

8. Implementation plan

Throughout this business case, we have set out how our proposals for local government reorganisation in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight would best meet the government's criteria and deliver sustainable councils for the future, built around transformation and collaboration.

Our implementation plan builds on this evidence-led process, setting out how these new councils would be delivered, including a detailed programme timeline, governance arrangements, shared principles and robust mitigation measures for risks that have been identified throughout the process.





8. Implementation plan

Our proposal not only reflects the best option in terms of maximising positive and sustainable outcomes for our residents, but also in terms of the efficiency of implementation to start delivering those outcomes as soon as possible. As a group of 11 councils in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, we have carefully considered the practicalities and arrangements required to deliver on the changes and initiatives outlined in this case for change. We haven't just theorised the potential outcomes but planned in detail how this will work and how we will get there, building on the vast array of existing competence and experience we have as a group of unitary city, borough and district councils.

Change of this scale will require councils to continue working closely together. We have committed to doing this both in the context of local government reorganisation and devolution, building on some of the great work we have already done bringing together over 90 council service leads to think through the 'how' as well as the 'what' when it comes to transformation.

Our commitment also extends to the continuity of services through this time, ensuring we can continue to serve our residents and minimise any disruption. We are ambitious in the change we can make as part of this proposal and will be focussing on deriving maximum benefits through this period.

This implementation plan will detail our programme plan and robust governance structures which will enable delivery at pace. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this plan with MHCLG and commit to driving towards success by sharing key lessons learned with other areas.

An understanding of unitarisation

As previously stated, we have significant unitary experience within our group of 11 councils with Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council running as unitary councils for approaching three decades with all the learning and experience that provides in delivering tailored services to their communities. Similarly, within the district and borough councils we have Chief Executives, Deputy Chief Executives and Directors who have worked at the top of unitary councils in other areas of the country. In our advisers KPMG, we have external support who have supported recent local reorganisations elsewhere. The existing councils who would form the new North Hampshire Unitary and the new Mid Hampshire Unitary have each also recruited experienced Directors of Adult Social Care and Children's Services to provide additional specialist expertise. We are also already gathering best practice from other reorganisation processes carried out previously to ensure they inform our thinking. We will use this extensive range of skills, experience and learning in ensuring the most effective approach to transition, building on best practice and innovative models informed by local insight.

Our proposal builds on the main population centres and economic areas of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, reflecting the way people live, work and travel. As demonstrated, our councils have existing strong networks and relationships with neighbouring authorities and partners within our four mainland and Isle of Wight unitary model that can be better utilised through local government reorganisation. Due to the natural alignment with our proposal and the way our authorities and partners already work together, transitioning through reorganisation will better enable seamless transition to the

new structures. We have already started on this journey, having brought together stakeholders from across the 12 councils, as well as our key partners, to kickstart the transformation required.

Principles

As a group of 11 of the 15 councils in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, we have collectively agreed on several principles which will underpin our approach to implementation. These principles reflect our deep understanding of our distinct economies and populations while also demonstrating our aspirations to deliver maximum benefit through reorganisation to our communities.

Collaboration – maintain close cooperation among the 15 councils throughout the reorganisation and transition process, sharing expertise, resources, and lessons learned to drive effective implementation and transformation.

Partnership – strengthen and build on relationships with neighbouring authorities, community organisations, and key stakeholders, ensuring alignment through a total placed based approach to maximise benefits for residents.

Continuity of service delivery – place residents at the centre of transition planning, ensuring uninterrupted access to essential services and prioritising community needs throughout, with robust safeguards to prevent any disruption during change.

Local design for local people – service delivery will align with our distinct communities, engaging them upfront in the shaping of future services focussing on outcomes and improvement.

Clear accountability and risk management – comprehensive governance and risk management structures to ensure accountability and transparency.

Financial sustainability – implementation will be focussed on building the foundations of strong and sustainable structures that deliver value for money.

