaboration with local responsiveness, ensuring adult social care is not only sustainable, but compassionate, accessible, and effective for every resident across Hertfordshire.

Many children's and inclusion functions already work to neighbourhood footprints across Hertfordshire. For example, Family Centres and SASH, including Youth Justice, operate through quadrant teams; Intensive Family Support works to defined localities; and Services for Young People, SEND panels and implementation, and the Music Service follow the same pattern. Building on what already works will strengthen a preventative model built around place, enabling earlier support closer to home and consistent engagement with local partnerships.

The four unitary authority (4UA) model proposed for Hertfordshire will support ongoing delivery of the SEND improvement plan. The model is based each authority taking responsibility for delivering its own SEND provision, ensuring statutory duties are met from day one. The priority is stability for children and young people who access these services, meaning a staged approach may required over time using a 'Hertfordshire Partnership' shared service to continue delivery of the Improvement Plan, provide access to specialist provision across unitary borders and provide reassurance.

At the same time, shared arrangements will be retained where they add value, such as joint commissioning for market intelligence, specialist placements, Herts for Learning for traded services and improvement services. These collaborative mechanisms help preserve efficiency and expertise across authorities, particularly in areas where scale and consistency are critical. The model also supports the development of Centres of Excellence and locality-based delivery, ensuring that best practice is shared and embedded. It is anticipated that changes such as schools admissions will need to be phased over an 18 month window to provide stability and continuity, and access agreements are likely to be needed to continue cross border access to schools for children and families.

Service delivery model

We recognise that any change in local government structure presents risks of disruption. Our priority is a stable transition, ensuring continuity of care, safeguarding, and workforce stability beyond vesting day. Clear leadership and oversight will manage this change effectively. This may include broad use of shared service arrangements via a 'Hertfordshire Partnership' in the first two years of operation, based on a lead provider model centred on the current operational centre in Robertson House and Farnham House. It is expected temporary hosted arrangements will be used by agreement for specialist functions where continuity is critical, for example Emergency Duty Team rota, tribunal and mediation support, pooled Educational Psychology capacity and other services depending on the length of time to prepare. There is an opportunity to prepare for transition early, working across all public partners to create further pipelines for hard to fill roles.

Year one to two

In the first year the emphasis is a well managed, safe and robust transition, so that all vulnerable children and young people have continuity of support.

Year One to Two	▪ Statutory leadership in each unitary, a clear front door linked to local support hubs, and simple, predictable panels and thresholds.
	▪ Visible accountability across four authorities. Robust planning keeps cases continuous, placements stable and statutory processes secure.
	▪ Clean contract novation, secure data migration and parallel running of critical systems where prudent to protect timeliness and data quality.
	▪ A common Emergency Duty Team as an ongoing shared function to ensure consistent 24-hour cover from day one.
	▪ Shared capacity for vital specialist services or where frontline services need to be protected
	▪ Continuity of traded school improvement through Herts for Learning as an ongoing shared service under common standards and governance.
	▪ Preparing additional recruitment campaigns, grow-your-own routes, return to practice and retention support across Adults and Children.

Years three to five

Over the longer term there are further opportunities to align each authority with the specific needs and challenges in its communities, using a range of options.

It is expected that within years 3 – 5, where transitionary shared services have been in place, they will be embedded into each unitary authority, with remaining shared arrangements being more focussed on specialist services, or where there is opportunity to collaborate to commission effectively. This may include:

Year Three to Five	▪ Longer term shared functions by agreement, including market intelligence, joint fostering and adoption recruitment pipelines, shared placements frameworks for specialist and complex, a common Emergency Duty Team rota, and Herts for Learning as an ongoing shared service.
	▪ Alignment with anticipated Government policy changes for SEND and Children's Social Care.
	▪ Larger in-house fostering and kinship networks.
	▪ Transitions planned with families, schools and employers so young people step into further learning, good work and independent living with the right accommodation and support.

HOUSING, HRA & HOMELESSNESS

Housing in this proposal comprises two connected elements: Strategic Housing in the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account; the accompanying diagram shows how they align and interact.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Strategic Housing
(General Fund)</th><th colspan="2">Housing Revenue Account
(HRA)</th></tr>
<tr><td>• Housing Strategy
• Private Sector Housing
• Allocations
• Housing Welfare
• Affordable Housing Enabling</td><td>• Housing Options
• Homelessness
• Temporary Accommodation
• Rough Sleeping

*Identified as critical</td><td>• Rent Collection
• Tenancy Management
• New Homes Development
• Resident Engagement</td><td>• Repairs & Maintenance
• Major Works & Capital Investment
• Estates
• Asset Management</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">All District & Borough Authorities</td><td>Dacorum
St Albans</td><td>Stevenage
Welwyn Hatfield</td></tr>
</table>

Homelessness is identified as a critical service in the Government's Devolution White Paper, which is why this chapter is elevated within the overarching proposal. Preventing and relieving homelessness, however, relies upon a complete, coordinated and collaborative housing system. Prevention and sustainment, fair allocations, strong private rented partnerships and consistent enforcement set the tone, while council landlord services influence quality, safety and affordability. Hertfordshire has over 90,000 affordable homes, with about 33,000 in local authority ownership, therefore public landlords are a major lever for standards and supply.

Our ambition is a consistent, prevention-led system that integrates housing with adults', children's and public health, reduces avoidable variation and aligns strategy with growth and regeneration. This will contribute credibly to national ambitions on supply, with a focus on genuinely affordable and social homes that are good quality and sustainable.

For residents this means a simpler route to help, clear updates on allocations and temporary accommodation, quicker recovery when things go wrong and visible local teams who know their area. Tenants of the combined HRAs experience responsive, accountable landlords focused on safer, warmer homes.

4 Unitary Model HRA Combinations	
North West Hertfordshire	**Central Hertfordshire**
Dacorum *10,061*	Stevenage *7,911*
St Albans *4,899*	Welwyn Hatfield *8,847*
Total *14,960*	Total *16,758*

General fund housing consolidates from 11 councils to four, enabling common standards and shared functions. Housing Revenue Account landlord functions combine into two larger HRAs: Dacorum with St Albans in the North West unitary, and Stevenage with Welwyn Hatfield in the Central unitary. This HRA configuration is comparable to a two unitary consolidation and aggregates more than a three unitary alternative, while keeping accountability rooted in place.

The need, challenge & opportunity

The lack of a single market view fragments purchasing power and weakens standards. Access to the PRS is constrained by affordability, landlord confidence and competition for limited supply. Incentives and sustainment support vary, leading to preventable tenancy failure and repeat presentations, while enforcement is inconsistent. Where councils are landlords, HRAs face investment backlogs, building safety and compliance duties, rising construction costs and the need to decarbonise. Data and systems are uneven, making it harder to see cross-boundary demand and track prevention, equality and performance transparently.

This sits within a strengthened regulatory environment that requires consistent compliance and visible improvement. The Housing Ombudsman sets the Complaint Handling Code and investigates maladministration, the Regulator of Social Housing regulates governance, viability and consumer standards and is rolling out routine inspections with graded outcomes from C1 to C4, with both Stevenage and Dacorum being awarded C2 judgements since the implementation of proactive regulation. Finally, the Building Safety Regulator oversees higher-risk residential buildings. Meeting these requirements reliably across four authorities and inside two combined HRAs is a central design challenge, reinforcing the need for standard operating practice, strong assurance and published performance.

Government reforms are welcome, including changes to Right to Buy, commitments to ban no-fault evictions, a multi-year social housing rent settlement, an expanded Affordable Homes Programme and additional homelessness funding. Yet fragmented allocations and inconsistent sustainment hold back social mobility and disadvantage residents who need to move for work or family. The LGA recommends investment to deliver at least 100,000 new social homes per year, which would meet need, reduce pressure on homelessness services and improve public finances over time. Reorganisation gives Hertfordshire a credible route to pair local control with shared capacity so prevention improves, temporary accommodation need reduces and investment aligns with growth.

How the four unitary model delivers this vision

Housing safety, legal compliance and resident continuity come first. On vesting day statutory Part seven functions and core HRA operations transfer intact, with contracts novated, providers paid on time and critical systems migrated or run in parallel where that protects service reliability and data quality. Each new authority puts clear decision making and visible accountability in place, with compliance and building safety embedded from the start.

Delivery sits at the scale that best serves outcomes. Day to day accountability for homelessness decisions, allocations, private sector enforcement and landlord services stays within each unitary so leaders are close to local markets and residents. Where markets are thin or specialist capability is scarce, the four share capacity by agreement under service

level arrangements, common technical standards and clear review points. Examples include a county wide temporary accommodation procurement hub, joint frameworks for specialist pathways and complex needs, a recognisable private rented access scheme and pooled expertise for building safety and asset compliance.

As the model settles, support becomes more local, more preventative and easier to navigate. Local teams work alongside adults, children's and public health and with community NHS services and the VCSE to keep people safely housed and reduce repeat presentations. Allocations are aligned to a common spine within each authority so similar need receives a similar offer and timetable, while local lettings plans and neighbourhood insight shape delivery on the ground. The two combined HRAs operate as modern, visible landlords focused on safer, warmer homes, faster repairs and stronger resident voice, while acting as delivery arms for regeneration and new social housing.

Why the four unitary configuration is the strongest choice:

1. **Local accountability, real market reach**
   Decisions stay in place, so prevention, allocations and enforcement reflect local markets. Where scale helps, the four act as one buyer and commissioner, securing better access and prices in temporary accommodation and a coherent offer to private landlords and providers.

2. **Delivery arm for strategic growth and social homes**
   Two sizeable HRAs function as visible delivery vehicles for regeneration and housing supply. Using land, borrowing, grant and devolved powers and funding through a Strategic Authority they build on existing development pipelines of genuinely affordable and social homes, especially family and specialist units that reduce temporary accommodation pressure.

3. **Flexibility and agility to transform**
   Right-sized councils create room to redesign end-to-end journeys, standardise core processes and automate routine tasks, without the drag of an oversized bureaucracy. That agility translates into faster decisions, fewer hand-offs, lower unit costs and better outcomes.

4. **Place-based integration that reduces demand**
   Housing works alongside Adults, Children's, Public Health, community safety and employment support in locality teams. Commission once where scale helps, then deliver locally with neighbourhood insight so help arrives earlier, repeat presentations fall and temporary accommodation stays shorten.

5. **Simpler integration, faster delivery**
   Moving from 11 organisations to four cuts interfaces, system variation and policy divergence. There are fewer mergers to complete and fewer platforms to align, which shortens the path to common standards, shared tools and visible performance.

Service delivery model

The operating model brings together locality delivery, targeted shared capacity and clear accountability. We begin by keeping everything safe and legal, then move in planned steps to a stable end state. Local housing support and prevention are the everyday front door. Statutory decisions and landlord services are led within each unitary so accountability stays close to residents and markets. Specialist capacity is shared only where this improves outcomes, resilience or value. The two combined HRAs act as modern landlords and visible delivery arms for regeneration and new social homes, aligned to local plans and a Strategic Authority offer on infrastructure and funding.

Year one to two

In the first year the emphasis is steadiness, clear accountability and standing up the essentials that protect resilience and value. Statutory Part 7 functions and landlord services transfer intact, with contract novation and safe data migration treated as critical path tasks. Each authority runs a prevention first gateway with named coordinators and simple updates so residents see clear next steps. Temporary accommodation and private rented access begin to benefit from shared buying power and consistent standards, while the combined HRAs focus on safe homes, responsive repairs and visible building safety programmes. Leadership teams set a practical improvement cadence so early progress can be felt by residents and landlords.

Year One to Two	▪ Stand up statutory leadership in each unitary and stabilise core homelessness and HRA operations.
	▪ Operate a prevention first gateway with clear triage and tenancy sustainment from day one.
	▪ Continue and mature existing temporary accommodation procurement arrangements and frameworks, with options to onboard additional partner authorities and apply common quality standards.
	▪ Align allocations to a single spine within each unitary, retaining local lettings plans where appropriate.
	▪ Launch targeted damp and mould and building safety programmes across the two HRAs with consistent reporting.
	▪ Begin to defragment systems where risk is low and value is high so communication and case visibility improve.
	▪ Prepare HRA delivery plans for new social homes, including site identification, pre-development work and funding bids with the Strategic Authority and Homes England.

Years three to five
By years three to five the long term design is in place. Locality housing teams work as one system alongside adults, children's and public health and with community partners. The Hertfordshire PRS access scheme is widely recognised by landlords and households. Temporary accommodation is managed as a single market with fewer nightly paid placements and shorter stays. Allocations are fair and predictable within each unitary. The two combined HRAs are visible delivery vehicles for regeneration and new social homes, with compliance, building safety and resident engagement embedded and evidenced. Shared functions remain tightly defined and only where collaboration continues to add value.

Year Three to Five	▪ Existing temporary accommodation procurement frameworks reach full maturity, with more partner authorities participating and firmer performance management.
	▪ PRS access and incentive scheme delivers higher volumes of sustained lets and grows a trusted landlord cohort.
	▪ Expanded in county move on options and specialist pathways reduce reliance on nightly paid and bed and breakfast.
	▪ Combined HRAs deliver safer, warmer homes and faster repairs, and act as delivery arms for social housing, using land, borrowing, grant and Strategic Authority powers to accelerate pipelines.
	• Consistent compliance and assurance across regulators, with strong resident voice guiding priorities and investment.

Residents see clearer routes to help in their local area, quicker decisions and support that starts earlier to keep tenancies stable. Fewer households spend long periods in temporary accommodation and more move into decent, affordable homes locally. Landlords work with a single, confident partner for access and standards. As the combined HRAs modernise landlord services and increase supply, homes become safer and warmer, repairs are faster and resident voice strengthens. The four unitary configuration keeps decisions close to place and uses selective scale to shape thin markets, achieving better value and better outcomes without losing the responsiveness communities expect.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Our ambition for transport and highways through reorganisation is to create a safe, reliable and sustainable network that is better aligned to local priorities. New unitary authorities will have the opportunity to bring transport decisions closer to communities, strengthen accountability, and embed innovation.

Each unitary will deliver the Highways Authority role close to residents, owning inspections, routine maintenance, enforcement, small works and supported transport tailored to place. Specialist and market-facing functions that benefit from scale, such as signals, bridges and structures, strategic drainage, winter modelling and real-time information standards, can be shared by agreement.

A new Hertfordshire-wide strategic authority will steward long-term strategy, Local Transport Plan, lead the countywide Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), coordinate major corridors and the funding pipeline.

The need, challenges and opportunity
Highways and Transport are an important foundation for growth. For example, town centres and new developments need more than reactive maintenance, they require future-proofing integrated planning. Highways and transport infrastructure must be aligned with housing, economic development and public transport so that new communities are viable, connected and sustainable. Fragmented schemes risk duplication, delay and missed opportunities. Coordinated highways services, working hand in hand with planning and regeneration teams, unlock development and deliver the infrastructure that communities expect and deserve.

The Government's Local Growth Plans and the English Devolution Bill place renewed emphasis on aligning local priorities with national missions. In this context, the four new unitary authorities will support growth-driving sectors, improve connectivity, strengthen local accountability and enable access to opportunity. Local transport is a shared priority for central and local collaboration.

Highways are among the most visible local services and residents notice when they work well and when they do not. Potholes left unrepaired, uneven pavements, unclear signage and inconsistent parking enforcement drives frustration among residents, particularly when performance varies across places. The current Hertfordshire operating model faces challenges. Standards and response times vary widely and with backlogs in some service areas. Specialist capacity is stretched in places such as signals, bridges and winter services, leaving the system vulnerable to price volatility and service gaps. Bus reliability varies significantly, and the potential for better integration with other modes of travel.
As one of the most complex and high-profile functions, Highways must be disaggregated with precision and held stable at vesting.

How the Four Unitary Model Delivers the Vision
To address the challenges outlined above, the new model will establish four Highways Authorities, each with a local gateway, clear standards and published target times.

Residents will access services through independent local gateways. Through localisation there is potential for local teams to integrate network management, inspections, parking, supported transport and member engagement so recurring issues are handled as one and joint procurement will be used where there are benefits from scale.

To aid a smooth transition, it is proposed that a countywide rulebook will be locally implemented for permits, inspections, reinstatement and traffic management. Joint procurement and pooled specialist panels will provide resilience and value. For continuity, shared network control, programme management and analytics will support phased convergence of asset, works and contact systems. The Strategic Authority will lead on Local Transport Plans (LTP), Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) and corridor strategies, with time-limited hosting arrangements where services are not yet live.

Service Delivery Model
Our overriding priority is to ensure services remain safe, legal and uninterrupted, particularly in areas such as winter readiness, emergency response, and supplier continuity. The disaggregation and aggregation of key functions will be phased, and not a single vesting-day switch. Temporary hosted arrangements will be deployed by agreement, with robust review points to ensure accountability and readiness for future transition. Moves will be sequenced as contracts expire, supplier transition windows are implemented and statutory readiness is enabled so continuity, winter resilience and supplier stability are protected. Given the specialist nature of some key services, there will be use of a Hertfordshire Partnership to provide selected shared services, by agreement and reviewed at agreed points.

In Year One, the intention is to

Year One	▪ Appoint a lead Officer in each unitary, with a joint transition board, and local teams.
	▪ Aggregate and Disaggregate core local delivery including inspections, defects, winter operations, permits, TROs, parking and minor works, with clear local leadership and accountability and aggregate current district functions.

	▪ Bringing together district and borough parking and related functions into each unitary, aligning policy and oversight.
	▪ Maintain existing term maintenance and street works arrangements, with interim coordination across the four authorities or a Hertfordshire Partnership to improve utility performance.
	▪ Keep passenger transport steady: concessionary fares administration maintained consistently, supported services and DRT delivered locally, with Strategic Authority leadership – or if not in place, a 'Hertfordshire Partnership' Shared Service arrangement, Enhanced Partnerships and BSIP frameworks.
	▪ Stabilise data and systems: keep current asset and works systems live, begin mapping for convergence, and establish a shared performance view that is simple and reliable.
	▪ Protect winter resilience: confirm depot access, salt supply, fleet and routes, and assure call-out, forecasting and duty rota arrangements.
	▪ Workforce and culture: retain key staff, set clear roles and escalation routes, and launch a joint development offer in permitting, network management, signals, winter and engagement.
	▪ Offering a Hertfordshire Partnership joint procurement oversight to manage specifications, frameworks and risk, while preserving local control of neighbourhood schemes and member priorities.

Dependent on funding and the policy framework, longer-term outcomes could include faster, visible repairs, higher first-time fix rates and clearer resident updates – along with the potential to trial new approaches. Local knowledge and planning can help inform the scheduling planned street works. Working with a new Strategic Authority and potential funding streams through devolution could develop a more coherent supported bus offer, consistent information and stronger links to active travel to improve public transport integration. Data-led prioritisation can shift spending towards prevention, and transparent performance will enhance accountability.

MEETS LOCAL NEEDS AND INFORMED BY LOCAL VIEWS (MHCLG CRITERION 4)

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK AND IMPACT ON PROPOSAL (4C)

Following a coordinated programme of engagement, we reached a large audience across Hertfordshire, with strong resident participation alongside staff and partner input. This countywide exercise provided clear insights into public attitudes and residents' priorities for change. Overall, residents said councils must deliver the basics well, be financially efficient and be easy to navigate. While no single view dominated, more residents supported four unitary authorities than the alternative options. The themes below summarise feedback that strengthens the case for a four unitary model.

1. Residents prioritise visible, place-shaping services

Residents constantly tell us that they judge the Councils performance upon everyday services such as waste collection, street cleansing and local planning decisions. These themes have shaped our proposals with "services you can count on" at their heart. The aim is to give people a simple, predictable experience on the things they notice every week.

A four unitary proposal creates the most ideal conditions for these priorities to be championed. Decisions are made closer to communities and organisations would have a greater understanding of place and local challenges.

Statistics with question context	Quotes and testimony
Which local government services are most important to you? People could choose several services that matter most. Responses: • Infrastructure 57%	"More joined up planning for large housing and infrastructure. Make sure there are enough Transport staff." – Dacorum council staff
	"The basics matter most – roads, bins, and keeping our streets clean." – St Albans resident

• Waste and recycling 46%, • Parks and green spaces 42%, • Planning and development 37% • Public safety 36%	More joined up working with the highways and planning teams in the planning application process." – Three Rivers resident
	Better joined up services and fix the infrastructure." – Welwyn Hatfield resident

2. Bringing government as close as possible to local communities

People want local government that responds to their local concerns and priorities. A four-unitary model keeps representation meaningful and accountability visible in a county as large and diverse as Hertfordshire, while simplifying "who does what" so residents are not bounced between tiers.

Statistics with question context	Quotes and testimony
What concerns you most about reorganisation? People chose a single top concern. Responses: • Council becoming less connected to my community 57%	"The larger any authority is, the less effective, the more impersonal, the more bureaucratic, the more wasteful and least cost effective it becomes." - Stevenage resident
	"The larger the organisation the less efficient it will be, council taxpayers will be ill served, and it is going to cost us more." - Broxbourne resident
	"Smaller, more local government is always more efficient and knowledgeable," - St Albans resident
	"Option four, because a very large organisation is unlikely to understand the needs of local communities." – Broxbourne resident
	"Enough to be money-saving in terms of efficiency and reduced management costs, but small enough to remain connected to the community." – St Albans resident

3. Local identity and community ties

Residents want joined-up services without losing local representation. They do not want an organisation so remote that it loses sight of local priorities. A four-unitary model is best placed to retain local identity because it is functionally closer to the communities it serves and does not require complicated, layered governance to replace the proximity of today's district and borough councils.

Statistics with question context	Quotes and testimony
What concerns you most about reorganisation? People chose a single top concern related to representation and focus. Responses: • Loss of local representation 52% • Council might change its priorities 47%	"Hertfordshire is a big county that has different areas and demographics. It is important to have enough councils to cover all of this efficiently." - Welwyn Hatfield resident
	"Strong shared ties across Watford, Bushey, Three Rivers, Bricket Wood and Radlett. Residents use the same transport networks, healthcare, schools and shopping hubs." - Hertsmere resident
	"Similarities of area. Dacorum and St Albans, similar small towns and semi-rural. Three Rivers, Watford, Hertsmere more urban. East of Hertfordshire might be the moon for all it has in common with our area." - Dacorum resident
	"As a resident from Hertsmere, being joint with Watford and Three Rivers makes the most sense. We are closest to London and face more expansion pressures than other district councils further north." - Hertsmere resident
	"Four aligns well with the local flavour we will need going forward." - Integrated Care Board stakeholder

4. Protecting our places

People want to safeguard the character and priorities of different parts of the county — from historic St Albans to the film industry in Borehamwood.

Statistics with question context	Quotes and testimony
What concerns you most about reorganisation? People chose a single top concern related to connection and representation. **Highest response:** • Council becoming less connected to my community 57%	"Of the models under discussion, the four unitary model seems the most appropriate to ensure a local focus and the ability to build." – Lee Valley Regional Park Authority "Fewer authorities may result in reduced service, particularly for smaller settlements." - Parish councillor, East Herts
	"I could see our area which is run efficiently and has no debt being sidelined by other areas that are not run as efficiently." - Broxbourne resident
	"Four as least change, but I see no reason why we are changing at all with all the cost and chaos reorganisation will cause." - North Herts resident
	"The more councils, the better, as I am totally opposed to change of the current system. More local councils mean more local democracy." - Watford respondent
	"From a local perspective, a four model could work better, even if three may work financially." - Love Hoddesdon BID

5. Safeguarding essential services

Children's Services and Adult Care in Hertfordshire currently perform well and must be protected through any reorganisation. We recognise that any change must preserve what works, maintain clear responsibility and make structural shifts invisible to people who rely on care.

Detractors of the four-unitary option cautioned that dividing the county could duplicate scarce specialist roles and risk short term disruption. The response to this is a key part of our proposal; specifically the prioritisation of a safe and legal day one, retaining countywide networks of expertise that can be deployed across all four councils, and only disaggregating services where it clearly benefits residents at a sustainable pace.

Statistics with question context	Quotes and testimony
Which local government services are most important to you? People could choose several services. **Highest response among care services:** • Adult social care 34% • Children's services 19%	"There is a risk of potential disruption to adult social care services, which could negatively affect vulnerable people." - Sunnyside Rural Trust stakeholder
	"There is a risk that we are unable to hang on to what works, and successful partnerships are undone by structural changes." - Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust stakeholder
	"Dividing the county into four would lead to unnecessary duplication of resources, for example having specialist staff in each new authority." - Detractor comment
	"Two or four unitaries better than three due to alignment with current health and care partnership geographies." – Health stakeholder.
	"Four should not prevent co-operation and standardisation across the four authorities where appropriate to reduce costs." - Dacorum resident

Support for the four unitary model tended to come from people who attached most importance to local voice, visible accountability and councils rooted in place, with the model seen as the best way to keep everyday services responsive and ensure each part of Hertfordshire gets sustained attention without losing sight of local identity. Although views were mixed, this option drew the broadest support among residents.

Stakeholders also stressed that collaboration will be essential. The ability to share or host services where it adds value, align policies and use common operating frameworks was highlighted as a practical way to strengthen efficiency, cut duplication and keep standards consistent across the four councils.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (MHCLG CRITERION 6)

Four unitary councils in Hertfordshire will offer the best opportunities to enable stronger community engagement and genuine opportunities for local empowerment. The new authorities will offer the closest alignment with local organisations including the voluntary sector, community groups and can partner closely with existing town and parish councils.

Case Study: Generation Hertsmere

Generation Hertsmere is an annual borough wide careers fair which brings together students from local secondary schools, SEN schools and colleges with employers, training providers and education institutions. The initiative forms part of Hertsmere Borough Council's wider economic development and youth employment strategy, addressing skills gaps and supporting local talent. Organised by Hertsmere Borough Council in partnership with Hertfordshire Careers Hub (Hertfordshire Futures) the event gives those aged 14-19 who live or go to school or college in Hertsmere the opportunity to engage their knowledge of the careers available in their area and meet local employers and training providers. Thousands of school children from across the borough have benefitted from meaningful encounters with employers and employees providing advice about the local labour market. There has been positive feedback from participants who have reported improved confidence and clarity in career planning.

Events such as Generation Hertsmere take place across the county, with Generation Events supporting the Hertfordshire Careers Hub's strategic plans by position careers education in the context of the local labour market – while aligning with each district and borough's economic development strategies. Since 2020, the Generation events have reached over 18,661 young people and parents across the county (as at September 2025). Under a 4UA model, events like this can continue to be tailored to best meet the needs of each locality, allowing young people to understand the local opportunities available to them now and in the future, building a workforce with the right skills and a strong local economy.

Councils close to communities by design

This proposal is unique. Feedback from our communities and residents highlights their preference for Councils which are closer to communities, where local voices and priorities can be heard. The proposal for four unitary Councils is based on the network of towns, villages and communities in which people live, work, study and connect.

Reflecting towns and communities

The Councils are designed to be around 300,000 population in order to be resilient, while reflecting local needs and priorities. The proposed model is based on ward representation, so that the distinctive needs of particular communities can be represented, resources targeted, and local identity respected. It reflects the county's distinct local identities and variations in community needs and support the Government's Pride in Place strategy to build stronger communities and neighbourhoods to build growth and ultimately improve socio-economic outcomes.

Local government structures should align with how people live their daily lives - including where they live, work, and access services. Residents in different areas often face very different issues, from urban housing and transport pressures to rural isolation and access to services. Doing so avoids the need to impose any specific sub-governance but instead each council will have the choice of different community engagement approaches.

Providing community representation and advocacy

With responsibility for a broader range of services, Councillors of the new unitary authorities will have a visible leadership role in their wards and with the broad range of services provided by the councils.

Councillors in new unitary councils will choose their preferred options for engagement to best serve their residents, be that neighbourhood forums, towns and parish councils or place-based development boards, along with the ability to support a neighbourhood working approach that is backbone of the community partnership work.

Working cooperatively in neighbourhoods
The English Devolution White Paper and the NHS Long Term Plan highlight the importance of working as closely as possible with communities to build trust, advocacy, innovation and achieve the best results. In Hertfordshire, neighbourhood working will be a defining feature of the proposed four unitary model, enabling services to be delivered more responsively, tailored to local needs, and shaped by those who use them.

Long-established approaches to community engagement are already in existence, from proactive town and parish councils to Business Improvement Districts and Town Boards, and to neighbourhood-based teams. There is a positive track record of local partnership working, from Community Safety Partnerships between Councils, police, fire, community safety teams and voluntary partners who work together to address issues in each district and borough, to the network of locally designed Citizens Advice functions, to cross-council teams working directly with communities.

This neighbourhood-based approach has community partnership at its core. This includes regular local partnership activity, led by ward Members including ward walks with officer and partner teams, police priority setting and community safety meetings, engagement with health partners and focussed project work on local priorities.

Local Government Reorganisation provides a stimulus to take this neighbourhood-based working further and deeper. With four community-rooted Councils working with other partners, there is potential for further alignment through ward-based engagement with Safer Neighbourhood Teams, links with school provision, connections with local Primary Care Networks so that addressing health inequalities and other challenges can be rooted into organisations. For some issues there are effective partnerships already that cover more than one locality or even more than one local authority, and these will be supported to continue.

A range of other engagement tools are currently used by Councils in Hertfordshire and can be embedded into the new unitary organisations:
- Service co-design methods to give agency, advocacy and impact
- Citizens' panels – a representative cross-section of the public who have agreed to participate in consultation exercises
- Youth councils, Parliaments and engagement to hear the voices of young people at school or college
- Forums or other arrangements for working with groups in society whose voices may not otherwise be heard, such as Roma, Gypsy and Travellers, carers, people with learning disabilities or autism
- Tenant engagement forums for those in council housing
- Participatory budget setting

Local democratic forums
In the four unitary model, there is no requirement to establish a layer of local democratic forums, but the flexibility for new councils to choose the most appropriate methods for local engagement. If chosen, local democratic forums could also provide a further method for community engagement in particular area beyond the neighbourhood working model, or a looser and more informal model could also be adopted rather than structural governance. This could cover a cluster of council wards or divisions, following the pattern of local identity and, as far as possible, the catchment areas for the new local NHS neighbourhood health centres. As Hertfordshire has a mixture of urban, suburban and rural communities, forum areas are likely to vary in population and geography and could have a range of different powers and representation from elected Members, to other co-opted partners.

Town and Parish Councils
Approximately 38% of Hertfordshire residents live in areas with a town or parish council. These local councils vary significantly in the population size they cover, in their resources and in the services they provide. The four unitary model will continue existing relationships with parish and town councils, providing a local connection and relationship on key areas such as service provision and community engagement. As with any council model through LGR, there are existing mechanisms that can be used if there is local appetite to consider the case for further town or parish councils to represent particular areas.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Partnership
Councils across Hertfordshire work collaboratively with the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector on a daily basis, recognising that VCFSE partners are often best placed to deliver services that councils cannot. To support this vital work, councils in Hertfordshire provide core funding to key infrastructure organisations such as Citizens Advice, CVS organisations, Women's Refuges, and others that offer essential support to vulnerable residents. Councils also work closely with faith communities, as well as town and parish councils, to foster strong, cohesive, and resilient local communities.

In the four unitary model, voluntary and community sector organisations will have the opportunity to participate in joint planning and working on the local issues that are relevant to them, both through the local democratic process, neighbourhood working approach, through wider themed partnerships such as sustainability, welfare and children's services, and through joint projects on priority areas and advocacy. As the four unitary model does not seek to integrate VCS partners into a specific area governance model, there is flexibility to work together as partners to determine the most impactful priorities to work together, and to achieve the best results for local communities and groups.

Case Study: Bristol's Community Resilience Fund (CRF)
Bristol's CRF was a £4 million programme by Bristol City Council to help community and voluntary organisations recover, strengthen sustainability, and build long-term capacity. Targeted at deprived areas and equality groups, it responded to calls for participatory democracy, including a 2020 report and a council motion to reboot democracy.

The council replaced traditional grants with a participatory approach. A Design Group of VCSE leaders worked with officers and TPXimpact to set priorities and process. Residents, councillors and organisations co-produced the decision framework. Grants were decided by panels of local people, councillors and VCSE representatives, recruited through open calls and sortition.

The model drew community involvement, improved council and voluntary sector relationships, and upskilled staff. It was time intensive and required cultural change. Lessons included flexibility, trust building and paying participants. The council will use the model for other funds and consultations, embedding participation in governance.

Town and Place-based Boards
Across the county, several town or place boards are in place bringing together business, public partners, voluntary and community support the renewal of towns and creation of opportunity. Providing continuity to these existing boards is vital, to continue impetus and regeneration efforts, will also providing a further community engagement option for new unitary councils to consider extending to other towns to help collaboratively plan, fund, and deliver projects that have a measurable local impact.

Case Study Stevenage Development Board
The Stevenage Development Board was set up in March 2020 to formulate a bid for the national Government's Town Fund initiative. Stevenage were one of 101 towns in England invited to bid, and were successfully awarded £37.5m in March 2021 following the submission of the Stevenage Town Investment Plan, set out and ratified by the Stevenage Development Board.

The Stevenage Development Board is chaired by an Independent Chair. The Board brings together voluntary key stakeholders from public sector organisations, private businesses, not-for-profit organisations and Heritage organisations, to ensure a diverse range of views are represented. This collaborative community based approach secured Stevenage the highest bid in the country, one of only two awarded at that level. This investment will support the delivery of an extensive range of project that will improve the lives of residents:

- *Station Gateway Enabling Works*
- *Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity*
- *Town Centre Diversification*
- *Stevenage Enterprise Centre*
- *Stevenage Innovation & Technology Centre*
- *Sports & Leisure Hub*
- *New Town Museum*

The Board continue to work in collaboration on a Town Investment Plan with a clear vision, strategy and delivery proposals, that supports local residents and businesses and has extended its vision to a Gunnels Wood Road improvement scheme and the vital Station Gateway project.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Executive Summary

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Hertfordshire represents a major transformation in the delivery and governance of public services across the county. Aimed at reducing duplication, improving coordination, and enhancing value for money, the reorganisation will affect residents, elected members, and staff across all 11 councils.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) provides an initial evaluation of the potential implications of LGR on protected and vulnerable groups, focusing on three key areas: access to services and employment, effectiveness of services and working conditions, and representation and engagement. It identifies a range of potential risks and opportunities that the 11 councils will need to take into account - particularly for disabled people, older adults, carers, ethnic minorities, care-experienced young people, and those facing socio-economic disadvantage.

The assessment highlights risks such as digital exclusion, loss of local engagement, disruption to support networks, and barriers to progression for underrepresented staff. It also outlines opportunities to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion into new governance structures, service models, and workforce practices.

Potential mitigation strategies include maintaining multi-channel service access, supporting digital inclusion, preserving workplace adjustments, and strengthening community and staff engagement. The EqIA also recommends inclusive consultation, co-production with affected groups, and ongoing monitoring of outcomes by protected characteristic.

The consideration of these equality implications will be a key focus for Hertfordshire's 11 councils as the implementation of the new unitary councils progresses. The principle of equality by design will be used to develop the new unitary councils' service offers to ensure that most vulnerable and underrepresented in our communities are not disadvantaged by this process. This EqIA will remain a live document, updated in response to feedback and evolving needs whilst also providing the foundation for more detailed consideration of specific areas of work as required.

Introduction

The proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) represents a significant transformation in how local government services are delivered and governed in Hertfordshire. It is intended to reduce duplication, improve coordination, and deliver better value for money for both residents and the workforce. However, any change to public service delivery and local government structures has the potential to have the greatest impact on those most reliant on these services—many of whom are among the most vulnerable or underrepresented in our communities and on the workforce who deliver them.

In Hertfordshire, the most vulnerable or underrepresented in our communities includes disabled people, older adults, carers, women, people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds and care-experienced young people. Socio-economic disadvantage often compounds the inequalities experienced by these groups, increasing their reliance on local services and their risk of exclusion. The reorganisation will also directly affect Elected Members and council staff across all 11 councils, who may experience changes to their roles, working patterns, locations, and support structures.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) will focus on the following areas for both residents and staff:

1. **Access to Services and Employment**
   The reorganisation may change how, where, and when services are delivered and how employment is structured. This could create new barriers or opportunities for inclusion, particularly for those who are digitally excluded, have mobility or communication needs, or face other structural disadvantages. The assessment will consider whether all residents can continue to access services equitably, and whether all staff can access fair employment, support, and progression. The county includes contrasting communities divided by rural and urban landscapes, which may place differing demands on any new structure. Factoring this in early could help mitigate potential pressures. Demographic characteristics and the presence—or absence—of existing infrastructure within communities are critical factors that can perpetuate inequality. For example, the rate of infrastructural development required in areas with younger families may differ significantly from that needed in communities with aging populations. Additionally, variables such as a community's proximity to London, the presence of major business enterprises, and the prevalence of commuter pressure points can influence patterns of growth, place increased demand on local resources, and potentially contribute to or exacerbate existing inequalities.
2. **Effectiveness of Services and Working Conditions**
   It is essential that services remain not only accessible but also effective for all, and that staff are able to work effectively and safely. The changes may affect the quality, responsiveness, and appropriateness of services for different groups, as well as the working conditions, wellbeing, and support available to staff. The assessment will explore whether the reorganisation risks reducing service effectiveness or staff wellbeing, particularly for those with specific needs or vulnerabilities.
3. **Representation, Engagement, and Community/Workforce Cohesion**
   The proposal may influence how communities and staff engage with local government and participate in decision-making. There is a risk that some groups—particularly those already underrepresented—may feel less connected or have reduced influence. The assessment will consider how the new structures can strengthen engagement and ensure inclusive representation for both residents and staff, including through staff networks and community forums.
4. **Mitigation and Opportunities**
   The reorganisation presents a critical opportunity to embed diversity and inclusion into new ways of working, both for service delivery and for the workforce. However, there is also a risk of unintended negative impacts if changes are not carefully assessed, communicated, and monitored. The assessment will identify opportunities to reduce inequality, promote fairness, and ensure that the voices of those with lived experience—whether as residents, service users, or staff—are heard and acted upon from the outset.

Section 1: Focus of the EqIA **[Click here to return to contents]**

What are the main aims or purpose of the proposal?

The LGR proposal seeks to restructure how services are delivered across Hertfordshire, aiming to reduce duplication, improve coordination, and enhance value for money. Driven by financial pressures and the need for stronger strategic leadership, the reform intends to create a more streamlined and responsive system for both residents and staff. While several reorganisation models are being considered, this EqIA focuses on the overall potential equality impacts of LGR across the county, rather than assessing individual options.

What outcomes are you trying to achieve, and for whom?

The proposal seeks to ensure that:

- **All Hertfordshire residents**—especially those most reliant on public services e.g. disabled people, older adults, carers, those from certain ethnic minority groups and care-experienced young people—can access high-quality, effective, and inclusive services.
- **All staff**—including those with protected characteristics—experience fair, inclusive, and supportive working conditions, with opportunities for progression and wellbeing protected during and after the transition.
- **All Councillors**—are provided with timely, transparent information. This will support informed decision-making and enable them to act as trusted advocates for residents throughout the transition process.

Outcomes include:

- Equitable access to services and employment for all, regardless of background or circumstance.
- Effective and responsive services and internal processes to meet diverse needs.
- Enhanced community and workforce engagement, representation, and cohesion.
- Reduced inequalities and barriers to inclusion, especially for marginalised or seldom-heard groups.
- Equitable governance led by informed and inclusive leaders, underpinned by clear accountability for advancing equality of opportunity and experience across the councils and the county.

What are the reasons for the proposal e.g. financial, legal, service improvement?

- **Financial:** Achieving efficiencies and better value for money by reducing duplication and streamlining service delivery and internal processes.
- **Service Improvement:** Improving coordination and consistency across services and teams, ensuring they remain fit for purpose and responsive to changing needs.
- **Legal/Policy:** Aligning with national and local policy objectives for public sector reform and ensuring compliance with equality and inclusion duties for both residents and staff.

How does this proposal fit with other services or strategies?

The LGR proposal sits within a broader landscape of transformation and reform across Hertfordshire, and may intersect with existing priorities such as digital innovation, community

engagement, and efforts to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The reorganisation is intended to complement and strengthen these efforts by embedding equality considerations into new structures and ways of working—for both service users and staff.

Which teams or organisations are involved in delivering or implementing it?

The proposal is being delivered jointly by Hertfordshire County Council, the county's district and borough councils and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Implementation will require joint working across service areas, with input from equality leads, service managers, HR, and representatives from marginalised communities and staff groups.

Which aspects are most important to equality and should be the focus of your attention?

This EqIA outlines the headline equality impacts of LGR, which will require more detailed monitoring during transition and implementation. Key considerations include:

- **Access to services and employment**: Ensuring changes do not create new barriers for residents or staff, particularly those with mobility, communication, or digital access needs.
- **Service effectiveness and internal processes**: Maintaining quality and responsiveness for all groups and ensuring staff are equipped to deliver inclusive services.
- **Community and workforce representation**: Supporting diverse participation in decision-making and safeguarding the civic voice.
- **Risk mitigation and opportunity realisation**: Embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion into all aspects of new structures.
- **Elected member representation**: Assessing how changes to roles, boundaries, and governance may impact councillors from underrepresented groups.
- **Geographic and place-based equity**: Recognising the distinct needs of Hertfordshire's rural and urban communities to ensure fair access and representation.

These themes should guide future governance design to ensure inclusive outcomes for all residents and staff.

Section 2: Data & Information **[Click here to return to contents]**

What existing data is available on access, outcomes, or service use by protected groups?

Hertfordshire councils hold a range of equalities data, including demographic insights by geography and protected characteristic e.g., age, disability, ethnicity, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and caring responsibilities for both residents and staff.

- **Residents:**
  Community-level data / Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) / service-level datasets e.g., Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Housing. This includes information on service use and outcomes by protected group.
- **Staff:**
  Workforce EDI data is collected on age, disability, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and caring responsibilities. HR systems provide data on recruitment, retention, progression, and workplace adjustments.

It is acknowledged that EDI data from staff may be incomplete due to its voluntary nature. This presents a risk to comprehensive analysis. To mitigate this, anonymised surveys and staff network engagement will be used to supplement existing data and ensure diverse perspectives are captured.

Are there gaps in data that need to be filled?

- Intersectional Data on Gender Reassignment
- Effect on services dependant on county structure chosen from 3 options

What does local or national data say about needs and barriers?

- **Residents:**
  - Local data shows disabled people, older adults, and those on low incomes are more likely to face barriers to digital and physical access.
  - National research e.g., Ofcom, Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index highlights that digital transformation can widen inequalities without targeted support.
  - Language barriers, lack of accessible information, and limited transport options restrict access for some ethnic minority and rural communities.
- **Staff:**
  - Older staff may be less likely to engage with digital HR systems or remote work.
  - Disabled staff may face barriers with new digital systems or physical relocations; risk of losing workplace adjustments.
  - Ethnic minority staff may be concentrated in roles that are more vulnerable to change; there may be language barriers or reduced engagement in consultation processes.

What feedback or complaints have been received from service users and staff?

- **Residents:**
  - Concerns about accessibility of new service models, and risk of reduced local engagement.
  - Issues raised about clarity and accessibility of communications regarding proposed changes.
  - Marginalised groups value face-to-face and community-based services; concerns about centralisation or digital-only approaches.
- **Staff:**

- Feedback from staff networks highlights anxiety about job security, loss of workplace adjustments, and the need for clear communication during transition.
- Concerns about the accessibility of new HR systems and the risk of isolation for remote/hybrid workers.
- Staff value ongoing engagement and opportunities to shape changes.

Feedback from elected members, particularly those from underrepresented groups, should be captured to understand concerns around role changes, representation, and influence in new governance models.

What engagement or consultation has already taken place?

Residents
A county-wide engagement programme was delivered across all ten districts, combining in-person events, online sessions, and a public survey. These activities enabled residents to ask questions, share views, and understand the LGR proposals. Stakeholder feedback and insights inform Hertfordshire's final LGR submission to Government.

Staff
All 11 authorities have engaged staff through internal communications, surveys, Q&A sessions, and union collaboration. Efforts have focused on transparency, inclusion, and supporting staff through the transition. District-led and county-level engagement activities were coordinated to ensure balanced representation across the workforce.

This inclusive approach to engagement supports the EqIA by ensuring that both resident and staff voices are reflected in the development of future governance models.

Section 3: Analysis and Assessment **[Click here to return to contents]**

Who uses the service now, and who doesn't? Why?

- **Residents:**
  All residents use local government services in Hertfordshire, but reliance is highest among disabled people, older adults, carers, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, care-experienced young people, and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
  Some groups are less likely to access services due to, language barriers, limited transport, or lack of accessible information. Rural communities and those with limited digital skills may be particularly affected by changes to service delivery models.
- **Staff:**
  The workforce is diverse, but some groups e.g., disabled staff, older staff, carers, ethnic minorities may be underrepresented in certain roles or grades, or face barriers to progression and inclusion.
  Staff with limited digital skills, those in rural locations, or those with caring responsibilities may be less able to engage with new digital systems or remote/hybrid working models.

What are the potential positive and negative impacts of the proposal?

- **Potential Positive Impacts (Residents & Staff):**
    - Improved coordination and consistency of services and internal processes may benefit all, especially those who currently experience fragmented or duplicated provision.
    - Opportunities to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion into new structures, service models, and workforce practices.
    - Potential for more efficient use of resources, enabling targeted support for marginalised groups and staff development.
- **Potential Negative Impacts (Residents & Staff):**
    - Risk of increased barriers for those who are digitally excluded or have limited access to transport if services and HR processes become more centralised or digital-first.
    - Potential loss of local knowledge, representation, and informal support networks, which may reduce trust and engagement among underrepresented communities and staff groups.
    - Disruption to established community and staff networks, particularly for seldom-heard or marginalised groups.

Councillors:

- Positive: Opportunity to redesign governance structures that better reflect community diversity and improve strategic leadership.
- Negative: Risk of reduced representation, especially for councillors from minority backgrounds, if fewer roles are available or if ward boundaries dilute community voices.

Which protected groups are most likely to be affected?

