

2. Our vision for four new mainland unitary councils and the Isle of Wight

Our proposal for four new mainland unitaries alongside the Isle of Wight – anchored around the population centres and urban economies of Basingstoke, Winchester, Portsmouth and Southampton – sets out a bold vision for a modern, efficient and resident-focused local government structure.

Our focus is on delivering services that are outcome-driven and designed around our customer journey, with a key focus on prevention. This will be achieved by reimagining service delivery and adopting cost-effective models. Service delivery will be tailored to local needs with a digital-first approach to empower residents while ensuring everyone has equal access to services. This forward-thinking approach sets out a compelling case for change, balancing innovation with practicality to meet the evolving needs of our communities.



2. Our vision for four new mainland unitary councils and the Isle of Wight

Our vision is driven by our commitment to achieve the best outcomes for our residents and communities. It recognises and protects the distinct geographic areas and economic identities of the four new unitary areas, prioritising the diverse needs of our residents through financially sustainable, place-focused services.



We have refined our vision through engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight:

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

The vision is supported by our guiding principles, as outlined in our interim plan, and service design opportunities which emphasise our values and priorities. To deliver on this vision, we will:

- Design services that respond to the **customer journey**, with a focus on prevention and outcomes tailored to local needs. This clear focus would drive **collaboration, simplicity, and efficiency** – minimising duplication, multiple hand-offs, and unnecessary interventions.
- Actively seek opportunities for real **transformation** by exploring how **services can be delivered differently, including with partners, through a total place-based approach**.
- Deliver the most appropriate service delivery models that are **cost effective, meet the diverse needs of our residents** and respond to the **unique challenges** in each of our areas.

- Prioritise a **customer first, digital by design approach**, encouraging self-service for all who can digitally interact with councils.
- Focus on the future state, supported by a defined methodology **and the roadmap required to achieve it**.
- Demonstrate a compelling case for change, underpinned by clear criteria around cost reduction and improved local service delivery, while acknowledging the **varying priorities in different parts of the unitary geographies**.
- Address the **resilience of authorities**, including **staff recruitment** and **smarter use of public assets**, ensuring an accurate picture of where each service is operating to **inform design and identify efficiencies**.
- Build on the existing service strengths while **optimising procurement practices to drive better value and outcomes**.
- Improve the **environmental sustainability** of the region as a key principle, ensuring that service models contribute to a greener and more resilient region.

Our four new mainland and the Isle of Wight unitary council proposal will build upon the strengths of existing district, borough, and unitary city councils, particularly their deep understanding of local communities and their needs. We recognise that the voices of our communities must continue to be heard and shape the delivery of high quality, accessible services. Understanding and being responsive to the local nuances and issues that matter most to our residents is fundamental.

By building new mainland authorities around four distinct geographic areas and communities, we can ensure that local needs are understood and effectively addressed. The four areas proposed for the new mainland unitaries mirror existing

patterns of economic and social activity, where existing hubs serve as focal points for their communities. A dedicated unitary council focused on each area enables councils to concentrate their efforts and resources, avoiding the dilution that comes from managing multiple distinct population centres and economic areas.

Anything other than this approach, which best reflects the way people live, work and travel, risks creating overly large and disconnected authorities that fail to reflect how people live and use local services. Combining distinct communities into broader geographies would alienate our communities, reduce responsiveness and limit the ability to tailor services to local need. It would also reduce the potential for targeted economic growth, missing the opportunity to unlock the full potential of each area.

Our residents clearly value local identity and decision-making. In a recent survey conducted across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, with over 13,000 respondents, an average of 87% agreed that councils should reflect the identity of local communities, and that decisions about local areas should be made close to the communities themselves. Our proposal is underpinned by these principles, alongside other key factors that matter deeply to our residents, which are outlined in more detail below.

Built around the anchors of the four population centres and economic hubs

Our new mainland unitaries reflect how people live, travel and work. The four major population centres and economies of Southampton, Portsmouth, Winchester and Basingstoke form the anchors for these new unitary councils to ensure they can better serve their distinct communities.

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight is a very diverse area with distinct geographical, economic, cultural, and infrastructural characteristics. We have rejected bringing together communities where there is no strong local connection into much larger unitary councils serving huge geographical areas. This would overlook specific communities' needs and fail to maximise the potential of each area. Such an approach would dilute political representation and community identity, leading to ineffective decision making and poor outcomes for our residents.

Collaborative and inclusive approach

From the outset, all 12 councils have committed to a common purpose to develop the best proposal for our residents. We have worked together as leaders and officers, with partners and communities at both a local and regional level. This has meant that our proposal has been informed by working with those that will help deliver it and shaped by the communities it will impact.

Aligned with community priorities and delivers genuine transformation

As a group of existing unitary, district, borough and city councils, we know our communities. We work with them, deliver services they rely on every day and understand the challenges they face.

Through our proposal, we have an opportunity to shape new unitary councils that reflect our areas, built around the four anchors of our major cities and towns and the unique requirements of the areas through a place-focused approach.

Our approach ensures a balanced and thriving Hampshire and the Isle of Wight at both the unitary and regional level. For instance, our four new mainland unitaries offer balanced population sizes across sensible geographical areas with an average population size of around 500,000. In contrast, an option with just one less council would create some of the largest council populations in the country, similar to Leeds in population, but spread over geographical areas larger than Greater London and Greater Manchester.

Under our proposal, we will build new councils that reflect our areas and that listen, lead and deliver on our vision for the future. With transformation and innovation at its heart, services would be designed for the modern world, making it easier for residents to access service and get a faster, more effective response. Our focus will be on tailoring services to the specific needs of our communities with partners through a total place approach. This will enable us to make the best use of community opportunities, assets and capacity in a way that that larger unitary councils will not be able to.

Our size and close connection to the distinct communities we serve will enable us to quickly deliver innovation, drive transformation and deliver flexible, placed focused services in partnership with others, leading to greater efficiency and cost savings.