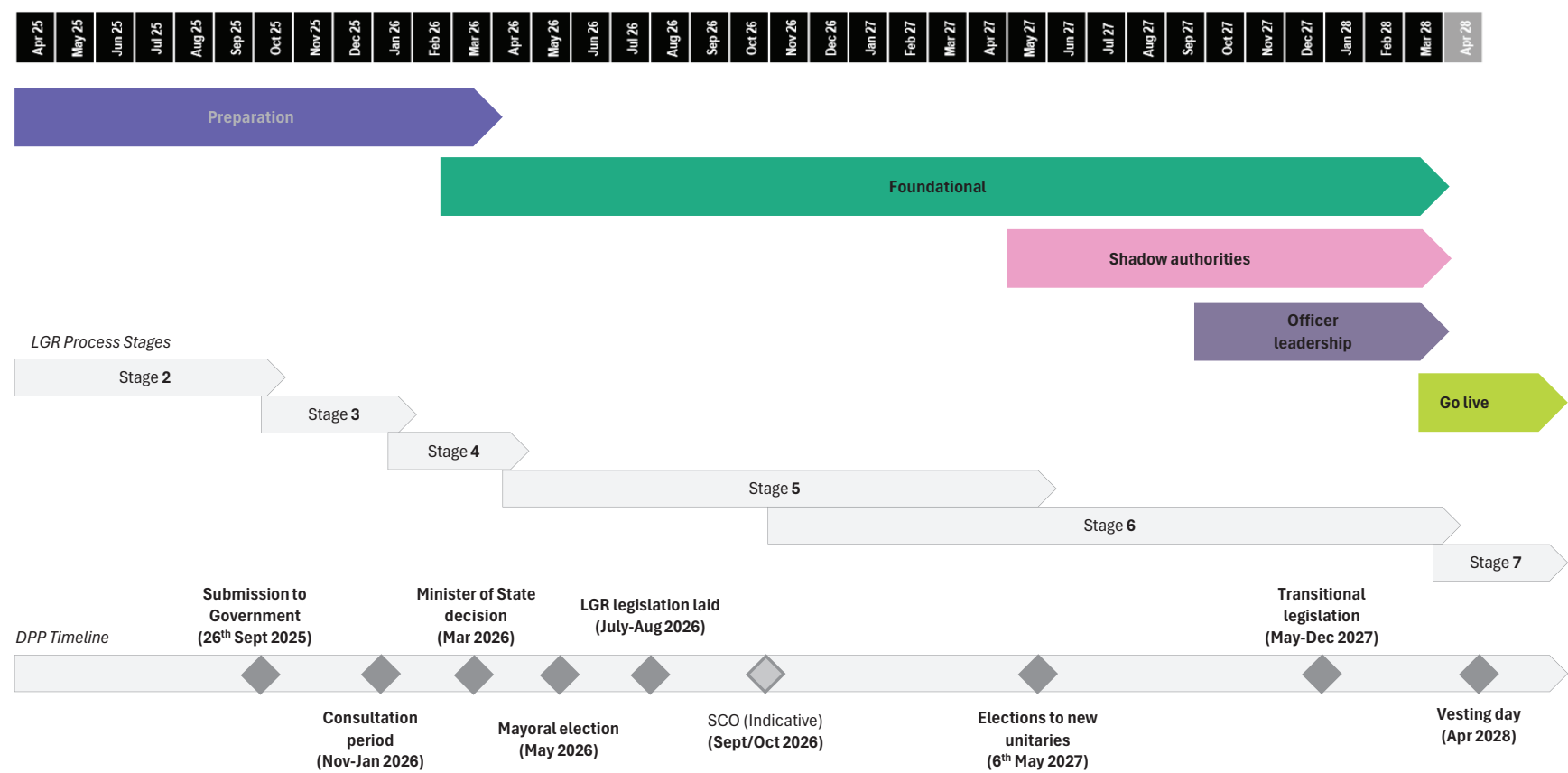
Workforce and culture – a human-first approach to implementation which ensures the wellbeing of our staff through transformation and developing an inclusive culture.



Timeline to Day 1

Five distinct phases of LGR implementation have been outlined below. These phases are critical to ensure government milestones are met and services continue to be delivered to residents through this period. It is also the start of the transformation journey, and through these phases, we will make the best use of time to deliver reorganisation benefits at pace with a secure programme to ensure this is done within a safe environment.

A detailed programme and stakeholder engagement plan is currently in development alongside our proposal to outline the practical steps required under each phase. This will be refined in the early stages of preparation while we continue to work as group of 11 councils and continue to engage with our stakeholder groups. From March 2026, our expectation and ambition is that all 15 councils in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight will begin to work collaboratively from foundation to go live and beyond.



Working together, we have identified the priorities and activities required under each of the five phases, aligning to government steps and the DPP timeline. The five phases include:

Phase	Priorities
Preparation: prior to government decision on proposal	• Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance) • Set up the plan, timeline and critical path • Set up a data hub - gather and maintain consistent programme data • Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils • Agree ambition and aims at a unitary and county-wide level
Foundational: prior to the election of shadow members or appointment of office leadership	• Appoint strategic partner • Progressing what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts • Service alignment and transformation • Preparing for key decisions • Elections
Shadow authorities: members elected but only with programme or unofficial groupings of officers for capacity	• Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles • Member inductions and service briefings • Key decision timetable • Approving the Council Plans, MTFS and operating models for each of the four new councils
Officer leadership: Tier 1-3 officers have been appointed and can prepare the new councils	• Tier 2 & Tier 3 leadership recruitment • Service Planning • Development of council plans, MTFS and budgets • Key policies and strategies • Operating models and staffing allocations • Preparing for day 1
Go live: post-vesting day when the new councils become operational	• Focus on seamless experience for residents and partners and stability for staff • Continued transformation and improvement