- **Residents:**
  Disabled people, older adults, carers, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, care-experienced young people are most likely to be affected, as they're more reliant on local services and may face barriers to access.
  Those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage may be disproportionately impacted by changes to eligibility, digital provision, or physical service locations.
- **Staff:**
  Disabled staff, older staff, carers, ethnic minorities, and lower-paid staff may be most affected by changes to working patterns, digital systems, relocation, or redundancy risk.

Are there differences in outcomes or access for different groups?

- **Residents**
  Certain groups—such as disabled people, older adults, ethnic minorities, care-experienced young people, and those on low incomes—may face barriers to accessing services, particularly where language, transport, or digital exclusion are

factors. Rural communities may also experience reduced access due to geographic isolation.

- **Staff**
  Disabled and older staff may face challenges with new digital systems or relocations, while carers and those on lower pay bands could be disproportionately affected by changes to working patterns. Ethnic minorities staff may be concentrated in roles vulnerable to restructuring and may face barriers to engagement.
- **Councillors**
  Reorganisation will impact councillor roles, responsibilities, and representation. Changes to governance structures and digital platforms may affect how councillors engage with communities. Inclusive consultation and transition planning are essential to safeguard democratic accountability and support diverse leadership.

Section 4: Action Planning **[Click here to return to contents]**

What actions could be taken to mitigate negative impacts?

To ensure equitable access during and after LGR, it is important that services remain available through multiple channels—including telephone, face-to-face, and outreach—for those unable to use digital platforms. Digital inclusion is a key priority, and targeted support, training, and resources should be provided for groups at risk of exclusion, such as disabled people, older adults, and those on low incomes. The EqIA recognises that digital inclusion is not binary; technology can also be an enabler. Hybrid models—such as co-browsing support in customer service centres, chatbot functions, and tools for residents with hearing impairments or limited English proficiency—should be explored to enhance accessibility.

Accessible communication is another critical area. Auditing and adapting communications to meet accessibility standards—including plain English, ‘easy read’ formats, and compatibility with assistive technologies—will help ensure all residents can engage with services and information. Community engagement structures should also be maintained and strengthened to ensure that marginalised and seldom-heard groups can participate meaningfully in decision-making and service design. The engagement programme has prioritised input from under-represented groups, and future outreach should continue to centre these voices through co-production workshops and targeted engagement.

Monitoring service access, outcomes, and satisfaction by protected characteristic will be essential to identifying and addressing emerging disparities. Where possible, services should be co-produced with affected communities and those with lived experience of exclusion to inform ongoing improvements. The EqIA should be reviewed regularly and updated in response to new data, feedback, and service changes. All 11 authorities involved in Hertfordshire’s LGR have committed to maintaining accessible services for all residents, regardless of digital capability.

Staff Considerations

Supporting staff through TUPE and restructuring will require clear communication, accessible HR guidance, and fair processes for all affected employees. Promoting good

mental health and wellbeing—through Employee Assistance Programmes, wellbeing resources, and regular check-ins—will be especially important during transition periods.

Inclusive recruitment and progression should be maintained, with monitoring by protected characteristic to ensure transparency and fairness. Reasonable workplace adjustments should be retained wherever possible, and accessibility audits should be conducted for new systems and physical spaces. Disabled staff should be actively involved in planning and testing, and inclusive facilities—such as gender-neutral toilets and prayer rooms—should be considered, subject to feasibility and site constraints.

Flexible and remote working options should be offered, particularly for carers, disabled staff, and those facing transport barriers. Staff networks e.g., disability, LGBTQ+, carers, ethnic minorities should be supported and promoted to ensure ongoing engagement and feedback. Recognised trade unions should be actively involved in consultation and negotiation, with early engagement recommended to collaboratively address emerging issues.

All workforce-related mitigations outlined in this document are subject to feasibility assessments and resource availability. While these actions reflect best practice and shared ambitions across Hertfordshire councils, implementation will depend on operational constraints, funding, and legal frameworks. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion is embedded across the programme—through governance, service design, workforce strategy, and engagement—to ensure inclusive outcomes throughout the LGR process.

Proposed Mitigations (by Protected Characteristics)

Age [Click here to return to contents]

Hertfordshire is experiencing a demographic shift toward an ageing population, with a growing proportion of older residents and a stabilising or shrinking working-age population. These trends will increase demand for adult social care, healthcare, and age-friendly infrastructure, while reducing pressure on early years services. Gender differences are also evident, with older women disproportionately represented in both ageing and caregiving roles. Employment patterns show a resilient labour market overall, but disparities persist across age, gender, and geography. Middle-aged cohorts are highly economically active, while younger and older groups face greater barriers to participation. Some districts show elevated unemployment, particularly among younger men, highlighting the need for targeted support.

As LGR progresses, governance models should be responsive to these demographic pressures. This includes age- and gender-sensitive workforce planning, support for older workers and carers, and strategies to enable youth employment. EqIA processes should consider how structural changes may affect political representation and ensure inclusive participation across all age groups.

For further available data on this characteristic visit Herts Insight:

- **Source 1**
- **Source 2**
- **Source 3**

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigations	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of digital exclusion for older adults and low-income groups	Provide alternative access routes and digital inclusion support	Reduced digital access barriers	Digital access rates and feedback from excluded groups
Anxiety about job security and relocation	Transparent communication and redeployment support	Reduced staff anxiety and improved retention	Staff engagement and retention rates
Potential language barriers for ethnic minorities	Explore options for resident translation and interpretation services if feasible	Improved service accessibility	Usage rates of translated materials and feedback
Potential loss of workplace adjustments	Audit and retain necessary adjustments during transition	Maintained accessibility and inclusion	Adjustment retention rates and staff satisfaction
Potential loss of local engagement and concerns heard	Maintain community forums and outreach	Sustained local involvement	Participation rates in local engagement activities
Loss of informal support networks due to centralisation	Maintain local engagement structures (e.g. community forums, staff networks)	Sustained community and staff cohesion	Participation rates in local forums and staff networks
Reduced trust and engagement among underrepresented groups	Co-produce with affected communities and staff; ensure representation in decision-making	Increased trust and inclusive engagement	Feedback from marginalised groups; engagement survey results
Intersectional impacts (e.g., disabled ethnic minorities)	Test feasibility of conducting intersectional analysis; tailor support and services to overlapping needs	More equitable outcomes for complex identity groups	Disaggregated outcome data; satisfaction by intersectional identity
Risk of unmet needs for marginalised groups, e.g: care-experienced / Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	Explore including targeted service design and outreach for these groups	Improved service access and satisfaction for specific communities	Uptake and satisfaction metrics for care-experienced

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigations	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Potential transport limitations for rural residents	Maintain or enhance physical service locations in key rural hubs; explore mobile/outreach services	Improved physical access to services for rural residents	Service usage rates in rural areas; feedback from rural communities
Potential for barriers to progression for staff with protected characteristics	Explore implementing inclusive recruitment, retention, and promotion policies; monitor progression by protected characteristic	Increased representation and career progression for underrepresented groups	Diversity in senior roles; promotion rates by protected characteristic; staff survey results
Underrepresentation in certain roles or grades	Explore targeted development programmes and mentoring for affected groups	More equitable distribution of staff across grades and departments	Workforce diversity dashboards; uptake of development programmes
Risk of exclusion from decision-making and strategic roles	Work toward diverse representation in governance and transformation workstreams	Inclusive decision-making and visibility of diverse voices	Representation in strategic groups; feedback from staff networks

Care- experienced [Click here to return to contents]

Care-experienced children and young people—including those currently looked after and care leavers—are among the most vulnerable groups in Hertfordshire. They often face compounded challenges across education, employment, housing, and mental health. The LGR should ensure that future governance and service models are responsive to their needs and do not exacerbate existing inequalities. Hertfordshire's Children Looked After (CLA) population shows high ethnic diversity and persistent challenges in placement stability and education, employment and training (EET) outcomes.

Care-experienced individuals may be disproportionately affected by structural changes, especially if services become more centralised or digital-first. They may rely on face-to-face support, consistent relationships, and tailored interventions. LGR should embed trauma-informed, inclusive, and accessible service design principles to safeguard outcomes for this group.

For further available data on this characteristic, visit the Hertfordshire County Council Children's Services Strategies and Reports page: Children's Social Care – Q1 2025/26 Performance Report

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of reduced access to education, employment, or training.	Strengthen EET pathways, mentoring, and targeted support for care leavers.	Increased EET rates and progression.	EET metrics; uptake of support programmes.
Risk of digital exclusion or disengagement from centralised services.	Ensure multi-channel access and outreach for care-experienced young people.	Improved service access and engagement.	Service usage data; feedback from care leavers.
Risk of unmet mental health needs.	Explore expanding access to trauma-informed counselling and wellbeing services.	Improved mental health outcomes.	Uptake of mental health services; wellbeing indicators.
Risk of underrepresentation in governance and consultation.	Review guaranteed interview schemes, mentorship programmes, and inclusive recruitment practices.	Increased employment rates and career progression for care-experienced individuals.	Workforce diversity data; uptake of schemes; progression tracking.
Risk of reduced housing stability for care leavers	Review housing policies; explore priority schemes and tenancy support.	Improved housing security and reduced homelessness among care-experienced individuals.	Housing access data; tenancy sustainment rates.

Disability [Click here to return to contents]

Disability prevalence and the degree of activity limitation vary significantly across Hertfordshire. LGR should embed disability- and age-inclusive planning into future governance arrangements. This includes:

- Differentiated funding allocations based on local levels of need
- Inclusive service design across health, housing, and transport
- Robust data systems to monitor health and care disparities over time

A uniform approach risks overlooking the complex, place-specific needs of disabled and older residents. Councillors from these groups may also face barriers to continued representation due to structural changes. The EqIA should explore how governance redesigns can support inclusive political participation and leadership, particularly for those affected by age-related disability.

For further available data on this characteristic, visit Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Disabled people may be excluded if services become digital-first without alternatives.	Consider ensuring non-digital access routes and assistive technologies.	Reduced digital exclusion among disabled users.	Digital access and satisfaction metrics.
Disabled staff may lose workplace adjustments during relocation or system changes.	Audit and retain adjustments; consult affected staff.	Continuity of support and improved staff wellbeing.	Adjustment retention rates; staff feedback.
Centralisation may reduce physical access for those with mobility impairments.	Maintain accessible service hubs and transport support.	Improved access to physical services.	Access audits; service usage by disabled residents.
Disruption may increase stress and anxiety for those with mental health needs.	Review resources for mental health support and clear communication.	Improved resilience and reduced stress.	Wellbeing survey results; uptake of support services.
Invisible disabilities may be overlooked in redesigns.	Include diverse disability profiles in consultation and design.	More inclusive services and policies.	Representation in consultation; feedback from affected groups.

Gender – Reassignment [Click here to return to contents]

There is a risk that structural changes may disrupt support networks or reduce visibility of transgender needs. However, the reorganisation also presents an opportunity to embed inclusive practices into new governance models, service frameworks, and workforce strategies. Future governance should ensure that transgender residents and staff are represented, supported, and able to participate fully in civic and professional life. This includes inclusive communication, gender-affirming facilities, and staff networks that promote awareness, dignity, and belonging.

For available data on this characteristic, visit:

- Equality and Diversity Hub

- Herts Insight – Local Communities & Diversity Profiles
- Young Pride in Herts (LGBT+ Youth Support)

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of exclusion if services do not reflect gender diversity.	Review if services are inclusive of all gender identities.	Improved access and reduced exclusion.	Service usage and feedback from gender-diverse users.
Potential for discrimination or lack of support for gender-diverse staff.	Maintain anti-discrimination training and inclusive HR policies.	Safer and more supportive workplace.	Staff survey results; incident reports.
Risk of unmet mental health needs due to lack of tailored support.	Explore resources and access to gender-informed mental health services.	Improved mental health outcomes.	Uptake and satisfaction with mental health services.
Gender-diverse individuals may be excluded from consultation and decision-making.	Actively engage with LGBTQ+ networks and individuals.	More inclusive and representative governance.	Participation metrics and feedback.

Pregnancy & Maternity [Click here to return to contents]

As LGR progresses, it is vital that both staff protections and resident-facing services are preserved and strengthened. EqIA processes should ensure continuity of care, inclusive workplace policies, and equitable access to support for pregnant individuals, new parents, and carers.

For available data on this characteristic, please visit:

- Hertfordshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026
- Herts Insight

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of reduced support or flexibility during maternity leave or pregnancy.	Maintain policies protecting maternity rights and explore flexible arrangements.	Protected rights and improved retention.	Policy compliance checks; staff feedback.

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Pregnant women and new mothers may face barriers to accessing centralised or digital services.	Maintain physical access points and offer telephone/face-to-face options.	Improved access and reduced exclusion.	Service access audits; user feedback.
Risk of stigma or exclusion for pregnant staff or those returning from leave.	Promote inclusive culture and support networks.	Improved inclusion and staff morale.	Staff survey results; participation in networks.
Consultation materials may not be accessible to new parents or those with limited time.	Explore flexible engagement formats and targeted outreach.	Greater engagement and representation.	Engagement metrics and feedback.
Families with limited resources may be disproportionately affected by service changes.	Link to financial support and community resources.	Reduced hardship and improved wellbeing.	Uptake of support schemes; service satisfaction.

Race [Click here to return to contents]

Hertfordshire's population includes a significant proportion of residents from minority ethnic backgrounds, with notable variation across districts. More diverse areas tend to have younger populations, which has implications for education, employment, and long-term service planning.

LGR should respond to these demographic differences by embedding inclusive practices into governance structures. This includes ensuring representative decision-making, culturally competent services, and targeted engagement strategies—particularly for younger minority groups. Equality and inclusion frameworks should reflect local diversity and be integrated into service design, communications, and resource allocation.

Failure to account for these differences risks undermining trust and equity in newly formed authorities. EqIA processes should explore how governance redesigns can support inclusive political participation and leadership across all ethnic identities and age groups.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Communities

While Hertfordshire-specific data on GRT communities remains limited, regional insights from the East of England provide a useful lens for understanding potential inequalities. These patterns are likely to reflect, at least in part, the experiences of GRT individuals in Hertfordshire and should inform inclusive planning—particularly in the context of LGR.

Key areas of concern for GRT communities include housing and living conditions, where individuals are more likely to reside in mobile or overcrowded accommodation, impacting health, safety, and access to services. Despite having a younger demographic profile, GRT individuals report poorer health outcomes, indicating systemic barriers to healthcare and wellbeing. Educational attainment is also significantly lower, with many lacking formal qualifications, particularly among younger adults. Employment rates are comparatively low, with a higher reliance on self-employment, which may reflect both cultural practices and limited access to formal job opportunities. These disparities underscore the importance of considering GRT needs in service design, policy development, and community engagement strategies to ensure inclusive and equitable governance.

For further available data on this characteristic, visit Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2
- Source 3

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Resident language barriers may prevent access to services and information.	Explore feasibility of providing translated materials and multilingual staff support.	Improved access and reduced exclusion.	Service usage and feedback from non-English speakers.
Potential discrimination may reduce trust in public services.	Build relationships through community-led engagement and transparency.	Increased trust and participation.	Engagement survey results; participation in consultations.
Ethnic minority groups may experience poorer health outcomes.	Consider targeted health interventions and culturally competent care.	Reduced disparities in health outcomes.	Health outcome data by ethnicity; service uptake.
Refugees and asylum seekers may experience isolation and lack of support.	Review peer networks and community integration programmes.	Improved social inclusion and wellbeing.	Participation in community programmes; wellbeing surveys.
Speakers of other languages as their first language may struggle to find suitable employment.	Review resources offering language training and support.	Improved employment access and retention.	Employment rates and feedback from affected groups.

Religion or Belief [Click here to return to contents]

Census data highlights a shift in religious identity across Hertfordshire, with a notable decline in Christian affiliation and a rise in residents identifying with no religion. Minority faith communities, including Muslim populations, have also grown, reflecting increasing religious diversity.

These trends align with broader national patterns and have implications for inclusive governance. The rise in secularism suggests evolving public expectations around neutrality in civic spaces and public services. Future governance models should ensure that both faith-based and secular communities are considered in policy development, communications, and service delivery.

Additionally, structural changes linked to LGR may impact political representation for councillors from minority faith backgrounds. EqIA processes should explore how governance redesigns can support inclusive participation and leadership across all belief systems.

For further available data on this characteristic, visit Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of exclusion if services do not accommodate religious needs or beliefs.	Consult with diverse belief groups; provide inclusive service options.	Improved access and reduced exclusion.	Service usage and feedback by religion or belief.
Potential for indirect discrimination through uniform or scheduling policies.	Explore potential for indirect discrimination through uniform or scheduling policies.	Review policies to allow religious dress and observance.	More inclusive and respectful workplace.
Lack of prayer spaces or inflexible schedules may disadvantage religious individuals.	Explore provision of prayer rooms and flexible scheduling.	Improved comfort and inclusion.	Facility availability; staff and user satisfaction.
Discrimination may reduce trust in public services.	Work with Faith forums to build relationships and transparency.	Increased trust and engagement.	Engagement metrics; feedback from faith communities.
Underrepresentation of faith groups in decision-making.	Include faith representatives in consultation and governance.	More representative and inclusive policies.	Participation rates; diversity in governance structures.

Sex [Click here to return to contents]

Mid-2024 population estimates show that Hertfordshire continues to have a female-majority population across all districts. This demographic pattern has important implications for LGR, particularly in shaping equitable service delivery and inclusive governance. The consistent gender distribution highlights the need for targeted investment in women's health services, including reproductive health, mental wellbeing, and support for long-term conditions. It also reinforces the importance of enhanced support for unpaid carers—many of whom are middle-aged women—through access to respite care, financial assistance, and recognition in service planning. Gender-sensitive workforce strategies are essential, especially in sectors such as health, education, and social care, where women are disproportionately represented. Inclusive transport and public safety planning should also address mobility and safety concerns that more frequently affect women, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas.

Age and gender data reveal a growing older population, with older women significantly outnumbering older men due to longer life expectancy. This trend underscores the need for robust adult social care systems, accessible infrastructure, and community-based support tailored to older residents. Gender-sensitive ageing policies are particularly important, as older women may face compounded disadvantages linked to lower lifetime earnings, caregiving responsibilities, and health inequalities. The female age structure also shows a concentration in the 45–59 age group—a cohort often balancing employment, caregiving, and personal health needs. Their experiences should inform workforce policy, including flexible working arrangements, carer leave, and occupational health support. Health outreach, housing adaptations, and community design should also reflect the needs of this group to support ageing in place and social inclusion.

From a governance perspective, structural changes under LGR may affect councillor representation, particularly for women active in caregiving and community leadership roles. EqIA processes should explore how governance redesigns can support inclusive political participation and promote leadership diversity, recognising the value of lived experience in shaping responsive and equitable local governance.

For further data on this characteristic, visit Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2
- Source 3

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of disproportionate impact on women due to caring responsibilities and part-time work.	Maintain inclusive policies and support for carers.	Reduced gender disparities in employment.	Staff survey results; retention and progression data.
Lone parents and families with limited resources may face barriers to	Seek to maintain physical access points and offer	Improved access and reduced exclusion.	Service access audits; user feedback.

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
accessing centralised or digital services.	telephone/face-to-face options.		
Risk of gender bias or exclusion in leadership and decision-making.	Continue to promote gender equity in leadership and governance.	More inclusive and representative workplace.	Leadership diversity metrics; staff feedback.
Families with limited resources may be disproportionately affected by service changes.	Link to financial support and community resources.	Reduced hardship and improved wellbeing.	Uptake of support schemes; service satisfaction.
Underrepresentation of male carers and lone fathers in consultation.	Explore targeted engagement with underrepresented gender groups.	Improved representation and service relevance.	Engagement metrics and feedback.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation [Click here to return to contents]

The 2021 Census introduced a voluntary question on gender identity, with 5.4% of Hertfordshire residents aged 16+ choosing not to respond. Among those who did, the vast majority identified with the gender assigned at birth. Hertfordshire's response rates are broadly consistent with regional and national patterns, suggesting cautious engagement with this topic.

While the data shows limited variation, it highlights the importance of recognising gender-diverse communities in future governance models. LGR presents an opportunity to embed EDI principles into:

- Service design, including gender-affirming healthcare and inclusive education.
- Public engagement and representation, ensuring visibility and voice for gender-diverse residents.
- Safe and welcoming spaces, such as gender-neutral facilities and inclusive public environments.

The relatively high non-response rate also points to the need for trust-building and privacy assurance in data collection and service delivery. EqIA processes should ensure that minority gender identities are not overlooked and that future governance structures are respectful, representative, and inclusive.

To improve visibility, data visualisations may exclude respondents whose gender identity matches their sex at birth or who did not respond, allowing clearer representation of minority gender identities. Councillors from these communities may face barriers to continued

representation due to structural changes. EqIA should explore how governance redesigns can support inclusive political participation and leadership.

For further data on this characteristic, visit Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of exclusion if services do not reflect sexual orientation diversity.	Review services to assess inclusivity of all sexual orientations.	Improved access and reduced exclusion.	Service usage and feedback from LGBTQ+ users.
Potential for discrimination or lack of support for LGBTQ+ staff.	Review anti-discrimination training and inclusive policies.	Safer and more supportive workplace.	Staff survey results; incident reports.
Lack of inclusive facilities may compromise safety and dignity.	Ensure inclusive spaces.	Improved safety and comfort.	Facility audits; feedback from users.
Risk of unmet mental health needs due to lack of tailored support.	Maintain access to LGBTQ+-informed mental health services.	Improved mental health outcomes.	Uptake and satisfaction with mental health services.
LGBTQ+ individuals may be excluded from consultation and decision-making.	Actively engage with LGBTQ+ networks and individuals.	More inclusive and representative governance.	Participation metrics and feedback.

Marriage & Civil Partnerships [Click here to return to contents]

The 2021 Census captured legal marital and civil partnership status, including whether relationships were same-sex or opposite-sex. Following legislative changes in 2013–2014, Hertfordshire saw a modest increase in same-sex marriages and civil partnerships. While these groups represent a small proportion of the population, their inclusion is vital for equitable governance.

Younger cohorts are more likely to identify within LGBTQ+ communities and may have distinct expectations around representation, service access, and civic participation. As LGR progresses, governance models should:

- Recognise diverse relationship types in service design and civic representation.
- Ensure inclusive engagement strategies that reflect the needs of LGBTQ+ residents across age groups.
- Embed EDI principles into policy, communications, and infrastructure planning.

Structural changes under LGR may affect representation and service access, particularly in districts with higher levels of minority populations, disability, unpaid care, or socio-economic disadvantage—such as Stevenage, Broxbourne, and Dacorum. Larger governance units may offer efficiency but risk diluting local responsiveness; more localised models may improve representation but introduce inconsistency.

EqIA processes should be data-driven and equity-focused, ensuring that LGBTQ+ residents are not marginalised in governance redesigns. This includes considering how councillor representation and leadership opportunities can remain inclusive across all identities and age groups.

For further available data on this characteristic, visit Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of exclusion if services only recognise marriage and not civil partnerships.	Review and revise service documentation and eligibility criteria.	Reduced exclusion and improved access.	Complaints and feedback analysis; service usage data.
Potential for unequal treatment in policies or benefits.	Implement training and policy reviews to ensure parity.	More equitable workplace experience.	Staff feedback; HR policy compliance checks.
Civil partners may be excluded from certain benefits or recognition. Civil partners may be underrepresented in decision-making processes.	Align all benefit schemes with legal standards for civil partnerships. Proactively include civil partners in consultation and governance.	Equal access to entitlements. More inclusive governance structures.	Audit results; uptake data. Engagement participation rates.
Language used in communications may unintentionally exclude civil partnerships.	Update all communications to use inclusive terminology.	Improved clarity and inclusivity.	Review of communication resources; feedback from users.

Carers [Click here to return to contents]

According to the 2021 Census, over 92,000 Hertfordshire residents provide unpaid care, with 24,038 delivering 50 or more hours per week—equivalent to full-time work. Districts such as Stevenage, Broxbourne, and North Hertfordshire show above-average rates of intensive care, placing significant pressure on local health and social care systems.

Unpaid care is closely linked to health inequalities, employment limitations, and financial strain. Carers often face reduced income, limited career progression, and increased physical and mental health challenges. These impacts are particularly acute for those providing intensive care, and for carers in areas with higher socio-economic vulnerability.

As LGR progresses, future governance models should be responsive to the needs of unpaid carers. This includes:

- Respite and adult social care services that reduce pressure on informal carers and improve wellbeing.
- Carer support programmes, including financial assistance, advocacy, and access to flexible employment.
- Integrated health and wellbeing initiatives that recognise carers as part of the wider care ecosystem.

Although unpaid carers are not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, they are protected by association—particularly when caring for individuals with protected characteristics such as disability. This principle extends to housing, benefits, and other services where indirect impacts may arise.

Age-standardised proportions (ASPs) offer a more accurate basis for comparing care burdens across districts and should inform resource allocation and service planning. Districts such as Dacorum, North Hertfordshire, and Welwyn Hatfield have the highest numbers of intensive carers, while Stevenage and Broxbourne show elevated rates relative to population size. These areas should not be disadvantaged by structural changes under LGR.

For further available data on this characteristic, visit Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of carers being overlooked in service design.	Include carers in consultation and co-production activities.	More inclusive and responsive services.	Engagement metrics; feedback from carers.
Potential for increased stress due to lack of flexibility.	Explore carer-friendly HR policies and awareness training.	Reduced stress and improved work-life balance.	Staff wellbeing indicators; policy uptake.

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Carers may not be aware of or able to access support.	Maintain visibility and accessibility of carer support services.	Increased uptake and satisfaction.	Service usage data; feedback surveys.
Poor communication may leave carers uninformed or unsupported.	Explore targeted communication strategies for carers.	Improved engagement and clarity.	Feedback from carers; communication audits.
Carers may miss out on development due to time constraints.	Where possible provide flexible and modular learning options.	Greater access to development opportunities.	Training participation rates; feedback from carers.
Risk of reduced representation of councillors from protected groups	Explore monitoring councillor diversity pre- and post-reorganisation; consider inclusive candidate support.	Maintained or improved diversity in elected leadership	Councillor diversity metrics; feedback from elected members

Other Relevant Groups [Click here to return to contents]

In addition to the protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010, it is essential to consider the needs and experiences of other groups who may be disproportionately affected by LGR. These groups often face structural barriers or compounded disadvantage, and their inclusion is critical to ensuring equitable outcomes.

LGR should account for the needs of individuals experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, including those with low income, limited educational attainment, or insecure employment. These groups often face heightened barriers to accessing services and opportunities. Residents in rural or isolated areas, or those who are digitally excluded due to lack of skills, connectivity, or resources, may also experience reduced access to essential services and civic participation.

People experiencing homelessness or insecure housing are particularly vulnerable to service disruption and require targeted outreach and support. Refugees, asylum seekers, and separated migrants may face language barriers, trauma-related needs, and unfamiliarity with local systems, necessitating culturally competent and trauma-informed service design. Individuals with low literacy or limited English proficiency may struggle to engage with communications and digital platforms and should be supported through accessible formats and interpretation services.

Other groups requiring tailored consideration include people involved in the criminal justice system, who may face stigma and barriers to reintegration. Members of the Armed Forces Community—including veterans, reservists, serving personnel, their families, and the

bereaved—may have distinct needs related to health, housing, employment, and civic engagement. Ensuring equitable access to public services for these groups will require recognition of the diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors that shape their experiences and engagement.

For further available data on these characteristics, visit Hertfordshire Heroes and Herts Insight:

- Source 1
- Source 2
- Source 3

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
Risk of worsening health outcomes if services are not inclusive or accessible.	Assess if services are culturally competent and physically accessible.	Reduced health inequalities.	Health outcome data; service usage by group.
Armed Forces Community including the bereaved may face barriers to accessing services.	Apply Armed Forces Covenant Duty and consult with Armed Forces networks.	Improved access and satisfaction.	Feedback from Armed Forces community; service audits.
Risk of increased tension if groups feel excluded or stereotyped.	Use inclusive language and ensure representation in decision-making.	More cohesive and respectful community relations.	Complaints data; engagement feedback.
Marginalised groups may be disproportionately affected by service changes.	Where appropriate conduct impact assessments and provide financial support where needed.	Reduced negative impact and improved equity.	Equality monitoring; uptake of mitigation measures.
Failure to address domestic abuse or reoffending risks.	Strengthen partnerships with specialist services and ensure safe access.	Increased protection and reduced harm.	Incident reports; service usage data.
Councillors may feel they lack the support needed to lead effectively through transition.	Provide timely, transparent information and access to training/development.	Informed leadership and trusted advocacy.	Participation in training; leadership feedback; decision-making confidence.
Migrants may face barriers to accessing services due to	Ensure services are culturally competent, linguistically	Improved service access and integration.	Service usage by migrant groups;

Potential Impact / Risk	Mitigation	Expected outcome	Measure of success
language, cultural, or legal factors.	accessible, and inclusive.		feedback and engagement data.
Refugees may experience trauma-related or systemic barriers to rebuilding their lives.	Signpost to trauma-informed, culturally sensitive support across key services.	Enhanced wellbeing, safety, and stability.	Uptake of support services; wellbeing indicators; integration metrics.

Who is responsible for actions, and what is the timeline?

- **Equality Leads:** Oversee EqIA updates, data analysis, and monitoring of equality outcomes.
- **Service Managers:** Implement mitigation actions within their service areas and report on progress.
- **Community Engagement Teams:** Lead on inclusive engagement and co-production activities.
- **Communications Team:** Ensure all communications are accessible and inclusive.
- **HR/Workforce Teams:** Lead on staff support, workplace adjustments, and inclusive recruitment.
- **Timeline:** Actions will be implemented throughout the transition period, with regular reviews and updates at key project milestones. Ongoing monitoring and engagement will continue post-implementation.

Are there plans for ongoing engagement with affected groups?

Yes. Hertfordshire Councils are committed to ongoing engagement with residents, service users, staff, and community organisations throughout the LGR process. This includes regular forums, surveys, focus groups, and co-production workshops to ensure diverse voices continue to shape decisions.

Staff and residents have already participated in dedicated surveys and live Q&A sessions, with further engagement planned. Feedback mechanisms will remain available, and the Equality Impact Assessment will be treated as a live document—updated in response to new insights, data, and changing needs. Councillors should be included in ongoing engagement activities to ensure their perspectives—particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds—inform the design of new governance structures and electoral arrangements.

The approach prioritises transparency, inclusion, and continuous improvement, ensuring that equality, diversity, and inclusion are embedded in both service delivery and workforce structures.

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CABINET

19 NOVEMBER 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: DRAFT TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY

REPORT OF: NIGEL SMITH, DIRECTOR: PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR. DONNA WRIGHT, PLACE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / **RESPONSIBLE GROWTH** / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The adopted Local Plan 2011-2031 stipulates that the Council "prepare and maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support its strategic policy approach and / or adapt to change. These will be used to inform the approach to retail at the time of the early review of the Local Plan".

1.2 As such, we are preparing an overarching Town Centres Strategy to

- provide additional guidance to Local Plan Policies: ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development, ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages, ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages and SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops;
- Set out the Council's planning priorities for its town centres which can be given appropriate weight in relevant planning decisions; and
- Act as a 'bridging document' pending the approved review of the Local Plan.

1.3 As an interim tool until any new Local Plan is progressed and adopted, the Town Centres Strategy seeks to provide the necessary policy guidance to maintain each town's unique successful qualities and place identities. It will offer good practice guidance to developers and relevant stakeholders when developing proposals and policy advice to development management officers when determining planning applications. It will also seek improvement for town centre vitality and viability within a planning context, whilst referencing other council strategies (including the Council Plan, the Economic Development and Sustainability strategies).

1.4 The draft Town Centres Strategy will (subject to Cabinet approval) be issued for public consultation in late 2025 with a final version anticipated to be presented for adoption in early 2026.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the draft Town Centres Strategy (attached as Appendix A to this report) and its associated Appendices be endorsed and approved for public consultation.

2.2 That delegated authority is granted to the Director, Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to make any minor non-material corrections, including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations, to the draft Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for the public consultation.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To allow the draft Town Centres Strategy to be progressed to public consultation so that it may be developed and eventually adopted as a material planning consideration to support developers, landowners and relevant stakeholders when considering developing proposals and to provide policy advice to development management officers when determining planning applications until superseded by any new Local Plan.

3.2. To set key priorities which seek to maintain and enhance the unique character and vitality and viability of the district's four town centres through agreed partnership working.

3.3. To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The Council could rely solely on the Local Plan for all matters relating to town centres instead of publishing a Town Centres Strategy. However, policy elements of the Local Plan, particularly those relating to significant development, town centres first approach, and land use class considerations require further clarification and guidance which can be provided through the Town Centres Strategy to help implement the Plan and achieve its good growth objectives. Much of the evidence underpinning the Local Plan predates, in particular, the Covid-19 pandemic which had a significant impact on the way communities across the country use and interact with their town centres.

4.2. The Council could have considered the creation of four distinct town centre strategies, meaning an individual piece of work per town centre with a deeper investigation, rather than this consolidated overarching singular strategy. However, creating four distinct town centre strategies would have required significantly more time, human resource and investigation. An overarching higher level Town Centres Strategy would help speed up the process and provide the necessary policy guidance for each town centre while the Local Plan is under review and help to manage speculative development proposals.

4.3 The Council could have produced a holistic corporate strategy for its town centres. combining the content of planning-led Town Centres Strategy with relevant projects and ambitions emerging from the Economic Development Strategy, the Churchgate redevelopment, Sustainability Strategy and other relevant workstreams. This was not pursued from an early stage, and the broad scope of the Town Centres Strategy has been agreed in consultation with Executive Members and the Council's Strategic Planning Project Board. The Local Plan is clear on the need for a planning-led strategy to perform a specific function in light of the commitment to an early review and update of the Plan. There needs to be appropriate separation(s) between the roles of the Council as Local Planning Authority and the Council as landowner / development project sponsor. The projects and documents cited above are hosted within different

Directorates of the Council to perform distinct functions and / or deliver on a wider remit. Each document cross-refers to the others where relevant and appropriate.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Executive Member for Place has been briefed on the matters set out above.

5.2. In addition, consultation has taken place with the Strategic Planning Matters Project Board on the scope of the Town Centres Strategy in October 2024 with updates on its draft iterations in May, July and October 2025.

5.3 The comments received from the above-mentioned Project Board regarding the scope of the Town Centres Strategy and future direction of North Herts town centres have informed the current draft, resulting in improvements to the Strategy in terms of its scope and mechanisms to promote town centre vitality and viability.

5.4 Internal consultation with relevant officers across Council departments and external consultation with relevant key stakeholders, such as the town's Business Improvement Districts and business representatives, as well as the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, have been involved in developing the draft Strategy, including in relation to the most recent updates.

5.5 Regular updates on the Strategy have been provided to Cabinet through various Strategic Planning Matters Reports, together with updates in Members Information Service (MIS) in relation to the preparation of the Town Centres & Retail Study, which provides the evidence base to the draft Strategy.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 13 September 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Chapter 7 (paragraphs 90 – 95) outlines guidance for town centre vitality. "Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation."

7.2. North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted November 2022, and the Council has committed to reviewing this. The Local Plan 2011- 2031 stipulates the need for a new Town Centres Strategy; to bridge the gap between current and emerging Local Plans and provide further details and guidance to support compliance with relevant town centre policies in the existing Local Plan. The commitment to producing town centre strategies, in combination with the broader commitment to early review, was a key influence on the Inspector's conclusions that the Local Plan was 'sound'.

7.3. The town centre policies for the district are set out in the Local Plan. These policies establish the amount of retail required to meet the projected population growth and also allocates parcels of land for retail-led, mixed-use development. The policies were developed through evidence gathering from experts and stakeholders and were subject to both public consultation and formal examination by the government's appointed Planning Inspector.

7.4. The evidence for the retail and town centre policies in the adopted Local Plan was published in 2016 and provides data to 2031. The Council commissioned consultants, Lichfields, in late 2023 to provide an up-to-date Town Centres and Retail evidence base to take account of the impact of Covid 19, online shopping, the cost-of-living increases, and new population projections to provide fresh retail needs projections to 2031 and 2036. This Study, completed in December 2024, will inform the review of the retail and town centre policies in the Local Plan and provide the necessary evidence base for the preparation of this Town Centres Strategy. This draft Strategy takes account of this updated evidence and its implications for policy and strategy development in the context of the North Herts' town centres.

7.5. The Council last published town centre strategies between 2004 and 2008. These were strategies for each of the four town centres in North Herts and need updating.

7.6. The adopted Local Plan, contains policies with implications for town centres, these include:

- Policy SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops,
- ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development,
- ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages and
- ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages.

These policies seek to promote, protect and enhance the well-being of the town centres in the District, whilst directing sustainable development, new retail, leisure and other town centre land uses within the town centres particularly following the NPPF's town centres first approach. The frontages policies seek to ensure that the town centres maintain their primary retail function whilst increasing their diversity with a range of complementary uses, promoting competitive, flexible town centre environment.

7.7 The Town centres Strategy is to be read alongside other policies and supporting guidance documents in the Local Plan which will have an impact on development proposals – including:

- Policy D1: Sustainable design
- Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets
- Policy SP13: Historic Environment
- Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability
- Policy SP6: Sustainable transport
- Policy HC1: Community Facilities
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design
- Policy SP10: Healthy Communities
- Developer Contributions SPD
- Parking SPD

7.8 The 2024 Retail and Town Centre Study has identified that there is a need to review these policies as part of the New Local Plan given changes in consumer behaviour patterns and the changing role and function of town centres in meeting these demands. The retail and town centre policies in the New Local Plan will need to be more flexible in their approach whilst ensuring that any development and improvements within the town centres contributes and strengthens the retail, economic, environmental and social benefits of the town centres as well as reinforcing each town centre's local distinctiveness as a special place to invest, live and visit.

7.9 This draft Strategy therefore seeks to provide the necessary interim guidance.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The draft Strategy incorporates advice on a range of changes in national policy and guidance and takes account of the updated evidence in the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024).

8.2. The draft Strategy addresses the relevant policy criteria identified in the adopted Local Plan by providing more robust guidance for developers and stakeholders that should be taken into consideration for any type of development or improvements within the town centres to promote their vitality and viability.

8.3. The draft Town Centres Strategy is a planning-led document and should be read in conjunction with relevant policies in the adopted Local Plan whilst also taking into consideration other important Council Strategies and projects, such as the Economic Development Strategy, the Churchgate Regeneration Zone project, the Council Plan and the Council's Sustainability Strategy. All these documents together contribute towards the Council's overall strategy for its town centres.

8.4. The draft Strategy has been prepared following similar principles to a Supplementary Planning Document including reference to relevant policies and evidence and stakeholder engagement in its preparation and, subject to Cabinet approval, public consultation.

8.5. The draft Strategy provides the overall direction of travel with clear policy guidance and priorities for each town centre to guide developers when submitting planning applications and other town centre improvements. It is based on a sound evidence base with clear connections to published policy and supplementary planning documents, including other Council and external organisations documents. These together inform the Strategy and contribute towards meeting the Council's Plan and the Local Plan goals and vision.

8.6. The Strategy covers a range of town centre topics including land use capacities and distributions, mixed-use needs, vacancy reoccupation, public realm quality, heritage preservation, sustainable transport, connectivity, active travel, and community facilities and community well-being.

8.7. As written, the draft Strategy covers all four town centres of the district: Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock, with considerations and implications for the surrounding context of each centre. It sets out the Council's vision for the town Centres across four generic themes: land use and retail, built environment, transport access and movement and communities.

8.8. The Strategy is delivery and development focussed, providing a comprehensive overview and summary of the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres at **Part 1: Town Centres Context.** This section will assist landowners, architects, planners, and stakeholders bringing forward development proposals in understanding the relevant context for North Herts' town centres.

8.9. In order to bridge the gap between current and emerging Local Plans and to provide further details and guidance to support compliance with relevant town centre policies in the existing Local Plan, **Part 2: Town Centre Guidance,** sets out a series of Guidance Notes. These Guidance Notes provide supplementary information to inform planning applications for development proposals affecting town centres.

8.10. Each of North Herts' town centres have specific strengths and weaknesses, offering their own unique offer and **Part 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies,** provides a vision statement, summary of key priorities for each centre including development opportunities for larger parcels of land and how these could be taken forward through partnership working.

8.11 **Part 4: Further Council Actions and Funding Opportunities,** identifies opportunities to support the vitality and viability of the town centres and proposes further actions together with several funding and delivery options that the Council could consider in delivering the ambitions set out within the draft Strategy. The effective delivery of the Strategy will require the Council to work closely with several partners and stakeholders. It is proposed to gauge the support of key identified partners and stakeholders through the formal consultation process of the Strategy. This will be important in terms of delivering the identified priorities for each of the town centres and the recommended further actions. This approach will help inform a clearer, action-oriented delivery plan to be included in the final version that can be subject to regular review and update.

8.12 The **Appendices** to the draft Strategy comprise:

- Appendix 1: providing a full reference list and hyperlinks to the comprehensive evidence base at Part 1.

- Appendix 2: outlines the Town Centre Policy Direction recommending alterations to the adopted Local Plan given the significant changes in retail floorspace demand, changes in use classes and other policy recommendations identified in the 2024 Retail and Town Centre Study. This has informed the guidance principles outlines in Part 2 of the draft Strategy, but its recommendations will be formally considered and taken forward through the Local Plan review.

- Appendix 3: includes further background evidence notes for each of the town centres to be read alongside Part 3.

8.13 The draft Town Centres Strategy is attached at Appendix A together with the supporting Appendices.

8.14 Subject to approval by Cabinet, the draft Town Centres Strategy together with its supporting appendices will be made available for public consultation in early December. It is proposed to have an extended consultation period over December and January given the Christmas period. This programme will also afford wider public engagement with the Area Forums in December during the consultation period, in addition to consulting with key stakeholders in terms of preparing a delivery plan as outlined in paragraph 8.11 above delivering, as well as with local businesses and members of the public registered on the Council's Local Plan data base.

8.15 Any comments received will inform the final version of the Strategy which would then be re-presented to Cabinet for approval and adoption at an appropriate time in early 2026. The final version of the Strategy will be desktop published with graphics, photos and designed as a readable and well-presented document.

8.16 If / once adopted, the Town Centres Strategy would be a material planning consideration for relevant planning applications and would supersede the Council's previous town centre strategies for Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston prepared between 2004 and 2008.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, paragraph 5.7.18 of the Constitution states that the Cabinet should exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Director: Place. This includes the preparation and adoption of planning strategies and guidance notes which do not form part of the Council Policy Framework.

9.2. The preparation of statutory plans and supporting documents is guided by a range of acts and associated regulations including the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Localism Act 2011.

9.3 Supporting documents and strategies to the Local Plan are often prepared as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). These have a defined meaning and place within the statutory planning system and are subject to various regulatory requirements.

9.4 The Town Centres Strategy has and will closely follow the *process* for the preparation of an SPD. However, because its content diverges from the policies of the Local Plan – due to the changed circumstances outlined in the report – it is not possible to formally adopt it as an SPD. It is intended that, subject to future approval, the Town Centres Strategy would be adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning applications.

9.5 The weight to be attributed to any policy or policy document or material consideration is a matter for the decision-maker on a case-by-case basis. However, by following the steps outlined above it is considered that a future, adopted strategy could be considered broadly commensurate to a formal SPD and applied as such.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. No new financial implications arising from this report. The general costs of preparing the draft Town Centres Strategy including consultancy and supplementary staffing costs has been met through existing revenue budgets (see also Human Resources Implications below). £119k was carried forward into 2025/26, £29k has been spent so far in 2025/26, leaving £90k in the town centres budget.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Good risk management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2 Town Centres Strategy is listed as a Corporate Risk relating to a key project in the Council Delivery Plan. As part of Council Delivery Plan monitoring arrangements, the risk entry is reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis and reported to Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. Without having a Town Centres Strategy in place that provides a strategic direction and overall policy guidance could lead to speculative development that undermines the function of the town centre thereby impacting its vitality and viability.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are not considered to be any direct equality issues arising from this report. Future individual schemes or considerations may well be subject to appropriate review to ensure they comply with latest equality legislative need. Any risks and opportunities identified will also be subject to assessment for impact on those that share a protected characteristic.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known direct Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report and its recommendations; this is a procedural decision.

14.2 The adopted Local Plan policies which implement the guidance and priorities within the draft Town Centres Strategy have been subject to statutory environmental assessment as part of the Local Plan examination. Officers will consider the environmental implications of any developments or improvements within or nearby the town centres when assessing planning applications and when reviewing retail and town centre policies in the updated Local Plan.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no new human resource implications arising from the contents of this report, other than officer requirements to progress the public consultation, which is part of their duties.

15.2 A Town Centre Project Officer post was established through a revenue budget growth bid a number of years ago with the intention it would lead on delivery of the Town Centres Strategy. This post was never successfully filled on a permanent basis despite multiple rounds of advertisement and recruitment. Resource for the project has been provided through a combination of agency contractors, consultant support, fixed-term appointments to the establishment post and backfilling by other officers.

15.3 The Town Centre Project Officer post is currently vacant. However, there is sufficient funding within the town centres budget (see para 10.1 above) and / or arising from salary underspend from this current vacancy should further work be required following the public consultation to complete the Strategy for final adoption by Cabinet.

15.4 Future officer resources required to deliver on the projects and priorities in the Town Centres Strategy are currently under consideration by the Service Manager and Director. The outcomes of this will be reflected in the Budget setting cycle for 2026/7 onwards and / or through quarterly budget monitoring reports as appropriate.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A: Draft North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy (Sept 2025) and Supporting Appendices

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Town Centres and Retail Study (December 2024) prepared by Lichfields

18.2 Adopted Local Plan (2011 – 2031)

18.3 Various Strategic Planning Matters Reports updating Cabinet at the following meetings:
16 January 2024
19 March 2024
09 July 2024
14 January 2025
24 June 2025.
23 September 2025

18.4 Various MIS Notes published in February 2024 and June 2024, available upon request.

North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy

Lichfields draft v4

21 October 2025

Draft for Consultation

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Foreword

This Town Centres Strategy will support development in and surrounding North Hertfordshire's four town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock, setting out the Council's vision for the town centres across the following themes:

Land use and retail

The Council will ensure that any significant development within the town centres contributes and strengthens the economic, environmental and social benefits of the town centre as well as reinforcing its local distinctiveness as a special place to invest, live and visit.

Built environment

The Council requires high quality design from landowners and developers to develop and maintain buildings, the built form, the public realm and open spaces in town centres that will reinforce the local distinctiveness of the town centres, mitigate climate change, support ecological networks and have regard to adopted and emerging design guides, design codes and other guidance as agreed with the Council.

Transport, access and movement

The Council will seek to provide inclusive and convenient sustainable transport and active travel options for all users to move with autonomy to support the economic vitality of the town centres as competitive hubs for resources, amenities and experiences, opportunities for social interaction and promoting physical health and well-being.

Community

The Council will utilise the planning system to facilitate social interactions, and the creation of healthy, inclusive communities. The town centres can support community well-being with access to facilities, secure environments and opportunities to thrive.

The Strategy is delivery and development focussed, providing a comprehensive overview and summary of the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres at **Part 1**. This part will assist landowners, architects, planners, and stakeholders bringing forward development proposals in understanding the relevant context for North Herts' town centres.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted in November 2022, and the Council is currently progressing the Local Plan Update 2025-2045. In order to bridge the gap between current and emerging Local Plan and provide further details and guidance to support compliance with relevant town centre policies in the existing Local Plan, **Part 2** sets out a series of Guidance Notes. These Guidance Notes will provide supplementary information to inform planning applications for development proposals affecting town centres.

Each of North Herts' town centres have specific strengths and challenges, offering their own unique offer and **Part 3** provides a summary of key priorities for each centre. These priorities are informed by the stakeholder consultation and the evidence gathered.

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The Strategy then sets out key funding options for the Council at **Part 4**, including a summary of risks and opportunities, and suggested approaches for delivery. The Section includes recommendations of suggested Council Further Actions to be taken forward. Gauging the support of key identified partners and stakeholders through the formal consultation process of the Strategy will be important in terms of delivering the identified priorities for each of the town centres and the recommended further actions.

The Appendices are to be read alongside the Strategy. These provide hyperlinks to access full documents listed in the Evidence Base at Part 1, policy recommendations from the Town Centre & Retail Study 2024 supporting Parts 2 and 3, and more detailed evidence notes on each town centre supporting Part 3.

Overview

This planning-based Town Centres Strategy has been developed by identifying clear threads through the existing **evidence** and stakeholder consultation, setting out interpretation of relevant Local Plan policies through **guidance**, summarising challenges and opportunities through **SWOT analysis**, presented as a series of key **priorities**.

How to read this document

The Town Centres Strategy will serve various roles for stakeholders living, visiting, working and investing in North Herts' town centres. As a guide to using this document, example use cases for each stakeholder are summarised below:

- **Council Members and Officers:** Predominantly focussed on Parts 3 and 4, summarising priorities for town centres and next steps and potential funding and delivery scenarios. Part 4, while predominantly applicable to Council Members and Officers, will be of interest for town centre stakeholders to understand how the Council may bring the priorities forward.
- **Town Centre Stakeholders [Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), residents, businesses etc.]:** Part 3 will be of most interest, informing stakeholders of the Council's key priorities for the centres identified through the planning-based strategy. Part 1 will also provide details of the Council's previous work, evidence base and decisions.
- **Landowners and Developers:** Part 3 will provide a steer on the Council's planning-based priorities for the centres, whilst Part 2 will assist with understanding of existing Local Plan policies and Part 1 provides a summary of the Council's broader plans and ambitions.
- **Consultants and Development Professionals:** Will utilise Part 1 to provide references to key evidence, Part 2 to inform interpretation of Local Plan policies and Part 3 to understand key priorities for delivery within the respective centres.

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Part 1: Town Centre Context

1A: Introduction and context

Introduction

In 2022, the Council adopted its Local Plan, a plan which allocates development sites and provides policy to guide developers and development decision makers over the period 2011-2031. The town centre policies for the district are set out in the Local Plan. These policies establish the amount of retail required to meet the projected population growth and also allocates parcels of land for retail/mixed use development. The policies were developed through evidence gathering from experts and stakeholders and were subject to both public consultation and formal examination by the government's appointed Planning Inspector.

The evidence for the retail and town centre policies in the Local Plan was published in 2016 and provides data to 2031. In 2023, the Council commissioned new evidence for the town centres to take account of the impact of Covid-19, online shopping, the cost-of-living increases, and new population projections to provide fresh retail needs projections to 2031 and 2036.

This Strategy takes account of this updated evidence and its implications for policy and strategy in the context of the North Herts' town centres that informed the planning policy approach set out in the Council's 2022 Local Plan. Once consulted upon and agreed by the Council's Cabinet, this Town Centres Strategy will inform future policies, strategies and decisions.

This Town Centres Strategy covers all four town centres and will supersede the Council's previous town centre strategies (2004-2008) upon adoption.

North Herts' Towns

North Herts is a rural district with four historic towns, a bounty of charming villages and protected townscapes and landscapes. The district has strong economic interactions with major settlements that surround its boundary; Cambridge to the north, Stevenage to the east, London to the south and both Luton and Milton Keynes to the west. These compliment the retail, leisure, business and entertainment offer for the residents and businesses in North Herts. In turn, the district attracts visitors and investors from these and other nearby settlements.

Hitchin is the largest North Herts town, with a Census 2021 population of 35,220, and dates to at least, the 7th century. The town centre has a medieval layout and developed out from its marketplace, alongside the River Hiz. The town's trade developed with agricultural goods sales including lavender, corn and malt. Hitchin expanded from the 19th century when it was connected to the Great Northern rail line from London with its Cambridge branch line, and later in the 20th century with the M1 via the A505 to the west, and the A1 (M) to the east via the A602 road connections.

Letchworth Garden City (Letchworth) is the second largest town in North Herts with a Census 2021 population of 33,990. It has developed from an ancient parish, as noted in the Domesday Book of 1086, to the world's first Garden City in 1903. The town was connected to the Great Northern East Coast rail line to London with its Cambridge branch line in 1903, and had its first Garden City homes completed in 1904. The modern town was established by investors, who bought up land to create the world's first Garden City. Much of the towns industrial, office and retail premises are now owned by a charity, the

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Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. The A1(M) to the east directly connects the Garden City to the national road network.

Royston is the third largest town in North Herts with a Census 2021 population of 17,448. It is located at a crossroads of the historic Roman, Ermine Street and the prehistoric, Icknield Way. It was once a settlement straddling both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Its market charter was granted by Richard I in 1189 and the market currently takes place every Wednesday and Saturday. A Corn Exchange opened in 1829 and is now home to retail premises. The town is linked to London and Cambridge by the East Coast Cambridge rail branch line and to the national road network via the A10 and A505.

Baldock is North Herts's smallest market town with a Census 2021 population of 10,615. As a prehistoric town, Baldock town centre has mainly 14th – 16th century buildings. Its wide High Street was formed by the demolition of up to three rows of buildings and now serves as a through road, parking, and outdoor seating areas. The Great North Road and the Icknield Way cross Baldock and have traditionally been a resting point for these routes. Baldock is also on Cambridge rail branch line.

1B: The Council's Role

The Council has a strategic role in town centre management and renewal. This is acknowledged in its Council Plan covering the period 2024-2028 which includes four priorities:

> **Thriving Communities**: Reducing health inequalities by working closely with partners like Everyone Active, to deliver physical activity programmes for older adults and less active residents. Continuing our commitment to providing grants to local organisations and investing in projects to strengthen the fabric of the district's towns and villages and a continued focus on our community safety priorities to foster safer and more inclusive communities.
>
> **Accessible Services**: The Council will continue modernising its services by enhancing online accessibility, simplifying customer experiences, and investing in facilities like leisure centres and parks.
>
> **Responsible Growth**: As the Local Plan continues to be implemented, North Herts will see much-needed housing and responsible development that considers the district's infrastructure and sustainability needs. Strategies to rejuvenate town centres and support local businesses are also central to the plan.
>
> **Sustainability**: The Council strives for sustainable service delivery both in terms of budget setting and protecting our environment. Responding to the climate and ecological emergencies, the council is committing to reducing carbon emissions and improving biodiversity.

The Priority of Responsible Growth directly supports the creation of a new
Town Centres Strategy for North Hertfordshire':

We also want to support economic growth across our district. We will prepare Town Centre Strategies and an Economic Development and Tourism Strategy to outline our approach to enhancing our town centres, business engagement and support, tourism, and emerging economic growth opportunities. We will work closely with businesses and other partners to deliver on our key objectives.

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Whilst Responsible Growth is the key priority for this Strategy, the other three priorities of the Council Plan will also contribute to the success of the town centres through its service delivery in working together with partners and the community. The Strategy cannot be delivered by the Council alone and will be dependent on close collaboration with key partners (including business groups (e.g. Business Improvement Districts - BIDs), landlords and leaseholders of town centre premises, community and other organisations) who might best work together to protect and enhance the economic, environmental and social benefits of the district's town centres. These benefits would include increases in visitors to the town centres, with associated uplifts in spending, alongside more sustainable linked trips within and across the towns and efforts to support the diverse and resilient mix of uses in the centres that will continue to serve residents, visitors and businesses within the centres.

The Council has collaborated with stakeholders including residents and visitors, local organisations, adjacent local authorities, and economic partnerships in producing this Town Centres Strategy. This has included an independent public survey of 1,001 residents by mobile/landline in January to February 2024, a workshop with stakeholders[1] with an interest in the district's town centres in June 2024 and discussions with relevant BIDs, landowners and the Royston Town Council.

1C: The Purpose of the Town Centres Strategy

This Town Centres Strategy is to be read in conjunction with North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted 2022), providing town centre businesses, residents, developers and other stakeholders guidance to support the interpretation of relevant town centre policies, and priorities for the respective centres.

The Town Centres Strategy will provide clear planning policy guidance to support and maintain each town's unique successful qualities and place identities, and to improve the vitality and viability of each town centre to ensure that change and development occur in a positive way while the Local Plan is under review. The guidance and recommendations will also inform the Council's future Local Plan policies.

Following consultation, the Strategy will be put forward for adoption by Cabinet to be given weight as an important material consideration in the assessment and determination of planning applications in and surrounding North Hertfordshire's four town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock. Once adopted, the Strategy will supersede the Council's existing Town Centre Strategies (2004-2008).

Part 1 sets out the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres.

Part 2 provides the Guidance Notes providing supplementary information to support compliance with relevant town centre policies.

Part 3 focuses on the strategies and priorities for North Herts' town centres.

Part 4 proposes further actions together with several funding and delivery options that the Council could consider in delivering the ambitions set out within the draft Strategy.

[1] Stakeholders invited to the workshop include: Hertfordshire Futures, Herts County Council, Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust, Baldock Town Partnership, Baldock Bygrave and Clothall Planning Group, Baldock Events Forum, Hitchin Forum – Transport and Planning Group, The Hitchin Society, Hitchin Market Traders Association, Hitchin Historical Society, Hitchin Youth Trust, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Royston Town Council, Royston Community Association, On Our Doorstep, North Hertfordshire College, North Hertfordshire Minority Ethnic Forum, Martin Group, Visit Hitchin (Business Improvement District), Love Letchworth (Business Improvement District), Royston First (Business Improvement District), settle, Martin Group, Decarbonise Letchworth (Transition Town Letchworth), Garden Square, Town House Publishing, John Shilcock, North Hertfordshire District Council Teams (Community Partnerships, Enterprise, Development Management, Strategic Planning) and Neighbouring authorities (St. Albans, Luton, East Hertfordshire District Council, Welwyn Hatfield, South Cambridge, Central Bedfordshire, Uttlesford, Stevenage)

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The abovementioned sections/parts have been divided into four themes for ease of reference:

1	Land use and retail
2	Built environment
3	Transport, access and movement
4	Community

The Appendices set out key supporting details and are to be read alongside the Strategy:

Appendix 1 lists the supporting Evidence Base documents, including hyperlinks.

Appendix 2 extracts the policy recommendations from the Town Centre & Retail Study 2024.

Appendix 3 provides detailed evidence notes for each town centre.

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1D: Town Centres Evidence

Further information on Part 1: Town Centre Context is found in Appendix 1: Resource List and Hyperlinks.

Introduction:

This section focuses on the evidence base which will underpin the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy. Each part is structured by a strategic theme and starts with outlining the relevant Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) policies to provide the policy context for each theme. It then outlines which documents from North Hertfordshire's evidence base relate to each theme and explains how each document relates to town centres. Finally, it summarises the recommendations and guidelines that each piece of evidence provides for town centres in the District.

This chapter explains how each document/set of documents can inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy and ultimately, how they help meet the Council's Local Plan goals and vision.

Theme 1: Land Use and Retail

Relevant subthemes:

Retail Needs, Allocations, Designations, and Impact Assessments;

Vitality and Viability in the Town Centres;

NPPF sections of Relevance:

Chapter 7: Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy ETC3: New Retail, Leisure and Other Main Town Centre Development

Policy ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages

Policy ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages

Policy SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops

Relevant evidence

BID Brochures

BID Brochure – Hitchin (Visit Hitchin BID, 2024): The brochure explains how the Hitchin BID is working to support businesses and the town centre, for the 2024-29 business plan.

The recommendations developed for the town centre include the following:

- New initiatives to encourage the "experience economy".
- Increase promotions in quieter areas of the Town Centre to encourage visitors to stay longer.
- Increase business support on a local and national level.

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- Improvement to town centre parking and accessibility.
- Force the pace of the Council's Town Centre Strategy.

BID Brochure - Letchworth GC (Love Letchworth BID, 2024): The brochure outlines the priorities and objectives for the BID which have been proposed for the next five years (Starting 2024). They include: (1) a 21st century Garden City which is connected to its business community, residents, and visitors; (2) a vibrant 'Go To' place which is attractive for everyone in Letchworth; and (3) A place which has strong sense of identity and is recognised locally, nationally, and internationally. Letchworth BID propose to undertake the following activities:

- Organise an annual calendar of events, campaigns and street entertainment.
- Introduction of shop local promotional opportunities and loyalty schemes.
- Maximise marketing and promotional opportunities of the town centre
- Enhancing landscaping, greenery and planting across the town centre.
- Maintaining and extending the operation of CCTV cameras across the town centre to help address anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Coordinating an enhanced business waste collection service, including recycling.
- Be the voice of businesses in the wider town centre meetings, such as the Town Centre Recovery Group and Sustainable Travel Group.
- Exploring opportunities for businesses to reduce overheads by working and seeking services collectively as a BID

BID Brochure – Royston (Royston First BID, 2024): the brochure outlines the ambitions and initiatives for Royston BID over the next five years including town investment events, smart radios, new industrial estate signage to assist with deliveries, youth employment initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour and support youth, a ShopSafe app to protect employees and customers, fire extinguisher and first aid training for businesses and employees, quarterly networking events and digital signage to provide free advertising space for businesses.

How can BID Brochures inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

Although the BID Brochures outlines proposals and ambitions which are unique to improving the business prospects within each town centre, they can be developed into general principles and measures which can be applicable for town centres across the District as a whole. They contribute towards meeting the Local Plan's vision of North Herts as "attractive and vibrant" with a "robust and prosperous economy", and generally boost the "viability and vitality" of the town centres.

Recovery Reports for Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth GC and Royston (People & Places, 2022): These are part of a district-wide initiative by the Council to work with key stakeholders in Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, and Royston. Published in 2022.

In the short term, the reports outline a COVID recovery plan for its town centres. In the medium to longer-term, they set out a development strategy framework to assist town centres in developing successfully over the next decade.

They provide the following recommendations:

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- Finalise development plan and 'forward framework': Key stakeholder organisations to review and comment on the draft development plan and its forward framework to enable People & Places (a partnership independent of the Council with a principal goal of revitalising town centres) to finalise it.
- Publish stakeholder summary: A short, illustrated version of the development plan findings can be published by People & Places for wider distribution, possibly supported by an accompanying video presentation.
- Initial business engagement and survey: The publication of the summary should be used to begin engagement with businesses through visits, meetings and a survey to gauge their perceptions, priorities and reaction to proposals.
- Meetings of theme-based sub-groups: to discuss the development of proposals for partnership working/governance.
- Partnership development and governance: Existing stakeholders as well as businesses representatives need to determine the partnership development and governance arrangements for revitalising Baldock's town centre. This includes focusing on the representation and roles for a core group responsible and equipped to manage the coordination of activity, including identifying resources, communication and engagement with wider stakeholders.
- Determine initial delivery priorities: The evolving partnership needs to determine initial delivery priorities that underpin long-term strategy and capacity as well as demonstrate 'quick wins' to stakeholders and the wider community. The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) provides an initial and flexible injection of funds to help achieve this.

How can the Recovery Reports inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The recommendations of the recovery reports can provide governance advice with regards to preparing strategies for improving town centres - i.e. how stakeholders (both the Council and other local bodies and businesses) can best collaborate in order to implement the proposals as well as the recovery strategy more generally.

Town Centre Strategies (2004-2008)

Town Centre Strategy – Hitchin (NHDC, 2005): Published in 2005, the Hitchin strategy sets out a vision and key aims that acknowledge the historic character of Hitchin and propose the enhancement of its town centre to serve the local community and attract visitors.

The strategy aims to guide physical development and maximise the future viability and vitality of Hitchin town centre, whilst emphasising its historic character, its local distinctiveness and the needs of its local community. The strategy allocated five key development sites at Paynes Park; Crown House; Post Office; Ransoms; plus Churchgate and its environs. Notably, Crown House, the old Post Office Site, Ransoms and part of the rear of Paynes Park have been developed since the initial publication of the strategy, providing mixed-use developments comprising mostly residential with retail at ground floor level.

Town Centre Strategy – Letchworth GC (NHDC, 2006): Published in 2006, the Strategy sets out the vision, objectives and planning strategy for the town centre including the allocation of opportunity

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sites. The Strategy outlines the proposed approach towards conservation management and urban design in the centre, as well as proposals for improving public realm and transport.

It proposes to expand the town centre's retail provision with increased floorspace and more stores, accommodating for greater provision of smaller specialist stores and a greater choice in food shopping, as well as ensuring that its character and design features as the first Garden City are protected and enhanced. Additionally, it explains that tourism, business and investment in the town centre will be promoted.

It proposes measures to improve the public realm and pedestrian environment, to attract visitors and encourage them to spend time there and recognises that more visitors will require improved parking management, better security, improved public transport, and improved facilities for walking and cycling.

The Strategy also seeks to ensure that open spaces and gardens that contribute to the landscape character of the Garden City are protected and enhanced for their amenity and environmental value including biodiversity.

Town Centre Strategy – Royston (NHDC, 2008): Published in 2008, the Royston strategy sets out the Council's vision and aims for the town centre in the next 15 years. Seven opportunity sites were identified as potential locations for development.

The Royston Town Centre Strategy highlighted that through traffic is directed onto local distributor roads outside of the main town centre shopping areas. While allowing access to the town centre businesses, through traffic can interrupt and detract from the appearance, amenity of the town centre and ease of pedestrian movements.

Town Centre Strategy – Baldock (NHDC, 2004): Published in 2004, the Baldock strategy promotes opportunities for enhancement of the town centre's street scene.

The Strategy for Baldock also outlines a number of improvements to the town centre following the opening of the Baldock Bypass, including retaining the High Street as a wide open space when undertaking any future enhancements, and respecting the historic layout and character of the town centre through enhancements to the streets and new developments.

The Strategy also seeks to continue to encourage retail and specialised shops into the town centre, improve and promote the Baldock Market and the use of the market area for other events, develop a strong Chamber of Trade, and promoting Baldock's heritage, cultural and leisure facilities.

How can the existing Town Centre Strategies for the North Herts Towns inform the new North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The North Hertfordshire Town Centre Strategies provide useful context, as their structure and recommendations can be transferable across the documents and across different towns. Further, the set of documents directly address issues of conservation, heritage character, public transport, economic vitality, and viability, all of which are issues which help meet the goals of the town centre vision.

North Hertfordshire Town Centres & Retail Study (Lichfields, 2024): The study includes an assessment of future retail and leisure-related development needs within the District's main town centres of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, and Royston.

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Since the previous studies, amendments to national planning policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Use Classes Order (UCO) have allowed for greater flexibility of uses within town centres, without requiring planning permission, through the integration of Use Class E. Key trends, such as the implications of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, continue to affect the high street and demand for town centre uses, which means town centres have had to change and diversify over the past years. Shopping behaviour will continue to change, subject to other emerging changes and uncertainties, and town centres will need to respond by providing a combined retail and leisure experience.

There is likely to be a shift from retail space to more food and beverage and leisure/ entertainment/ cultural uses, with vacant shop premises converting to these uses. This also provides an opportunity for a flexible approach to new formats and uses where they would support the overall vitality and viability of centres and reoccupy long-term vacant premises. Such uses could be encouraged where they complement the existing mix of uses in the area and would support the evening economy across the District's town centres. Not all vacant units will be suitable for conversion to these uses; therefore, new development may be required to accommodate some new uses.

The combined cumulative total floorspace capacity projections for all retail and food and beverage floorspace is just over 5,000 sq.m gross up to 2036. Based on a reasonable reduction in shop vacancy rates, reoccupied space could in theory accommodate around three quarters of the projected need up to 2036. However, these floorspace projections should not be adopted as rigid targets, nor as maximum or minimum requirements, but be viewed as broad guidance and as a starting point for the review of site-specific allocations and development management policies.

The capacity projections set out at Appendix 3, 4, and 5 of the 2024 Town Centres & Retail Study suggest no pressing requirements to allocate new sites for major retail or commercial leisure developments to accommodate projected growth for the next decade. The priority in the short- to medium-term would be for the reoccupation of vacant shop units, with existing mixed-use development allocations and new facilities in the Strategic Housing Sites being sufficient to cover any long-term residual need.

Recommendations:

- Regarding town centre growth, national policy requires that a range of suitable sites should be allocated to meet the retail development needs of a variety of scales and types, to accommodate for at least ten years and preferably up to 2036. The main concentration of vacant shop floorspace is in Letchworth, which in turn means it has the most potential to accommodate growth alongside existing allocations.
- The potential to redistribute capacity from Baldock and Hitchin to Letchworth should be explored, with opportunities to reoccupy vacated retail spaces across other town centre uses considered viable.
- The leisure expenditure projections indicate there may be potential to accommodate an additional 1,700 sq.m gross of commercial leisure and cultural floorspace by 2036, which could include any combination of two medium sized health and fitness facilities, new leisure innovations and small-scale tourist attractions/ cultural facilities. As main town centre uses, these facilities should be directed to town centre locations. The location and distribution of any new facilities would depend on the nature of the proposal and operator interest. However, it is

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expected that these facilities would be located within the districts' larger towns, unless suitable alternative town centre opportunities present themselves.

- Overall, North Herts has a reasonably strong evening economy, particularly in terms of restaurant uses. The emerging Local Plan review should recognise and foster the potential for uses that enhance the evening and night-time economy in centres, albeit recognising potential negative environmental and amenity effects and considering appropriate management strategies and mitigation measures.
- No change to the existing hierarchy of centres is considered necessary. The network of town, village and neighbourhood centres should be protected and enhanced to ensure sustainable shopping patterns and that there is appropriate accessibility to important facilities for all sections of the community.
- The need for town centre boundaries and primary/secondary shopping frontages should be reconsidered, for example in Baldock, where a separate town centre boundary and a defined secondary shopping frontage is potentially unnecessary.
- The primary shopping area (PSA) designation can fulfil the purposes of both primary and secondary frontages in most town centres. Relatively low retail floorspace capacity projections suggest there is no need to extend the existing town centre boundaries to accommodate future growth, but longer-term projections of an under-supply of floorspace implies a contraction is also unwarranted. However, as town centre boundaries are quite widely drawn in most centres, predominantly residential areas on the peripheries of town centres could be removed. Notably, main town centre uses (as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework) would continue be protected within town centre boundaries.

How can the Town Centres & Retail Study inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Study can inform the overall guidance of the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy through updated evidence for retail and leisure floorspace capacity, as well as future recommendations for amendments to town centre boundaries and shopping frontages. The Study Appendices include town centre health checks, which inform the individuals strengths and weaknesses of each town centre. , and recommendations for subsequent priorities for future growth of the town centres, which in turn, can help meet the Local Plan's vision of a "robust and prosperous economy".

Developer Contributions (NHDC, 2023): This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out detailed guidance on the type and scale of developer contributions that will be sought to support new development in North Hertfordshire. It contains a section on the economy and town centres. It states that in the town centres, contributions towards future town centre public realm enhancements will be sought from relevant major development schemes, including:

- Schemes for development within existing town centres;
- Schemes for out-of-centre development where the contributions may help preserve the vitality and / or viability of the existing centre(s); and
- Schemes elsewhere that may result in a substantive increase in footfall in existing town centres.

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It also states that improvements to the public realm will not necessarily be confined to the main town centres. Where appropriate, the Council will seek contributions towards public realm improvements in smaller centres and other areas which play an important role in defining place and supporting the day-to-day function of the built environment. Priorities for public realm enhancements may be identified in Neighbourhood Plans or other locally led strategies such as Parish Plans.

How can the Developer Contributions SPD inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The SPD provides guidance on what developers need to consider when submitting an application for a development scheme in the town centre, recommendations of where in the town centre these contributions should targeted, i.e. public realm enhancements, and to what type of town centre – small or large. This information could be included in the Strategy document, and help achieve the Council's vision of North Hertfordshire being an "attractive and vibrant place" where "vitality and viability" has been safeguarded.

The Council is currently reviewing the Developer Contributions SPD which will be subject to formal consultation later in 2025 with anticipated adoption in early 2026.

North Hertfordshire Economic Development Strategy: The Council adopted its new Economic Development Strategy for the District in July 2025. The strategy is aligned with the Council's economic aspirations, priorities and economic vision. The Council Plan (2024-2028) sets out the importance of 'Responsible Growth'. This demonstrates a clear commitment has been made to "support economic growth across the district", and to "work closely with businesses and other partners to deliver on our key objectives". The strategy is supported by a comprehensive evidence base, that includes stakeholder engagement with a variety of local businesses and an in-depth analysis of economic data in North Hertfordshire (in relation to jobs, trending growth areas, industries, connectivity etc.). The Strategy identified five action areas from the evidence base to focus on: business and enterprise, people and skills, innovation and economic change, site and premises, investment, position and promotion. The strategy also celebrates North Hertfordshire's position geographically and maps out areas within the district ("looking in") and outside ("looking out") – both themes identify opportunities available to the Council to achieve substantial economic growth. The strategy focuses on economic portraits of each town in North Hertfordshire, mapping out key opportunities in each of them.

How can the North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

A successful Economic Development Strategy would encourage the productivity of existing businesses and attract new business in and around North Herts' towns, increasing resident and workers spending and further supporting existing businesses. This increase in prosperity and diversification of economic drivers would increase the draw and attraction of the District's centres to a wider variety of retail and leisure operators.

The Strategy also directly references town centre development opportunities, as well as areas where developments in and around the centres would benefit from greater connectivity and links to and through the centres including the Churchgate Regeneration Zone, Garden Square Shopping Centre in Letchworth, Growing Baldock, and Royston Gateway.

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How the land use and retail evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision

The evidence outlined above helps work towards the following sections of the Council's Vision, as outlined in the Local Plan:

- By 2031 North Hertfordshire will be an attractive and vibrant place where people will want to live, work and spend their leisure time.
- North Hertfordshire will have a robust and prosperous economy (including sustainable tourism) with a greater mix of skilled jobs, focused in locations that best support the District's growing population. Local and smaller scale businesses will have had the opportunity to grow.
- The vitality and viability of the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock are safeguarded in a way that takes account of their distinctive role. This will have been achieved through carefully planned development which meets the needs of these centres, retaining their market share in terms of their retail offer, whilst recognising the importance of preserving and enhancing their historic character. In local and village centres, shopping facilities that meet local needs will be supported.
- The District's important natural and historic areas and buildings that help to create the distinctive identity of the District in both urban and rural areas will have been protected and enhanced where possible. The quality and attractiveness of the landscape of North Hertfordshire, which contributes to its distinctive character, will have been conserved and enhanced where possible.
- Additionally, the 2024 Town Centres & Retail Study provides opportunities and recommendations for town centre policies in the emerging Local Plan update relating to emerging capacity for new floorspace, amendments to boundaries, and suggested controls for the mix of uses.

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Theme 2: Built environment

Relevant subthemes:

The Built Form, Public Realm and Design

Heritage and Historic Character;

Spatial Layout;

NPPF Sections of Relevance

Chapter 12: Achieving well-designed places

Chapter 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy D1: Sustainable design

Policy HE1: Designated Heritage Assets

Policy SP13: Historic Environment

Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability

Relevant evidence

Character and Conservation Statements (NHDC) for Hitchin (2011), Letchworth (2001), Royston (2007), and Baldock (2003)

Hitchin: The Statement explains that the designated conservation area, the Hitchin Conservation Area, encompasses the historic town centre as well as public or private parkland and high-quality residential suburbs. The Statement goes on to propose three new conservation area designations, because of their unique character: (1) Butts Close, contained by Fishponds Road and Bedford Road; (2) The Railway Station and associated railway buildings and Ransom's Recreation Ground, and (3) Hitchin Hill Path and Butchers Lane. Character statements and conservation area maps for each of the three proposed conservation area designations were adopted in 2011. Other recommendations for site specific improvements included improvements to Bancroft Recreation Ground (which received a splash park in 2015 and further play equipment in 2025), enhancements to The Dell Woodside Open Air Theatre, as well as *"to continue improvements to the River Hiz, including, where possible, the opening up of the river frontage for public access"*.

Letchworth: Section 3.0 of the Statement describes the special interest and character and appearance of the town centre. In addition, the Statement identifies areas and buildings within the town centre which are not considered to preserve or enhance the special character of the area as opportunity areas for improvement. The Statement highlights these areas and identifies the reasons why they are not considered to be in character. It then goes on to recommend the improvement of these areas or buildings to ensure that they preserve or enhance the special character of the town centre. It is important to note that this document was published in 2001 and as such, some areas or buildings referred to as not preserving the character of the area have been redeveloped or repurposed for alternative uses including Station Parade (amended façade as part of an extension in 2019) and the Council's old Town Lodge and Document Centre buildings on Gernon Road (demolished to provide an office building and residential accommodation) amongst others.

Royston: The Statement assesses the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area, and identifies the areas where improvement or redevelopment opportunities exist. It also identifies the areas in the historic town centre which are redevelopment opportunities, i.e. regarded as having a negative impact upon the character and appearance of the conservation area and where redevelopment is positively encouraged. The majority of the areas identified for redevelopment are on, or in, close proximity to the high street.

Baldock: The Statement outlines steps taken to ensure that changes within the conservation area preserve or enhance its special character or appearance. It identifies and describes the special characteristics of the market town that will need to be considered when considering proposed changes. The Statement identifies areas within the town centre which have a negative or neutral impact on the local conservation area but does not provide any targeted recommendations.

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How can the Character and Conservation Statements inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The principles and measures outlined in each of the documents to preserve each of the conservation areas and the special character of the town centre, the identification of each conservation area's special characteristics, and the redevelopment proposals for areas which have a negative impact on character can inform and be included in the Strategy's guidance. This contributes towards meeting the Council's vision of protecting and enhancing the historic areas and buildings.

Design Supplementary Planning Document (NHDC, 2011): This July 2011 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out guidance, expanding on policies within the Council's previous Development Plan. The SPD provides key design standards to inform development schemes and planning applications across a series of key principles ranging from character to public realm and legibility. The SPD goes on to set out key design principles for the four town centres in Section 4, with reference to key characteristics such as layout, views, and street scene to be reflected in future development schemes.

How can the Design SPD inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The SPD provides guidance on the key design characteristics that development proposals will be assessed against, and that planning applications will need to clearly demonstrate for proposals within and surrounding the District's town centres. Whilst the policy elements are somewhat dated and reference a previous Development Plan, the context for the centres and design principles identified remain relevant and will be carried forward in the Council's emerging Design Code work.

Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (NHDC, 2024): The 2024 Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides the standards required to meet the objectives and policies of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan through the three pillars of sustainability, i.e. environmental, social, and economic.

Reflecting the Council's 2019 climate emergency motion and subsequent Climate Change Strategy, recently replaced in August 2025 by its Sustainability Strategy (2025-2030), the SPD includes detailed guidance on sustainability expectations for different forms of development when applying the Local Plan policies. The guidance is presented thematically, covering energy performance and minimising carbon footprints, to healthy placemaking and sustainable travel.

Each theme includes a checklist with a threshold for application alongside expectations for developments and a ranking system of bronze, silver, and gold that ranges from basic Local Plan policy compliance (the baseline minimum expectation) through to areas where developments excel. It is not expected that all development will achieve gold for all themes and applicants are to identify which themes to aim for gold standard, depending on site context, type and scale of development.

How can the Sustainability SPD inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The SPD provides guidance, thresholds and a checklist on what developers need to consider when submitting an application for a development scheme. These include proposals in the town centres, as well as those surrounding centres, and themes including healthy placemaking, sustainable travel, and historic buildings would directly affect how development proposals interact with the District's town centres whilst supporting the Council's Plan sustainability priority.

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How the built environment evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision:

The evidence helps meet the following part of the Council's vision, as outlined in the Local Plan:

- The vitality and viability of the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock are safeguarded in a way that takes account of their distinctive role. This will have been achieved through carefully planned development which meets the needs of these centres, retaining their market share in terms of their retail offer, whilst recognising the importance of preserving and enhancing their historic character. In local and village centres, shopping facilities that meet local needs will be supported.
- The District's important natural and historic areas and buildings that help to create the distinctive identity of the District in both urban and rural areas will have been protected and enhanced where possible. The quality and attractiveness of the landscape of North Hertfordshire, which contributes to its distinctive character, will have been conserved and enhanced where possible. New green infrastructure will have enhanced the network of green corridors linking settlements to the open countryside, providing greater opportunities for healthy lifestyles.
- The Council's vision describes how new developments will contribute to sustainable communities, defined as safe, attractive and inclusive, to be achieved through compliance with guiding principles set out within the Local Plan alongside the Sustainability SPD.

Theme 3: Transport, access and movement

Relevant subthemes:

Sustainable Travel

Transport Services

Transport infrastructure

NPPF sections of relevance:

Chapter 9 – Promoting sustainable transport

Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy SP6: Sustainable transport

Policy T1: Assessment of transport matters

Policy T2: Parking

Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD

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Relevant evidence:

Hertfordshire Active Travel Strategy (Hertfordshire County Council, 2013): Hertfordshire's Active Travel Strategy sets out how the County Council will deliver and promote interventions to increase the number of people walking and cycling in Hertfordshire. Its recommendations are relevant to ensuring the provision of cycle and pedestrian access arrangements, and links to local cycling and walking networks are provided across the town centres.

Recommendations include:

- Providing secure cycle parking at key destinations e.g. rail stations, town centres, and schools.
- Ensuring that all railway stations, key employment sites and key services in towns, especially those associated with high levels of commuting or limited car parking, have convenient cycle and pedestrian access arrangements, high-quality, covered and secure cycle parking and links to local cycling and walking networks.
- Production of up-to-date route and network maps of the cycling and walking network for each town and wider networks.

How can the Active Travel Strategy inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Active Travel Strategy can provide guidance and targeted interventions/recommendations for the promotion of active travel modes in town centres across North Hertfordshire, helping meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling in order to combat climate change.

Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide (Hertfordshire County Council, 2024): Chapter 3 of the Guide describes how environmentally sustainable, healthy and future ready movement networks will be delivered in Hertfordshire (including in the town centres).

The Guide recommends the following:

- Promotion of walking by implementing measures to increase the priority of pedestrians relative to motorised vehicles, especially in town centres, and creating walking-friendly town and neighbourhood centres.
- All occupied parts of development should be within 400m walking distance of a bus stop or transport.
- In a town centre location, areas with a significant proportion of elderly residents, around educational establishments, and commercial and industrial developments, the maximum walking distance should be reduced to 200m.
- Consideration of cycling connectivity should ensure priority links to town centres and sustainable transport hubs and connections.

How can the Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide can provide guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking, cycling and public transport within

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the town centres, and provide guidance with regards to transport provision for new development. It can also provide design measures to promote walking in town centres and help meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling in order to combat climate change.

Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4) 2018-2031 Guide (Hertfordshire County Council, 2018): Objective 5 of the Plan aims to enhance the quality and vitality of town centres. Policy 7: Active Travel (walking) explains that the County Council will aim to encourage and promote walking by implementing measures to increase the priority of pedestrians relative to cars, especially in town centres, and create walking-friendly town and neighbourhood centres.

Objective 5 identifies that there are a number of towns which are in need of renewal and regeneration, and that transport plays a role in improving the urban environment. The negative impact of high levels of car use and congestion on the urban environment (noise, air quality, aesthetics, historic & natural environment) limits the potential to improve provision for other modes. It identifies a need to enhance the accessibility to town centres to support growth, development and vitality.

The Plan makes reference towards balancing the negative impact of congestion and car use with the role of transport in improving the urban environment, which is relevant for town centres, particularly for larger town centre areas experiencing greater levels of demand from shoppers and other visitors.

How can the LTP4 inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The LTP4 provides the reasoning and justification for increasing provision of walking and cycling within the town centres, and balancing car use with more sustainable transport modes around the town centres. This helps meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling, as well as improving the vitality and viability of town centres.

Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) (WSP, 2022) The Plan references relevant local policies and guidance, including the Local Transport Plan, place and Movement Design Guide and the Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy and highlights the importance of integration of town centres within local walking and cycling routes. The LCWIP goes on to identify a number of routes to be taken forward to improve connectivity to (and within) each of the town centres.

How can the LCWIP inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The LCWIP can provide guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking and cycling within the town centres, which can feed into the Strategy. It can also provide design measures to promote walking and cycling in town centres. This helps meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling in order to combat climate change.

North Central Growth Transport Plan (AECOM, 2022): Provides targeted interventions relating to sustainable transport measures for each of the four North Herts town centres. Recommendations include:

- Package 7 (Hitchin Centre) which outlines the aim to encourage use of public transport through support for services and creation of a safe and attractive corridor in which to take advantage of the services within Hitchin Town Centre and Rail Station.

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- Package 10 (Hitchin to Letchworth/Baldock) seeks to enhance cycling infrastructure between Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock; and make it a safe and attractive option for sustainable trips.
- Package 11 (Letchworth Centre and Employment Area) aims to increase active transport provision between Letchworth Centre and Employment Area by providing a signposted and connected active transport network and to improve access to Letchworth rail station.
- Package 13 (Baldock connectivity, rail station and development) seeks to make Baldock a safe, convenient and attractive place to make sustainable transport trips through improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure and facilities as well as public transport journeys.
- Package 15 (Royston) aims to transform Royston into a town that facilitates safe, attractive and convenient journeys by active and sustainable transport modes.

How can the North Central Growth Transport Plan inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The North Central Growth Transport Plan can provide guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking, cycling and public transport within the town centres. This helps meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking, cycling and public transport to combat climate change.

North Hertfordshire Local Transport Strategy (Markides Associates, 2017): Outlines transport strategies for each of the town centres and analyses the results of transport modelling impact assessments. It identifies key issues and transport strategy elements, outlining various measures and recommendations for the town centre areas. Recommendations include:

1. Design focus on walking and cycling through all development, to local facilities and to adjacent areas.
2. Development of a sustainable spine along the A505 enhancing people movement between the towns
3. Bus-based public transport and interchange in the main urban centres

How can the North Hertfordshire Local Transport Strategy inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The North Hertfordshire Local Transport Strategy can provide guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking, cycling and public transport within the town centres. It also assesses the key strengths and weaknesses of the transport system in each town, in order to develop enhanced recommendations via an evidence-based approach, which can feed into the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy. This can help meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking, cycling and public transport to combat climate change.

North Hertfordshire Parking Strategy (NHDC, 2019): References off-street parking capacity in town centres. Policy 2 explains that the Council will periodically review the level of off-street car parking capacity in each of the town centres. The Council will aim to manage the overall level of capacity in line with policy objectives for town centre vitality, while seeking to minimise environmental impacts, recognising the need for encouraging sustainable travel and adapting to new technology and trends in parking. The Council will consider the balance required between short and longer-stay parking needs in

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its reviews. The Council will manage its off-street car parks in a financially responsible manner. Where appropriate, the Council will work with other off-street parking operators to seek to ensure that the combined car parking capacity in town centres meets policy objectives and is financially sustainable.

How can the North Hertfordshire Parking Strategy inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The North Hertfordshire Parking Strategy can provide guidance with regards to balancing the need for parking provision in town centres for purposes of vitality (part of the Council's vision) with the environmental impacts of parking.

Sustainable Travel Town Documents

- **Letchworth GC Outline (NHDC, 2021):** Makes reference to parking provision in town centres. North Hertfordshire District Council through its adopted Parking Strategy is supportive of the principle of working towards the removal of free parking in its town centres to encourage modal shift towards more active and sustainable travel through walking, cycling and public transport. The Council will work towards achieving no net gain in parking spaces, both for on-street in the town centre and in off-street facilities where it is within the Council's power to do so.
- **Royston Outline (NHDC, 2021):** Outlines recommendations for the town centre including cycle parking (in town centre, at neighbourhood retail centres and other key service locations including improved cycling facilities at the Railway station), additional seating in town centre and on key route, widened pavements and planters, and consideration of potential semi-pedestrianisation in the future. References are also made to a phased approach to reducing free parking within the centre to encourage a modal shift towards more active and sustainable travel.

How can the Sustainable Travel Town Documents inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Sustainable Travel Town Documents provide targeted recommendations for town centres regarding the promotion of walking and cycling, as well as design and parking measures to help encourage modal shift. These town centre specific recommendations can be distilled into general principles for use in the Strategy, and work towards achieving the Council's vision of getting more people walking and cycling.

Active North Hertfordshire Strategy Report (SLC, 2023): References a key theme outlined within the Council Plan relating to the local economy; highlighting the role of the regeneration of town centres and addressing issues faced by rural communities

How can the Active North Hertfordshire Strategy inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

Provides the link between sustainable transport and regenerating the local economy.

Electric Vehicle Strategy (Hertfordshire County Council, 2022): Sets out Hertfordshire County Council's actions to enable the roll-out of public EV charging infrastructure to facilitate this transition. It explains that charge points are increasingly installed in supermarkets, retail outlets,

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leisure facilities hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, and privately managed town centre car parks**.** Recommends installation of charge points and roll out of charging infrastructure.

How can the Electric Vehicle Strategy inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Strategy regarding electric vehicles can inform the development of guidance and development of recommendations regarding electric vehicles for the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy to help meet the Council's vision towards "using natural resources more efficiently" and address climate change.

North Hertfordshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan (RS Regeneration, 2018): Outlines strategies for improving and delivering infrastructure in the District, including in Town Centres. Outlines potential for significant levels of new investment to deliver growth, impact on the transport network, and how to address this. For example, proposes for cycling infrastructure in Hitchin to include advance stop lines, improved signage and covered parking in the town centre

How can the North Hertfordshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Plan provides guidance for improving transport infrastructure and potential investment strategies, which can feed into this Town Centres Strategy. Although these are location specific, they can be distilled to develop general principles for the Strategy.

Air Quality Strategy, and Air Quality Implementation Plan (Hertfordshire County Council, 2019): Although the documents do not make direct reference to town centres, the principles outlined in the documents are relevant towards developing strategies for improving air quality and introducing modes of clean transport, and this is applicable to town centres.

How can the Air Quality Strategy and Air Quality Implementation Plan inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The guidance can explain that development coming forward should consider that clean air is a Council priority, and this should be made explicit in the town Centres Strategy document. The clean air principles outlined in both documents should inform the Strategy's guidance.

How the transport, access and movement evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision

The evidence base outlined above helps address the following section of the Local Plan vision:

- The District will play its part in addressing climate change by improving opportunities for travelling by public transport, walking and cycling, using natural resources more efficiently, reducing the demand for water, securing high quality sustainable design and managing the risk of flooding.
- Increased footfall in town centres through increased levels of walking and cycling, can in turn result in improved "viability and vitality" of town centres, and improved local economies, which is also part of the Council's vision.

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Theme 4: Community

Relevant subthemes:

Community Facilities

Community Safety

Community Health;

Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy HC1: Community Facilities

Policy D1: Sustainable Design

Policy SP10: Healthy Communities

NPPF Sections of Relevance:

Chapter 8: Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities

Relevant evidence

North Hertfordshire Sport Provision and Open Space Review & Standards (NHDC, 2016): Assesses the provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities in North Hertfordshire. In relation to town centres, it explains that small sites of less than 0.1 ha can provide valuable local open space, particularly in residential areas and town centres.

How can the North Hertfordshire Sports Provision and Open Spaces Review inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

This Review can provide guidance for the Town Centres Strategy with regards to open space provision in town centres and helps realise the Council's vision to provide community and recreational facilities accessible to the local population. An updated study is being finalised and will supersede the 2016 work.

Council Plan 2024-2028 (NHDC, 2024): One of the priorities outlined in the plan is *Thriving Communities*, which means focusing on community safety priorities such as anti-social behaviour, violence against women and girls, and environmental crime (such as fly tipping). Recommendations include continuing to allocate grant funding to local groups who provide vital services and activities, as well as working with partners to deliver projects which reduce health inequalities. The Plan references the importances of street cleaning services, as well as the leisure centres provided by Everyone Active. The Council Plan also emphasises efforts towards the reduction of Carbon emissions across the District. Further commentary on the strategic role of the Council Plan is set out in Section 1B.

How can the Council Plan inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Council Plan provides recommendations to improve community safety in the town centres, which can be applied to the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy and help realise the Council's vision for thriving communities with accessible services through responsible growth and sustainability.

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Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 (NHDC 2025): The Sustainability Strategy launched in August 2025 and replaces the Climate Change Strategy to align with the Council priority of Sustainability. The Sustainability Strategy takes a broader scope by including many areas of sustainability, including emissions reductions, climate change adaptation and biodiversity, taking into account action needed to tackle climate change, protect nature, and make better use of natural resources. This strategy has five areas of focus: Council Emissions, District Emissions, Adaptation, Biodiversity and Cross Cutting.

The aims of the Sustainability Strategy are:

- Achieve Net Zero by 2030 for the Council's own operations.
- Achieve a Net Zero North Hertfordshire district by 2040.
- Ensure all operations and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Become a district that is resilient to unavoidable impacts of climate change.
- Increase biodiversity in North Hertfordshire.

How can the Sustainability Strategy inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

This Strategy sets out the key areas of focus for the Council to improve its sustainability, including how the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy can guide developments within town centres that will require consideration of sustainability across biodiversity, emissions and adaptation to climate change.

Resilient Together Report (ResilienTogether, 2017): Resilient Together is a Local Authority led partnership which works with the local community to reduce flood risk from the Pix Brook (which flows through Letchworth) and improve water quality. As urban areas have grown, the health of some watercourses has weakened. The Pix Brook has been affected by urban growth and is at increased flood risk from rapid storm runoff, as well as from pollution and a reduction in habitat. ResilienTogether aims to address flooding in urban areas, including Letchworth town centre. ResilienTogether aims to create a 'smart catchment' to reduce flood risk, enhance the water environment and improve community resilience. It proposes installation of monitoring stations along the Pix Brook in order to understand the impacts of extreme weather on water flows and water quality.

How can the Resilient Together Report inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The Resilient Together Report can provide guidance for the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy of how to reduce flood risk in town centres, enhancing community resilience in the process whilst at the same time protecting and enhancing biodiversity, which is part of the Council's vision.

Green Infrastructure (GI) Principles (Natural England, 2023): Natural England has developed a set of GI Principles that underpin the GI Framework. The Principles are intended to provide a baseline for different organisations to develop stronger green infrastructure policy and delivery. The principles cover the *Why, What and How* of how to deliver good GI. There are mapped environmental, socio-economic datasets to support the standards. The Principles can be applied to town

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centres, and include Nature Rich Places, Active and Healthy Places, Thriving and Prospering Places, Water Management and Resilient and Climate Positive Places.

How can the Green Infrastructure Principles inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy?

The GI principles can be applied to devise guidance to enhance and protect green infrastructure in the North Hertfordshire town centres. This will help realise the aim of the Council's vision to enhance and protect its landscape as well as enhance the network of green corridors linking settlements to the open countryside, providing greater opportunities for healthy lifestyles; and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the area.

How the community evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision:

The evidence base outlined above helps meet the following sections of the Local Plan vision:

- The District's important natural and historic areas and buildings that help to create the distinctive identity of the District in both urban and rural areas will have been protected and enhanced where possible. The quality and attractiveness of the landscape of North Hertfordshire, which contributes to its distinctive character, will have been conserved and enhanced where possible. New green infrastructure will have enhanced the network of green corridors linking settlements to the open countryside, providing greater opportunities for healthy lifestyles.
- The rich biodiversity and geodiversity of North Hertfordshire will have been protected and enhanced where possible. Where new development could potentially have an adverse impact on biodiversity and geodiversity, measures will have been taken to ensure that the impact was either avoided or mitigated.
- North Hertfordshire will have a range of community, leisure, cultural and recreational facilities in locations that are accessible to the local population, creating cohesive communities that enhance the opportunities and recognise the needs of the centres' diverse demographics from the day-to-day workers to the older population, children and young people.

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Part 2: Town Centre Guidance

2A: Town Centre Developments

How to use this Part

This part of the Town Centres Strategy provides a series of Guidance Notes to support developers, consultants, landowners, and decision makers responding to the requirements of Local plan policies when progressing development proposals in North Herts' town centres.

The Guidance Notes set out advice to assist with the interpretation of relevant Local Plan policies, providing additional information and guidance to ensure that development proposals take account of the breadth of relevant evidence and the Council's broader strategies effecting and affected by developments in the town centres. These include:

- clarifying how and where Local Plan policies will be applied in the assessment of planning applications;
- interpretation of Local Plan policies, listing examples of key criteria and principles that would be expected to be addressed when submitting applications for developments within town centres; and
- examples of supporting information, details, design considerations and infrastructure contributions that would demonstrate Local Plan policy compliance.

Early engagement with the Guidance Notes is encouraged when developing proposals within and affecting town centres, including through pre-application discussions with the Council, to address any areas that would require further consideration to meet the requirements of the Local Plan and Town Centres Strategy. Whilst the Guidance Notes reflect Local Plan policy requirements, the broader principles are considered beneficial for all town centre proposals, including those that would not require an application for planning permission (such as changes within the same Use Class, funding bids, licencing, and prior approval applications) to support the Council's aspirations for the town centres.

Part 1 of this document has set out the relevant town centre related evidence base documents, supplementary planning documents, and Council strategies. This section should also be read alongside the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2032 (adopted 2022).

As with Part 1, the Guidance Notes are presented thematically, expanding on select Local Plan policies as referenced in the text. The Guidance Notes include requirements and recommendations for approaching policy criteria to: address the requirements of the Local Plan policies, consider the findings of the relevant evidence, and implement the Council's strategies affecting town centres.

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2B: Guidance Notes

Introduction

To ensure the strategy is responsive to wider trends and strategic challenges, the Council has reviewed the trends in the usage of the town centres through stakeholder engagement, public telephone surveys and commissioning town centres experts, Lichfields, to provide data, trends and recommendations. The surveys provide insights to the shopping habits and desires of residents and visitors. These findings, together with other relevant evidence, strategies and frameworks summarised across Part 1 have helped to identify a number of common themes which seek to deliver the strategic objectives of this strategy through a set of general policy Guidance Notes that provide a greater level of detail into Local Plan policies that can be applied to developments across the four town centres.

The Guidance Notes in this part provide a framework for protecting, improving and delivering positive changes in North Herts' four town centres. The policies are thematically aligned as follows:

	Guidance Note	Theme
1	Promoting Vitality and Viability in Town Centres	Land use and retail
2	The Built Form, Public Realm and Design	Built environment
3	Heritage and Historic Character	Built environment
4	Promoting Sustainable Travel	Transport, access and movement
5	Community Facilities	Community

Table B1: Thematically guiding policies that are applied to each town centre strategy.

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Guidance Note 1
Promoting Vitality and Viability in Town Centres

a Local Plan Policy SP9 defines significant developments as those 'generally comprising residential development of 100 dwellings or more'. In relation to commercial development and other main town centre uses, development of 1,000 sq.m gross or more, sites greater than 1 ha, or existing allocations within town centres would be considered significant development.

b To promote, protect and enhance the four main town centres in accordance with Local Plan Policy SP4 a), proposals involving the loss of retail and leisure floorspace will be resisted, other than where evidence can be provided demonstrating that the floorspace would not otherwise be required to meet an identified need over the plan period.

c Proposals that require planning permission that would result in the loss of Use Class E Uses at ground floor level in the Primary Shopping Area (currently designated as Primary Shopping Frontages) or main town centre uses (including Use Class E, Sui Generis and Use Class F) within the town centre boundaries should only be permitted subject to criteria relating to:

- adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole;
- individual or cumulative impact on neighbouring amenity;
- provision of an active frontage at ground floor level which relates well to the design of the building and to the street-scene and its setting; and
- adequate marketing of the unit for Use Class E uses in primary shopping frontages or for main town centre uses (including Use Class E, Sui Generis and Use Class F) in other parts of the town centre.

d In accordance with Local Plan Policy SP4 b), it is appropriate for significant developments proposing new or replacement retail and leisure floorspace to provide for a mix of uses (with suitable planning controls, where necessary) to support the vitality and viability of town centres. These uses could include shops, cafes and restaurants (Use Class E) along with pubs and drinking establishments and takeaways (Sui Generis).

e The Council will consider that any significant development within the town centre boundary, including Local Plan allocations, meets the criteria of Local Plan Policy SP9 and should be subject to a proportionate Strategic Masterplan exercise which, as a minimum, should demonstrate how the proposals have taken account of the guidance set out within this document.

Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops

Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability

Policy ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development

Policy ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages

Policy ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages

Guidance Note 2
The Built Form, Public Realm and Design

a In accordance with Local Plan Policy D1, proposed streetscapes including roads, buildings, pavements, hard and soft landscaping, lighting and street furniture in significant developments or public realm interventions should:

- be of high quality and contribute towards an overall user experience in town centres;
- be safe and accommodating to people with mobility, sensory and neurological impairments;
- improve wayfinding and legibility, permeability, and key views of landmark buildings; and
- take account of the existing hierarchy of streets and pathways if proposing a change to the street hierarchy. This should not be to the detriment of pedestrian and cycling routes.

b Open spaces should be designed and maintained to a high quality to promote active recreation, opportunities for social interaction and physical linkages across and between the town centres to support visitors' health and wellbeing to support Local Plan Policy NE6.

c To meet Local Plan Policy SP12 2), biodiversity and habitats should be protected and improved in the town centres, in open and green spaces, riversides (as in the case of Hitchin), as well as in the built environment which supports ecological networks. Developers and landowners for significant developments should demonstrate how they will promote these policy aims through design, layout, land use, lighting and landscaping, and prioritise climate action with a long-term vision, including contributing to biodiversity net gain where relevant to help create an attractive environment for the users of the town centres that will also help to mitigate climate change.

d To support Local Plan Policy D1 a) building types, massing, building and ground floor heights, sight lines, setbacks, and gaps for non-residential development should be proportional in the context of the town, street and surrounding buildings.

e In accordance with Local Plan Policy D1 a), materials proposed for buildings and ornamentation should be of high quality, sustainable and long-lasting, with reference to the form and character of the proposed development (and where relevant, in relation to the historic buildings). Designs should be complementary, rather than directly copying or competing with historic styles, with scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve. They should enhance the existing fabric through similar materials and sympathetic designs.

f In support of Local Plan Policy D1 b), pavements should be of high quality, clear of obstructions and integrate within the street hierarchy and right of ways. Street trees, planting and shrubs are also important elements contributing to the public realm and built environment, and these should be retained and enhanced wherever possible.

Guidance Note 3
Heritage and Historical Character

a In accordance with Local Plan Policies HE1-3, proposed developments should conserve and enhance the special architectural, historic interest, character and appearance of each of the town centres, and integrate new development sensitively to the setting of listed buildings, designated and non-designated heritage assets.

b Local Plan Policy SP13 sets the Council's strategy for the protection and enhancement of North Hertfordshire's historic environment. Reflecting Strategic Objective ENV3, this should be taken to include the town centres' cultural assets, in addition to buildings of cultural and heritage value. Proposed developments in town centres will be expected to deliver (as appropriate) and fund (or contribute funding towards) the centre's cultural heritage, such as the promotion of Garden City principles in Letchworth Garden City, Royston Town Trail, the River Hiz and historic market in Hitchin, amongst others.

Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy D1: Sustainable design

Policy NE6: New and improved open space

Policy SP12: Green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity

Policy SP13: Historic environment

Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets

Policy HE2: Heritage at risk

Policy HE3: Non-designated heritage assets

Strategic Objective ENV3: Protect, maintain and enhance the District's historic and natural environment, its cultural assets and network of open spaces, urban and rural landscapes

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Guidance Note 4
Promoting Sustainable Travel

a Local Plan Policies SP6 and T1 d) seek to deliver accessibility improvements and promote the use of sustainable transport modes. Proposed developments in or surrounding town centres will be expected to deliver (as appropriate) and fund (or contribute funding towards):

i. infrastructure on-site and off-site that promotes:

safe and direct walking and cycling routes to town centres, and between town centres, key amenities and travel/mobility hubs including railway stations;

secure cycle parking; or

parking spaces for club cars*, including at or close to railway stations

ii. new or extended services, linked to appropriate triggers, for the following:

bus services;

bike/e-scooter rental schemes (on or off site); or

car clubs and ride-sharing services.

* Car clubs are short-term car rental services that allow members access to locally parked cars and pay by the minute, hour or day.

b The Council's Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD (2011) Paragraph 4.8 sets out the evidence needed for the Council to consider a level of parking provision below the minimum standards in accordance with Policy T2:

"Clear evidence must be provided that residents and visitor parking demand will not exceed the parking provided OR that alternative short and long stay daytime and evening parking will be readily available to future residents and visitors. The developer should identify examples of this evidence from other developments or locations in similar circumstances to those found in the district."

A future update to the SPD will provide further details of the level of evidence required where it is considered that existing and future demands for parking is likely to be lower than the minimum standards. This evidence is likely to be based on the site's location and the quality of sustainable transport options already available, in addition to any transport options that will become available as a result of the application proposal or agreed to be delivered with the development.

c The Council's Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD (2011) Paragraph 4.10 provides criteria where car free developments may be considered in town centres where any of the following apply:

- The extension or alteration or re-use of an existing building with no access to parking;
- The reversion of a previously converted property to its original residential use, including flats above shops;
- The provision of residential accommodation on a small town centre site that may not otherwise come forward for development; or
- Where arrangements are made to share an existing car park within the vicinity of the site that can accommodate development

Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy SP6: Sustainable transport

Policy T1: Assessment of transport matters

Policy T2: Parking

Guidance Note 5
Community Facilities

a Local Plan Policy HC1 seeks the retention and provision of cultural, recreation and community facilities. For new significant developments in town centres that:

i. include community facilities, developers and landowners are expected to reflect best practices for community cohesion, health and safety, as well as opportunities for skill development within their development.

ii. do not include community facilities within the scheme, the Council will seek commuted payments from developers through planning obligations towards the provision of new off-site facilities or enhancements to existing community facilities within the town centre, where there is a demonstratable need.

b In accordance with Local Plan Policy HC1, development of new and improved health, children's and youth facilities will be supported within or close to town centres, as part of town centre allocations and/or through contributions secured through planning obligations for development proposals, where there is a demonstratable need.

c The Council will resist the loss of community facilities and will require the replacement of existing community facilities in development proposals or through enhancement schemes, in line with Local Plan Policy HC1.

d The Local Plan definition of community facilities under Policy HC1 should be taken to include public access to toilet facilities. Where public toilets are not available in the vicinity of a proposed development including a community facility use, proposed community facilities should provide the general public access to toilets and changing rooms on their premises, otherwise known as a Community Toilet Scheme.

Local Plan Policies of Relevance:

Policy HC1: Community facilities

Part 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies

Introduction

The following strategies for North Hertfordshire's individual towns focus on a concise series of key priorities for the town centres, that will work alongside the Guidance Notes set out in Part 2 to steer development and investment in and surrounding Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock.

The priorities identified provide a focus and key actions for the Council, and work within the planning policy context of the Council's adopted Local Plan 2011-2031, ahead of the new Local Plan. Part 4 also sets out further District-wide initiatives for the Council to undertake alongside the key priorities identified. The Council may wish to revisit these sections and update the priorities in due course as actions are undertaken and new opportunities emerge.

The key priorities are informed by the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis for each town, based on the context and evidence summarised in Part 1 and Appendix 3 alongside consultations, ranging from residents to stakeholder workshops, undertaken during the Town Centre and Retail Study (2024), as well as subsequent meetings with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), landowners and stakeholders.

Consideration of the suitability of planning obligations will be particularly relevant where proposals impact town centres, either through trade diversion or any increases in the number of visitors or users of existing or proposed town centre services. Part 4 sets out how the Council may also seek to explore alternative funding options including national government funding opportunities, private investment, or direct funding allocations from District Council or County Council budgets to deliver identified priorities.

The strategies' key priorities identify opportunities to support vitality and viability of the town centres.

This strategy has been developed with a planning and delivery focus, setting out next steps and actions to bring forward the key priorities. One area that this can be achieved is through financial contributions from developments that would affect the town centres in the form of planning obligations. It is noted that Section 106 sets out the tests for requesting planning obligations[2], in accordance with Regulation 122 of The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010. It is not for strategies such as this, to specifically set out formulaic requests for such financial contributions, which would be subject to viability and costings via the Council or applicant.

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[2] Planning obligations assist in mitigating the impact of unacceptable development to make it acceptable in planning terms. Planning obligations may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission if they meet the tests that are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms. They must be:

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- directly related to the development; and
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

3A: Hitchin

Further information on Hitchin town centre is found in Appendix 3A: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes.

Identity

Hitchin's origins have been traced back to pre-Roman times, aligned with the River Hiz as an important crossing point. Over time, Hitchin developed as a market town, and thus, the layout of the town centre has unfolded with temporary market stalls becoming permanent. In the 19th century, with the arrival of the railway, the previously unchanged street plan rapidly expanded to meet the new demands of the town's growth.

Now, the historic layout of the town centre is linear in structure stretching for over 800 metres north-south along Bancroft and the High Street. Narrow streets are clustered around Market Place adjoining to St. Mary's Church (dating back to the 14th century) and are adjacent to the Churchgate Shopping Centre developed in the 1970s.

There is a mix of typologies and uses in Hitchin town centre; a conservation area, listed buildings and late twentieth century developments, as well as a mix of residential, commercial shopping, recreation, and restaurants or cafe uses. The town centre has evolved over time and will continue to do so, but any changes should respect the overall historic character of Hitchin.

Hitchin is the main shopping and commercial centre in North Hertfordshire, predominantly serving the western half of the District. The centre has the strongest range and choice of comparison and convenience goods retail and services uses, including a wide range of national multiple operators.

Visitors are drawn to Hitchin by the market town's attractive historic character, as well as the variety of restaurants and cafes. The town also serves as a popular filming location, further tying the aesthetics and historic character of the town to its identity. Nonetheless, the River Hiz and the area surrounding St. Mary's Church are underutilised assets, with planned development of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone providing a significantly opportunity to secure the long-term viability of the centre.

Vision

Hitchin will maintain and support the quality of its intrinsic historic market town character to develop an attractive, mixed-use, safe, accessible, vibrant and lively town centre for the local community and visitors to shop, work and live in. Hitchin will have strong and sustainable connections to key destinations, such as the railway station, Hitchin Lavender Fields, and nearby towns and villages. Town centre assets will be optimised, such as the River Hiz, St. Mary's Church, museums and its historic market. For the Churchgate Regeneration Zone and any other new development, Hitchin will take advantage of the opportunity to bring people into the town centre, provide quality public spaces, contribute to the cultural heritage and support the retail core.

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SWOT Analysis

Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. Hitchin is the main shopping destination in the district, providing a good range and choice of convenience and comparison shops. It has a reasonable selection of national multiple retailers, and it has the strongest range and choice of comparison and convenience retail, and services uses in the district.
2. Large food stores are available which cater for main and bulk food shopping needs.
3. The environmental quality of the centre is good, reflecting its historic character and the centre's attractive mix of period buildings and a varied street scene, including the Market Place.
4. The town centre provides a range of service facilities including banks and building societies.
5. The evening economy is relatively strong with many restaurants, pubs and bars.
6. The vacancy rate is much lower than the national average - suggesting demand for premises is relatively good.
7. Most areas of the centre are well maintained, and adequate street furniture is provided.
8. The centre has a good range of small specialist independent retailers.
9. The centre has a good bus service, with many bus routes serving the centre.
10. Buildings are generally attractive and in a reasonable to good condition.
11. The household survey results suggest Hitchin has higher levels of customer satisfaction than dissatisfaction.
12. Hitchin features a popular market in the town centre, operating on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Weaknesses

13. The choice of retailers is not comparable with some larger centres, which encourages expenditure leakage to centres with a better range of facilities, such as Cambridge, Luton and Stevenage.
14. The linear form of the centre does not provide a natural circuit for shoppers, and pedestrian flows within peripheral areas are low, i.e. Bridge Street and the top end of Bancroft.
15. Some non-pedestrianised streets have narrow pavements and can be congested, and difficult for those with mobility difficulties at peak times, such as Sun Street and Bucklersbury.
16. The historic character of the town centre, particularly in terms of the Conservation Area designation and listed buildings could constrain potential redevelopment opportunities. It could restrict the growth of the centre and deter new operators, due to the lack of availability of spaces needed for larger format stores.
17. The Churchgate Shopping Centre and the market area between St Mary's Church and the Churchgate Centre detract from the overall attractiveness of the town centre.

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18. Surface car parking around St Mary's Church is visually dominant and detracts from the advantages of the proximity to the river frontage and historic core.
19. The train station is not within a reasonable walking distance of the town centre.
20. Lack of legibility from the town centre to peripheral car parks (e.g. Woodside and Lairage) and key facilities within and on the edge of the town centre (e.g. swimming pool, schools, museums, Priory Park and the rail station).

Opportunities

21. Hitchin has a reasonably affluent population, but a high proportion of the expenditure generated leaks from the area. Population and expenditure are expected to grow in the future. If Hitchin can maintain its current share of market expenditure there is potential to improve and expand retail, leisure and service uses.
22. There remain several opportunity sites within the town centre, which could accommodate new retail/leisure uses, which would help to retain more expenditure and customers in the area.
23. Improved linkages along the River Hiz could provide better access and natural circuit for pedestrians between Bridge Street, the Churchgate Centre, the Portmill Lane car parks and Hermitage Road.
24. Improved pedestrian, cycling and bus linkages to the railway station would improve overall levels of customer accessibility to the town centre.
25. Enhancement of the Churchgate Centre and market area would significantly improve the attraction and ambience of the town centre as a retail and leisure destination.
26. The centre is already popular as a restaurant and café destination, providing a key opportunity (particularly within or associated with any development of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone) to develop a complementary cultural strategy.
27. A holistic approach to transport and parking may provide opportunities for reconfiguration of provision, whilst maintaining or increasing footfall and vitality.

Threats

28. The number of vacant shop units has increased significantly in recent years. The continuation of this trend could undermine Hitchin's role as a higher order shopping destination in the retail hierarchy.
29. The continued polarisation of national multiples in larger centres and/or the business failure of more national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. The continued rationalisation and restructuring of national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. Multiple operators could seek to focus on (sub-)regional centres such as Stevenage, Cambridge and Luton rather than Hitchin.
30. Transport impacts of growth within and around Hitchin, including Luton Airport, could exacerbate congestion. This could deter town centre visits, given the proximity and capacity of through routes.

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Key Priorities – Hitchin Town Centre

Theme	Priority area	Actions / Planning considerations	Responsibility
A • Land use and retail • Built environment • Transport, access and movement	Churchgate Regeneration Zone	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will assess proposals associated with the Churchgate Regeneration Zone (Local Plan Allocation HT11) as a Significant Development in accordance with Local Plan Policy SP9 and the Guidance Notes identified in Part 2. This would require a strategic masterplan demonstrating how the development could: – provide a mix of flexible and adaptable commercial units that would enable future reoccupation by a range of town centre uses, as well a mix of accommodation to increase the town centre's resident population; – strategically target a mix of retail, food and beverage, and leisure operators, including recognition and assessment of the impact of any potential overlap of catchments for leisure uses; – activate and open up the River Hiz for user recreation; – improve pedestrian and active travel permeability through the site and surrounding area such as introducing street patterns to increase accessibility and linkages across the centre; – support the ongoing vitality of the town centre by increasing potential for visitors and footfall including the promotion of active travel to the centre. – deliver a holistic parking strategy; any proposals should be supported	NHDC as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Future development partners

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		by a parking survey to demonstrate the current use of existing car parks in and around the town centre and plan for appropriate levels of parking, integrating with an emerging transport strategy for Hitchin; – ensure any scheme facilitates and does not prejudice further sites being brought forward in the future; and – provide accessible links to, and enhanced utilities infrastructure for Hitchin Market, including electrical connections and water supply.	
B • Built environment • Transport, access and movement	Public realm, connectivity and wayfinding	• Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy and delivery plan for Hitchin , taking forward the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. For Hitchin: – Create a public realm and wayfinding strategy in collaboration with the BID, Churchgate Regeneration Zone development partners and other stakeholders, including viability and costings, to identify key opportunities for investment from street furniture, lighting and planters, as well as the provision of public realm alongside the River Hiz. – Identify funding sources, future joint bidding opportunities, and requests for planning obligations for relevant developments for financial contributions to wayfinding, pedestrian routes, and public realm investments, particularly between the town centre, new public realm along the River Hiz, and the surrounding open space and gardens.	NHDC HCC Visit Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) Future development partners

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		– Improve transport links and signage from the town centre to key destinations such as the Hitchin Lavender Fields, the theatre and event space at The Dell, and other leisure destinations outside the town centre.	
C • Land use and retail • Community	Cultural economy strategy	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will recognise the benefits of innovative commercial uses that contribute to the nighttime economy, particularly options for young people, as a positive material consideration when supported through evidence of viability, long-term vacancies, preventing breaks in active frontages, resolving amenity issues (e.g.: noise and smells), impact on the nature and character of the retail frontages • Building on the economic opportunities from the Churchgate Regeneration Zone, the Council and development partners for Churchgate will engage with key stakeholders to identify further commercial and cultural opportunities including investing in The Dell as an open-air theatre and to identify possible future funding sources.	NHDC Visit Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID)
D • Transport, access and movement	Hitchin as a key sustainable transport hub	• In collaboration with HCC, the BID and other stakeholders, the Council will develop a transport strategy for Hitchin that aims to reduce car dependency in the district and promote sustainable modes of travel into and within the town, including to: – better integrate rail and bus services to facilitate travel by public transport within the district and to major destinations beyond, including	NHDC HCC Visit Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) Future development partners

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		Stevenage, Luton (including the airport), Biggleswade and Bedford; – consider opportunities for providing a bus station in the town centre to increase the convenience and comfort for people interchanging between services; – improve the efficiency of bus routing in the town centre by adding a bus turnaround; – deliver schemes in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan; – consider redirecting through-traffic and more effectively regulate traffic flows within the town to: ▪ minimise congestion that impacts bus journey times and reliability; ▪ enable the reallocation of road space for safer walking and cycling, particularly between the town centre and railway station; ▪ reduce the severance and other inhibitory effects of the A505 on people walking and cycling into and in the town; – improve air quality for residents and visitors.	

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3B: Letchworth Garden City

Further information on Letchworth Garden City town centre is found in Appendix 3B: Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Evidence Notes.

Identity

Letchworth Garden City (Letchworth) is a unique town centre as a result of its origins as an intensively planned town – the world's first Garden City – founded in the early twentieth century. By following masterplan principles to balance high quality residential homes with nature pursuits, local employment and accessible transport, the areas of open space, commercial land uses and housing are integrated and convenient to one another. Detailed buildings contribute to the town centre's unique flair, as the concept of the Garden City incited innovation and competitive design.

The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation owns a large proportion of the town centre land and assets, and are involved in the visioning, development and investments of the town's future. Such a large volume of ownership to a single organisation is unique compared to the other town centres and stimulates different commercial decisions and town-centre-wide interventions. This single ownership also provides a key point of difference, providing opportunities for broader strategic alignment.

Letchworth is the only town centre with a railway station directly within its boundary and allows visitors to immediately arrive to the centre. The town centre, although hosting wide, accessible and pleasant footpaths, is spread without a distinct core. There is a variety of uses throughout the town centre, shops, residential flats, restaurants, cafes, with a range of budget priced comparison retail. Letchworth is positioned as an important town centre demonstrating Garden City principles, opportunities for recreation and leisure, and a balanced offer.

More recently, Letchworth is part of Hertfordshire County Council's Sustainable Travel Town programme, which aims to bring forward a series of measures to reshape the local highways network and achieve a significant switch to walking, cycling and public transport.

Vision

Letchworth will maintain and develop the town centre for civic and social life, connected by accessible public transport networks through leadership, sense of place, and enterprise. Letchworth will: support the future of arts and heritage; will be a great place to live, visit and shop in; will increase residents life chances; and will be a protagonist in raising investment for the local economy; uphold and promote Garden City principles, and therefore its unique identity, as the first of its kind.

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SWOT Analysis

Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. Letchworth is a compact well-defined centre with a natural circuit for shoppers. The centre has a relatively pleasant shopping environment.
2. The large Morrisons food store is an important anchor store catering for main and top-up food shopping.
3. Letchworth has retained a reasonable range of comparison goods shops, although this has declined and there is a lower representation of comparison retailers than Hitchin.
4. The Arcade, The Wynd and other secondary areas provide a good range of interesting specialist retailers.
5. The centre is easily accessible by a range of modes of transport, with a railway station located within the town centre. Car access is also convenient with several centrally located car parks.
6. Movement around the centre on foot is supported by wide pavements and pedestrianised areas, and Letchworth is one of the County Council's Sustainable Travel Towns.
7. The centre is attractively landscaped giving the centre a sense of spaciousness. Environmental improvements have enhanced the overall attractiveness of the centre.
8. Much of the town centre is consolidated under the sole ownership of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which provides a simpler single point of contact and greater opportunities for longer-term strategies.

Weaknesses

9. The proportion of vacant units is significantly above the national average, with vacancies spread across the centre, which suggest the supply of units is currently greater than operator demand.
10. The centre has a lower number of national multiples when compared with Hitchin and other larger centres in the sub-region such as Cambridge and Welwyn.
11. Like many centres of a similar size, Letchworth has lost most of its banks and building societies.
12. Leakage of higher value comparison spend to other centres within and beyond District

Opportunities

13. Letchworth has a reasonably large and affluent population, which presents an opportunity to claw-back leakage from this catchment by improving its current offer.
14. The vacant premises across the centre could provide an opportunity to consolidate retail, redevelop and accommodate new facilities.
15. The new Emil Dale Academy school recently opened, providing another source of footfall within the centre and an opportunity to cater to the new student population.

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16. The Broadway Cinema helps to boost the evening economy, but this facility could be improved and the number of visitors optimised.

17. There remains a number of opportunity sites within the town centre, including the potential regeneration of Garden Square Shopping Centre, which could accommodate new retail/leisure uses that could help to retain more expenditure and customers in the area.

18. There are a number of open and green spaces in close proximity to the town centre that would provide a draw to the centre (if supported by necessary routes and linkages) in keeping with the town's Garden City principles.

Threats

19. The continued rationalisation and restructuring of national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. Multiple operators could seek to focus on (sub-)regional centres such as Stevenage, Cambridge and Luton rather than Letchworth.

20. Prominent town centre units are vacant with a lack of interest from suitable (main town centre uses) occupiers, held back by various heritage, conservation and planning constraints, with a risk of long term or repeat vacancies.

21. The District Council's offices are located adjacent to the centre, providing a steady stream of workers in the centre each day. In the long-term, potential Local Government Reorganisation could impact the need for this office space.

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Key Priorities – Letchworth Garden City Town Centre

Theme	Priority area	Actions / Planning considerations	Responsibility
A • Land use and retail • Built environment	Town centre development opportunities and allocations (Garden Square Shopping Centre and Arena Parade)	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will assess proposals associated with the development of Garden Square and Arena Parade (Local Plan Allocation LG21) as a Significant Development in accordance with Local Plan Policy SP9 and the Guidance Notes identified in Part 2. This would require the preparation of a strategic masterplan demonstrating how the developments could: – provide a mix of flexible and adaptable units that would enable future reoccupation by a range of town centre uses, as well a mix of accommodation to increase the town centre's resident population; – strategically target a mix of retail, food and beverage, and leisure operators, including recognition and assessment of the impact of any potential overlap of catchments for leisure uses; – demonstrate consideration of the inclusion of community facilities, including the potential for a primary care/health hub; – improve pedestrian and active travel permeability through the site and surrounding area, such as introducing street patterns to increase legibility and linkages across the centre; – support the ongoing vitality of the town centre by increasing potential for visitors and footfall, including the promotion of active travel to the centre; and	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Future development partners

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		– ensure any scheme facilitates and does not prejudice further sites being brought forward in the future.	
B • Land use and retail	Repurposing of vacant units	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will seek to address higher levels of vacancy by giving positive weight to the repurposing of vacant units by uses that contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre as a material benefit to be weighed against limited loss of floorspace or limited harm to heritage assets in the determination of planning applications.	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Landowners Future development partners Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation
C • Land use and retail • Community	The Wynd	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will give positive weight to new uses and formats (including non-main town centre uses) in the Wynd where it can be demonstrated that they would contribute to the character of the street (to be weighed against any loss of main town centre uses and floorspace).	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management
D • Land use and retail • Community	Evening economy	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will give positive weight to innovative commercial uses that contribute to the nighttime economy, particularly options for young people, when supported by evidence of viability, long-term vacancies, preventing breaks in active frontages, resolving historic amenity issues (e.g. noise, unpleasant odours, or anti-social behaviour), and the impact on the nature and character of the retail frontages.	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Love Letchworth Business Improvement District (BID) Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

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		• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will give positive weight to planning applications for amendments to operating hours to support an evening economy where supported by evidence that it will not lead to unacceptable adverse amenity issues. • Collaborate with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, alongside the BID, to build on the Letchworth Culture Strategy 'Create the Future' to incorporate the evening economy. This will include identifying funding sources and future joint bidding opportunities to support potential pilot schemes and the roll-out of extended operating hours as part of a wider evening economy strategy.	
E • Transport, access and movement	Connectivity and links to Broadway Gardens and Howard Park	• Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy taking forward the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). For Letchworth: – Taking account of the findings and recommendations of the Places & People 'Town Centre Access Review' and 'Placemaking Plan' to develop viability and costings to deliver key priorities identified, including orientation and signage improvements at Letchworth Station and Broadway Gardens. – Progress the recommendations of the LCWIP for the development of a segregated carriageway facility for cyclists around Broadway Gardens, on Bridge Road, Station Place and Station Road. – Identify funding sources, future joint bidding opportunities, and requests	NHDC HCC Love Letchworth Business Improvement District (BID) Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

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		for planning obligations for relevant developments for financial contributions to wayfinding, pedestrian and cycling routes and public realm investments between the town centre and the surrounding open space and gardens.	
F • Transport, access and movement	Station forecourt	• In collaboration with HCC, engage with Network Rail to progress the redevelopment of the Station forecourt as a key gateway into Letchworth, building on existing design and funding for the redevelopment of existing areas of parking and vegetation to improve access and visual links into the centre.	HCC NHDC Network Rail Letchworth Garden City Heritsge Foundation

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3C: Royston

Further information on Royston town centre is found in Appendix 3C: Royston Town Centre Evidence Notes.

Identity

Royston has a rich heritage dating back to the 12th century, with surrounding green open spaces and town centre streets with a variety of cafes and restaurants offering a diverse mix of food and drink. Royston is distinctive through its historic qualities of the town centre, such as its medieval street layout, market places and sites of archaeological and historic interests. An outstanding feature of Royston town centre is its compact size and streets, namely, King Street and High Street, lined with historic shop fronts. Leaning into the rich heritage, the Royston Town Trail has 31 marked stops throughout the centre detailing medieval and cultural buildings of interest.

Royston is smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth and primarily serves the day-to-day shopping, food, beverage, and service needs of local residents. Its town centre is located in the northeast of North Herts, southwest of Cambridge; it is approximately 10 miles away from the Hitchin-Letchworth-Baldock grouping, and thus, plays an important service role for many of the surrounding villages in both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. There is a large employment estate to the north of the town, Royston Gateway Retail Park and Industrial Estate.

In recent years, the expansion of out-of-town retail at Royston Gateway has developed into a significant draw to the area, bringing visitors from a catchment extending north into Cambridgeshire. However, Royston Gateway is not currently well linked to the town centre, which provides a longer-term opportunity to develop a cohesive wider offer.

In 2022, Royston became a Sustainable Travel Town, and as such, prioritises measures to improve public transport, walking and cycling. Royston Railway Station approximately half a mile north of the town centre and is accessed on foot via narrow pedestrian paths along Kneesworth Street which carries high levels of traffic.

Vision

Royston will have a thriving town centre with a strong sense of identity marked by a clearly identifiable and vibrant ‘heart’ by tapping into its distinct character marked by rich heritage, medieval layout and a diverse mix of food and drink offerings. The centre features cultural attractions including Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Priory Memorial Gardens, and Royston Town Trail that offer a key opportunity for further economic and cultural growth. The town centre will encourage sustainable travel and serve its local community as a welcoming place that is a pleasure to live in, work in and visit.

ft for Consultation

SWOT Analysis

Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. The centre serves the day-to-day service needs of residents.
2. The centre is accessible by a choice of modes of transport other than the car, with bus stops and a railway station located close to the centre, supporting a high proportion of trips by walking.
3. Access by car is served by convenient car parks located within and around to the main shopping area.
4. There is a small but interesting range of independent specialist retailers.
5. There is a good selection of pubs and restaurants that strengthen the evening economy.
6. The centre has a relatively low proportion of vacant units compared to both the District and UK averages, showing a healthy level of market demand.
7. Royston Town Council offices are located immediately adjacent to the town centre, providing access to key administrative functions as well as a draw to the centre.
8. The centre features a number of distinct cultural attractions within and in close proximity to the town centre, including Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Priory Memorial Gardens, and Royston Town Trail.
9. Royston features a popular market in the town centre, operating on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Weaknesses

10. The closure of the Morrisons town centre food store has reduced the food and grocery offer and an important anchor store for the centre has been lost.
11. Premises in Royston are generally small which may be less attractive to potential new occupiers looking for more modern premises. The centre has a limited number of larger retail units to accommodate national multiple retailers.
12. The Angel Pavement shopping mall features a number of vacancies but is dated and the design is relatively constrained reducing the attractiveness of the units for new occupiers.
13. Many of the pavements in the peripheral parts of the centre are narrow which causes congestion and vehicular and pedestrian conflict.
14. The opportunity to expand and improve the market is constrained by the existing location and infrastructure, including limited pedestrian access.
15. Although the train station is within a reasonable walking distance from the heart of the town centre, the trip is along narrow pedestrian paths, inactive frontages and with little buffer to vehicular traffic.
16. A number of key retailers including Tesco, Aldi M&S and Costa have located to peripheral locations on the bypass and northern fringe of the centre, drawing spending from the core centre.

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17. The main employment area is located to the north of the town, closer to the Royston Gateway Retail Park, limiting the attractiveness of the town centre and the amount of lunchtime / after work spending.

Opportunities

18. Royston Town Centre benefits from a local customer base, and local residents need to travel large distances to reach alternative facilities. Population and expenditure generated by this customer base is expected to grow in the future, which should provide opportunities to improve the range and choice of shops and services in the town.
19. The Corn Exchange is an attractive destination within the centre with key heritage traits, featuring a variety of small specialist independent shops and the potential to offer a range of town centre services building on the popularity of the existing offer.
20. Royston Town Centre is closely linked by public transport to Cambridge and intervening villages (such as Melbourn, Shepreth etc.) and has the potential to benefit from increased spending from planned strategic housing growth around Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire.
21. Royston Town Centre is dominated by independent traders, which could benefit from planning policy support for growth and opportunities for diversification through potential amalgamation, subdivision and investment in existing units.
22. Both the Royston Gateway Retail Park and Industrial Estate attract different users that could be drawn into Royston town centre for complementary activities.

Threats

23. The recent loss of the Morrisons from the town centre further reduces the number of national multiple retailers and the convenience goods shopping draw of the centre (as a distinct destination from Royston Gateway).
24. The potential for further edge-of-town / out of centre retail development at Royston Gateway (given the limited town centre opportunities) would draw further trade from the town centre.

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Key Priorities – Royston Town Centre

Theme	Priority areas	Actions / Planning considerations	Responsibility
A • Land use and retail • Community	Royston's key assets	• Work with the Town Council and BID to establish a joint marketing strategy for the Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Priory Memorial Gardens, and Royston Town Trail to encourage visitors to the town centre. • Building on the Council's Economic Strategy, collaborate with the BID, Royston Town Council and other stakeholders to support the establishment of a Royston focussed Destination Management Organization (DMO) to promote leisure activities and attractions in and around Royston.	NHDC Royston Town Council Royston First Business Improvement District (BID)
B • Land use and retail	Growth and evolution of independent and speciality operators, protecting their contribution to Royston's character	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will recognise the benefits of the viability of existing operators that contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre and give positive weight to applications for the amalgamation, subdivision and investment in existing units to be weighed against limited loss of floorspace or less than substantial harm to heritage assets in the determination of planning applications	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Landowners Future development partners
C • Transport, access and movement	Public realm, connectivity and wayfinding	• Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy taking forward the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). For Royston: – Provide signage and facilitate transport links to improve links, legibility and wayfinding routes to and from the key retail areas to the north of Royston and surrounding industrial areas – Improve transport links and signage from the town centre to the Priory Memorial Gardens, railway station, bus station,	NHDC HCC Royston Town Council Royston BID

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		Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Therfield Heath, Royston Gateway Retail Park, and other destinations with a focus on visitors from South Cambridgeshire – Progress LCWIP recommendations, in particular to facilitate north and south cycle movements.	
D • Land use and retail • Community	Royston Market	• Encourage Royston Town Council to undertake a study to identify the demand and opportunities to expand and enhance the existing market offering, including the potential for addition pitches and a greater range of operating hours and days • Collaborate with the BID and the Town Council to identify and apply funding sources to support expansion and promotion of the market.	NHDC Royston Town Council

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3D: Baldock

Further information on Baldock town centre is found in Appendix 3D: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes.

Identity

Baldock is the smallest town centre in North Herts and is located to the east of Letchworth. The town centre provides a mix of independent specialist retailers, food and beverage outlets and service businesses alongside a historic open market that operates every Wednesday.

Baldock town centre has a strong local identity with a thriving cafe and pub culture, which takes full advantage of the wide High Street and its refined old buildings. Baldock's strength lies with its specialist, independent retailers and service business sector which make a valuable contribution to the local economy and community. Combined, the built environment and town identity provides a pleasant social centre for residents and visitors to interact.

The town centre has retained its traditional market town character with the historic core containing fine architecture from the medieval and Georgian periods. St. Mary's Church, a Grade I Listed Building, lies in the northern part of the town centre and is surrounded by historic and more recent residential areas. The town centre is designated a Conservation Area and contains a mix of uses with town houses, inns and commercial buildings.

Since the completion of the A505 bypass, opportunities exist to promote a more vibrant and sustainable town centre, a social centre for residents as identified in the North Hertfordshire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). Moreover, the Tesco Extra – located on the periphery of the town centre – attracts customers from neighbouring villages and towns, as well as locals but would benefit from better links to the town centre.

Looking forward, significant residential development surrounding Baldock town centre will likely increase town centre footfall and demand; the Growing Baldock scheme is planned to provide an additional 3,000 homes.

Vision

Baldock will maintain and maximise its town centre's strengths, namely, its historical market context, network of pedestrian paths, leafy green features, and local identity for cafe culture – by enhancing its attractive, safe, accessible, and lively town centre that incentivises investment for the local community and visitors to work, live and relax. Significant growth surrounding Baldock will provide a vibrant new resident and working population to visit and spend in the centre.

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SWOT Analysis

Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. Baldock is an attractive historic market town with period buildings and a pleasant environment. The centre has a wide and attractive tree lined High Street and a high-quality public realm.
2. The town centre is relatively compact, easy to navigate and generally accessible. The pavements are relatively wide and well maintained.
3. The shop vacancy rate is below the District and UK averages, and this has not increased significantly since 2015.
4. The centre has a strong presence of small independent outlets and primarily serves the day-to-day shopping and service needs of local residents.
5. There is adequate on-street parking provided within the centre and off-street parking at the Tesco Extra store and the Twitchell car park.
6. Baldock has a well-established evening economy with a wide selection of restaurants, pubs and bars for a centre of its size. The town centre has a higher-than-average proportion of food and beverage outlets.
7. Following the completion of the A505 Baldock bypass, the centre has benefited from investment and public realm improvements with recent updates including the replacement of street furniture along High Street and Whitehorse Street.
8. The town hosts a variety of regular community events that 'activate' the High Street ranging from Ecofest to Baldock Beer Festival, as well as the weekly outdoor market on Wednesdays.

Weaknesses

9. The large Tesco Extra on the edge of the town centre is a significant draw, but there is little evidence of a commensurate level of linked trips into the town centre. This is potentially exacerbated by the poor wayfinding and a lack of clear pedestrian links between Tesco Extra and the centre. As such, Baldock currently draws trade from a relatively small catchment area, similar to Royston, in contrast to Hitchin and Letchworth.
10. The public realm in the core Market Square is directly adjacent to parking bays, which may detract from the quality and experience of the public realm.
11. High volumes of traffic along Hitchin Street, Whitehorse Street, and High Street undermine the ambience of the shopping environment and inhibit pedestrian movements. Additionally, the pedestrian crossings of High Street, which is a busy road, are far apart (240m and 300m). Pedestrians are often observed walking on the road, especially near Simpson Drive.
12. The centre has no banks or building societies.
13. Shopping areas are fragmented with several breaks in the retail frontage by offices and dwellings located on the High Street.

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14. Many of the shops are converted dwellings and some are also listed buildings, which can limit interest from potential occupiers that require a specific spatial format.
15. There are a limited range of retail shops, including national multiples. There are few comparison goods retailers within Baldock, well below the District and UK averages.
16. There is no co-ordinating body between local businesses and the District Council, and limited demand for a group (such as a BID) that would facilitate stakeholder engagement and local representation.

Opportunities

17. Shop rental rates are lower in Baldock than the other town centres in North Herts and more affordable for small independent traders.
18. The Local Plan (2011 – 2031) allocates 3,360 homes in Baldock. This could significantly increase the resident population supporting new and existing shops and services within the town centre.
19. The BA10 employment land allocation (19.6ha) could increase spending in the town. This will depend in part on improving cycling and walking connectivity between the industrial/employment land and the town centre.
20. The Growing Baldock development will provide a greater critical mass of businesses and commercial activity within the town, attracting a wider variety of retail and leisure operators.
21. If more of the customers drawn to the Tesco Extra, some of whom are from outside the district, could be attracted to other shops and services in the town centre, that would boost the vitality and viability of the town centre. This depends in part on improving pedestrian routes and signage through the memorial gardens from Tesco to the High Street.
22. The transport strategy for Growing Baldock redirects through traffic away from the centre to A505/A1(M)/Letchworth Gate. This provides an opportunity to address east-to-west traffic on Hitchin Road/Whitehorse Road that detract from the centre, as well as to provide an additional pedestrian crossing on High Street (as recommended by the LCWIP).
23. Baldock town centre is dominated by independent traders, which could benefit from planning policy support for growth and opportunities for diversification through potential amalgamation, subdivision and investment in existing units.

Threats

24. Since 2015, the number of comparison goods shops has decreased significantly. The continuation of this trend could undermine the centre's attraction as a shopping, food and beverage destination.
25. Whilst Growing Baldock will increase the resident population within the town's catchment, the edge of centre Tesco Extra store provides an extensive range of food and non-food goods, which may directly attract the new spending, reducing the potential spending available to new and existing facilities in the town centre.
26. The increase in spending and activity generated by the Growing Baldock development may be lost by the limited opportunities/vacant units for existing businesses to expand or relocate within the town centre.

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27. Failure to appropriately manage, monitor and influence the Growing Baldock development may result in an adverse impact on the town centre in terms of loss of vitality or footfall, increased traffic etc. if the emerging residents and workers are drawn to alternative destinations.

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Key Priorities – Baldock Town Centre

Theme	Priority areas	Actions / Planning considerations	Responsibility
A • Land use and retail • Built environment	Growth and evolution of independent and speciality operators, protecting their contribution to Baldock's character	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will: – recognise the benefits of the viability of existing operators that contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre through amalgamation and subdivision of units, and investment in existing town centre facilities as a material benefit to be weighed against limited loss of floorspace or less than substantial harm to heritage assets in the determination of planning applications. – give positive weight to new uses and formats (including non-main town centre uses) where it can be demonstrated that they would contribute to the character of the street (to be weighed against any loss of main town centre uses and floorspace).	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Existing and future operators Landowners Developers
B • Built environment • Transport, access and movement	Connectivity and wayfinding as the wider centre grows	• Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy taking forward the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). For Baldock: – Growing Baldock residential-led development should support new residents access to the town centre via cycling and pedestrian routes, car, and public transport in accordance with the approved masterplan. This will include the redesign of Station Road / Icknield Way junction and additional cycle	NHDC HCC Future development partners

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		routes, and overall improvements to Whitehorse Street, amongst others; – links to new employment floorspace at Local Plan Allocation Policy BA10 including development of a new access from Royston Road alongside additional signage and access routes to draw workers into the town centre; and – improvements to pedestrian links between Tesco Extra and Baldock Town Centre to incentivise and support linked trips.	
C • Land use and retail • Community	Monitoring of town centre service provision and infrastructure	• The Council will request funding from development such as Growing Baldock to support the Council's monitoring of the mix of uses and services within and surrounding Baldock Town Centre including main town centre uses, community administrative and medical facilities in order to: – identify and address any deficiencies through the loss of existing services and/or capacity as a direct result of the planned increases in residential population, visitors and employees; and – build-up an evidence base to support intervention through additional allocations, funding bids, or marketing initiatives.	NHDC Future development partners
D • Land use and retail	Capture benefits of planned growth	• Through the Council's ***development management role*** in the planning system, the Council will require developments in and surrounding the town centre, such as Growing Baldock to enter into planning obligations for financial contributions to deliver the actions and town centre priorities (as well as those within the approved masterplan, LCWIP amongst others) to	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Future development partners

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		mitigate the impact of otherwise unacceptable developments to make them acceptable in planning terms.	

3E: Summary of priority areas

Hitchin	Letchworth	Royston	Baldock
Churchgate Regeneration Zone	Town centre development opportunities and allocations (Garden Square Shopping Centre and Arena Parade)	Royston's key assets	Growth and evolution of independent and speciality operators, protecting their contribution to Baldock's character
Public realm, connectivity and wayfinding	Repurposing of vacant units	Growth and evolution of independent and speciality operators, protecting their contribution to Royston's character	Connectivity and wayfinding as the wider centre grows
Cultural economy strategy	The Wynd	Public realm, connectivity and wayfinding	Monitoring of town centre service provision and infrastructure
Hitchin as a key sustainable transport hub	Evening economy	Royston Market	Capture benefits of planned growth
	Connectivity and links to Broadway Gardens and Howard Park		
	Station forecourt		

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Part 4: Further Council Actions and Funding Opportunities

4A: Further Council Actions

The Towns Centres Strategy has identified a series of cross-cutting planning-based thematic policies to guide development, Council intervention and investment proposals. The Strategy adopts a place-based approach to identifying key investment priorities, tailored to the needs of each individual town centre to support vitality and viability throughout the district.

The Council should look to support, protect and enhance long-term viability and vitality of town centres. The effective delivery of the Strategy will require the Council to work closely with several partners and stakeholders.

Set out below are recommendations for Council-led priorities for action across each of the town centres.

Gauging the support of key identified partners and stakeholders through the formal consultation process of the Strategy will be important in terms of delivering the identified priorities for each of the town centres and the recommended further actions. This will inform an action-oriented delivery plan in the final version that can be subject to regular review and update.

Land use and retail

1. The Council will incorporate the findings and recommendations for new policies from the North Hertfordshire Town Centres & Retail Study (2024, or any subsequent updates) when preparing the emerging Local Plan Update. The recommendations are reproduced at Appendix A of this document.
2. The Council will continue to foster engagement and partnerships with relevant town centre stakeholder groups including Royston Town Council, Visit Hitchin BID, Love Letchworth BID, Royston First BID, and the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (amongst others). The Council will support the potential to diversify commercial uses in vacant units, and further boost footfall and dwell time, including through promotion and marketing efforts.
3. The Council will explore opportunities to facilitate community programming and spaces for recreation across open and green spaces in and surrounding town centres.
4. The Council will implement the Economic Strategy for North Hertfordshire to build a strong, resilient and sustainable local economy that will provide a critical mass of workers, residents, and commercial activity within the town centres.

Built environment

5. In accordance with Local Plan Policy SP9 and Guidance Note 1, the Council will require 'significant developments', including those within town centres, to be subject to a proportionate Strategic Masterplan exercise.
6. In accordance with Local Plan Policy D1, the Council will:

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a encourage high density development in town centres that incorporate a mix of commercial uses on the ground floor, with residential or commercial above.

b progress and encourage enhancements to the public realm or new developments that ensure that the character and high quality of the historic fabric is maintained and thematically linked to the town centre enhancements.

c preserve the historic layout and retain the width of the streets across town centres, with any exceptions to be suitably justified. The towns' pedestrian permeability, achieved through a network of footpaths, should be protected and enhanced.

d ensure that new developments are complementary, rather than directly copying or competing with historic styles, with scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve. They should enhance the existing fabric through similar materials and sympathetic designs, scale, height, massing and proportions.

Transport, access and movement

7. The Council will work with partners to develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy and delivery plan for the four towns, building on Hertfordshire County Council's Active Travel funded work in Stevenage Town Centre.

8. Review the Council's Parking Strategy to complement planned improvements in sustainable travel options. This could be by setting parking tariffs to encourage greater use of car parks outside the town centre boundary and reduce the amount of traffic circulating in town centres.

9. The Council, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, will seek developer contributions and apply for, or support other bodies' applications for, grant funding to support sustainable transport infrastructure and services, including to:

   a Appoint a transport project officer to deliver the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), including measures and schemes that complement the Plan's priorities.

   b Reduce through-traffic in all towns to reduce congestion (in particular on bus routes), increase safety and space for people walking and cycling, and improve air quality for residents and visitors.

   c Reduce traffic speeds where these pose a danger or deterrent to people walking or cycling.

   d Modify junctions where traffic speeds or volumes pose a danger or deterrent to people walking or cycling, in particular those with mobility or sensory impairments.

   e Increase the frequency and operating hours of bus services within and into all towns.

   f Invite and support operators of bike/e-scooter rental schemes and car clubs into all towns.

   g Promote public and shared transport services, including carpooling/ridesharing, to employers, education providers, leisure and sports centres, tourist attractions and information providers, etc.

   h Create, reconfigure, add waiting facilities or otherwise enhance travel/mobility hubs, including existing railway and bus stations, to better integrate sustainable modes of travel – walking,

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wheeling (wheelchair, rollator, child buggy, etc), cycling, e-scootering (when and where legal), public and shared transport – and make interchanging more convenient, safe and comfortable.

i Support technology initiatives to integrate transport services into a single platform for planning, booking and payment options.

j Review the location and quantity of disabled parking bays to ensure that they adequately match demand.

k Prioritise buses using smart traffic management (e.g. traffic signals that respond to approaching buses or hold traffic where queues cause least disruption to bus services), bus lanes (provided these do not compromise provision unacceptably for active travel), and bus gates (where access is restricted to buses, other authorised vehicles and cycles).

Community

10. The Council through its annual Authority Monitoring Report will record the provision of the community facilities and services within the Primary Shopping Area and town centre boundary to assess any gaps in meeting the needs of the local community.
11. The Council will facilitate collaboration between stakeholders and facility providers as appropriate to help meet the needs of the local community.
12. The Council's forthcoming Design Code will include advice on permeability and layout that foster a safe environment and deter anti-social behaviour to help guide developers and landowners.
13. The Council will expect licencing regulations of commercial retailers, within the Council's control, to deter 'dead frontages' through recommending appropriate hours of operation based on the surrounding mix of uses, proximity to areas of sensitivity (such as schools), delivery needs in comparison to the public realm and noise and waste pollution from the retailer.
14. The Council, through partnership working, will:

    a Promote each of North Herts' town centres to demonstrate their unique character and strengths.

    b Communicate and market the town centre offers, events and engagements to keep residents and visitors informed and to increase the frequency of their usage of the town centres.

    c Support stakeholder groups in town centres to strengthen local networks, connections and skills.

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4B: Funding Opportunities

In order to ensure that the Council can deliver the ambitions set out within this Strategy, there are several funding and delivery factors that will be integral to the implementation of the identified priorities. This section sets out the potential funding and delivery options that could be leveraged by NHDC.

There are likely to be opportunities for the Council to obtain funding from the Government, building on their previous success with historic funding rounds such as the Growth Area Fund (GAF). This may be

complemented by opportunities for grant funding from third sector or other organisations. Developer contributions from strategic and large developments will be a significant source of funding for all four towns. It may be appropriate in some cases to explore public–private partnerships. A summary of potential private and public sector funding opportunities is provided in more detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1 High-level funding opportunities

		Funding Opportunities	Commentary
Public Sector	National	Local Growth Fund Local Mission Fund	Announced by Government in the Spending Review, awaiting further details. The objectives of these funds align with the priority areas identified in the strategy.
		Heritage Lottery Fund Arts Council England	Funding to support place-specific heritage and cultural interventions, particularly in Letchworth and Baldock.
		National Wealth Fund	Blend of public and private financing to aid local authorities with capital to fund projects across priority sectors including transport, creative industries and digital technology.
	Regional	Sub-national / Regional Transport Bodies	Utilising opportunities from regional authorities and dedicated project officer to secure funding for interventions.
		Hertfordshire County Council	Discretionary funding from the County Council.
	Local	S106 Contributions	Contributions for non-highway town centre improvements and alignment with HCC contributions for transport interventions from the town centre outward. This may consist of 'Strand 1' contributions from individual schemes within or adjoining town centres or broader 'Strand 2' contributions from developments in the wider area to mitigate cumulative impacts. Collection and spend should be closely co-ordinated to ensure holistic delivery of town centre initiatives.
		Local discretionary funding	From existing capital funding e.g. GAF or discretionary funding through NHDC from council tax or business rate charges. Place-specific funding can also be utilised for targeted investment e.g. the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Fund.

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		Business Improvement District (BID) Funding	Leveraging funds raised through the mandatory levy charged to businesses within the BID.
Private Sector		Public Works Loan (PWL)	PWL, now administered by HM Treasury, can be utilised by NHDC to fund capital projects.
		Private Loans/Grants	Use of private equity to wholly or match fund capital projects including the Private Finance Initiative where the project will yield sufficient revenue.
		Local Climate Bonds	Leverage the use of Local Climate Bonds to finance suitable environmental and social impact projects.

Key considerations for NHDC

Whilst there are a number of potential funding mechanisms, which NHDC can utilise to deliver their strategy, there is both opportunity and risk associated with these mechanisms. The opportunities and risks related to the potential funding opportunities are highlighted below:

Opportunities

- Although the timing and criteria of Government funding programmes remain uncertain, NHDC can proactively prepare projects to be funding ready. This includes packaging initiatives such as town centre improvements into targeted groups (e.g. walking and cycling infrastructure, wayfinding, and public realm enhancements) to align with specific funding streams.
- The Council should strengthen its capacity and capability to develop high-quality funding applications. Projects should be progressed to a mature stage, supported by a robust evidence base, to enhance the credibility of bids and increase the likelihood of securing funding.
- NHDC benefits from a strong network of stakeholders, which is a key asset for the District. The Council should leverage these relationships to coordinate efforts and facilitate joint funding and delivery of projects. Effective collaboration will help ensure that the distinct priorities of each town centre are addressed.
- Additionally, NHDC should make greater use of national-level resources. For instance, the National Wealth Fund offers support to local authorities by financing capital projects and providing advisory services to help overcome financial barriers.

Risks

- There is limited transparency in future funding programmes committed by Central Government. These programmes may therefore not align with project timescales and therefore NHDC must develop a clear funding and financing strategy which sets out a series of realistic funding models that deliver the priorities within this strategy.

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- Local Government Reform (LGR) will act as both a risk and opportunity. The risk lies in ensuring that the importance of North Hertfordshire town centres are recognised and carried forward to new devolved authorities. LGR also presents an opportunity for additional funding streams through devolved funds, which are more accessible than Central Government funding programmes.

4C: Consultation

The consultation process will help assess the level of support from key partners and stakeholders for the actions set out across the Strategy. Consultation feedback will shape a practical delivery plan for the Council, in order to guide positive development, strengthening the identity, vitality and viability of North Hertfordshire's towns.

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Glossary

Active Travel

Active travel refers to modes of travel that involve a level of activity, including walking, wheeling and cycling.

Convenience goods

Consumer goods purchased on a regular basis e.g. food/groceries and cleaning materials.

Comparison goods

Durable goods such as clothing, household goods, furniture, DIY and electrical goods.

Experian

A data consultancy widely used for retail and leisure planning information.

Food and beverage

Classes A3 food and drink outlets, selling food and drinks consumed away from the home or hot food takeaway food but not food and grocery items including convenience goods.

National Multiple

Retailers with ten or more outlets.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies - economic, environmental and social planning policies - for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans can provide for sufficient housing and other development in a sustainable manner.

Planning Obligation / Section 106

A legal agreement between a developer and a local authority to mitigate the impacts of development, often to support transport infrastructure improvements, controls over the level of affordable housing, training initiative, and environmental improvements. Planning obligations are often based on Section 106 of The Town & Country Planning Act (1990) and can be referred to as Section 106 agreements (s106) or 'developer contributions' when provided as a financial contribution.

Primary Shopping Area

Area defined on the local authority's proposal map where retail development is concentrated.

Primary Shopping Frontage

Area defined on the local authority's proposal map, likely to include a high proportion of retail uses which may include food, drinks, clothing and household goods.

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Public Realm

The network of publicly accessible spaces between buildings where people move and interact, including streets, pavements, squares, and open spaces.

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is a planning policy document that provides additional, detailed guidance to help interpret and implement existing policies contained within a Local Plan.

Town Centre Boundary

Area defined on the local authority's proposal map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area.

Use Classes Order (UCO)

A categorisation system within the planning process set out by the Government to label types of property and land based on function.

- **Use Class E**

  Commercial and service premises including retail or shop uses, restaurants and cafés, financial or professional services (e.g. banks and building societies), indoor sport and recreation, medical services, nurseries, and businesses (e.g. offices, light industry, and research and development).

- **Use Class F**

  Local Community Uses, learning and non-residential institutions including local shops (not more than 280 sq.m and within 1,000 m of a similar facility) community halls, outdoor sport or recreation, and indoor swimming pool or ice-skating rink, educational establishments, galleries, museums, libraries, public halls, places of worship and courts.

- **Sui generis**

  Uses which do not fall within any other specified use classes, including theatres, launderettes, petrol stations, hostels, nightclubs, betting offices and pay day loan shops, pubs and bars, takeaways, and cinemas.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Reference list and hyperlinks

Appendix 2: Town Centre Policy Direction

Appendix 3: Individual Town Centre Evidence Notes

Appendix C1: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes

Appendix C2: Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Evidence Notes

Appendix C3: Royston Town Centre Evidence Notes

Appendix C4: Baldock Town Centre Evidence Notes

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Appendix 1: Resource List and Hyperlinks

Part 1: Town Centre Evidence

Theme 1: Land use and retail

- BID Brochure – Hitchin (Visit Hitchin BID, 2024)
- BID Brochure - Letchworth GC (Love Letchworth BID, 2024)
- BID Brochure – Royston (Royston First BID, 2024)
- Baldock Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan (People & Places, 2022)
- Hitchin Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan (People & Places, 2022)
- Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan (People & Places, 2022)
- Royston Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan (People & Places, 2022)
- Town Centre Strategy – Hitchin (NHDC, 2005)
- Town Centre Strategy – Letchworth GC (NHDC, 2006)
- Town Centre Strategy – Royston (NHDC, 2008)
- Town Centre Strategy – Baldock (NHDC, 2004)
- North Hertfordshire Town Centres & Retail Study (Lichfields, 2024)
- Development Contributions SPD (NHDC, 2023)
- North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy (NHDC, 2025)

Theme 2: Built environment

- Character and Conservation Statements (NHDC) Hitchin (2011)
- Character and Conservation Statements (NHDC) Letchworth (2001)
- Character and Conservation Statements (NHDC) Royston (2007)
- Character and Conservation Statements (NHDC) Baldock (2003)
- Design Supplementary Planning Document (NHDC, 2011)
- Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (NHDC, 2024)

Theme 3: Transport, access and movement

- An Active Travel Strategy for Hertfordshire (Hertfordshire County Council, 2024)
- Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide (Hertfordshire County Council, 2024)
- Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4) 2018-2031 Guide (Hertfordshire County Council, 2018)
- Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) (WSP, 2022)
- North Central Growth Transport Plan (AECOM, 2022)
- North Hertfordshire Local Transport Strategy (Markides Associates, 2017)
- North Hertfordshire Parking Strategy 2019 – 2031 (NHDC, 2019)
- Sustainable Travel Town Letchworth GC Outline (NHDC, 2021)
- Sustainable Travel Town Royston Outline (NHDC, 2021)
- Active North Hertfordshire Strategy Report (SLC, 2023)
- Electric Vehicle Strategy (Hertfordshire County Council, 2022)
- North Hertfordshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan (RS Regeneration, 2018)
- Air Quality Strategy, and Air Quality Implementation Plan (Hertfordshire County Council, 2019)

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Theme 4: Community

- North Hertfordshire Sport Provision and Open Space Review & Standards (NHDC, 2016)
- Council Plan 2024-2028 (NHDC, 2024)
- Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 (NHC 2025)
- Resilient Together Report (ResilienTogether, 2017)
- Green Infrastructure Principles (Natural England, 2023)

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Appendix 2: Town Centre Policy Direction

Existing Local Plan Town Centre Policy

Policy SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops

The Council will make provision for an appropriate range of retail and service facilities across the District and are committed to protecting the vitality and viability of all centres. We will:

a) Promote, protect and enhance the provision of shops, financial and professional services, café or restaurants, pubs or drinking establishments or takeaways in the following centres in our retail hierarchy:

   i. the town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston;

   ii. 13 existing local centres consisting of:

   - village centres at Ashwell, Codicote and Knebworth;
   - seven centres in Hitchin;
   - two centres in Letchworth Garden City; and
   - the centre at Great Ashby; and

   iii. iii. 2 new local centres north of Baldock and East of Luton within the strategic housing sites identified in this Plan;

b) Support proposals for main town centre uses in these locations where they are appropriate to the size, scale, function, catchment area, historic and architectural character of the centre;

c) Identify Primary Shopping Frontages within town centres where shops will be expected to concentrate;

d) To ensure the District's towns maintain their role and market share, make provision for up to 38,100 gross sq.m of additional floorspace over the plan period, comprising shops, café or restaurants, pubs or drinking establishments or takeaways including the re-occupation of vacant floorspace, consisting of:

   i. 22,500 gross sq.m comparison goods (e.g. clothes, shoes, furniture, carpets);

   ii. 8,600 gross sq.m convenience (e.g. food, drink, toiletries); and

   iii. 7,000 gross sq.m food and beverage outlets (e.g. restaurants, takeaways and bars).

   38,100 gross sq.m is a district wide retail capacity but it is principally derived from the retail capacity projections for the four town centres, as indicated below:

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Years	2016-2021	2021-2026	2026-2031	Totals
Baldock	300	1,600	1,400	3,300
Hitchin	3,800	3,600	3,700	11,100
Letchworth	2,400	3,300	3,500	9,200
Royston	3,200	2,000	1,900	7,100
Strategic Housing Sites	1,500	2,700	2,600	6,800
Other	200	200	200	600
Total	**11,400**	**13,400**	**13,300**	**38,100**

The three town centres of Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth have significant overlapping markets, with spend leakage from Letchworth to Hitchin and a lack of physical space at Baldock to accommodate its projected retail capacity. To address the leakage and physical capacity across these three centres the indicative distribution and phasing of provision is as follows:

Years	2016-2021	2021-2026	2026-2031	Totals
Baldock	300	1,600	1,400	3,300
Hitchin	3,800	3,600	3,700	11,100
Letchworth	2,400	3,300	3,500	9,200
Royston	3,200	2,000	1,900	7,100
Strategic Housing Sites	1,500	2,700	2,600	6,800
Other	200	200	200	600
Total	**11,400**	**13,400**	**13,300**	**38,100**

*2016 to 2021 projections includes take-up of vacant units and the implementation of commitments.

e) Prepare and maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support this approach and / or adapt to change. These will be used to inform the approach to retail at the time of the early review; and;

f) Support the retention and provision of shops outside of identified centres where they serve a local day-to-day need.

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Town Centre Policy Recommendations

(extract from North Hertfordshire Town Centres and Retail Study 2024)

Meeting North Hertfordshire's needs

When planning for growth in their town centres, local planning authorities should allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail development needed. It is important that the needs for retail and other main town centre uses are met in full and not compromised by limited site availability. The combined floorspace projections for retail and food/beverage floorspace in 2026, 2031 and 2036 are summarised and rounded in Tables 8.1 and 8.2.

Table 0.1 Combined retail and food/beverage floorspace requirements (sq.m gross) - cumulative

	Convenience retail (sq.m gross)	Comparison retail (sq.m gross)	Food /beverage (sq.m gross)	Total (sq.m gross)
By 2026	-240	10	870	**640**
By 2031	-360	180	2,850	**2,670**
By 2036	-140	390	4,920	**5,170**

Table 0.2 Combined floorspace requirements by location (sq.m gross) - cumulative

	By 2026	By 2031	By 2036
Hitchin	290	1,180	2,150
Letchworth	160	690	1,350
Baldock	150	550	1,020
Royston	-50	-70	100
Other North Herts	90	320	550
Total	**640**	**2,670**	**5,170**

The early Local Plan review Plan should seek to accommodate for at least ten years and preferably up to 2036. Due to over-lapping shopping catchment areas, there should be potential to redistribute capacity to Letchworth from Hitchin and Baldock. Letchworth has the main concentration of vacant floorspace and the most potential to accommodate growth within the designated centre.

The combined total floorspace capacity projection up to 2036 is 5,170 sq.m gross. Based on a reasonable reduction in shop vacancy rates, reoccupied space could in theory accommodate about three quarters of the projected capacity need up to 2036.

The leisure expenditure projections indicate there may be potential to accommodate an additional 1,700 sq.m gross of commercial leisure and cultural floorspace by 2036, which could include:

- two medium sized health and fitness facilities (about 140 new fitness stations);
- new leisure innovations e.g. trampolines, indoor climbing, escape rooms, virtual sport activities; and
- small scale tourist attractions/cultural facilities.

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The development strategy should be flexible to respond to emerging opportunities for new leisure, entertainment and tourist related facilities.

The updated capacity projections suggest there is no pressing requirement to allocate new sites for major retail or leisure development to accommodate projected growth for the next ten years. The priority in the short to medium term will be the reoccupation of vacant shop units. Existing Local Plan allocated sites for mixed use development i.e. HT11, HT12, LG19, LG21 and RY12 and new facilities in strategic housing sites are more than sufficient to accommodate any long-term residual need.

Future planning policy

Hierarchy of centres

Continuing to identify the hierarchy of centres and the centres boundaries in the early Local Plan review is important in terms of:

- ensuring the vitality and viability of town, village and neighbourhood centres is maintained and enhanced as important hubs for the community, through the application of the impact test;
- directing retail and main town centre uses to appropriate accessible and sustainable locations, through the application of the sequential approach to site selection; and
- identifying a viable role and strategy for each centre, based on the health check analysis in this report.

No changes to the existing hierarchy are considered necessary. The network of town, village and neighbourhood centres should be protected and enhanced to ensure appropriate accessibility to important facilities for all sections of the community and to ensure sustainable shopping patterns.

Impact and sequential tests

Local Plan Policy ETC3 and the supporting text clearly set out the sequential and impact tests and are in the most part consistent with the latest NPPF and not affected by the changes to the use classes order. However, the policy wording implies an impact assessment is required for all main town centre uses. Policy ETC3 criterion b) could be amended to "retail and leisure" rather than "town centre" development for consistency with the NPPF.

In relation to the sequential test the supporting text at Local Plan paragraph 5.13 could be expanded to reflect paragraph 92 of the NPPF, which indicates when considering edge-of-centre and out-of-centre sites preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre.

The NPPF minimum threshold of 2,500 sq.m gross continues to be an inappropriate threshold for North Hertfordshire because this scale of development would exceed the five-year retail and food and beverage projections for all centres in the District. The early Local Plan review should continue to adopt lower impact thresholds for retail and leisure uses in Baldock and Royston i.e. 500 sq.m gross. The threshold in Letchworth could also be reduced from 1,000 sq.m gross to 500 sq.m gross, because the floorspace capacity projections are much lower. A lower impact threshold of 1,000 sq.m gross rather than 2,500 sq.m gross could be considered in Hitchin.

All retail and leisure developments above these floorspace thresholds (combined) proposed outside or on the edge of designated town, village and neighbourhood centres should be required to prepare a

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proportionate impact assessment, including retail and leisure uses included within mixed use allocations. The level of detail required in the impact assessment will vary case-by-case and it is for the applicant to provide robust justification that their impact assessment is robust, appropriate and proportionate.

As in the adopted Local Plan Policies ETC6 and ETC7 the early Local Plan review should continue to support small scale shops and services within village and neighbourhood centres and outside designated centres, where a particular market and locational requirement has been robustly justified. Both Policy ETC6 and ETC7 should seek to protect valuable local shops and services.

Town and local centre boundaries

The early Local Plan review Plan should continue to define clear boundaries for town, village and neighbourhood centres on the Proposals Map and should remain the focus for retail, leisure and other main town centre uses. The continued need for town centre boundaries, primary and secondary shopping frontages needs to be considered. For example, a separate town centre boundary and secondary shopping frontages is probably unnecessary in Baldock.

The relatively low retail floorspace capacity projections up to 2036, suggest there is no need to extend centre boundaries to accommodate future growth, but the longer term projected under-supply of floorspace implies a significant contraction of centre boundaries is also unnecessary. However, town centre boundaries are relatively widely drawn in most centres and some predominantly residential areas on the periphery of town centres could be removed. The Council should review the centre boundaries and amend as necessary.

Controlling the mix of uses

The policy approach set out in Policies ETC4 and ETC5 could be challenged following recent changes to the Use Classes Order and Permitted Development Rights. The updated floorspace projections do not indicate an overall reduction in Class E main town centre uses is required in North Hertfordshire's town centres. The continued adoption of Article 4 Directions in the four town centres will help to prevent the loss of town centre uses.

The continuation of the policy approaches set out in Policies ETC4 and ETC5 will be undermined and hampered by the UCO/PDR changes. The continued adoption of Article 4 Directions in the four town centres will help to prevent the loss of town centre uses

The early Local Plan review could designate a primary shopping area (PSA) in Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston town centres to manage the mix of uses and protect the vitality and viability of these centres. This PSA should cover the area currently designated as primary shopping frontages. The PSA will be the area where retail uses will be concentrated for the sequential approach and the area from where edge-of-centre sites will be measured. Leisure and other non-retail town centre uses can be focused in the wider town centre area i.e. the area between the PSA and the town centre boundary.

The continued designation of secondary frontages, in addition to a PSA, is probably unnecessary. The designated town centre boundary in Baldock could be adopted to control the mix of uses, rather than a PSA or frontage designations.

Class E uses should be maintained and enhanced in the PSA and development should maintain an active frontage. This approach would replace Policy ETC3. Within other parts of these three town

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centres and in Baldock a wider range of main town centre uses including Class E, Sui Generis and Class F could be promoted and protected. This approach would replace Policy ETC4.

Proposals that require planning permission that would result in the loss of these uses at ground floor level in the PSA or wider town centre should only be permitted subject to criteria relating to:

- individual or cumulative impact on neighbouring amenity;
- adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole;
- provision of an active frontage at ground floor level which relates well to the design of the building and to the street-scene and its setting; and
- adequate marketing of the unit for Class E uses in primary frontages or Class E, Sui Generis and Class F uses in other parts of the centre.

In the future and in specific cases, it may be appropriate to consider Article 4 directions to prevent permitted changes of use that could undermine the character or vitality and viability of parts of town centres.

Future monitoring

The recommendations and projections within this study will assist the Council in reviewing development plan policies over the coming years and to assist future development management decisions. The study provides an overview of the potential need for further retail and leisure development in the medium and long-term up to 2036. Longer-term projections are subject to uncertainty and forecasts will need to be amended to reflect emerging changes, as and when new information becomes available. These uncertainties include the longer-term implications of the Covid-19 and cost of living crisis that will need to be monitored. Longer-term projections up to 2036 should be treated with caution and provide broad guidance only. Projections should be monitored and the floorspace projections rolled forward. The following key assumptions should be updated as necessary:

- population projections;
- local expenditure estimates (information from Experian or other recognised providers);
- growth rate assumptions for expenditure per capita (information from Experian or other recognised data providers);
- the impact of potential increases in home and internet shopping (Experian regularly provides projections for internet shopping and these projections will need to be updated at the same time as expenditure and population figures);
- existing retail floorspace and average turnover to floorspace densities; and
- implemented development within and around the study area.

These key inputs into the retail/leisure capacity assessment can be amended to provide revised capacity projections.

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Appendix 3: Individual Town Centre Evidence Notes

3A: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

3B: Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Evidence Notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

3C: Royston Town Centre Evidence Notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

3D: Baldock Town Centre Evidence Notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

for Consultation

This appendix is a helpful tool to be read alongside Part 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies, as well as and Part 2B: Guidance Notes, within North Hertfordshire' Town Centres Strategy.

The following sub-sections to Appendix 3 represent evidence related to each town centre, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City (Letchworth), Royston and Baldock respectively, and across the thematic pillars of the Town Centres Strategy:

- Retail and Land Use,
- Built Environment,
- Transport, access and movement and
- Community.

Links to the relevant supporting documents are listed in Appendix 1.

Appendix 3A: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Hitchin are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- Local Needs Index and
- Article 4 Directions**.**

Mix of Uses: There are 346 retail and service units within Hitchin town centre's designated shopping frontages; the mix of uses is set out in ***Table 1*** below, which is compared with the District and UK averages. Approximately a third of these units are comparison retail, which is just over the District and National average. Falling below the District and National averages, Hitchin has only 10 hot food takeaways.

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units (UK avg.)
Convenience retail	23	6.6	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	107	30.9	27.8	27.7
Financial/Professional	32	9.2	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	42	12.1	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	13	3.8	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	10	2.9	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	85	24.6	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	34	9.8	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	**346**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 1: *Mix of retail and service uses – Hitchin town centre (Town Centres and Retail Study, 2024).*

Vacancy rate and economic vitality: At 9.8% shop vacancy, Hitchin is below the District and National averages; there were 34 vacant units within the centre at the time of the 2023 land use survey. From 2015 to 2023 the number of vacant units in the town centre increased from 20 units to 34 units. Although Hitchin town centre has experienced the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, the

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vacancy rate remains relatively low compared with other centres. Vacant units vary in size from under 50 square metres to over 1,000 square metres and are relatively evenly spread throughout the centre with no obvious concentrations.

Boundary and frontages: The existing town centre boundary for Hitchin can be found in ***Figure 1;*** notably, town centre boundaries evolve over time as required by the Local Plan updates process. In Hitchin town centre boundary, there are areas that do not actively host commercial or mixed-use development, but rather non-main town centre uses, such as residential use.

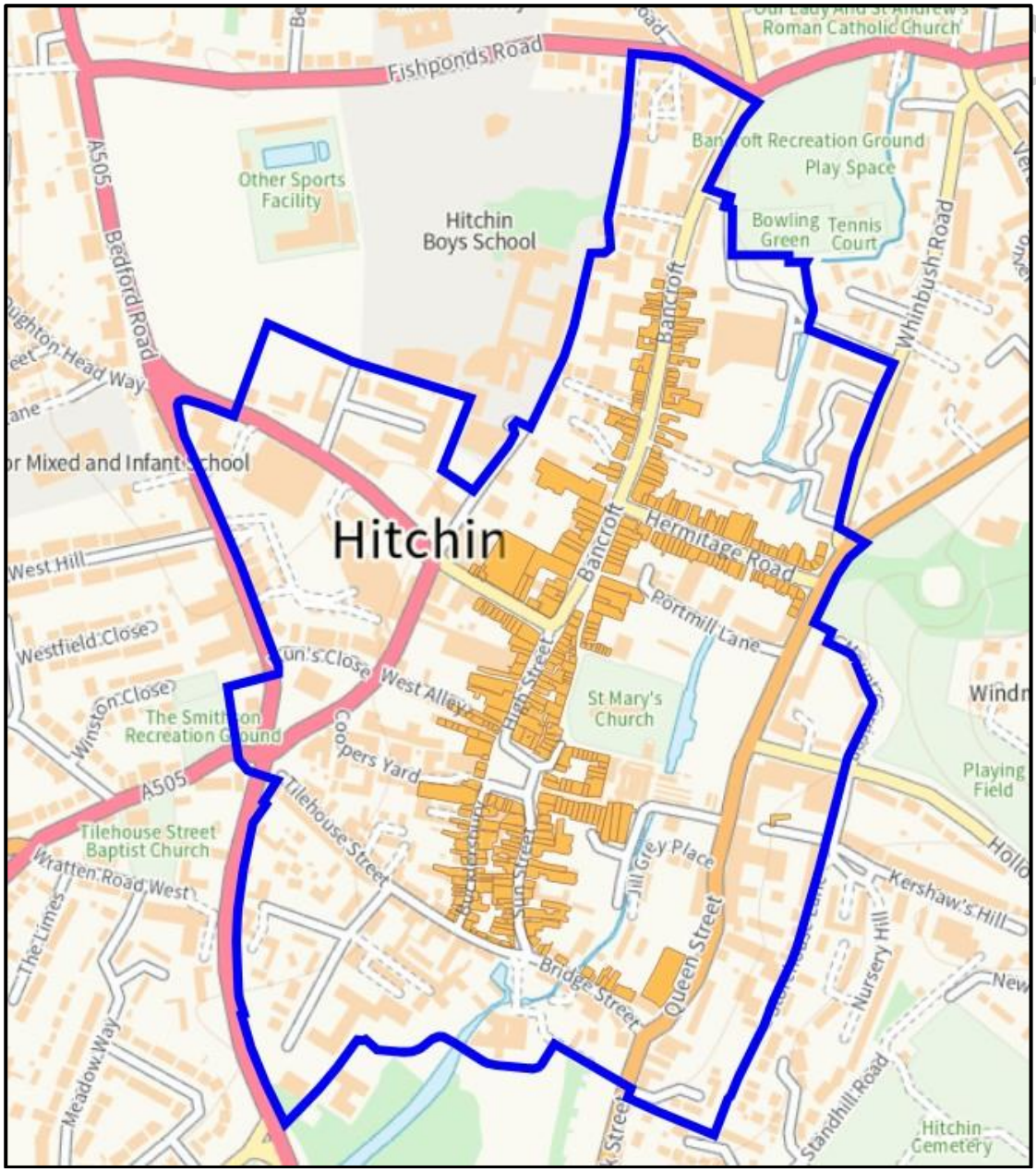

Figure 1: *Hitchin town centre, depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and retail land use in orange (town centre area: 451,274 sq.m).*

Development Allocations: Based on the Local Plan (2011 – 2031), there are two town centre allocations as mixed-use enhancement opportunity sites in Hitchin.

> **HT11 Churchgate & its surrounding area:** This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 4,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas. The policy requires a concept framework/masterplan to be prepared and provides further guidance on key considerations to be covered.
>
> To help bring this development forward, the Council has acquired the leasehold for the Churchgate Shopping Centre and is marketing the centre and its locational environment as a redevelopment opportunity and is rebranding this allocation as the Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ). The mixed-use policy allocation, HT11 for Churchgate and its surrounding area in the Local Plan (2011 -2031), has supportive text for the redevelopment of this mixed- use site.
>
> Separate to the Town Centres Strategy, the Council's Enterprise Team has conducted public consultation on this proposed redevelopment site seeking public views. Further information on the CRZ can be found on the Council's website: Join the Churchgate Conversation.
>
> **HT12 Paynes Park:** This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 3,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas. The policy requires a concept framework/masterplan, and the policy identifies the key considerations to be covered.
>
> Since the time that Paynes Park was allocated for redevelopment, part of this allocation, known as the former Woolworths building and its car park to the rear, is subject to a Planning Application for the reprovision of retail units and the addition of 44 one-and two- bedroom apartments.

Leisure: Informed by the Town Centres and Retail Study, leisure in Hitchin is oriented around food and beverage pastimes, such as frequenting restaurants and pubs, as well as using hair salons, health facilities and non-food shopping. Within the shopping category and compared to the rest of the district's town centres, visitors report non-food shopping in Hitchin at 10% more, a logical outcome considering this town centre's robust offer of national and smaller boutique comparison shops. Hitchin also hosts other various leisure experiences in the town centre, such as the North Hertfordshire Museum and British Schools Museum, with recreational lavender fields nearby.

Activity	Hitchin %	Average % across all town centres
Go for walk	0.5	0.9
Cafe/pub/restaurant	57.1	46.8
Leisure activity	8.1	9.9

Table 2: *Participation in leisure activities by Hitchin town centre users (Town Centres and Retail Study, 2024).*

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Visit time: According to the NEMS household survey (2024), 71% of respondents dwell for more than 1 hour in Hitchin town centre. Hitchin has the highest percentage of visitors that dwell for longer than 1 hour. Compared to the other town centres within North Herts, the user visit duration to the town centre is unique to Hitchin; this is about 20 – 35% more than the other town centres. It is logical that this town's profile has a longer duration of visits correlated with more 'out of town' users, there is a draw to come into Hitchin and make the journey worthwhile.

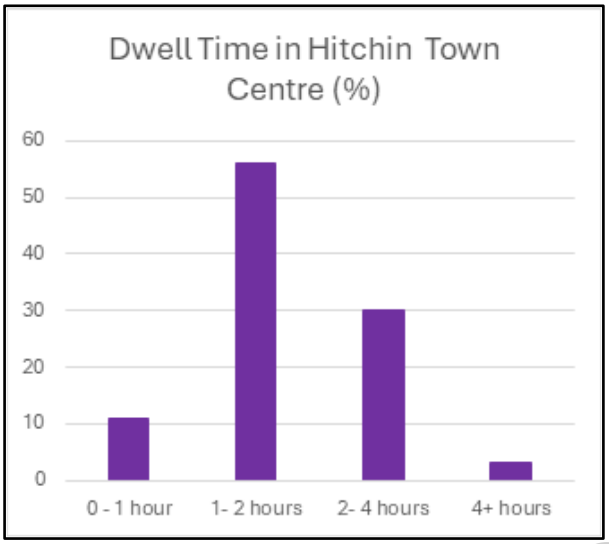

Figure 2: *Dwell time for Hitchin town centre users (HUQ, 2023 – 2024).*

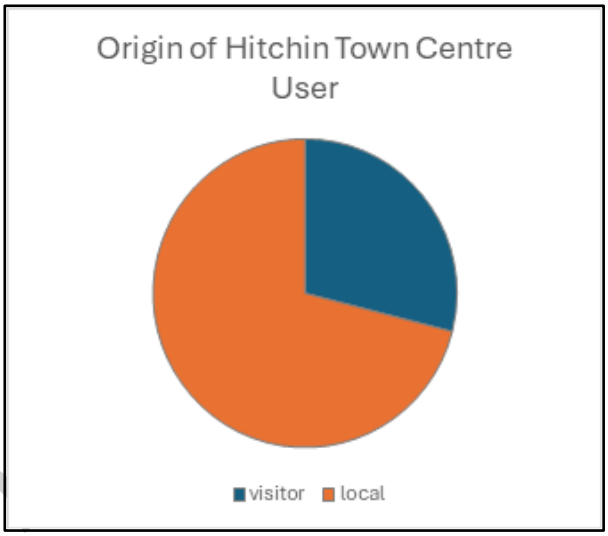

Figure 3: *Origin of Hitchin town centre users (People & Places, 2022).*

Local Needs Index: A standardised Local Needs Index of Hitchin town centre was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Hitchin scored 15 out of 16, only lacking a community hall. Although, the community may access this amenity, a community hall, through the presence of St. Mary's Parish, Hitchin Town Hall and/or the North Herts' Museum, all of which hold rooms for community uses (such as workshops or events) and are located within the town centre.

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)
Hitchin	Town Centre	15
Letchworth	Town Centre	16
Royston	Town Centre	14
Baldock	Town Centre	12

Table 3: *Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centres and Retail Study, 2024).*

Planning protections - Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings: Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial

opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

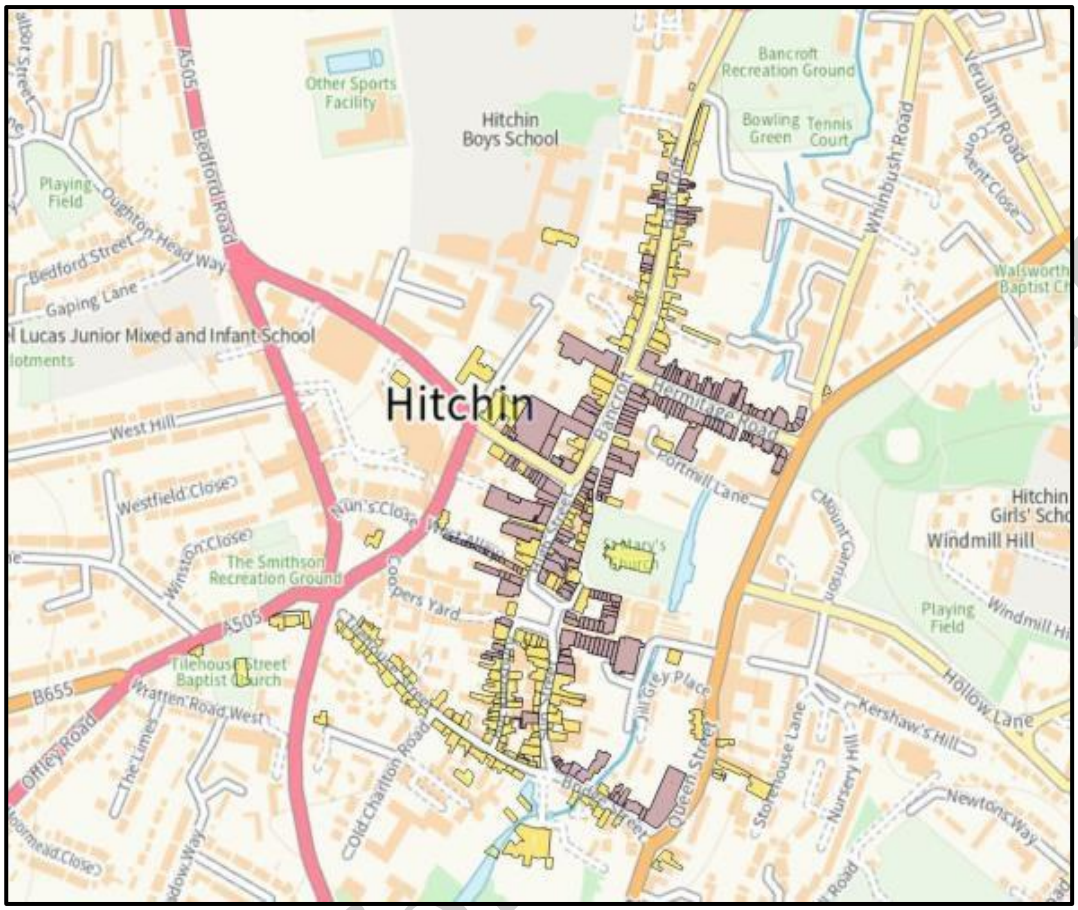

Figure 4: *Planning protections in Hitchin town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.*

Built environment

The built environmental conditions for Hitchin are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces.

Design and the public realm: The historic layout of Hitchin features narrow streets clustered around Market Place adjoining with St Mary's church. Historically, the buildings are a mix of town houses built on narrow burgage plots and for commercial activities. The town centre has evolved over time and will continue to do so, but any changes should respect the overall historic character of Hitchin.

The scale and typology of new buildings should be dictated by the scale and typology of historic buildings. Architecture of new developments should be complementary, rather than directly copying or competing with historic styles. New designs should use materials that compliment historic styles. There should be scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve.

Building heights are generally three storeys, although there is a mix of two and three storey buildings which creates interest and variety. As the roofscape in Hitchin town centre varies in pitch and style, flat roofs are considered inappropriate for new development. Higher densities are appropriate within the town centre, as are a mix of uses including residential, retail and commercial.

Vistas and viewpoints are restricted within the town centre due to the curved character of the streets; this creates a sense of anticipation and interest for the user, with important views of St Mary's Church.

As continuous frontages create strong building lines and thus clear enclosures of places, continuous frontages should be retained in any new development, including larger buildings which should reflect plot sizes in their detailing. Moreover, where appropriate, narrow building plots should be maintained. To activate the facades and naturally build in surveillance of the public realm, building frontages should face the street. Blank walls should be modified to create interest in the plinth.

Historic Character: Hitchin is one of the oldest continually inhabited towns in the county, and arguably, the historic centre of North Herts. The Hitchin Conservation Area spans beyond the current town centre boundary and contains the entire town centre. There are just under 100 listed buildings in Hitchin town centre which are protected through various listed building designations. A few modern buildings exist throughout the town centre, which arguably detract from the overall historical environmental character. The current pattern of roads and footpaths has significantly influenced the development of the town's layout and further, preserves a network of rights of way over the former medieval open fields.

The relationship of buildings to the spaces in the Hitchin Conservation Area is varied according to historical development and uses within each part of the conservation area.

In the south and west, namely Bucklesburry Street and Sun Street, where the streets are narrow, the buildings are all two or three storeys high and mostly listed and sit on the back edge of the pavement providing a complex and closely contained streetscape of great quality.

Churchgate sits between The Market Place Square and the more modern Hitchin Market. It is also adjacent to St. Mary's Church. This site, including the Market Place Square, is currently under consideration for redevelopment (Churchgate Regeneration Zone) and must respect the surrounding context and town character, such as building heights, density, materiality, design, and views.

St. Mary's Church and churchyard are tucked away behind the Market Place and High Street by narrow pedestrianised lanes (Churchyard and Munts Alley). The grounds sit alongside the River Hiz with scenic banks for users to recreate, and also alongside St. Mary's Car Park. Views to the east of St. Mary's Church (along Queen's Street) detract from the high quality and historic character of the grounds and the town centre.

Hermitage Road includes uniform rows of mixed-use buildings dating back to the early 20th century, with a priority towards commercial activities on the ground floor, and office or residential above. This road includes a clear vantage point up to Windmill Hill.

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Compared to the other town centres in the district, Hitchin has more listed buildings in number than Baldock, Letchworth Garden City and Royston town centres combined, but in terms of ratio (non-listed compared to listed buildings) within the town centre, Hitchin has less than Baldock and Royston.

Open and green spaces: The town centre contains important public spaces which should be protected and enhanced. The hard character of Market Place contrasts with the soft landscaping to the east of St Mary's church along the banks of the River Hiz. The River Hiz is an important element in the character of Hitchin town centre and its potential for a riverside walk should be fulfilled. Additionally, Priory Park, Windmill Hill and Bancroft Recreation Ground are all close to the town centre and are important open green spaces. It is important to improve connectivity between these spaces and the town centre.

Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Hitchin are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- mode of travel
- footfall and
- parking.

Access and movement: Hitchin town centre has a strong urban structure resulting in an informal grid of routes. Some of these routes are for both vehicles and pedestrians, although there are a number which are just for pedestrians making Hitchin town centre permeable for people accessing the town centre on foot. However, due to the historic nature of the centre, some pavements and streets are narrow restricting pedestrian movement when congested (i.e. Sun Street and Bucklersbury). From 1993 onwards, the town centre has been partially pedestrianised, and the impact of this intervention can perhaps be traced in user survey results from Hitchin's 2022 Recovery and Development Plan by People & Places: approximately three quarters of respondents felt positively about the "pedestrian access around the town centre", with an addition 24% feeling neutral.

Motor traffic volumes through Hitchin, particularly on the A505 and B656, and large volumes of HGV traffic, in particular on the A505 and Grove Road (leading to the industrial estate), create significant barriers to walking and cycling. The locations that are least supportive for pedestrian uses in and close to the town centre include Cambridge Road railway underbridge, multiple roundabouts on the A505, and major junctions on the B656 (Walsworth Road and Queen Street). Hills around the town centre are also a barrier to cycling, as cycling routes that minimise climbs and avoid steep climbs are preferred.

Of relevance to Hitchin town centre, connections that have been identified in the Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to be improved include:

- Hitchin to Baldock via Letchworth Garden City via cycling routes and bus networks,
- Hitchin town centre to the railway station via pedestrian routes, and
- Hitchin town centre to Stevenage via bus networks.

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For example, a segregated cycle infrastructure on the route connecting Hitchin to Letchworth to Baldock has been proposed, with lower speed limits for motorised vehicles on respective roads and an improvement in bus provision. Additionally, the LCWIP determined Core Walking Zones (CWZ) to understand trips that can be optimised to increase walkability. Hitchin is considered a CWZ with routes between its town centre and railway station as Key Walking Routes. There are bus stops on Bancroft, Hermitage Road and Queen Street, and bus services link the centre to Bedford, Luton, Shefford, and Welwyn.

Mode of Travel: The Hitchin Railway Station is 1.4km from Market Place, a 20-minute walk for most people. As expected, the Household Survey for the Town Centre and Retail Study suggests that few Hitchin town centre users arrive by train. Although there are various bus stops throughout the town centre, there is no bus station. As the bus stops are dispersed around Hermitage Road, Queen Street and Bancroft, interchanging between routes is difficult.

Based on NEMS Household survey, the majority of visitors use the car to reach Hitchin, although this town centre has more walking behaviour compared to the other three town centres. According to the People & Places Recovery Report (2022), 61% Hitchin users reported a preference to travel by foot into the town centre compared to by car (32%). These results indicate that these two studies engaged with different sample populations resulting in different route choice preferences. It can be interpreted that locals are more likely to reach the town centre by foot (who the People & Places Recovery Report engaged with more), while visitors from the wider Study Area reach the town centre by car (who the NEMS Household Study engage with more).

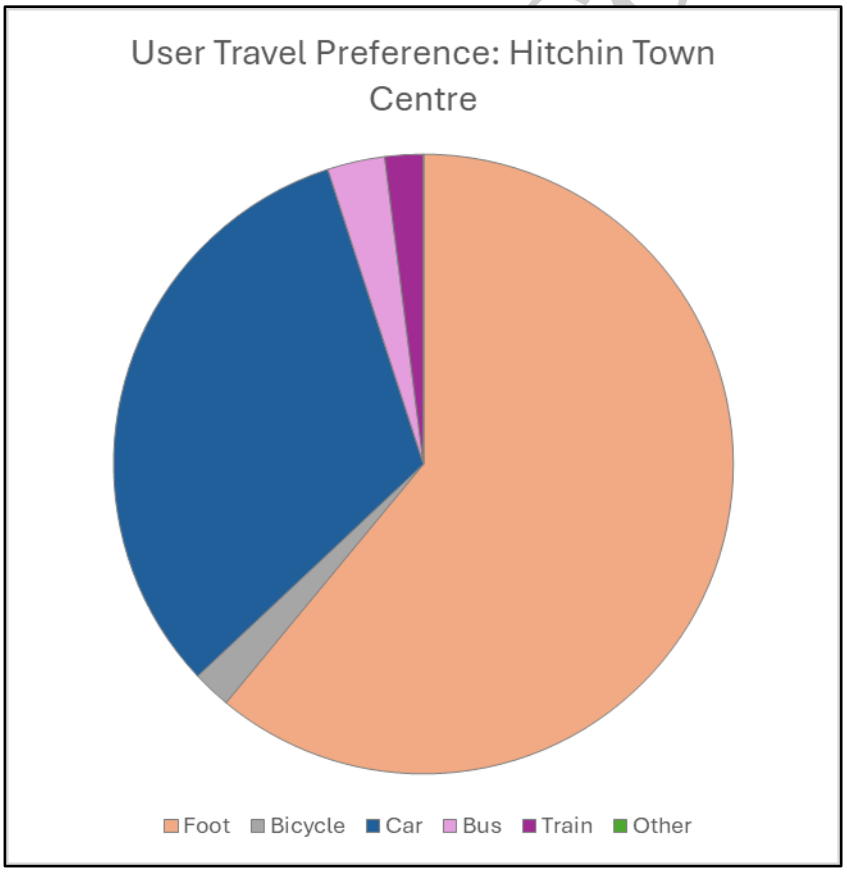

Figure 5: *User travel preference in Hitchin town centre (People & Places, 2022)*

Consultation

Following Hertfordshire County Council's public consultation on pedestrianisation and travel preferences in Hitchin town centre, both High Street and Market Square are now closed to vehicles during the day, except on Sundays.

Footfall: The district's HUQ footfall data indicates that Hitchin town centre has experienced the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic with a reduced annual footfall from just below 10 million in 2019 to approximately 6 million in 2020 and further to about 5 million in 2021. Likely Recovering from physical isolation measures and businesses temporary closures, the town centre's annual footfall recovered steadily surpassing its pre-covid frequency, to roughly 12 million in 2023.

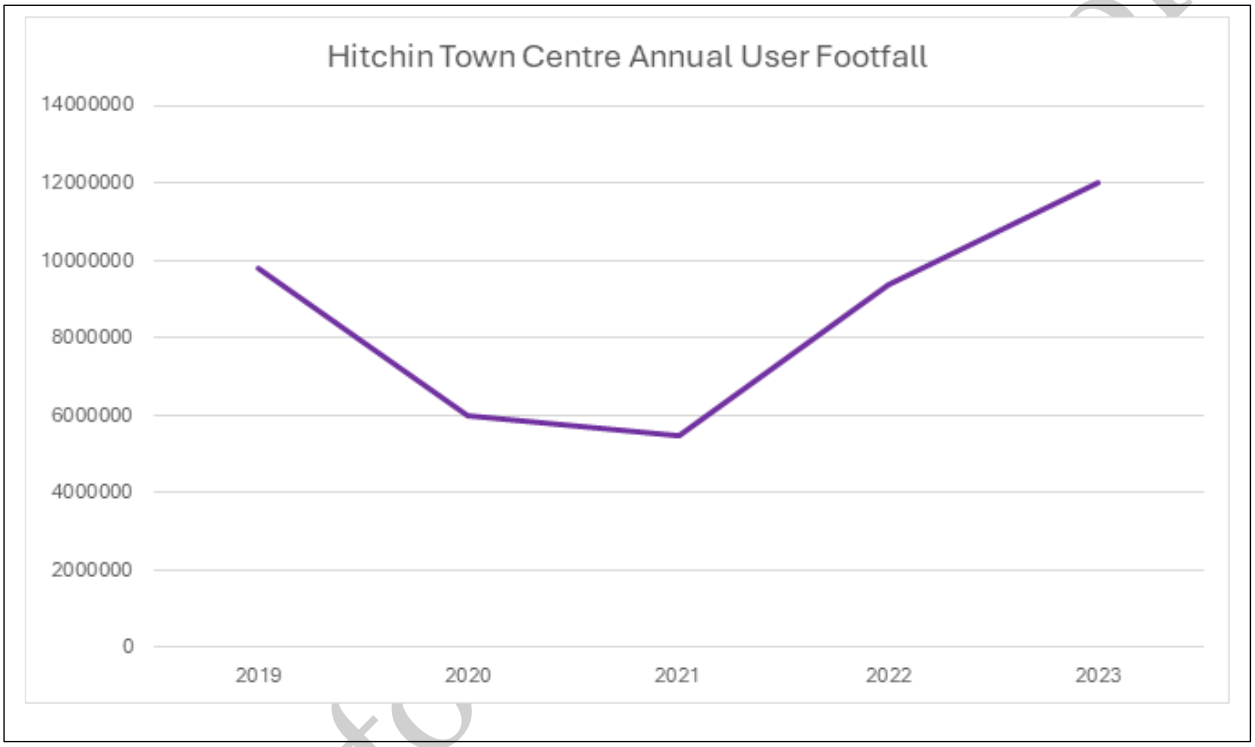

Figure 6: *Annual footfall in Hitchin Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ).*

Parking: While users report, via the Household Questionnaire and People & Places surveys, a relatively high volume of positive opinions regarding pedestrian access inside the town centre (as well as positive reactions to walking and cycling routes into the town), they also report negative to neutral opinions regarding both on and off-street parking provisions. There is a mix of Council owned and privately owned car parks that are accessible to the main shopping area, but provision is relatively fragmented with some having small capacity and/or located up-hill from the centre. These provide a varied amount of parking in terms of on and off-street, short and long-stay, location, charging periods and price.

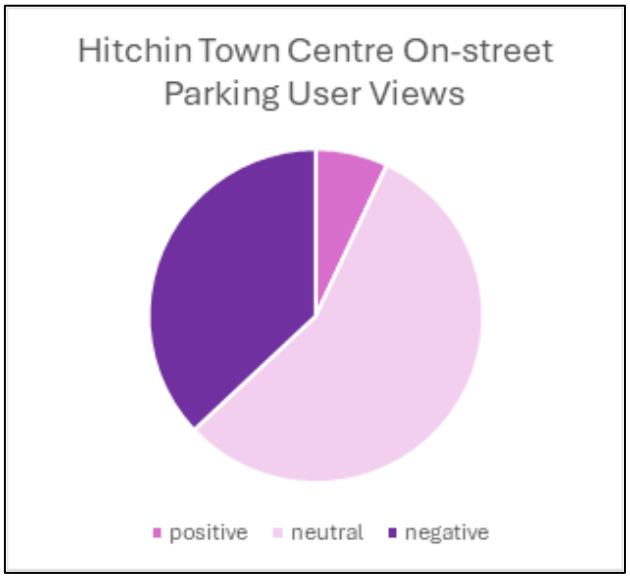

Figure 7: *On-street parking views by Hitchin town centre users. Users lack positive views. (People & Places, 2022).*

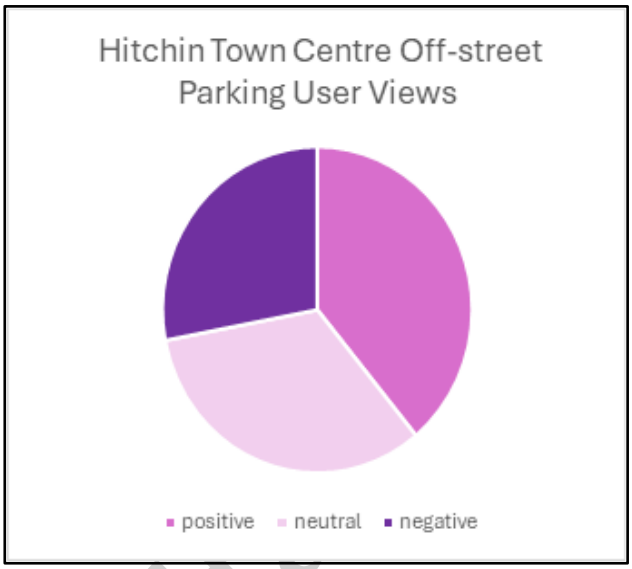

Figure 8: *Off-street parking views by Hitchin town centre users. Users are generally split between positive, neutral and negative views. (People & Places, 2022).*

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Community

Hitchin has a good provision of community facilities, such as the North Hertfordshire Museum and Hitchin Town Hall (both located adjacent to High Street/ Bancroft Road), and various community venues, such as The Block Community Hub, Signing Rooms and St. Mary's Church. The community spaces accommodate a variety of community functions with spaces to hire for external events. Additionally, and linked to promoting the town centre's offer, Visit Hitchin founded in 2009, the town's Business Improvement District (BID), helps to facilitate community culture through programming the Market Square events. Via the North Herts' Communities Partnership Team, Hitchin users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroot grants and hear about important updates, and also Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

The Hitchin Market is open four days a week and connects a community of market traders invested in raising and maintaining the profile of the town centre to boost the local economy. Moreover, Visit Hitchin hosts over 600 local businesses contributing via a business rates levy to inspire "visitors to the town to stay longer, spend more money and return more frequently." As is set out to be achieved through events, seasonal displays, nighttime security, graffiti removal, online promotion, and business support.

Design-wise, Hitchin's Primary Shopping Area generally follows good design to deter anti-social behaviour using natural surveillance, interactive shop facades, clear lines of sight, and pedestrian paths, although the historic and cosy character of the wider town does foster narrow side streets and routes that do not clearly indicate an end point or how to exit the area. To benefit the community health in Hitchin, and overlapping with both the built environment and accessibility, wayfinding signs would be helpful to indicate clear routes to key amenities throughout the town centre. This will help to facilitate a more pleasant experience with less stress for users and bolster the existing walking culture.

Churchgate lacks pedestrian permeability and good design to invite users to enter, spend time and shop there; there is also a high vacancy rate for tenants in this development, resulting in dead frontages. Directly attached behind the Churchgate shopping centre, the outdoor market has many physical and metal manmade elements that block lines of sight and provide opportunities to hide behind. Arguably, although the path around St. Mary's Churchyard (Churchyard Walk) has vulnerabilities, such as mid-height walls and darker paths at night, in regard to designing out crime, the cosy and historic nature of this path contributes to the town's unique setting.

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Appendix 3B: Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Evidence Notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Letchworth Garden City (Letchworth)are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- visit time,
- Local Needs Index and
- Article 4 Directions**.**

Mix of Uses: There are 244 retail and service units within Letchworth town centre's designated shopping frontages; the mix of uses is set out in ***Table 4*** below, which is compared with the District and UK averages. Generally, Letchworth has a broad offer with a variety of type of commercial uses, although participants in the Household Survey have indicated a desire for improved quality in the comparison shops. Of the comparison shops, Letchworth has higher than average frequency of charity shops, as well as those that provide books, crafts and hobby materials, but lower than average for shops that sell clothing and footwear. Notably, there is a significant percentage of vacancies at 19.7%, higher than the 13.9% UK average. Of the 244 units, approximately 26% of this is comparison retail, 12% restaurant and 24% other non-retail service (such as hairdressers). Perhaps mirroring the town centre's history of sobriety, Letchworth has 4 pubs making up just 1.6% of retail units; this falls below both the district and the UK averages.

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units (UK avg.)
Convenience retail	12	4.9	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	64	26.2	27.8	27.7
Financial/Professional	17	7.0	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	30	12.3	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	4	1.6	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	10	4.1	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	59	24.2	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	48	19.7	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	244	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4: *Mix of retail and service uses – Letchworth town centre (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

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Vacancy rate and economic vitality: There were 48 vacant units within the centre at the time of the Council's 2023 land use survey, equating to a vacancy rate of 19.7%, which is well above both the District and UK averages. Such a high vacancy rate could support distributing a portion of the growth capacity projections, especially for retailers that would service Hitchin and Baldock residents, into Letchworth town centre.

Boundary and frontages: The existing town centre boundary for Letchworth can be found in ***Figure 9*****;** notably a significant area that is included within the boundary does not actively host commercial or mixed-use development.

Figure 9: *Letchworth town centre, depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and retail land use in orange (town centre area: 274,506 sq.m).*

Development Allocations: Based on the Local Plan (2011 – 2031), there are three town centre allocations as mixed-use enhancement opportunity sites in Letchworth.

LG19 The Wynd: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 4,500 sq.m of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas.

Since the time that The Wynd was allocated for redevelopment, the landowners and tenants have invested in the area. This investment, including a popular play area, has improved the footfall to the area, vibrancy and quality of the public realm.

LG20 Gernon Road: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 1,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas.

Since the time that Gernon Road was allocated for redevelopment, the site, excluding the county library, has been redeveloped. The development of homes and an office for Croudace Homes has been completed.

LG21 Arena Parade: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 5,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas.

Since the time that Arena Parade was allocated for redevelopment, the site has undergone some improvement works. However, the buildings are outdated with the need for improvements and repairs.

Garden Square Shopping Centre: Since the adoption of the Local Plan (2011 -2031), this proposed development opportunity has arisen and will be subject to a Planning Performance Agreement, including the preparation of a master plan for the site. Guidance is provided in Part 2 and Part 3 of the Town Centres Strategy.

Leisure: Letchworth visitors take part in non-food shopping, window shopping and leisure activities more than the combined district average. Compared to other town centres, visitors to Letchworth less frequently visit pubs and restaurants. Interestingly, leisure activities are 18.4%, while the district average is 9.9%. Considering Letchworth's origin as a place for craft, art and innovation, future retail and leisure offer could seek to maintain and support such experiences and artistic activities.

Activity	Letchworth %	Average % across all town centres
Go for walk	0.4	0.9
Cafe/pub/restaurant	43.5	46.8
Leisure activity	18.4	9.9

Table 5: *Participation in leisure activities by Letchworth town centre users (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

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Visit time: According to the NEMS household telephone survey (2024), 49% of respondents (from the wider region and locals) dwell for more than 1 hour in Letchworth town centre. Letchworth is the second highest town centre for users to dwell for longer than an hour, following behind Hitchin which holds the longest user dwell time.

Similarly, the People & Places Recovery Report (2022) also found that Letchworth was the second highest town centre for dwell time for longer than an hour (74%); this was based on users surveyed from Letchworth. While the percentages for Letchworth vary between surveys, the order remains the same in relation to the other town centres – this indicates Letchworth has maintained its relative status over the years and between users groups, those who live locally or more distant.

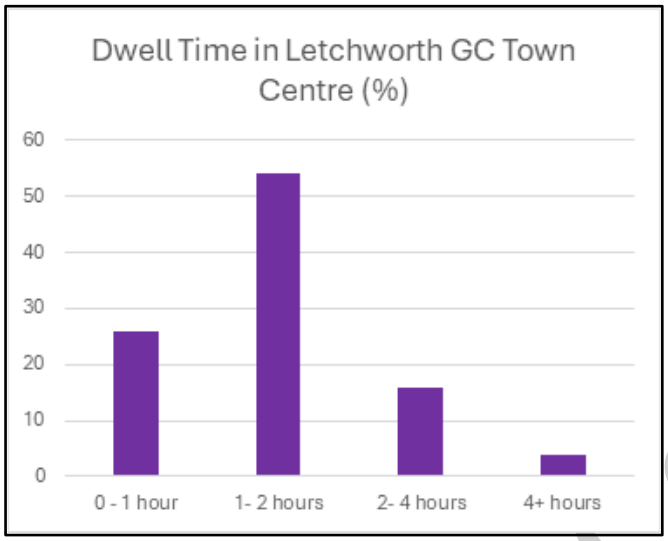

Figure 10: *Dwell time for Letchworth town centre users during one year period 2023 – 2024 (HUQ).*

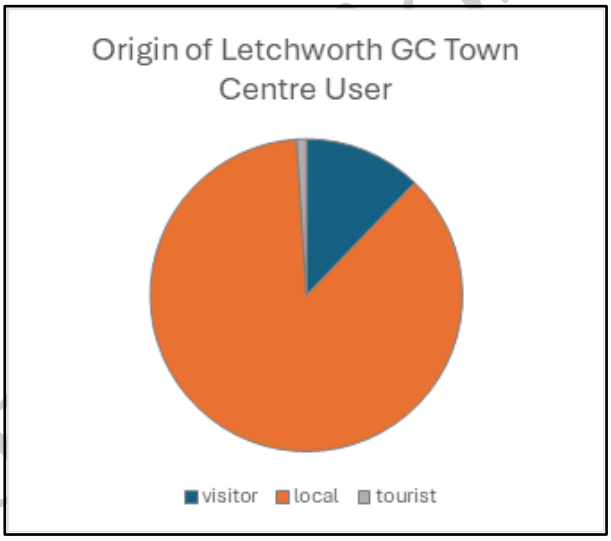

Figure 11: *Origin of Letchworth GC town centre users (People & Places, 2022).*

Local Needs Index: A standardised Local Nees Index of Letchworth GC town centre was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Letchworth GC scored 16 out of 16, meeting all types of listed services. Letchworth is in an advantageous position to build on a strong and complete mix of essential services to further incentivise visitors to shop, stay and recreate in the town centre.

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)
Hitchin	Town Centre	15
Letchworth	Town Centre	16
Royston	Town Centre	14
Baldock	Town Centre	12

Table 6: *Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

Planning protections - Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings: Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

Figure 12: *Planning protections in Letchworth town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.*

Built environment

The built environment conditions for Letchworth are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces

Design and public realm: As outlined in the planning of the world's first Garden City, the town follows a masterplan on the principle of balance using a central town square with radiating axes and grid pattern layouts. This balance integrates high quality residential homes with natural pursuits, local employment and accessible transport, areas of open space, commercial shopping and housing. Letchworth was the creation of a town dominated by open space, varied types of trees to symbolise distinct areas of the town, and groups of houses oriented to obtain the maximum benefits of daylight. Such master planning garnered widespread interest and led to the development of pioneer planning legislation and the founding of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1914.

In the 1990s, the environmental quality of Letchworth town centre improved following significant interventions in the public realm focused on consistency of design and was likely supported by the town's unique land ownership context; one main owner (Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation) in combination with the Council's holdings. The centre has a pleasant shopping environment, particularly from pedestrian-oriented improvements along Eastcheap and Leys Avenue, yet the hierarchy of streets lacks clear order, and users report that there is no one distinct core area of the town centre. Partial or full pedestrianisation exists in the main shopping area and contributes towards the town's sense of spaciousness; such is the case in The Wynd, Arcade, and Garden Square Centre.

The centre has wide, clean pavements and several areas of open space and planting. Street furniture is provided along the length of Leys Avenue including benches, bins, and street lighting. Commercial units are generally well maintained and are of good quality. Leys Square provides landscaped seating areas, water features and sculptures, which enhances the appearance of the town centre. The centre has attractive arcades, e.g. the covered Arcade, which connects Leys Avenue with Station Road. The Wynd area has lower density and provides an enclosed pedestrianised area for cafe seating, a children's playground, and community garden. The Garden Square Shopping Centre is partially covered and located off Eastcheap with several units occupied by national retailers. However, although this shopping centre is pedestrianised, it is relatively unattractive compared to the rest of the centre and has a number of vacant units.

According to the People & Places Recovery & Development Plan (2022), and specifically the User Survey Section, Letchworth users are less negative towards the status of the public realm and more critical of what services the town centre has to offer. Similarly, the health checks within the Retail and Town Centres Study (2024) indicate that the public realm, or the environmental quality of Letchworth's town centre, is regarded positively by users, and thus a strength.

Historic Character: Although Letchworth is a relatively recent town centre compared to Baldock, Hitchin and Royston, it does hold important historical value as the world's first Garden City. As such, Letchworth town centre sits entirely within the wider Conservation Area and hosts a series of heritage

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and listed buildings, which are protected through listed building designations. In particular, the Museum, The Grammar School and The Town Hall border the important site of Broadway Gardens and feature a distinct Georgian design. Additionally, the Broadway Cinema is a unique repurposed art deco building from the 1930s. Other buildings throughout the town centre represent more modern styles and architecture, dating from the 1960s and 1970s. The more recently built development of Garden Square Shopping Centre stands out compared to other buildings in the town centre; according to the People & Places Recovery and Development Plan, "the frontage within the Garden Square Shopping Centre… was identified of poorer quality and less sympathetic to the character of Letchworth, and this detracts from the town centre appearance."

Overall, Letchworth has large buildings, often formal Georgian in style with rough cast brickwork and rich red tile roofs; they are two or three storeys with continuous façades and provide a high density interspersed throughout the town centre. Following the Garden City principle of balance, the scale and mass of the town's buildings are pleasantly counterbalanced by the relative width of the streets.

Any future development proposals in the town centre of Letchworth should be complementary, taking into consideration the design, layout, scale, material and colours of the surrounding character. There should be scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve.

Open and green spaces: Letchworth town centre has a pleasant public realm with consistent design, wide pedestrian paths, and open and green spaces that include both formal and informal types. Along Leys Avenue, there is water splash zone gently enclosed with street furniture: benches, garden planters, and bins. Additionally, outdoor seating areas nearby spill into this zone. On Eastcheap, there are many benches positioned along the wide pedestrian pavements. At the station, there is a small green park and memorial statue, although this resource is underperforming with reports of antisocial behaviour and a general low-quality environment due to overgrowth and litter, the Love Letchworth BID has undertaken improvements to this area. In the Wynd, there is a small route spanning roughly 70 meters transecting Openshaw Way's curved road that is pedestrianised with garden planters, cherry blossom trees, and outdoor seating from the small cafes. Directly beside this area is a children's playground and a community garden. In the northwest part of the town centre, along Broadway Avenue, the pedestrian routes are through a wide central footpath with benches, bushes, and small trees.

Formally, there is one green space within Letchworth's town centre boundary, Broadway Gardens. Howard Park is directly adjacent to the town centre boundary, and further, there are two formal green spaces nearby, Norton Common and The Grange Recreation Park. Norton Common and The Grange sit relatively close to one another and considering upcoming residential development of 900 homes bordering this area (LG1), there is a unique opportunity to connect the town centre to residences via these green links. Both the formal and informal open spaces should seek to be better connected to improve the town centre hierarchy of streets and user experience.

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Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Letchworth are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- mode of travel,
- footfall and
- parking.

Access and movement: Letchworth, according to Town Centre and Retail Study (2024) health checks, the town centre maintains a good quality public realm, including pedestrian paths, accessibility and quality of surfaces. Walkways and pavements within the town centre boundary are well kept and wide enough for users to walk without impediment. In recent years, Eastcheap and Leys Avenue have been resurfaced, as defined in the previous Letchworth Town Centre Strategy (2007), and now allocates less space for roads and parking; through this design pedestrians are given more priority to traverse the centre. While design on the material level is perceived positively by both experts and users, as understood from the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024) and the User Survey within the Letchworth Recovery and Development Plan (2022), wayfinding through the town centre and a hierarchy of streets towards a central core is not clear. As the Garden Square Shopping Centre has been identified as detracting from the historic quality of the town centre, future development here could be a catalyst to create a stronger hierarchy and network of streets to clearly symbolise the central core of the town.

Letchworth is a Sustainable Travel Town appointed by Hertfordshire County Council. In collaboration with local town organisations, North Herts seeks to support sustainable travel within the town boundary. This stipulates that "pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users will have a greater priority than they do at present, leading to a higher level of natural enforcement and behavioural change." North Herts Council is working with Love Letchworth BID, Herts County Council, and The Letchworth Heritage Foundation in this programme.

In 2022, Letchworth users were surveyed regarding various town centre perceptions and habits by People & Places. In relation to the built environment, the survey concluded that users wanted more convenient and cheaper parking options. Further, users shared that they travel to the town centre by foot (50%) and by car (47%), with the remaining 3% between cycling, bus or taxi. The Household Survey within the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024) pooled responses from a wide catchment area and found that the majority of respondents who visited Letchworth used the car.

Mode of Travel: Unique to Letchworth, the railway station is accessible and within the core town centre. The station provides direct access to London, Stevenage, Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City to the south, and Baldock, Royston and Cambridge to the north. Bus stops are located near the railway station on Station Road and Broadway and are accessible to the main shopping area. Bus routes link the centre with surrounding town, villages and neighbourhood centres.

The Household Survey found that the majority of respondents who visited Letchworth in the last year used the car as the main mode of transport. Comparatively, the People & Places Recovery & Development Report (2022) found that 50% of users report their preference to travel to the town centre

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by foot at 50% and by car at 47%. Based on origin of users and duration of visit, it can be concluded that locals and nearby residents (87%) visit the town centre frequently for shorter durations (under 2 hours) and are more likely to travel by foot (50%) compared to visitors traveling in from out of town (12%). who are more likely to stay for longer and use the car.

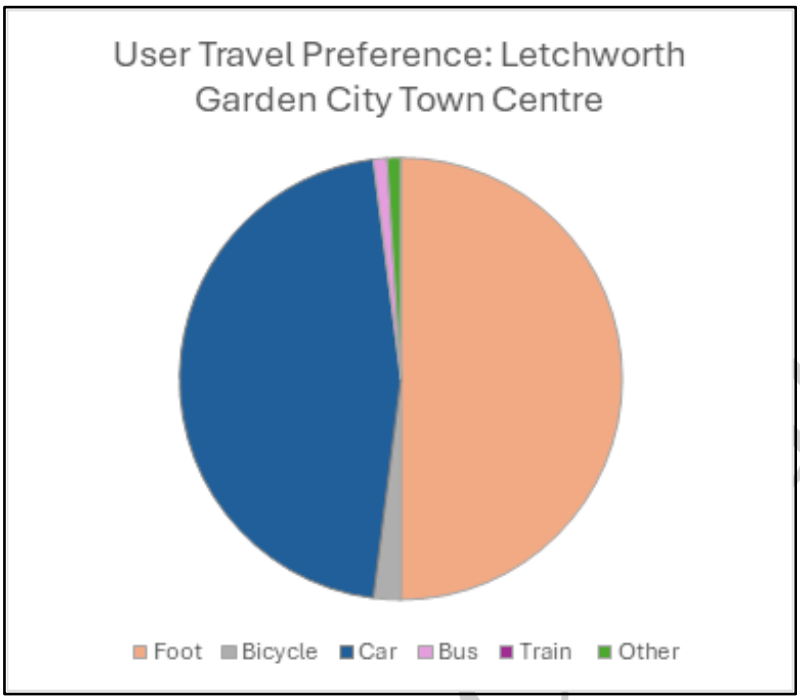

Figure 13: *User travel preference in Letchworth town centre (People & Places, 2022)*

Footfall: The district's HUQ footfall data indicates that Letchworth town centre has experienced the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic with a reduced annual footfall from just about 9 million in 2019 to approximately 5 million in 2020 with a plateau in 2021 followed by a gradual uptick to approximately 6 million in 2023. Although the town centre has improved since Covid-19, it has not returned to pre-pandemic vibrancy levels using footfall as an indicator.

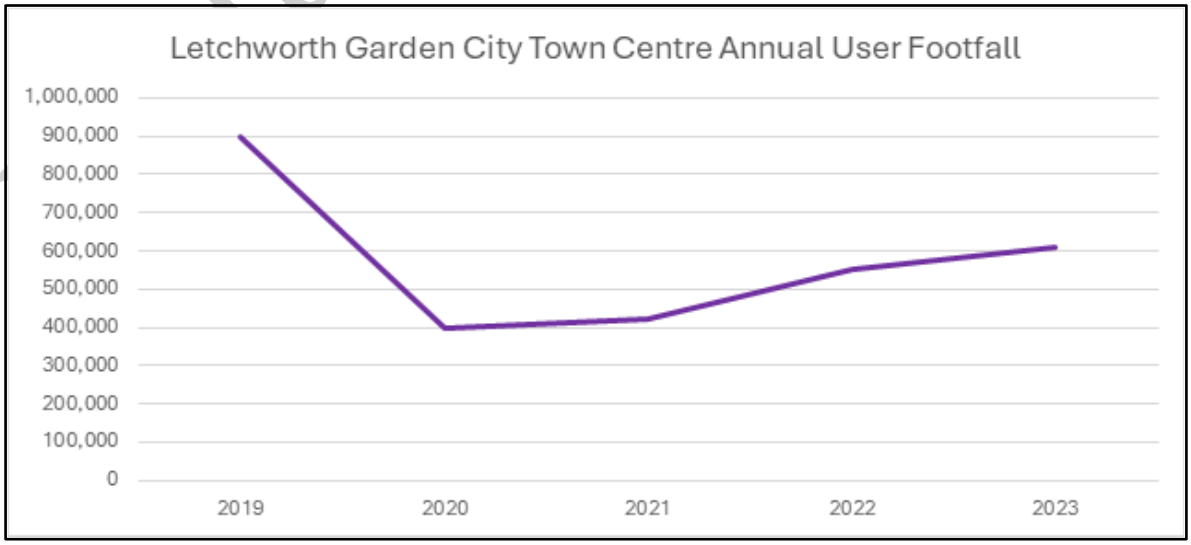

Figure 14: *Annual footfall in Letchworth Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ)*

Parking: As the world's first Garden City, Letchworth town centre was built with a masterplan, consisting of radiating axes and grid patterns that are interspersed with a variety of parking, public transport, and active travel options. Specific to parking, there is adequate provision with a mix of both private and council-owned lots, as well as on-street and off-street options. In general, the off-street car parks are conveniently located within the town centre and major shopping destinations; for example, the Garden Square multi-storey car park, Morrisons open car park, and The Wynd car park.

Town centre users are roughly 70% content (positive to neutral feelings) towards the on-street parking offer and roughly 80% content (positive to neutral feelings) towards the off-street parking offer. According to the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024), particularly the Household Survey, Letchworth parking availability was regarded more positively compared to parking availability in the other town centres. Unsurprisingly, as parking surveys frequently show negative responses on cost, the respondents were relatively more negative than positive for Letchworth town centre both for the parking costs and compared to other town centres.

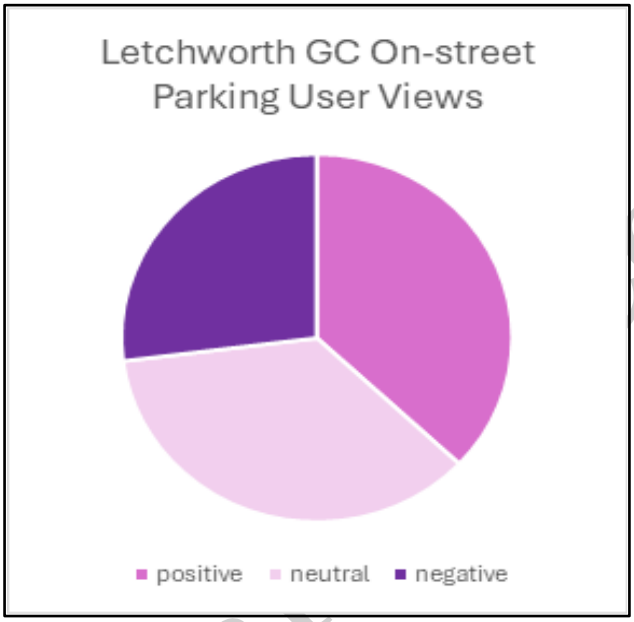

Figure 15: *On-street parking views by Letchworth users. Over 70% or users respond with positive or neutral views (People & Places, 2022).*

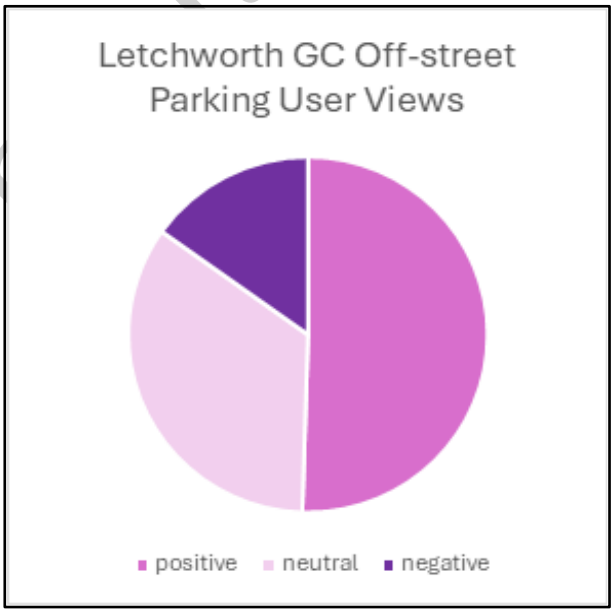

Figure 16: *Off-street parking views by Letchworth users. Users are largely positive to neutral (People & Places, 2022).*

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Community

Letchworth has a good provision of community facilities, including Letchworth Library, Letchworth Youth Centre, and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, including an information centre and town history museum. These various community spaces accommodate a variety of community functions with spaces to hire for external events. Additionally, the District's council offices are within the town centre and provide support and services. Via the North Herts' Communities Partnership Team,

Letchworth users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroot grants and hear about important updates as well as the Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

A key stakeholder of the town centre that also contributes to the promotion and marketing is Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (LGCHF); they seek to "manage assets and investment to generate income … to care for the Garden City estate and support [the] local community, providing access to green spaces and a range of culture, heritage, learning and leisure facilities.

A second key stakeholder of the town centre that also contributes to the promotion and marketing is Love Letchworth BID as this organisation helps to facilitate a community culture through programming public events and building business capacity with locals. Love Letchworth BID works on four streams of projects to boost the town centre's vitality: facilitating regular and seasonal events, bringing accessible transport and parking, marketing promotion with digital media, and improving the range and quality of social, leisure, service, and retail offer in the town centre.

Both LGCHF and Love Letchworth BID work with town centre businesses, including the Garden Square Shopping Centre, to improve user experience and look ahead to the future. At present, the Garden Square Shopping Centre is underperforming, especially regarding above ground floor units, be that commercial or residential leases. There is potential to improve the occupancy and vibrancy of the Garden Square Shopping Centre alongside a paired promotion and marketing campaign.

Considering access to resources and services, Letchworth meets all 16 aspects within the Local Needs Index. Letchworth has plentiful resources and services within the town centres, thereby supporting a robust community culture, events and programmes, along with incentivising higher footfall and longer dwell times for visitors.

Letchworth's environment includes interactive shop facades, clear lines of sight, pedestrian paths, and opportunities for rest to create high-quality places that support community use and congregating. Leys Avenue, Broadway, Eastcheap and The Wynd promote Garden City principles through balanced design and human-scale architecture. Such design, combined with higher footfall, thus natural surveillance, deters anti-social behaviour. The open and green spaces of Broadway Gardens and Howard Park both supports community well-being to provide uses with recreational opportunities and natural features. These spaces are opportunities to foster deeper well-being for town centre users through physical health, exposure to green features and community event programming.

Arguably, the Letchworth railway forecourt poses as a challenge to public safety due to its overgrown plants, lack of lighting and underused pedestrian route through the parklet; station users are often observed walking around the parklet to the wider sidewalk routes.

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Appendix 3C: Royston Town Centre Evidence Notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Royston are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- visit time,
- Local Needs Index and
- planning protections**.**

Mix of uses: Royston town centre's designated shopping frontages have 145 retail and service units, and the mix of uses is set out in ***Table 7***, which is compared with the District and UK averages. On average, there are more restaurants, professional services and other non-retail services (such as barbers). There is a lower-than-average presence of convenience stores and pubs. Royston retail profile supports a higher dwell time for visitors that do come to the town centre for sit down meal and/or meeting for a professional service.

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units (UK avg.)
Convenience retail	5	3.4	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	42	29.0	27.8	27.7
Financial/Professional	15	10.3	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	19	13.1	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	3	2.1	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	8	5.5	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	43	29.7	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	10	6.9	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	145	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7: *Mix of retail and service uses – Royston town centre (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

Vacancy rate and economic vitality: There were 10 vacant units within the centre at the time of the Council's 2023 land use survey, equating to a vacancy rate of 6.9%, which is below the District and UK averages. This low vacancy rate suggests the supply of shop premises is in line with demand.

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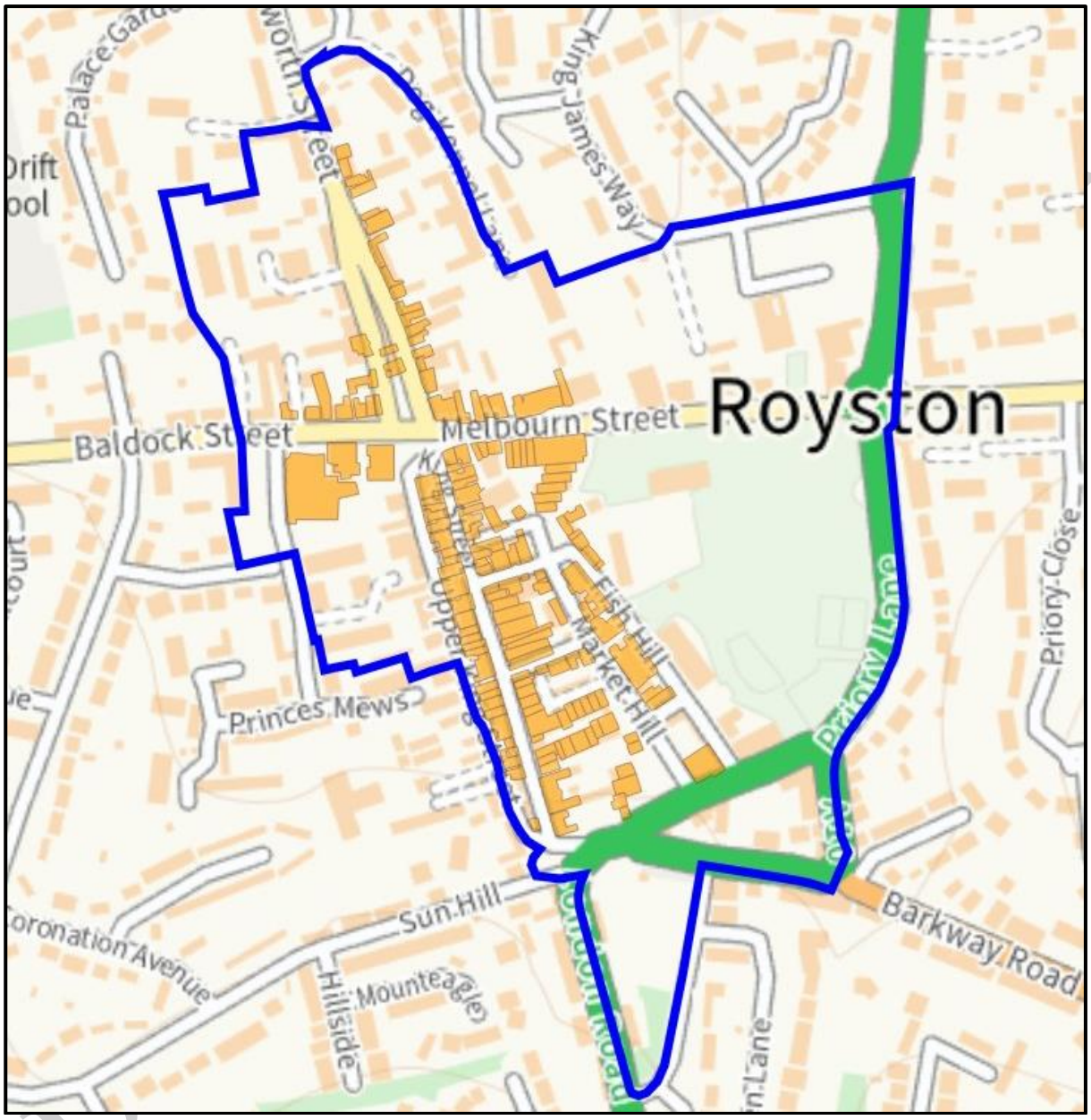
Boundary and frontages: The existing town centre boundary for Royston can be found in ***Figure 17***, notably a significant are does not actively host commercial or mixed-use development (town centre area: 174,466 sq.m) within the current boundary.



*F**igure 17:** Royston town centre depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and commercial retail land use in orange (town centre area: 174,466 sq.m).*

Development allocations: Based on the Local Plan (2011 – 2031), there is one mixed use town centre allocation in Royston.

> **RY12 Town Hall:** This allocation proposes that the current site is redeveloped to provide 4,000 sq.m of additional main town centre use floorspace, and provision of residential

accommodation on upper floors. The policy identifies the key considerations to be covered, including the potential retention of the Town Hall.

Since the time that the Town Hall site was allocated for redevelopment, the site has had limited development activity.

Leisure: As shown in ***Table 8***, leisure in Royston is primarily oriented around food and beverage pastimes, such as frequenting restaurants, as to be expected based on the breakdown of type of service unit within the centre. By ratio, Royston has more restaurants by ratio than the UK average and the combined average of North Herts' town centres, yet based on the household survey, a lower percentage of users frequent Royston's cafes and pubs as a leisure pastime (34.1%) compared to the North Herts' town centre average (46.8%).

Activity	Royston %	Average % across all town centres
Go for walk	1.3	0.9
Cafe/pub/restaurant	34.1	46.8
Leisure activity	8.3	9.9

Table 8: *Participation in leisure activities by Royston town centre users (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

Visit time: According to the NEMS household survey (2024), 35% of respondents dwell for more than 1 hour in Royston town centre. Compared to the other town centres, Royston has the lowest frequency for dwell time for more than one hour. Similarly, in the People &Places User Survey, Royston came in last with the lowest percentage for town users to dwell for longer than an hour (58%). Although the percentages vary between NEMS (2024) and the People & Place's survey (2022), the order remains the same. This indicates that Royston has maintained its status in relation to the other town centres but perhaps has dropped further in attraction to visitors within this order. Alternatively, as the sample populations vary, the NEMS survey is a broader sample from a wider catchment, whereas the People & Places survey engaged with more local users, the visitors are more drastically less enticed to visit Royston compared to the locals and in the context of the other towns in the district.

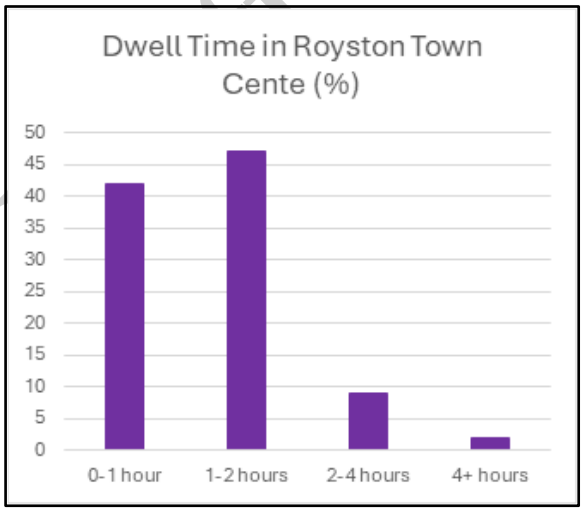


Figure 18: *Dwell time for Royston town centre users in one year period from 2023 – 2024 (HUQ)*

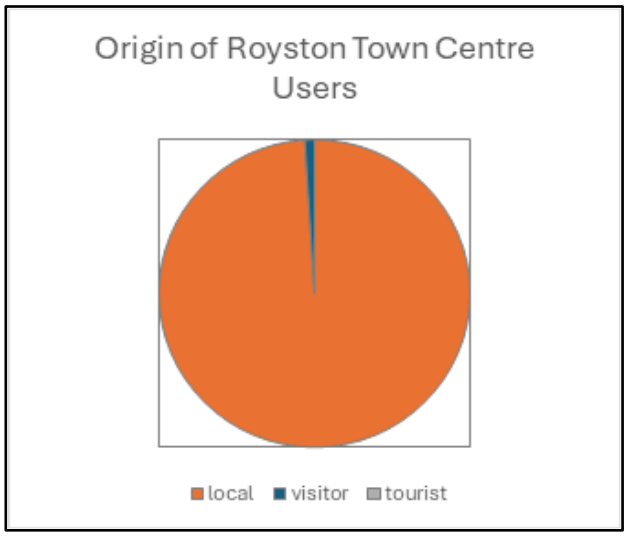


Figure 19: *Origin of Royston town centre users. The great majority are local users (People & Places, 2022.*

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Local Needs Index: A standardised Local Nees Index of Royston town centre was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Royston scored 14 out of 16, technically lacking an off-license and community hall. Whilst Royston does not have a standalone community hall, it does have community halls within several churches on the town centre periphery. Additionally, Royston Town Council premises are within the town centre and have rooms for hire; perhaps this also suffices for community convening. The Tesco Express at the top of Market Hill in the town centre likely provides a similar service to an off-license shop.

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)
Hitchin	Town Centre	15
Letchworth	Town Centre	16
Royston	Town Centre	14
Baldock	Town Centre	12

Table 9: *Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

Planning protections - Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings: Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

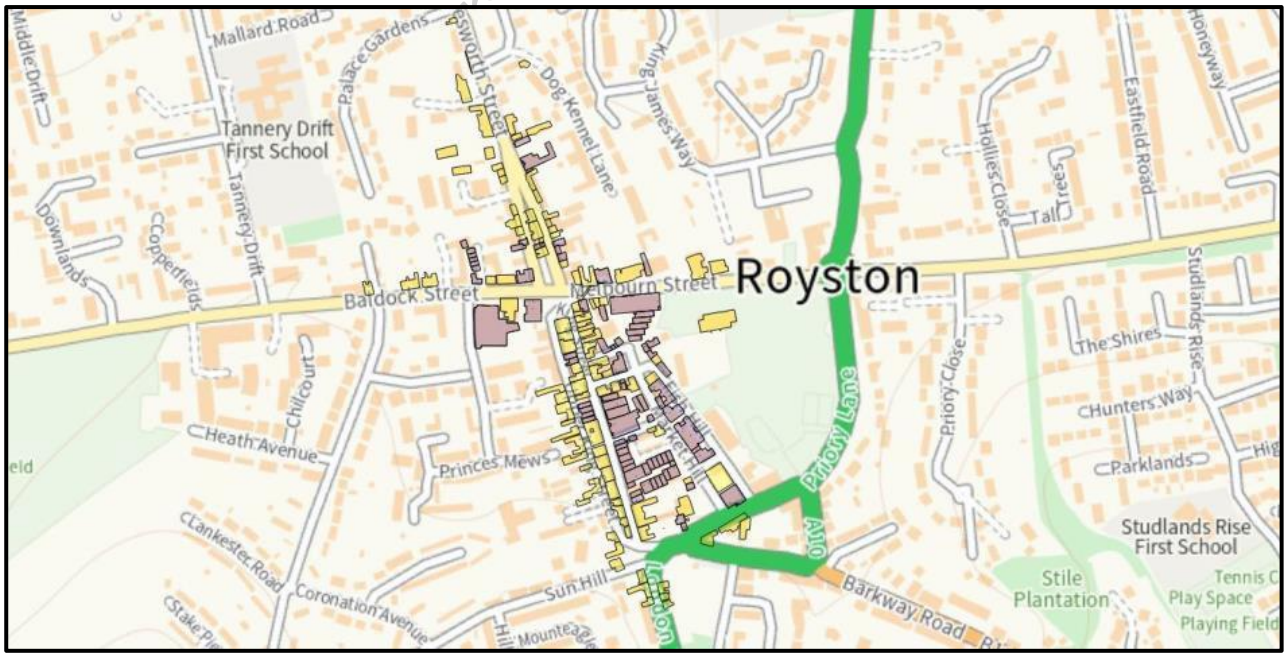

Figure 20. *Planning protections in Royston town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.*

Built environment

The built environmental conditions for Royston are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces

Design and public realm: Royston town centre is located in the northeast of North Herts, southwest of Cambridge. It is smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth and primarily serves the day- to-day shopping, food, beverage, and service needs of local residents, although the out-of-centre Tesco Extra, Aldi, and M&S stores serve wider catchment areas. The structure of the centre is linear, stretching over 500 metres north-south with narrow streets and a slight hill incline north-south. The quality of the public realm in terms of maintenance, street furniture, and safety is good. Throughout the town centre, there are several signs and plaques to depict the heritage and history of Royston, especially related to the Royston Cave and King James I hunting expeditions.

Historic character: As a town dating back to late 12th century, Royston holds significant heritage significance. Both the current and proposed town centre boundaries are entirely within the wider Conservation Area, as shown in Figure X.

As noted in the Conservation Area Townscape Analysis and Conservation Area Statement, the town layout is medieval in its pattern with buildings set adjacently to the road on long narrow plots, with the narrowest end onto the street. This arrangement is typical of the medieval period and plots of this shape are known as 'burgage' plots. The main buildings (houses or shops) were positioned closest to the thoroughfare with workshops and outbuildings in the plots behind.

Importantly, the medieval market was situated at the main crossroads of the historic roads known as The Cross, in a wide part of Ermine Street to the north and south of the crossroads. Over time, the stalls occupying these areas became permanent resulting in an island of buildings within Kneesworth Street and the High Street forming Upper and Lower King Streets. The High Street is a relatively narrow, with a slight slope, but straight street, reflecting its origins as the direct route through the town to and from London. The town centre streets are narrow with narrow pedestrian paths; the streets lack trees and are paved with similar materials: York stone and brown/grey bricks. This results in a cold feeling public realm and certain sections of the town, primarily the narrow alleys linking High Street to Upper King Street, are shaded. Buildings are often two storey and date back to the 18th and 19th centuries.

There are numerous listed buildings within Royston town centre, frequently located on Fish Hill, Baldock Road, Kneesworth Street, and King Street. Important buildings or sites include: The Priory, King James' Palace and Royston Cave.

In accordance with Historic Environment Policy HE1 - Designated heritage assets from the Local Plan 2011 - 2031, historical assets such as designated Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens must continue to be protected and maintained. Further, any future development must respect an overall emphasis on the preservation and enhancement of the

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existing fabric in order to maintain continuity throughout the town; and where new building takes place, the design, layout, scale, material and colours should blend with the established character.

Open and green spaces: The layout of Royston town centre has evolved from a medieval market town and has major crossroads with narrow streets, pedestrian paths and plots. The narrow and compact nature of the town centre affords limited open or green spaces. At the base of High Street, an area called The Cross, there is a small recreation area including info boards, benches, a statue, and tree landscaping with views towards north and south. Additionally, Fish Hill has an enclosed square with benches and trees oriented toward the historic Courthouse that has been repurposed as a restaurant.

There is one formal green open space within Royston town centre boundary, the Priory Memorial Gardens; it is located south of Melbourn Street on the eastern side of the town. This green resource is adjacent to the Town Hall and Royston Police Station, and it wraps around the Saint John the Baptist Church. Future interventions should ensure strong access and connections to the Priory Memorial Gardens to offer town centre visitors recess in green space.

Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Royston are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- parking,
- mode of travel and
- footfall.

Access and movement: Royston, like Letchworth, is part of the Sustainable Travel Town programme, which is bringing together Herts County Council, North Herts District Council, Royston Town Council and Royston First Business Improvement District (BID) in a collaboration to develop and deliver plans to support sustainable travel in and around the town. One of the programme's objectives is that "pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users will have a greater priority than they do at present, leading to a higher level of natural enforcement and behavioural change."

The town centre is linear in structure whilst High Street, Market Hill and linking streets provide a natural circuit for pedestrians. Pavements are generally well maintained but narrow, particularly on Kneesworth Street and parts of the High Street. Cycle parking is available. The volume of through-traffic along Baldock Street/Melbourn Street acts as a barrier to pedestrian movement between the High Street and Kneesworth Street. Further west and east there are zebra crossings.

Mode of Travel: Royston Railway Station is about 600 metres (approximately 9 minutes to walk) north of the Baldock Street and Melbourn Street junction.

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Based on NEMS Household survey, the majority of visitors use a car to reach Royston. Additionally, based on the People & Places Report User Survey, 58% of Royston users surveyed travel to the centre by foot, and 39% travel by car; this sample population was made up of 99% locals and 1% visitors (living outside the postcode, but within a 30-minute drive). This indicates that locals are more likely to walk to the centre, whereas respondents from the wider Study Area will arrive by car.

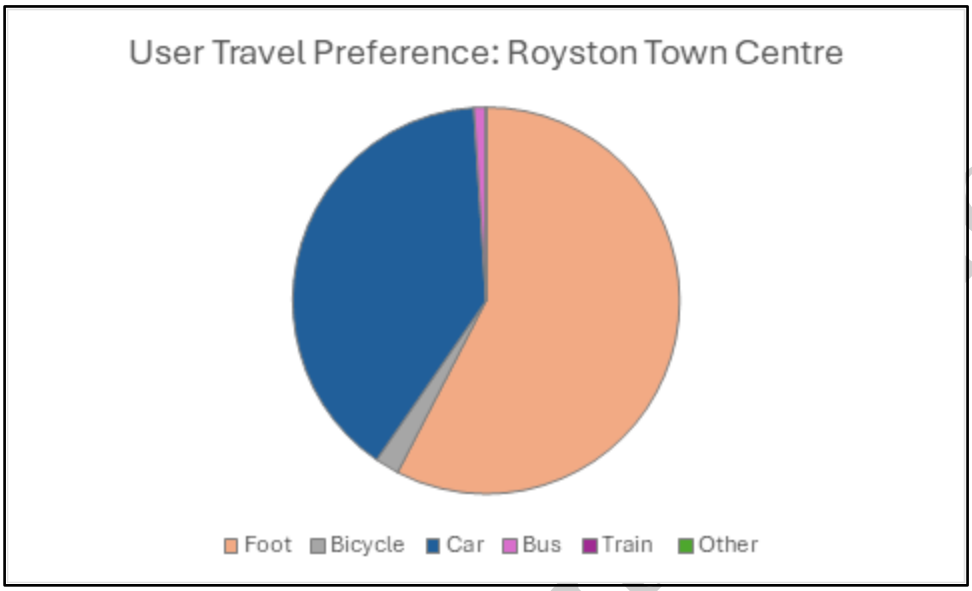

Figure 20: *User travel preference into Royston town centre (People & Places, 2022).*

Footfall: Royston town centre's annual HUQ footfall data indicates that this town is no different from the other 3 town centres of the district in that is has negatively experienced the effects of Covid-19 pandemic. In 2019, the annual footfall went from roughly 7 million to 4 million in 2020 and stays relatively constant to 2021. A brief bounce back from the pandemic shows the footfall increasing in 2022 to just shy of 6 million, to then drop back down in 2023 to below 5 million. Interestingly, Royston's trend to bounce back in 2022 and reduce again in 2023 is similar to Baldock's annual footfall data.

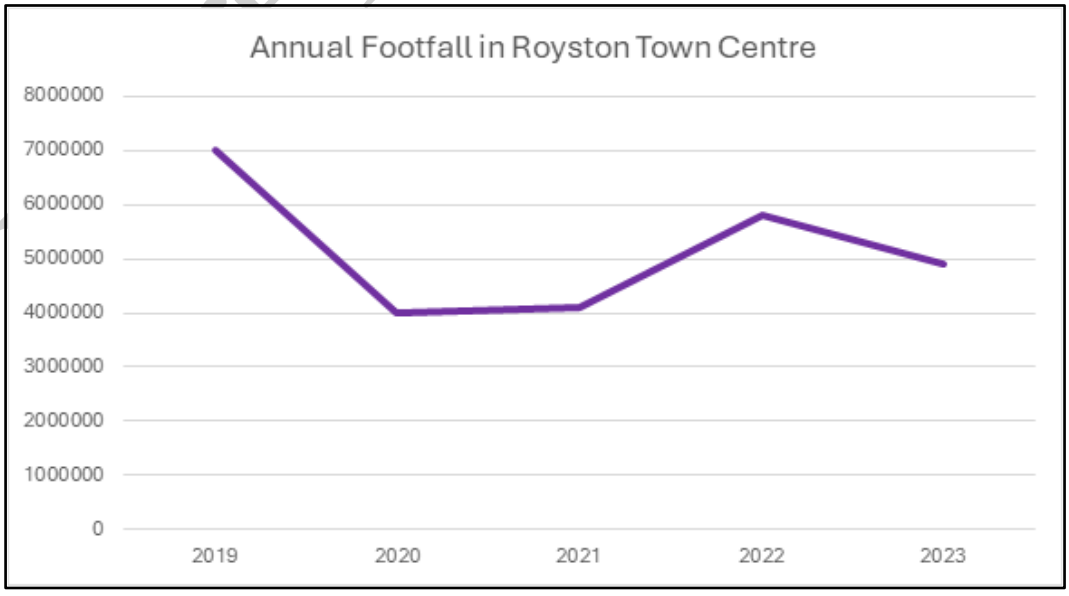

Figure 21: *Annual footfall in Royston Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ).*

Parking: Royston town centre car parks are accessible to the main shopping area, but provision is relatively fragmented with four of the six car parks providing less than 35 spaces. According to Lichfields' 2024 study, respondents who visit Royston responded relatively more negatively to parking offer, availability and cost, than any other town centre. Similarly, in the People & Places 2022 Recovery and Development Plan, Royston users share negative perceptions on parking especially on-street offer (approximately 85% have neutral to negative views for on-street parking and 65% have neutral to negative views for off-street parking). Due to the physical layout of the town, there is limited to ability to provide car parking directly on town centre streets. Interestingly, these same users report positive opinions on both road links and pedestrian access throughout the town centre.

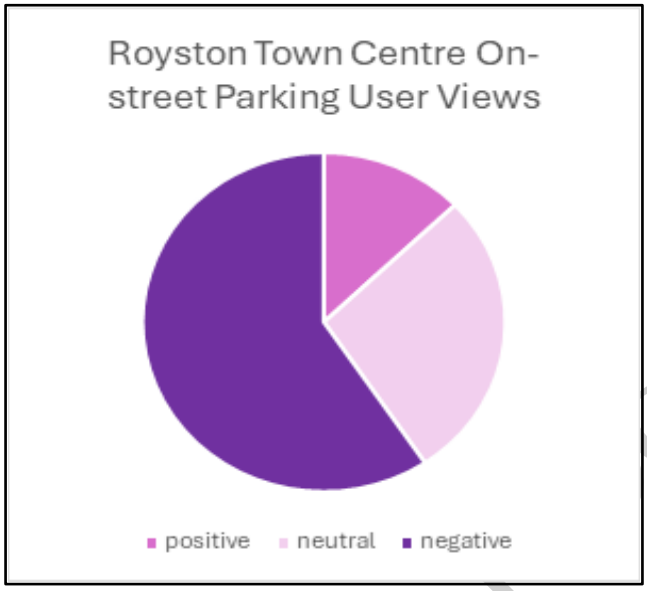

Figure 22: *On-street parking views by Royston town centre users. 60% of users respond with negative views (People & Places, 2022).*

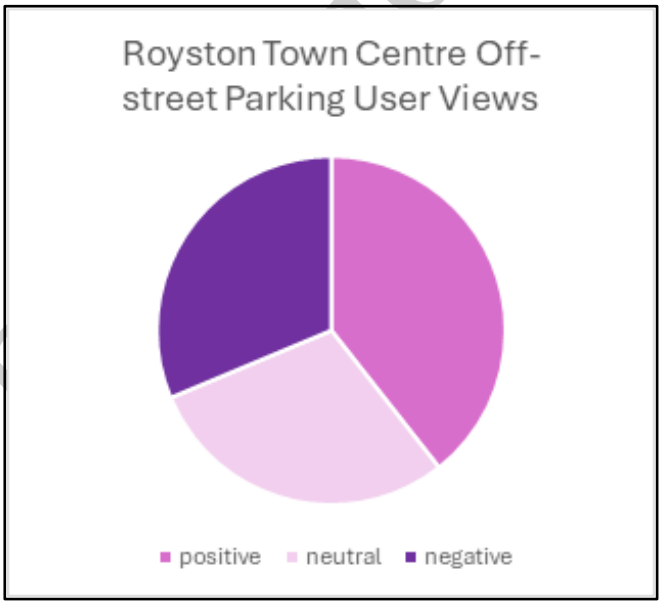

Figure 23: *Off-street parking views by Royston town centre users. Users are generally evenly split between positive, neutral and negative views (People & Places, 2022).*

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Community

For a town centre of its size, Royston has a good provision of community facilities with a library, police station, town hall, and health centre within the core. As previously referenced, users have access to community halls surrounding the town centre via local churches, and further rooms for hire within Royston Town Council. These are essential to the functioning of the town and provide much-needed spaces for communal gatherings and events. Via North Herts' Community Partnerships Team, Royston users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroot grants and hear about important updates, and also Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

Royston holds a unique historic market town character defined by its medieval street layout, compact size, and heritage, featured on the Royston Town Trail, interspersed between local shops, cafes and restaurants.

Royston is unique compared to the other three towns, as it is the only town in the district with a local town council, Royston Town Council. Royston First, the town's Business Improvement District founded in 2009, often collaborates with the town council to improve the status of Royston town centre. In this aim, Royston First applies the business levy back into local area through 5 key areas: town investment (such as the Youth Employment Initiative), events (local business awards), welcome and security (ShopSafe app), business support (first aid training), and marketing (digital signage).

Royston was awarded the badge of Sustainable Travel Town to pilot active travel mechanisms for overall public health and climate action. These different groups, Royston Town Council, Royston First and Royston Sustainable Travel Town consortium work to promote the profile Royston town centre. While Royston is within North Herts, it borders Cambridgeshire Country Council, and experiences competition in market expenditure to Cambridge.

The health centre, Granta Market Hill Surgery operated by the NHS, is located along Market Hill and is an important resource for community health. This amenity also draws in visitors to the town centre to either trip chain alongside their appointment, or for carers, family members etc. (who have travelled in with the Granta Market Hill patient) can visit the town centre during the appointment.

Whilst Royston town centre has a handful of long-term challenges related to its historic morphology, main vehicle road bisecting the town centre, and topography sloped hill, the main High Street offers users a pleasant experience with good design, such as prioritising pedestrians, interactive facades, and opportunities to rest with natural surveillance. The open space at The Cross and at the intersection of Jepps Lane and Fish Hill are good opportunities to facilitate community programming and spaces for recreation.

Baldock Street / Melbourn Street bisect the town centre and positions users in competition with a major vehicle road to cross safely. This road also arguably acts as a perceptual barrier to disconnect Kneesworth Street and Lower King Street from the rest of the town centre. Further, along these streets, the pedestrian paths are extremely narrow with major traffic going by and in some locations very dark.

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Appendix 3D: Baldock Town Centre Evidence Notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Baldock are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- visit time,
- Local Needs Index and
- planning protections**.**

Mix of uses: There are 73 retail and service units within Baldock town centre's designated shopping frontages; the mix of uses is set out in Table 10 below, which is compared with the District and UK averages.

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units (UK avg.)
Convenience retail	5	6.8	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	13	17.8	27.8	27.7
Financial/Professional	3	4.1	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	12	16.4	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	4	5.5	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	5	6.8	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	25	32.9	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	7	9.6	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	73	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 10: *Mix of retail and service uses – Baldock town centre (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

Vacancy rate and economic vitality: Of the 73 total retail and service units within the town centre, there were 7 vacant units at the time of the Council's 2023 land use and monitoring survey. This equates to a vacancy rate of 9.6%, which is below the District and UK averages (12.3% and 13.9% respectively). The number of vacant units recorded in 2015 was similar with 6 vacant units. The relatively low vacancy rate suggests the supply of shop premises is broadly in line with operator demand and provides opportunity for churning retail spaces for current and potential occupiers.

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Boundary and frontages: The existing town centre boundary for Baldock can be found in ***Figure24;*** notably, there are pockets or areas that exist within the boundary that do not actively host commercial or mixed-use development (town centre area: 109,968 sq.m).

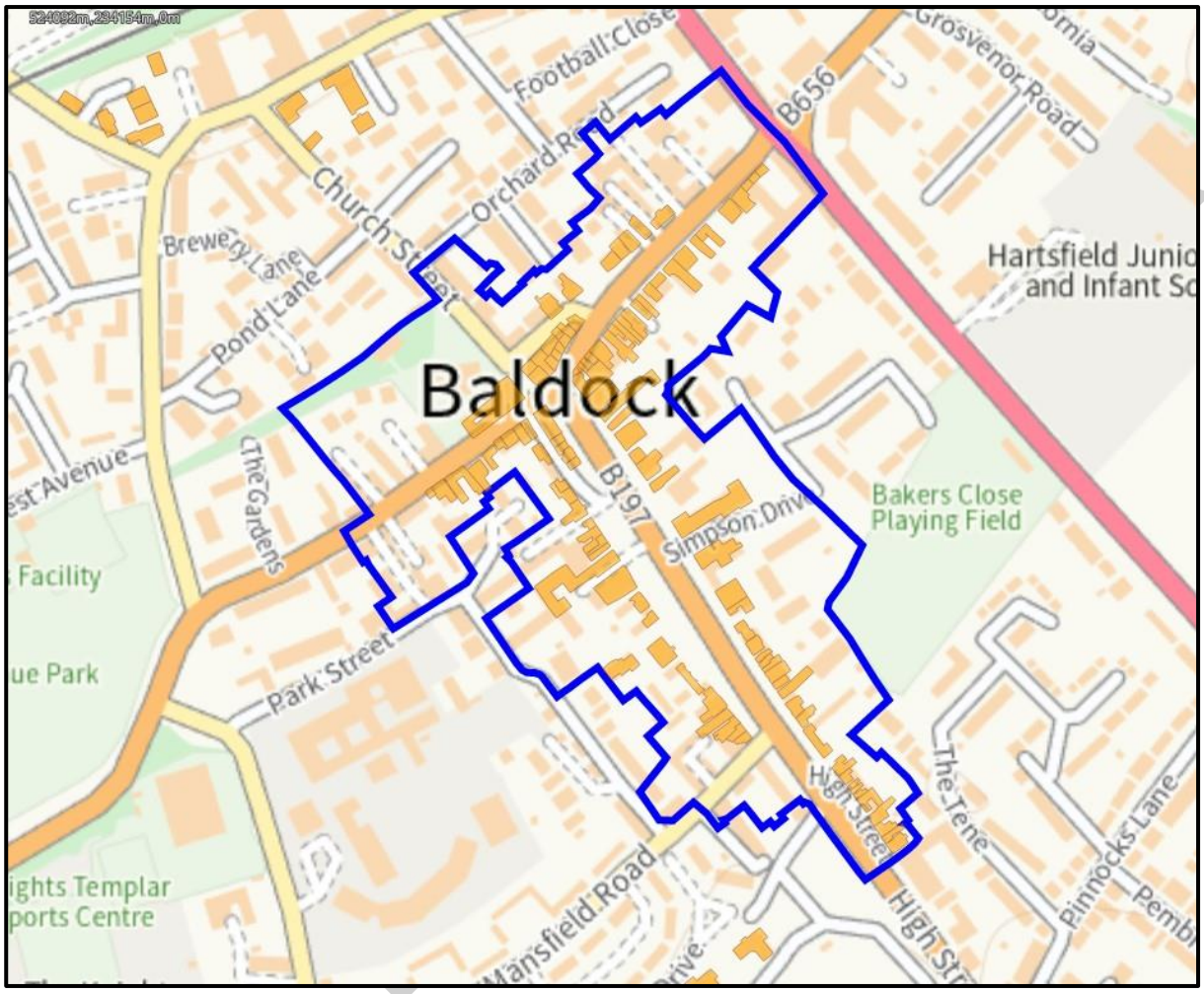

Figure 24: *Baldock town centre, depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and retail land use in orange (town centre area: 109,968 sq.m).*

Development allocations: The 2022 Local Plan does not allocate any town centre mixed use allocations for Baldock, nor does it have any active allocations, this is due to the highly historic nature of the town centre and proximity to neighbouring Letchworth.

The Growing Baldock scheme for residential-led use and associated employment and community facilities is being progressed. A Strategic Masterplan was approved in Summer 2025. The site policy in the Local Plan envisages 1,500 square metres of retail uses being provided within the land north of the railway (Site BA1) that satisfies the immediate needs of residents and will not be a competition to the local economy of the town centre.

Additionally, adjacent to the town centre lies allocated employment land to meet the needs of Functional Economic Market Area, east of Baldock BA10 (19.6ha). This was set out in the 2022 Local

Plan and is currently under review. Advantageously, employment land near town centres can have positive impact on the footfall into the centre and the local economy.

Leisure: As shown in ***Table 11,*** leisure in Baldock is primarily oriented around food and beverage pastimes, such as frequenting cafes, pubs or restaurants. By ratio, Baldock has more restaurant/cafe and public house/bar units than the other town centres in North Herts' and across the UK. While there is the potential for a distribution of 1,400 square metres of leisure space to develop within the town centres of North Herts, such as a cinema, gyms or escape room, it is less likely to be placed in Baldock town centre considering its limited size, number of listed buildings and low number of vacant units.

Activity	Baldock %	Average % across all town centres
Go for walk	1.3	0.9
Cafe/pub/restaurant	52.6	46.8
Leisure activity	4.9	9.9

Table 11: *Participation in leisure activities by Baldock town centre users (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

Visit time: According to the NEMS Household Survey (2024), 41% of respondents dwell for more than 1 hour in Baldock town centre. Compared to the other town centres, Baldock dwell time is in the middle, with more users dwelling for an hour or longer than Royston, but less than Letchworth and Hitchin. Further, in this survey, respondents shared that visited Baldock in the last year for food shopping (46%) and cafes/pubs (53%): the respondents could select multiple options.

Similarly, in the Recovery & Development Plan (2022), 68% of Baldock users shared that they visited the centre for longer than 1 hour. In comparison to the other town centres, Baldock again sits in the middle, with higher percentage than Royston and lower than Letchworth and Hitchin for dwell time of 1 hour or more. Within this survey, research concludes that users often spent their time on comparison shopping (47%), such as food shopping, and for leisure activities (37%).

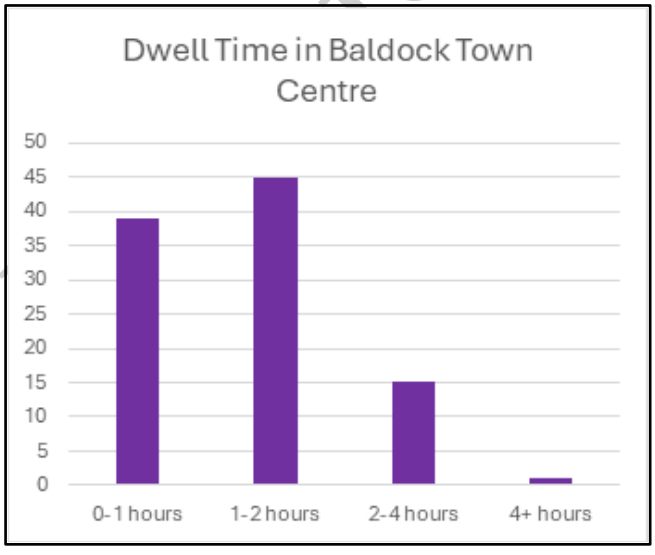

Figure 25: *Dwell time for Baldock town centre users within a 1 year period spanning 2023 - 2024. It is relatively uncommon for users to dwell longer than 2 hours. (HUQ)*

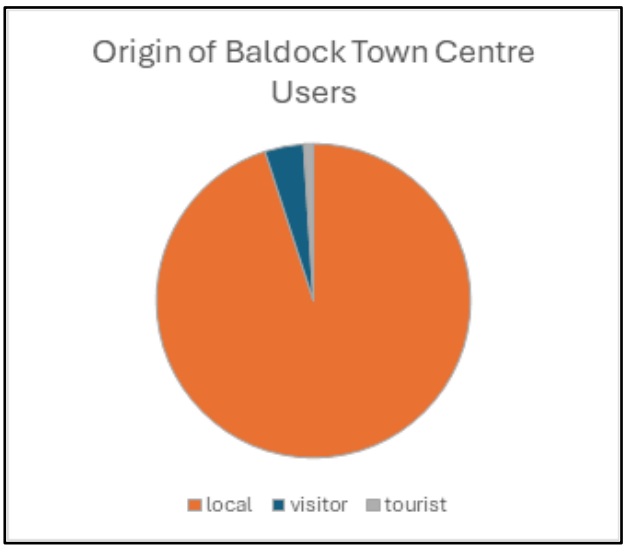

Figure 26*: Origin of Baldock town centre users. The large majority are locals (People & Places, 2022.*

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Local Needs Index: A standardised Local Needs Index for town centres was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Baldock scored 12 out of 16, only lacking a bank, newsagent, florist and off-license. The Tesco Extra, located on the edge of the town boundary, provides some of these missing services within the defined town centre boundary.

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)
Hitchin	Town Centre	15
Letchworth	Town Centre	16
Royston	Town Centre	14
Baldock	Town Centre	12

Table 12: *Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).*

Planning protections - Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings: Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

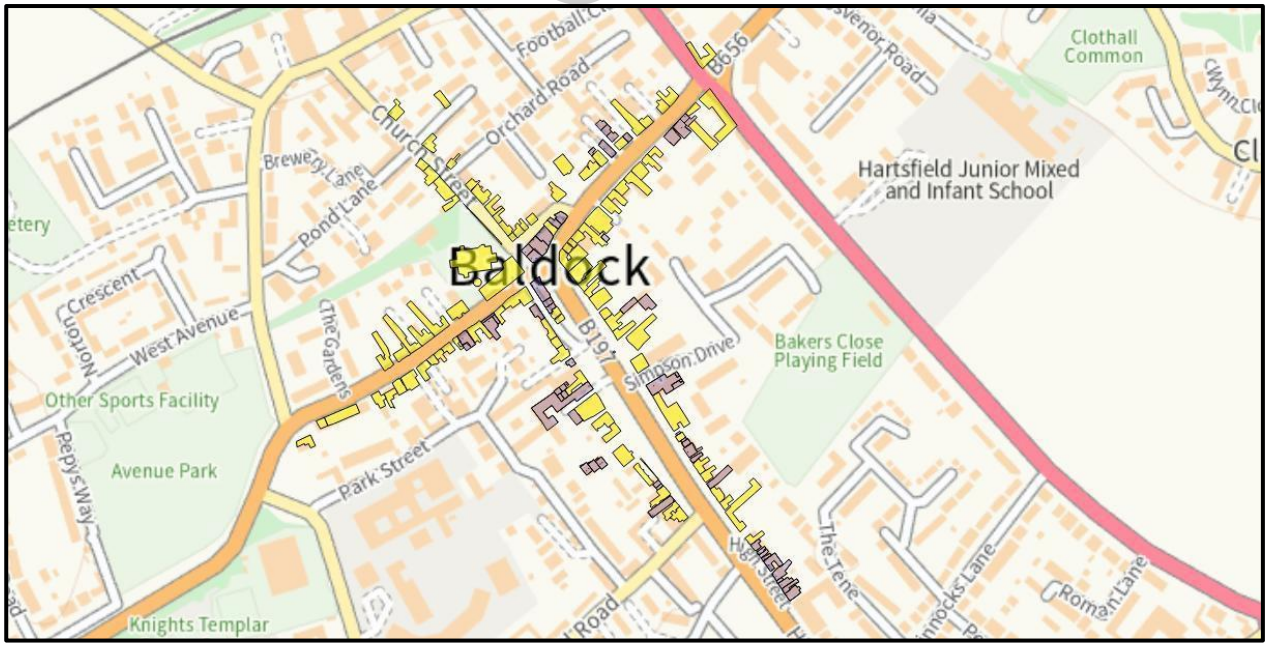

Figure 27: *Planning protections in Baldock town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.*

Consultation

Built environment

The built environmental conditions for Baldock are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces.

Design and public realm: Baldock town centre is characterised by wide main streets enclosed by continuous frontages and narrow side streets. The streets widen towards the junction of High Street, Whitehorse Street and Hitchin Street. This widening of the streets creates spaces for the public realm and community uses. This strategy recommends that the historic layout should be preserved, and the width of the streets should be retained. The town's pedestrian permeability, achieved through a network of footpaths, should be protected and enhanced.

New buildings should enhance the existing fabric through similar materials and sympathetic designs, scale, height, massing and proportions. The buildings are two, three or four storeys with some consistency in height. There are a large number of townhouses which are built on burgage plots, creating continuous frontages which should dictate the scale and typology of new development in the town centre. High density may be acceptable with a mix of commercial on the ground floor with residential above.

Coach arches are common within the town centre and these often open out into small courtyards. These could accommodate mews type development (a row of stables with living quarters above them, set back from the street and accessed through an archway), small commercial units and conversions. Rear walled gardens are important to retain.

The public realm is a sensitive area for new architecture and enhancements because of the quality of the historic buildings.

Any enhancements to the public realm or new buildings should ensure that the character and high quality of the historic fabric is maintained and be thematically linked to the town centre enhancements.

Historic Character: As an historic market town, Baldock has a significant number of listed buildings throughout its town centre. Further, the Conservation Area spans beyond the current town centre boundary and thus includes the entire town centre within it. The overall character of this Conservation Area is largely that of 18th Century buildings. There are large Georgian Town Houses, such as Clare House, The Manor House and Holford House as well as many other older buildings also having been re-fronted in brick in the style of this time.

In accordance with Historic Environment Policy HE1 - Designated heritage assets from the 2022 Local Plan, historical assets such as designated Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens must continue to be protected and maintained.

Open and green spaces: The historic layout of Baldock town centre creates wide open streets with two and three storey buildings that frame the area and support local events and a cafe culture. For

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example, the town's core square, it includes a memorial garden and recreational seating at the meeting of Bell Row and High Street. High Street spans about half a mile and provides a clear view, east and west with green leafy trees between the pedestrian paths and buildings. This scale and design of open space creates a positive public realm and further inspires walking.

Both the width of the streets and surrounding buildings, as well as the pedestrian permeability, and the network of footpaths, should be retained and protected. Street furniture exists throughout the centre, although they are currently in need of repair due to weathering, they offer users frequent opportunities to sit and relax in the open space. While pedestrian footpaths exist throughout the centre, there are limited zebra crossings on High Street; there is one to the north-west on High Street near Hitchin Street, and one to the south-east on High Street near Manfield Road.

St. Mary's Parish Church offers a protected small green space with views of the historic building dating to the 12th century. It is conveniently adjacent to the open seating area on Sun Street, and nearby High Street's activity. Tesco Extra, and the Tesco Memorial Gardens, while not within the existing town centre boundary, are located directly adjacent to the town on the southwestern side of High Street. This area is a green buffer between the large car park and the pleasant town centre open realm, this strategy recommends improving the overall quality and connectivity to High Street.

Considering North Herts's register for formal open and green spaces, there are three near Baldock town centre: Avenue Park, Ivel Springs and more distantly, Weston Hills. While none of these exist within the current town centre boundary, it is beneficial to maintain and promote their quality for town centre users' recreation, as well as trip chaining for visitors to also use the town centre.

Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Baldock are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- mode of travel,
- footfall and
- parking.

Access and movement: Following Baldock's Town Centre Enhancement Scheme in 2006, significant changes to the street scene and infrastructure have enabled better pedestrian permeability and flows of movement. This was achieved through widening the pedestrian paths, which has enabled wider walking access and space for traders to use the open realm for outdoor seating. The completion of the Baldock (A505) Bypass has aided this through the diversion of traffic around the town centre.

The Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan was published in 2021 and supports walking and cycling infrastructure, with a specific aim to improve infrastructure. This report also states the importance to reduce congestion and air pollution, thereby supporting walking and cycling journeys within Baldock.

Of relevance to Baldock town centre, connections that have been identified (by the Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan) to be improved include Hitchin to Baldock via Letchworth and

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Baldock connectivity to rail stations and development sites, with a desire to improve the A505 transport corridor. For example, a segregated cycle infrastructure on this route has been proposed, with lower speed limits for motorised vehicles on respective roads. To improve pedestrian flow between Letchworth and Baldock, the A1(M) Pedestrian Bridge would require minimal changes, surfacing, lighting, bollards and vegetation management, to return high impact. Additionally, the Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan determined Core Walking Zones to understand trips that can be optimised for increased walkability. Baldock is considered a Core Walking Zone with routes between its town centre and railway station as Key Walking Routes.

Mode of Travel: The Baldock Railway Station is located about 550 metres (under 10 minutes' average walk) to the northeast of the town centres' market square. Despite this, the household survey within the 2024 Town Centre and Retail Study suggests that few Baldock shop customers arrive by train.

Based on NEMS Household survey, the majority of visitors to Baldock arrive by car. Additionally, based on the People & Places Report User Survey, 68% of Baldock residents surveyed travel to the centre by foot, and 33% travel by car; this sample population was made up of 95% locals and 5% visitors (living outside the postcode, but within a 30-minute drive). This indicates that locals are more likely to walk to the centre, whereas respondents from the wider Study Area will arrive by car.

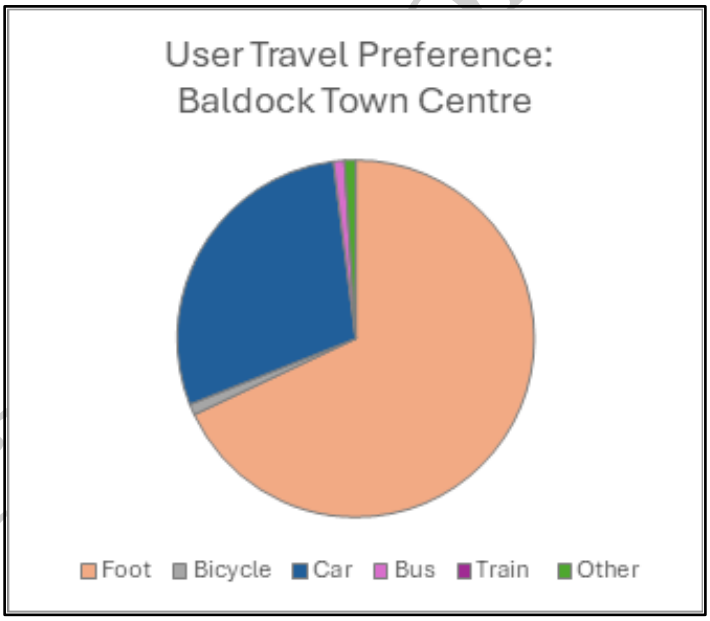

Figure 28: *User travel preference in Baldock town centre (People & Places, 2022).*

Footfall: The district's HUQ footfall data indicates that Baldock town centre has experienced the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic with a reduced annual footfall from roughly 7 million in 2019 to

4.7 million in 2020. Recovering from physical isolation measures, the town centre's annual footfall rose slightly in 2021, and more significantly in 2022 to above the 2019 frequency (7.4 million). Interestingly, in 2023, Baldock town centre's footfall decreases again to just above 6 million visitors annually.

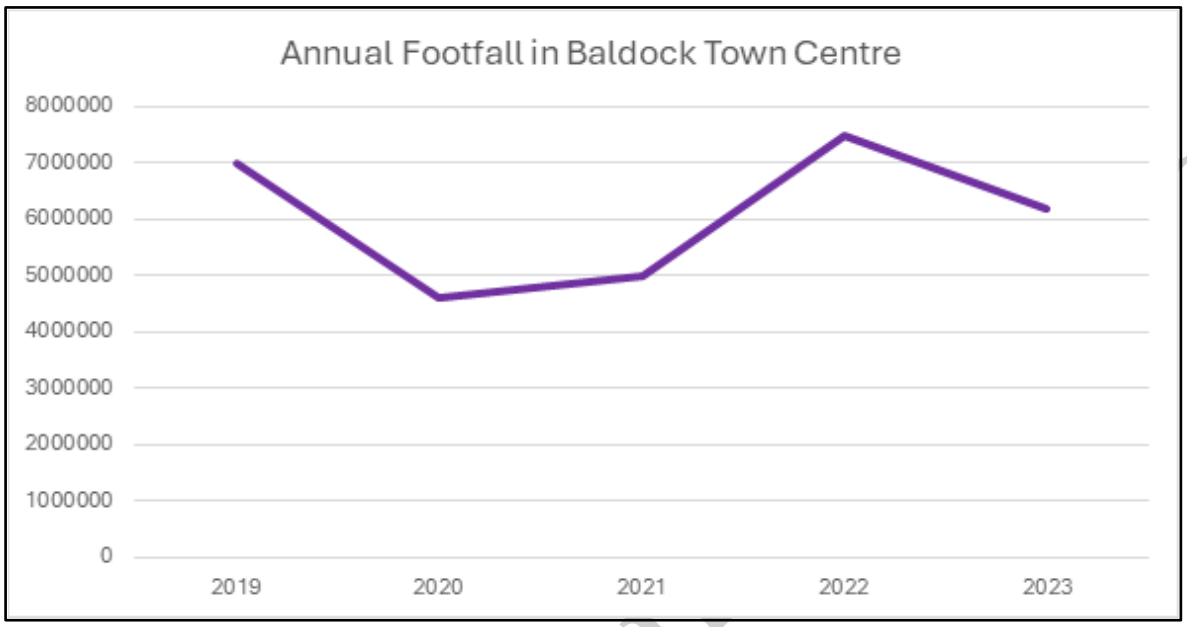

Figure 29: *Annual footfall in Baldock Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ).*

Parking: For local traffic, following Town Enhancement Scheme, work has been done to "organise parking to enable new open public spaces, provide short-term parking on the high street, and improve parking appearance." Now, on-street car parking is available along the west and east sides of High Street, along Whitehorse Street, Hitchin Street and Sun Street, and is free for up to two hours. Off-street public car parking is located near Baldock Community Centre. The Tesco Extra store also provides car parking spaces for customers. with improved wayfinding, if an appropriate partnership was formed between the district and Tesco Extra, this could be an opportunity to motivate Tesco patrons to walk and enjoy town centre businesses and public realm as well.

The quantity of on- and off-street parking within walking distance of the town centre is sufficient to meet current demand, and there are good pedestrian routes traversing the town. In the People & Places Baldock Town Centre Recovery and Development Plan (2022), users surveyed reported positive (79%) and neutral (18%) views, totalling to 97% combined, towards pedestrian access, with only 3% reporting negative attitudes on this aspect. Regarding on-street parking, users were relatively satisfied (positive and neutral) with the provision, with only 23% reporting negative attitudes. For off-street parking, there were fewer positive reports (29%), but a similar percentage of negative attitudes (25%).

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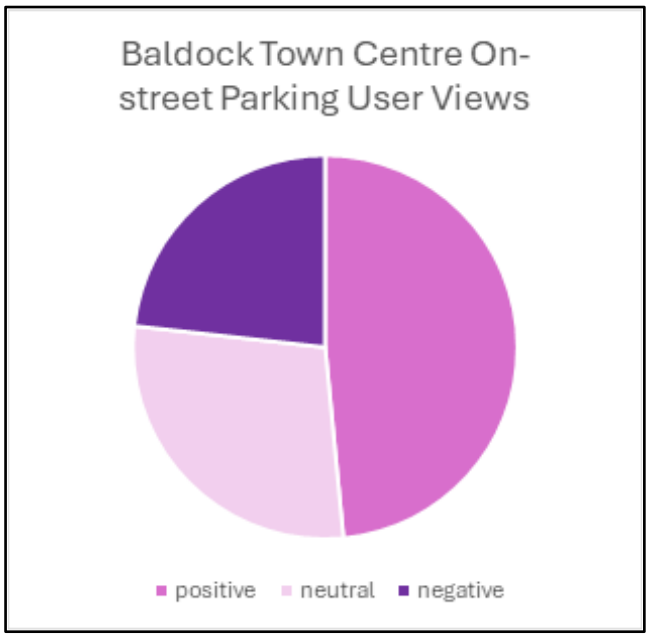

Figure 30: *On-street parking views by Baldock town centre users. Over 75% of users respond with positive or neutral views (People & Places, 2022).*

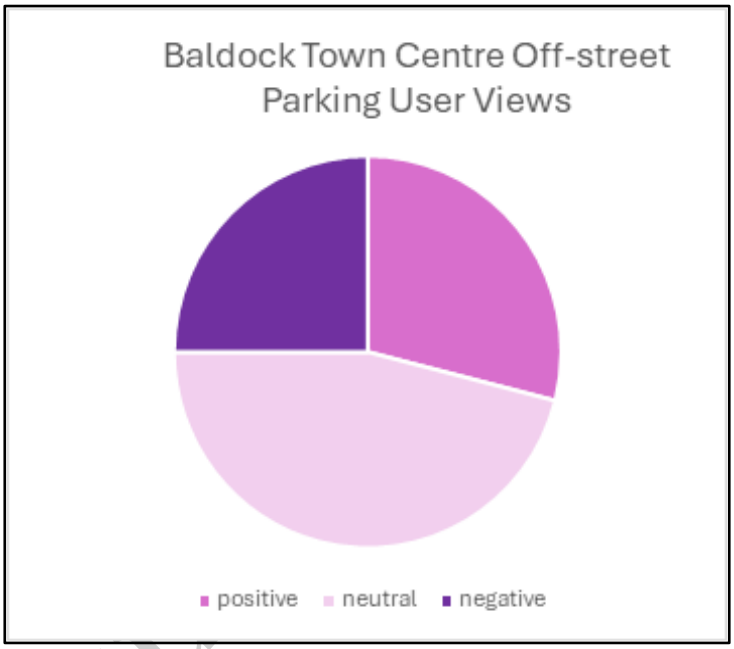

Figure 31: *Off-street parking views by Baldock town centre users. Users are generally split, with many neutral views (People & Places, 2022).*

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Community

Baldock town centre has a good provision of community facilities, with a library, community centre and arts and heritage centre within the core. The community centre accommodates a variety of community functions with spaces to hire for external events. The library programmes a range of activities with combined walking and reading discussion groups and meetings with Police Community Support Officer. Additionally, and linked to promoting the town centre's offer, the Baldock Events Forum helps facilitate a community culture through managing the weekly outdoor market. Via the North Herts' Communities Partnership Team, Baldock users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroot grants and hear about important updates, as well as Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

To entice visitors into the town centre, Baldock should promote its strong offer for cafes, restaurants and pubs with charming historic market town character and pedestrian access.

Design-wise, Baldock Primary Shopping Area follows good design to deter anti-social behaviour using natural surveillance, interactive shop facades, clear lines of sight, and wide pedestrian paths. The public realm and small-town characteristic of Baldock facilitates visitors to walk the high street and interact with familiar neighbours, shop workers or the community in general, especially near the open public space at Bell Row and High Street.

Considering community safety and roads, High Street is the major artery of Baldock town centre, followed by Whitehorse Street; these streets intersect at a roundabout with a pedestrian crossing. There is one other pedestrian crossing on High Street within the town centre and it is a quarter mile south near Mansfield Road, approximately 4 minutes walking one direction. From officer site visits, users of the town centre are often observed crossing the road at unmarked spots and in-between moving cars to access the main town shops sitting directly across from each other. This behaviour is a hazard and highlights the disfunction of the pedestrian infrastructure.

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CABINET

19 NOVEMBER 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2025-28

REPORT OF: *Director- Resources*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *Resources*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Cabinet to approve a new Procurement Strategy (Appendix A) that reflects the Procurement Act 2023 (the Act), our Contract Procurement Rules and our Council Plan.

Whilst the primary focus is on delivering Value of Money, the Strategy also includes the following which align with our Council priorities:

- Maximising Public Benefit: Aiming to achieve the greatest possible benefit for the community through our procurement activities. This includes embedding sustainability, social value and supporting small/ local businesses.
- Transparency in Communication: Providing clear and accessible information to suppliers about our procurement policies and decisions to foster understanding and fair competition.
- Integrity: Maintaining the highest standards of integrity in all procurement actions and ensuring that our processes are transparent, promoting trust and accountability.

Annex A to the Strategy clarifies what we mean by 'Go Local' which seeks to (where feasible) support local businesses.

The proposal is that the new strategy will be for the period up to 31st March 2028.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet approve the Procurement Strategy attached at Appendix A

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Having a Procurement Strategy provides a focus for procurement activity and guidance, so that it can support the delivery of Council priorities.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Do Nothing. We could continue to use the current Procurement Strategy. But that is dated 2023/24 and was intended to be a short-term strategy pending the implementation of the Procurement Act. It was also written before the adoption of the current Council Plan. This is not the most appropriate approach as it would mean that part of the Council's regulatory framework is out of date.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. A report went to the internal informal Political Liaison Board of the Executive and the Leadership team, in July 2025, and it was supported for consideration by Cabinet.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 20 June 2025.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. We adopted a short-term procurement strategy for 2023/24, which was a continuation of the previous strategy. This was because the t Act was due to implemented. The new Act would require a new set of Contract Procurement Rules. The plan was that a new procurement strategy would then follow.

7.2. Following delays to the implementation of the Procurement Act, and it was enacted with effect from 24th February 2025. Full Council agreed the new Contract Procurement rules on 19 September 2024. Whilst this was in advance of the implementation date the adopted changes to the Contract Procedure Rules reflect the statutory provisions as set out in the implemented Act.

7.3. The focus of the Procurement Officer has been on creating guidance and templates (to be used by Contract Managers) to support the new Act and the updated Contract Procedure Rules.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The proposed procurement strategy (as attached at Appendix A) sets out our strategic objectives for procurement and therefore has strong links to our Council Plan. In section 2 it sets out four key aims, i.e.:

- Delivering Value for Money
- Maximising Public Benefit
- Transparent in our communication
- Acting with Integrity

8.2. Section 3 then describes in more detail how we will achieve those aims.

8.3. Section 6 details how we will measure success.

8.4. The remaining sections detail some further aspirations (i.e. commercial innovation, engaging with Small and Medium sized enterprises and engaging Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises) and how we will seek continuous improvement.

8.5. Annex A to the Strategy details how we will look to support local businesses through our Go Local policy.

8.6. There will be further annexes and supporting documentation that sits alongside the strategy. These will support Contract Managers with the practical application of the Strategy. These will be developed over the remainder of this year.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Act, effective from 24 February 2025, introduces significant reforms to public procurement processes in the UK. The Act aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and accountability in public procurement. The requirements of the Act have been reflected in the Procurement Strategy. Failure to comply with the procurement laws and regulations, can result in legal challenges, fines and reputational damage.

9.2. Cabinet's Terms of Reference at paragraph 5.7.1 state that they will "prepare and implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council". As the Procurement Strategy is not reserved to Council (in either sections 4 or 20 of the Constitution) then it is a Cabinet decision.

9.3. Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee's terms of reference include (at paragraph 10.1.5 (u)) to "review any issue referred to it by the Chief Executive, Statutory Officer or Director…". The Director – Resources (Chief Finance Officer) is referring this strategy to FAR as it is felt that they can provide useful input to Cabinet in considering the risk and governance issues related to the Strategy.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Overall, the Procurement Strategy seeks to develop improved Value for Money.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. The Procurement Strategy aligns what we want to achieve from our procurements with our Council Plan. This helps to manage risk.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. The Strategy aims to support the Council priority for accessible services and also includes a section setting out our Equality Duty and what we expect from our suppliers.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not directly apply to this report. However, this Procurement Strategy supports the delivery of Social Value and looks to reinforce what we mean by "go local".

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known direct Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this Strategy. Although the Procurement Strategy commits to a Green Procurement checklist, that will seek to improve the environmental outcomes from our procurements.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The delivery of the Procurement Strategy will be supported by the Procurement Officer and Contract Managers. Other Officers (e.g. Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager, Policy and Strategy) will provide specialist support. The Strategy has been discussed at our Contract and Procurement Group to get feedback on its practical application, which did not identify any issues.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A - Proposed Procurement Strategy

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 *Contract Procurement Rules https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Section%2020%20-%20Contract%20Procurement%20Rules.pdf*

North Herts Council Procurement Strategy 2025–2028

1. Introduction

This Procurement Strategy sets out how we will ensure our procurement activity delivers high-quality, value-for-money goods, services, and works that support our Council Plan 2024–2028. Procurement is a key lever in achieving our four core priorities: Thriving Communities, Accessible Services, Responsible Growth, and Sustainability.

This strategy aligns with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government in England (2022), the Council's Contract Procurement Rules (CPRs, Section 20 off the Council's Constitution), and the Procurement Act 2023. It positions procurement as a strategic enabler of transformation, innovation, and community wellbeing.

The Procurement Act 2023 introduces a new public procurement regime across the UK from February 2025. It emphasises transparency, value for money, public benefit, and effective contract delivery, and influences our approach to procedures, notices, supplier evaluation, and contract management.

2. Purpose and Scope

When undertaking procurement, we will:

- Delivering Value for Money: Ensuring that each procurement decision maximises the value received from public funds.
- Maximising Public Benefit: Aiming to achieve the greatest possible benefit for the community through our procurement activities. This includes embedding sustainability.
- Transparency in Communication: Providing clear and accessible information to suppliers about our procurement policies and decisions to foster understanding and fair competition.
- Integrity: Maintaining the highest standards of integrity in all procurement actions and ensuring that our processes are transparent, promoting trust and accountability.

We operate a devolved procurement model. Service managers are responsible for procurements within their areas, supported by a central Procurement Officer who provides strategic oversight, templates, guidance, training, and compliance assurance.

This strategy applies to all procurement activity, including capital programmes, revenue-funded purchases, and externally funded projects (grants). It embeds legal compliance, social value, environmental responsibility, commercial thinking, and procurement maturity improvement in all procurement practice.

It also promotes use of the National Procurement Strategy Self-Assessment Toolkit to benchmark our progress and guide improvement.

3. Delivering on our Commitments and Council Plan priorities

3.1 Value for Money

We will deliver on our commitments by:

- Supporting high-quality, inclusive, and accessible service delivery.
- Promoting innovation, efficiency, and income opportunities, e.g. through use of flexible procurement.
- Explore use of joint procurement, although balanced against Go Local.
- Ensure delivery models and business cases fully consider affordability, risk mitigation, and value for money
- Procurement decisions will be made on the basis of whole-life value, balancing cost, quality, risk, and deliverability
- Support for Contract Managers to write specifications that promote inclusive and accessible services.

Ensuring that we deliver Value for Money links to our Council Plan priority for Sustainability (financial). We can also help deliver our Accessible Services priority by incorporating requirements into our contracts.

3.2 Maximising Public Benefit

We will deliver on our commitments by:

- Embedding sustainability (including low-carbon and waste reduction) and net-zero targets in procurements over £100k
- Develop a Green Procurement Checklist in conjunction with the Contract Procurement Group
- Applying a 10% minimum weighting for Social Value in all relevant procurements, including a focus on employment, training and community investment.
- Support for Contract Managers to maximise Social Value benefits when writing procurement documents.
- Annual reporting on delivery of Social Value.
- Annual reporting of carbon savings from procurement.
- Supporting local businesses, SMEs, and VCSEs via a Go Local policy (see Annex A).
- Relevant contracts will include KPIs related to customer access and feedback
- Require the use of ethical supply chains.

Our commitments in relation to Social Value can support our Council Plan priorities for Thriving Communities, Responsible Growth and Sustainability (environmental). This will depend on the Social Value offered by successful contractors. This is in addition to any Sustainability (environmental) that is directly incorporated into contracts, supported by a Green Procurement checklist. As a public sector organisation, the Council are also required by the Public Sector Equality Duty to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and advance the equality of opportunity between people who share a

protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage). This obligation also supports the Council's broader efforts to prevent Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) through a Safety Charter and its accreditation to the White Ribbon campaign that seeks to foster a culture of respect and equality within the workplace and broader community. There is an expectation that potential suppliers will support the Council's stance on equality, diversity and inclusion and the reduction of gender-based violence by promoting respectful workplace cultures and practices.

Supporting local business and employment supports our Responsible Growth priority.

KPIs relate to customer access will help to ensure the delivery of Accessible Services.

3.3 Transparency, Communication and Integrity

We will deliver on our commitments by:

- Enhance transparency in line with the Local Government Transparency Code
- Improve procurement maturity using the National Procurement Strategy Toolkit
- Using data and feedback to improve how we engage the market, manage suppliers, and build capability.
- Provide SME-friendly quote packs and standardised simplified documentation
- Consider use of supplier Q&A sessions
- Conflict of interest declarations and assessments required for all contracts above £100k.
- Waivers and direct awards follow formal sign-off procedures

4. Procurement maturity

In addition to the above we will also aim to improve our procurement maturity. Some of the specific themes and actions in relation to that ambition are:

4.1 Commercial Procurement and Innovation

Procurement supports innovation and commercial thinking by identifying opportunities to reduce cost, increase efficiency, and generate income.

How we will deliver this:

- Provide flexible procurement documents that allow innovation
- Deliver commercial awareness training to service managers and contract managers
- Explore joint procurement opportunities with neighbouring councils

4.2 SME (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) and VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises) Engagement

The Council will support SMEs and VCSEs by reducing entry barriers and ensuring transparent, proportionate processes.

How we will deliver this:

- Publish a live procurement pipeline
- Provide SME-friendly quote packs and standardised simplified documentation
- Hold supplier Q&A sessions and provide guidance via the Procurement Officer

5. Governance and Accountability

All procurement must align with the principles, procedures, and transparency requirements of the Procurement Act 2023, including use of standardised notices and compliance with new thresholds and competitive procedures.

In addition, they will comply with the Council's CPRs and Constitution. Contract managers are accountable for their activity; the Procurement Officer provides assurance and support.

- Templates and checklists are mandatory
- Conflict of interest declarations and assessments required for all evaluations above £100k.
- Contract Procurement Group will review high-value procurements and oversee pipeline planning
- Waivers and direct awards must follow formal sign-off procedures

6. Measuring Success

Key performance indicators:

- % spend with local suppliers
- % of spend with SMEs, and VCSEs
- Carbon savings achieved through procurement
- Value of Social Value achieved (Social Value Portal) and assessment of Social Value achieved for lower value procurements.
- Procurement maturity level measured using the National Procurement Strategy (NPS) Toolkit
- Training completion
- Monitoring CPR compliance and audit outcomes, and learning lessons from those findings

7. Continuous Improvement

The strategy will be reviewed annually and updated in response to:

- Legal or policy changes
- Market developments
- Internal audit findings

- National benchmarking or peer reviews

Annual self-assessment against the NPS Toolkit will guide training, supplier engagement, and process development.

Annex A- Go Local Policy

1. What is this policy for?

This policy helps North Herts Council support local jobs and businesses by encouraging officers to prioritise suppliers who operate from within the district. It keeps the process simple and practical for everyday use - especially when getting quotes or awarding contracts under £100,000. This is part of the Council priority for Responsible Growth.

2. What is a local business?

- **North Herts business:** A business that is based solely in North Herts or has its main physical business presence (e.g. office, depot, premises) in the district.
- **Strong North Herts presence:** A business that has a significant physical presence in North Herts (e.g. a permanent site, office or satellite premises) and offers local employment.

3. When do we use this?

- Use this policy for all contracts and quotes under £100,000.
- Applies to formal tenders and informal quote exercises.

4. What do officers need to do?

- Where required to only get one quote (under £10k for Goods and Services, under £25k for Works) then use a local business wherever possible. Value for Money should still be considered, but the value of local business must form part of that.
- Try to include at least one local supplier in your quotes.
- Ask all suppliers if they are a Local Business (this will be included in the quotation pack)
- When comparing suppliers, make it clear that this is part of your evaluation criteria. 2 points will be awarded for suppliers that meet the definition of a North Herts business. 1 point will be awarded for suppliers that meet the defuinirion of having a strong North Herts presence.

CABINET
19 NOVEMBER 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026-30

REPORT OF: *Director: Resources*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *Resources*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2026/27 to 2029/30 to guide and inform the Council's Business Planning Process. The four year period of the MTFS reflects the timelines related to Local Government Reorganisation.

The MTFS details a high level of uncertainty in our future funding, but that this should be resolved by the end of December. There will need to an adapt as we go through the budget setting process.

The MTFS supports and is supported by the Council Plan. This reflects that the Council can only deliver priorities and projects that it can afford and should prioritise its spending around delivering its priorities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet recommend the Medium Term Financial Strategy for approval by Full Council, as attached at Appendix A.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Adoption of a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2026/2027 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2026/27 in February 2026. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The Council needs to have a strategy for setting its budget to ensure that it meets its statutory duty to set a balanced budget over the medium term, and ensure that spend is prioritised towards delivering statutory services and its strategic aims (as set out in the Council Plan).

4.2 In line with the Financial Management Code (published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy), the Council aspires to set a longer-term financial strategy (e.g. 10 years) that considers the various risks and plans scenarios to deal with them. However, this MTFS deliberately takes a shorter-term view, which reflects the impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The LGR timelines would mean that this Council would no longer exist from April 2028, but we need to consider the impact of our financial position on the successor Authority.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 The Executive Member for Resources has been consulted in developing this Strategy.

5.2 No direct external consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this report. However, over the Summer, we did a budget survey. The results of that consultation will be considered as part of the budget setting process. A brief summary is included in Appendix A.

5.3 As in previous years, Member workshops are being held in November to discuss budget proposals and priorities in advance of them being considered by Cabinet. Due to the intentional delay to preparing this MTFS, those workshops also took place prior to this report being considered.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget each year. This can include using reserves if this is affordable over the medium term. The Council therefore sets a Medium Term Financial Strategy each year to help determine the approach that it will take to setting the detailed budget for the following year. This explains why the period of the MTFS is different to the period covered by the Council Plan. However they strongly align in terms of the actions required to deliver a medium-term balanced budget.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is attached as Appendix A. It details the uncertainties and assumptions used to estimate our future finances. It notes that the high uncertainty over our future funding will be resolved by the end of December. This means that there will be a need to adapt as go through the budget setting process.

8.2 Our reserves can be used in a managed way to support the implementation of savings required. But they can not be used in the medium term without a plan to achieve a balanced budget.

8.3 Council will be asked to approve the wording of the MTFS (as per Appendix A). The Communications Team will then work on improving the presentation (e.g. images, colour) prior to it being published on our website.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference include at 5.7.38 the power, by recommendation "to advise the Council in the formulation of those policies within the Council's terms of reference". Council's terms of reference include at 4.4.1(b) "approving or adopting the budget". The MTFS is part of the budget setting process. Paragraph 2.7 of the Council's Financial Regulations (Section 19 of the Constitution) details that "[t]he Medium Term Financial Strategy … require[s] approval by Full Council".

9.2 Councillors are reminded of the requirement, under section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, to set a balanced budget prior to the commencement of the financial year in question; and also that the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer to report on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves allowed for in the budget.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Revenue financial implications are covered in Appendix A.

10.2 The main purpose of the Medium Term Financial Strategy is to consider the revenue funding, income and expenditure for the Council. This includes considering the revenue implications of capital expenditure.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2 The key risks within the budget assumptions are referred to in Appendix A.

11.3 There are financial and reputational risks involved in arriving at a balanced budget against the uncertainty surrounding levels of government funding. We seek to mitigate the risks through the use of the established corporate business planning process and early involvement of members in the process.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 The MTFS attempts to align resources to the delivery of the Council Plan, which sets the corporate objectives. Through its corporate objectives the Council is seeking to address equality implications in the services it provides and through the remainder of the Corporate Business Planning Process will carry out Equalities Impact Assessments for relevant efficiency or investment options.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that directly apply to this report.

14.2 The MTFS attempts to align resources to the delivery of the Council Plan, which sets the corporate objectives. Through its corporate objectives the Council is seeking to address the impacts of climate change in the services it provides and through the remainder of the Corporate Business Planning Process will carry out Environmental Impact Assessments for relevant efficiency or investment options.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The MTFS makes assumptions in relation to pay inflation. As the actual rate of inflation will be subject to national pay bargaining, the actual costs will depend on the results of those negotiations. The budget also makes assumptions around funding for increments. Whilst the MTFS references our pay competitiveness, the budget does not currently make any allowance for any costs that could be incurred in addressing this (e.g. pay increases above inflation).

14.2 The delivery of projects to deliver council objectives depends on having adequate people resources with the requisite skills.

14.3 The development of budget proposals will take up staff time. As they are developed these budget proposals will identify the ongoing impact on staff.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026-30

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None

North Herts Council

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026-30

Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy sits alongside the Council Plan. It sets out our financial forecasts over the next five years and how we will manage the funding that we think we will have available, to deliver as much as we can, in line with our priorities.

Our Council Plan covers the period until the next set of Council elections, so is from 2024-28. It is good practice for a financial strategy to take a longer-term focus, usually at least 5 years. The Government has announced a plan for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which would see this Council cease to exist from 1st April 2028. We would be replaced by a Unitary Council (combining District and County Council services) over a wider (yet to be determined) geographical area. This means that more focus is put on the period up to 31st March 2027 but maintaining a longer-term view over 2 years beyond then (up until the end of 2029/30) to assess any impacts that our finances would have on our successor Council. It also provides coverage in case of any delay to the LGR timelines.

For the period of overlap with the Council Plan, the intention is that the two documents are aligned.

Delivering our Vision and Priorities

Our vision and priorities are set out in detail in our Council Plan.

Our vision is “working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts.
To support that our priorities are Thriving Communities, Accessible Services, Responsible Growth and Sustainability.

Most of the money that we spend is on delivering statutory services (about two thirds of our net spend). We will always look to deliver these services in line with our priorities. Even as our funding has continued to reduce, we have tried to maintain our ability to offer discretionary services that are linked to our priorities. Our forecasts include scenarios where we will need to further reduce our costs in the future. This would mean that difficult decisions will need to be taken. If faced with that choice, we will make those decisions in line with our priorities, and taking into account what residents told us in the budget survey.

Our Council Plan includes our ambitions for North Herts. Some of the ideas may be dependent on identifying funding or developing a sustainable business case.

Future funding

We have delayed this strategy to try and base it on increased certainty over our future funding. But at the time of writing this, we do not yet have that certainty.

Over the summer, Government consulted on a new funding formula for Local Government. This is known as Fair Funding 2.0.

Some of the aims of the Fair Funding review are:

- Multi-year settlements to support planning for the future (initially 3 years from 2026/27 to 2028/29).
- Fewer funding streams, especially those that require a bidding process.
- Better targeting of money where it is needed, including a focus on deprivation and prevention.
- Reflecting the relative costs of delivering services in different areas.
- Adjusting the funding needed by the ability to raise Council Tax.

The overall process for setting Government funding (which includes the Business Rates that can be retained) is set out below:

The consultation document did not provide any indicative allocations but provided information that meant that experts in the field of Local Government finance could estimate the impact. Those experts were also able to have discussions with officials at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide verification. We commissioned information from LG Futures to support our response to the consultation. Through their work supporting all Hertfordshire Councils on LGR, we also now have access to forecasts from another company, Pixel. Initial indications (from those that had seen the results from both) were that there was a significant difference between the LG Futures and Pixel models. But looking at the results for North Herts, the differences are not that significant. The LG Futures model allows us to easily see the impact of changing assumptions which were specifically stated as being subject to consultation. By far the most significant one of these is whether social care grants are treated as part of the general funding pot to be allocated or kept outside to be allocated on a more specific social care formula. Making it part of the overall funding pot means that we get a very small share of it. But as it is such a large amount of grant, that very small share is significant.

This table shows the relative difference in funding that the Social Care assumption could make:

Estimated Government Funding (including retained Business Rate baseline) £m	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**
With Social Care in baseline	6.51	7.00	7.46
Without Social Care in baseline	5.64	5.26	4.86
Difference	(0.87)	(1.74)	(2.60)

The Fair Funding Review does not affect the Council Tax we can raise. The expectation is that the cap will be retained at up to 3% without a local referendum. Our Council Tax income is also affected by growth in properties in the district, the impact of our Council Tax reduction scheme (CTRS) and our collection rate. Based on the latest data our Council Tax base (which includes property growth and CTRS impacts) is slightly up on our previous forecasts. We would retain our collection rate (how much of the Council Tax we are owed ultimately gets paid) at 99%.

As part of Simpler Recycling, Government require that all Councils collect food waste on a weekly basis from April 2026. Whilst we already collect food waste weekly, it is still a new burden, and we have previously expected that we would receive additional funding for the ongoing cost. Our forecasts will now assume that this be contained within the Fair Funding outcomes.

For 2025/26 we have guaranteed income of £1.435 million in relation to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). EPR is where producers have to pay for the cost of collection and disposal of packaging material. The funding is then passed on to Councils. This means that the cost of packaging materials should be borne by the end customers of those goods (through slightly higher prices) rather than the general Council taxpayer. The latest forecast for the amount we will receive in 2025/26 is about £300k more than the guaranteed amount, although half of that increase relates to being recompensed for the costs of taking part in a flexible plastic collection trial. The EPR funding is not within the scope of the Fair Funding formula. The aim of EPR is to encourage reductions in packaging waste so over time the payments we receive should slowly decrease. Reductions in packaging waste that needs to be collected will not reduce our costs as collection costs are priced based on number of households, not volumes collected. It is possible that net costs could go up as some of the recyclable material that we collect generate an income, which is linked to volumes. We will need to forecast how much our EPR payments will be in future years. We will base this on a 20% reduction each year.

We are expecting a policy statement on Fair Funding soon. It is unlikely to give us any actual funding amounts. It may provide more information that would allow the Local Government funding experts to further refine their models. The provisional Local Government finance settlement will be announced in mid-December. At that point we will know what our funding will be for the next 3 years.

Our previous funding forecasts

Our current year (2025/26) budget includes the following funding forecasts for future years:

Funding by source by year, amounts in £m	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**
Council Tax	14.09	14.58	15.10	15.63
Government Grant and retained Business Rates	4.42	3.93	3.42	2.89
Extended Producer Responsibility	1.44	1.44	1.44	1.44
Council Tax Support to Parishes	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Net Total	**19.91**	**19.91**	**19.91**	**19.91**
Add: Temporary Accommodation element of Homeless Prevention Grant *	0.37	0.37	0..37	0.37
Revised Total	**20.28**	**20.28**	**20.28**	**20.28**

* This grant is added in as expected that it will form part of base funding in the Fair Funding formula, so means the total will be comparable to Fair Funding estimates.

Revising our funding forecasts

The table below assumes the following:

- Council Tax income to be based on the latest tax base with a 0.99% collection rate, with 0.5% annual tax base growth and 2.99% rate increases. The tax base growth is a net figure as some of the growth will be used to fund the additional costs of the new properties (e.g. waste collection).
- EPR at the 2025/26 guaranteed level with a 20% decrease per year.
- Any previously announced New Burdens funding will be rolled in to Fair Funding (including Simpler Recycling).
- We will continue to budget for Business Rates at the baseline level, i.e. do not assume any growth (noting that growth will be less likely as the baseline level will be reset).
- Provide a range for Fair Funding based on whether Social Care grants are included or excluded.
- Amounts to grow by inflation at 2% for 2029/30.
- For now, assume that Council Tax support to parishes continues, although a choice could be taken to provide notice that this will cease.

Funding by source by year, amounts in £m	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**
Council Tax	14.15	14.65	15.16	15.69
Fair Funding impact (including Temporary Accommodation element of Homeless Prevention Grant)	5.64 to 6.51	5.26 to 7.00	4.86 to 7.46	4.96 to 7.61
Extended Producer Responsibility	1.15	0.92	0.74	0.59
Council Support to Parishes	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Total	**20.90 to 21.77**	**20.79 to 22.53**	**20.72 to 23.32**	**21.20 to 23.85**

Our General Fund reserves

Our latest forecast (Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring report) is that our General Fund balance at 31st March 2026 will be £14.8 million. That involves using £1.27 million of our General Fund during 2025/26 to support our revenue spend, alongside £2.86 million of other reserves. That reflects a combination of spend that has been carried forward from previous years, as well as an underlying budget gap. The underlying budget gap is from wanting greater certainty over our future funding before committing to significant budget reductions.

As detailed in the year end revenue monitor for 2024/25, the gain on Business Rates from the release of provisions at the end of 2024/25 is expected to be received in 2026/27. The release of provisions helped the Council achieve a surplus over previous estimates for the year of £2.3million. In addition, the pooling gain

from the Council being part of a Business Rates Pool in 2024/25 meant that the Council was able to retain £1.5million more of this surplus than if the Council had been outside the Pool. The pooling gain reduced the transfer required to the General Fund to cover the cost of the business rates levy from the business rates grant held in earmarked reserve, the balance of which can be used to help balance the budget.

We are required to make sure that we have a certain level of reserves when we set our budget. This is to provide protection against known and unknown risks. This includes us being able to react to changes in demand and any emergencies that may arise. Our allowance of known risks is based on estimating the monetary impact of an event happening and applying a percentage to this, based on the likelihood of it happening (high, medium or low). Our allowance for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure and 3% of budgeted income (excluding Housing Benefit). For 2025/26 this gave a minimum balance of £2.6m. It is assumed that there will need to be some growth in this minimum level to reflect inflation, so a minimum of £3m will be assumed. Our reserves are well above this minimum recommended level, and even more so when the extra Business Rates gains are added in.

Revenue and Capital spend

Revenue is what we spend on day-to-day activities. It includes staffing and payments to suppliers to deliver services. It also includes income from fees and charges where the user pays for some or all of the cost of the service. This strategy is mainly focused on revenue spend.

Capital is what we spend on the buying, creating and maintaining our assets. Assets are things that can be used for more than one year, and include land, buildings and vehicles.

Most of our funding is revenue and can be used for either revenue or capital spend.

Where we sell surplus assets we receive a capital receipt and that funding can only be used to fund new capital spend. We are not expecting any large capital receipts and are expecting that we will need to reduce our forecasts (compared with last year's budget) as we go through the detailed budget setting process. We also sometimes get capital grants, that can only be used for capital spend.

There are revenue costs that are linked to capital spend. We have moved to a position where we have a need to borrow to fund our capital programme, as we have used up all our capital reserves. This is a normal position for Councils to be in, and there are provisions that allow us to borrow to fund capital spend. We cannot borrow money to fund revenue spend. When we set our Treasury Strategy as part of the 2026/27 budget we will need to determine if are going to use internal or external borrowing. It is likely that we will continue with our current approach of borrowing internally. This means that we use the cash that we hold to fund capital spend. The costs of capital spend then come from the lost interest that we would have earned from investing that cash and the need to charge a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). In essence, the MRP spreads the cost of a capital asset over its expected useful life. For the purposes of this Medium-Term Financial Strategy, we assume that there will be no significant changes in treasury or MRP costs compared to those included in the 2025/26 budget forecasts. This is partly based on there being no defined proposals for significant increases in capital spend. This will be reviewed as part of the detailed work in setting the 2026/27 budget.

Our revenue budget forecasts for 2026/27 onwards

The revenue budget that was set by Council in February 2025 included the forecasts below for net spend in 2026/27 onwards. This excludes the savings that were marked as tbc and therefore had not been identified. It includes the addition of the Community Safety Officer post that was agreed at the budget meeting.

Amounts in £m	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**
Forecast spend	22.40	22.71	22.70	22.77

As part of setting the 2026/27 this will be fully reviewed. But as part of updating this strategy the following assumptions are considered/ updated.

Temporary Accommodation element of Homeless Prevention Grant

The Temporary Accommodation element of the Homeless Prevention Grant has been a specific grant, and therefore netted off against the expenditure in that service area. As detailed above the intention is that this grant will be rolled in to general funding. So the service budget will need to be increased to reflect the loss of direct grant funding. This is a pressure of £370k each year.

Budget monitoring updates

Since the budget was set in February 2026, we have had budget monitoring reports for Q3 2024/25, end of year 2024/25 and Q1 2025/26. These reports identified the following ongoing budget impacts:

Amounts in £m	**Estimated ongoing impact (excluding carry-forwards)**
Q3 2024/25 report	0.076
End of year 2024/25 report	(0.361)
Q1 2025/26 report	0.314
Total impact	**0.029**

Inflation and cost of living impacts

In August the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee cut the UK interest rate to 4% (from 4.25%). Whilst the current rate of inflation is above the 2% target, the Committee's report forecasts that inflation will drop to the 2% target during 2027. It is then forecast to stay at that level.

Pay inflation and pay competitiveness

The pay claim for 2025/26 was agreed at 3.2%. The NJC Trade Unions have not yet submitted a pay claim for 2026/27. Our current forecasts are based on 2% pay inflation from 2026/27 onwards. It is proposed that this assumption is changed to 3% for 2026/27 and 2027/28. This is to reflect that:

- General inflation will remain above the 2% target over that period.
- Increases in the National Living Wage are likely to create pressure on our pay levels. This will have the greatest impact on those at the bottom of the pay scales, but we have to be mindful on maintaining pay differentials.
- There have been periods of below inflation pay rises in Local Government, which the Unions will seek to try and address.

We have started work on assessing our pay competitiveness against our Councils. This uses an LGA pay benchmarking tool, but it has been difficult to ensure that we are getting like for like comparisons. Jobs between different Councils will never be exactly the same, but it is important to try and get the best matches. It is hoped that a recent improvement to the tool will allow us to make more progress. Any decision on pay increases that fall outside the NJC process, would need to consider affordability and any constraints from the LGR process. For the purposes of this strategy, an additional pay increase will not be assumed. We will still continue to work on promoting our non-pay benefits.

Contracted services inflation

Our contracts have a mix of inflation increases built into them. Some of our larger contracts use a basket of inflation indicators. Others will just be linked to general inflation. It is proposed that 3.8% inflation is assumed for 2026/27 (current CPI, August 2025 value), then 3% for 2727/28 and then 2% thereafter. For those contracts that have more specific inflationary measures, it is assumed that over time these will be strongly aligned to general inflation.

Increases in fees and charges, and impact on demand/ ability to pay

It has previously been decided that parking charges should be modelled on assuming a 2% increase each year. That is not a target increase, and actual increases will need to consider managing demand, cost of provision, encouraging modal shift away from private car use and supporting the vitality of town centres. This assumption of a 2% increase will be retained. The work on annual uplifts has now been brought forward so that they will be applied from Aril each year.

Garden waste went back to being an annual charge from April 2025 onwards. This was set at £55 for 2025/26. For this purpose of this strategy, it is assumed that it will increase in line with inflation (i.e. 3.8% for 2026/27, 3% for 2027/28 and then 2% thereafter) but rounded to the nearest pound. The decision on the charge will be taken by Cabinet. It is assumed we will continue with having a concessionary discount for those that are less able to pay.

We have seen a drop in the number of trade waste and recycling customers, but projected income is still in line with budget. Therefore, it is currently assumed that the overall market can bear an increase in costs in line with inflation. This may be from selling additional recycling services. This will be reviewed prior to April each year by reviewing market conditions, and actual increases may be higher or lower.

Where fees and charges are set by regulation (e.g. planning fees) then the Council will set charges in line with those regulations. The assumption is that any ancillary charges will be increased in line with increases in general fees and charges.

All other fees and charges provide a relatively low amount of income. The target is that these fees and charges should recover the full cost of provision. Costs of provision are generally likely to increase with pay inflation. Therefore, the assumption will be that prices should increase in line with pay inflation estimates.

Our current assumption is that increases at these levels would not affect demand. For most of our services we seek payment in advance of receiving the service, so we are also not expecting an increase in levels of overdue debt.

Eligibility for Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) determines who is eligible for a discount on their Council Tax bill. For pensioners there is a mandatory scheme set by Government. For working age residents, we can determine how any discounts are determined.

We moved to a banded scheme for working-age CTRS eligibility in April 2023. During the first year (2023/24) this resulted in an increase in the total value of support that was being provided. Since then the value of support has stabilised. The cost of CTRS is reflected through changes in the tax base as it reduces the number of properties eligible to pay Council Tax. It is assumed that there will not be any further impact on the tax base from CTRS. Following some work by Marie Curie, we plan to look at helping those in poverty with a terminal illness. Our current expectation is that this can be covered through our existing discretionary support. All these assumptions will be kept under review as CTRS eligibility is uncertain.

Pension costs

The latest triennial valuation (for March 2022) was completed before the 2022/23 budget was set. That valuation set our pension contribution rates for the three years up until 2025/26. Current forecasts for 2026/27 onwards are also based on that valuation. We expect to get our funding results by December, which will set our contribution rates for the next three years (2026/27 to 2028/29). We will update the forecasts when we have these. Indications have been that we could see a decrease in these costs.

Planning income

The adoption of the Council's Local Plan means that there will be large new developments in the District. The precise timing of these developments is not known, and may be affected by the impacts of continuing high interest rates.

As these sites go through the planning process, they will generate significant planning income. Some of the capacity to deliver these has already been included in previous staffing growth bids. There will also be additional internal and external resource required. Where possible, the cost of short term external resources, and to a limited extent the internal resources, will be met through Planning Performance Agreements. However, these are voluntary agreements and cannot be required. The forecast cost of longer-term internal resources is forecast to be less than the additional income generated.

We will attempt to develop a prudent estimate of additional planning income over the next 4 years. This will reflect that the income is only earned when the application is determined, and not when we initially receive the fee income. Where there are over-achievements in early years, these will be put into a central reserve to enable the smoothing of any shortfalls in later years. When prudent, any balance in the reserve will be released back to the General Fund. The reserve will not be used to directly fund additional planning expenditure. There will be a need for additional resource in the medium-term, but this will be covered through the normal budget process.

Capacity to deliver our priorities

Our Council Plan sets out our vision and priorities for 2024-28. The Council Plan will continue to be supported by our Council Delivery Plan.

The projects in the Council Delivery Plan for 2025/26 have been subject to prioritisation, and there are fewer of them. However there are still risks around delivery, particularly in relation to finances and Officer capacity. This is part of the reason why the Council Delivery Plan is reviewed on a quarterly basis by Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet.

The table below details those projects that are in the current Council Delivery Plan (as reported to Cabinet in September 2025) and any further projects specifically referenced in the Council Plan. The table shows the financial implications of those projects in 2026/27 onwards:

Project	Resources
Churchgate area regeneration	The current spend to get to a viable scheme is being funded from the income generated by the current Churchgate leases and additional approved budget. Project Management is from the Enterprise Team, with specific support from a part-time project manager. Ultimately it is expected that a significant capital budget will be required, but not yet at a stage where this can be quantified.
Waste and street cleansing contract	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme- Leisure Centres	Revenue and capital budgets have been agreed and are monitored regularly. Project management from the Leisure and Active Communities Manager with some additional external support. Expected to be substantially completed in 2025/26.
Decarbonisation of Council Buildings Phase 2	Capital budget approved. The impact on ongoing running costs will be refined throughout the project. Project Management from Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager.
Engaging the community on our finances and how we spend our money	Focus of the project is on making decisions in relation to our budget. There are no direct financial implications. Project Management from Director- Resources.
Local Plan Review	Assumed that this will be delivered from existing resources, including use of specific reserves. Project Management from the Strategic Planning Team.
Digital Transformation	Staffing resource is coming from Customer Services and IT. The projects may deliver some net savings, alongside process improvements for customers and staff. As the amount is uncertain these are not budgeted for at this stage.
Pay on exit parking	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Engaging the community on our finances and how we spend our money	Expecting to deliver from existing staff resources and using existing Council communication tools. Being led by Communications and Finance teams.
King George V Skate Park	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Oughtonhead Weir	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Town Centre Strategies	Assumed that this will be delivered from existing resources, including use of specific reserves. Project Management from Strategic Planning Projects Team..
Residential/ Public EV charging	Expected to be completed in 2025/26.
Achieving net zero Carbon emissions	Our leisure centres make up around 45% of our scope 1-3 emissions. The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme therefore supports significant progress towards net zero. Within the new waste contract, all vehicles under 7.5 tonnes will be electric. We have budget provision for using HVO fuel in the larger waste vehicles. The phase 2 decarbonisation budget includes the Town Hall and Museum, North Herts Learner Pool and District Council Offices. There are not currently any other specific capital budgets allocated for carbon improvements. There is also no budget allocated for off-setting costs.
Local Government Reorganisation	This has been very resource intensive in supporting the development of the options proposal document, alongside the consultant support. It is expected that this will continue and likely to need additional resource in key support areas (e.g. IT and HR). The initial funding from Government has all been used. There will need to be additional budget allocated as part of the 2026/27 budget process, although this will be time-limited.

Projects are generally managed by relevant Officers, in addition to their core role. This creates the potential for delays.

There is not currently any resource allocated for any new projects that are not listed above.

Our future spend forecasts and resultant budget gap

Bringing together the above assumptions gives the following spend forecasts over the next 4 years. This is then compared with the estimated range of funding for each year to give a forecast funding gap.

Amounts in £m	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**
Forecast spend from 2025/26 budget	22.40	22.71	22.70	22.77
Temporary Accommodation Grant	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37
Budget monitoring impacts	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Change in pay inflation	0.40	0.80	0.80	0.80
Change in contract inflation	0.30	0.60	0.60	0.60
Change in fees and charges inflation	(0.20)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.40)
Revised forecast spend	**23.30**	**24.11**	**24.10**	**24.17**
Forecast funding range	20.90 to 21.77	20.79 to 22.53	20.72 to 23.32	21.20 to 23.85
Forecast budget gap	**1.53 to 2.40**	**1.58 to 3.32**	**0.78 to 3.38**	**0.32 to 2.97**

Addressing our funding gap

The table above shows that our financial position will be highly dependent on the outcome of the Fair Funding review. In 2028/29 the budget gap could be as low as around £0.8million, but could be as high as around £3.4million. Note that these are only estimates and the outcome of the Fair Funding review could be outside of the range that has been presented. The funding from Extended Producer Responsibility is only an estimate. On the expenditure side this is currently only a high level assessment, which will be refined as we go through the budget process.

It is difficult to commit to a package of savings to address the higher funding gap, when the lower funding gap is so much smaller. As a result of the level of savings we have delivered previously, most of the efficiency savings have been taken and remaining savings are likely to require changes to service levels.

What do we mean by savings?

We refer to the likely need for savings to balance our budget. Savings could mean any of the following:

- Being able to deliver our existing services at a lower cost. The use of technology and automation may enable to do this in some areas. But generally, the savings that we have delivered across a number of years have been through efficiencies, meaning that there are fewer opportunities left.
- Being able to generate additional income from services that we are able to charge for, less any costs in providing that additional level of service.
- Being able to generate income from commercial activities. The opportunities to do this are limited by economic conditions and government policy. We also need to make sure that these activities are in line with our priorities.
- As capital expenditure comes with a revenue cost, reviewing our capital programme to ensure it reflects priorities and is deliverable.
- Reducing the level of services that we provide, or no longer providing services that we are not required to provide. Whilst we would always want to avoid this, we have to consider the overall sustainability of our Council.

Over June and July, we asked residents to help us shape our future budget decision-making by sharing their thoughts on the services they value and their future priorities via our first-ever budget consultation.

The aim of the consultation was to gauge residents' views and use the findings to aid our decision-making rather than make any concrete decisions on future services. The consultation focused on those services which are paid for through our general funding rather than those that are fully covered by fees and charges.

559 residents responded who told us their top five services in terms of importance to them were: 1) Waste collection & recycling; 2) Parks and greenspaces; 3) Street cleaning; 4) Community safety and environmental crime; and 5) Environment health. In terms of their thoughts on balancing our future budgets, they told us that they would rather we find ways new ways to fund our existing services rather than reduce the frequency or quality of the services we provide. We will use the results from this survey when we consider savings options.

We have a high level of reserves, which in the short-term can be used to help balance the budget whilst we develop and deliver savings proposals. This is not a medium-term solution, as we have a legal requirement to set a balanced medium-term budget. We also should not see Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as a barrier to this as it is due to take place within that medium-term time horizon. We should have an implementable plan to deliver a balanced budget. Where savings are required, some of those may need to be delivered after LGR, but they are a viable option for a new Unitary Council to adopt.

Our level of reserves means that we have some financial capacity to:

- Deliver required savings in a way that seeks to manage the impact on our residents.
- Provide additional short-term resource to support the LGR process- both internally and contributions to work across Hertfordshire.
- Ensure that key projects are progressed, especially where there is an advantage to that happening in advance of LGR.

The above is dependent on having a plan that achieves a balanced budget. Ongoing costs and any potential redundancy costs (including where they will fall on the new Unitary Authority) must be fully considered, and avoided as much as possible.

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