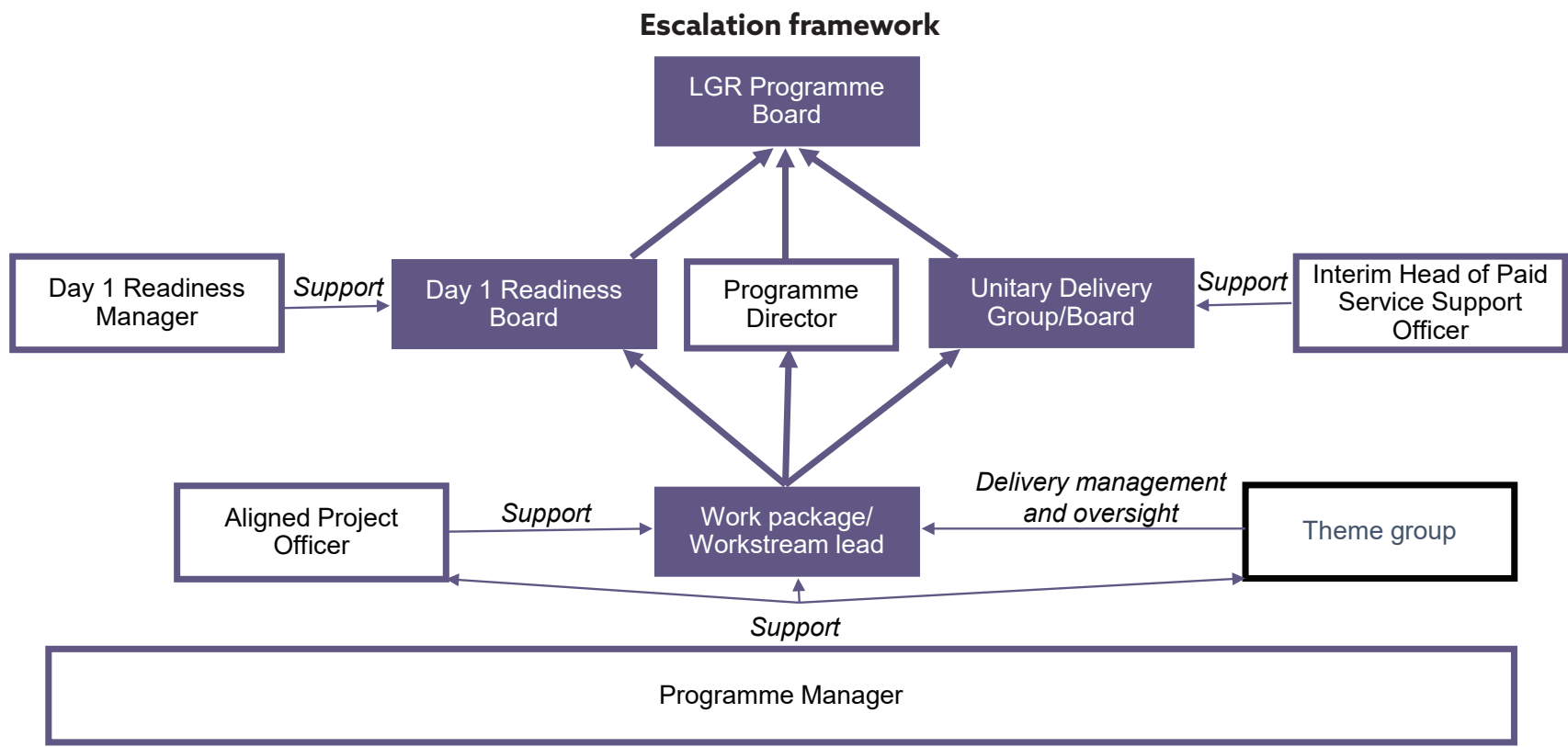
Governance and workstreams

We will establish a Local Government Reorganisation Programme Board across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, reporting to the Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Leaders' Group and ultimately the shadow authorities. This board will comprise of Chief Executives and the Programme Director, providing strategic oversight of the programme and addressing key risks and issues.

To ensure effective delivery, we will also set up a Day 1 Board focused on implementing the programme plan. This Board will monitor progress against key milestones and ensure all Day 1 requirements are met.

Beneath the overarching LGR programme, we will create unitary delivery groups dedicated to the specific needs of each new council. These groups will focus on critical areas such as elections, council plans, member induction, policies and organisational culture and service planning relating to the new unitaries.

These delivery groups will become increasingly important as we transition to Shadow Authorities and appoint Heads of Paid Service. By establishing them early, we are laying strong foundations for the success of the new unitary councils.



Unitary Delivery Groups will focus on preparing for the new councils. These groups will operate collaboratively by design and remain agile, enabling them to respond to opportunities that may arise within individual unitary areas. As the programme progresses, these governance structures will evolve to support the Shadow Authorities and play a key role in establishing the new councils once permanent officers are in place.

We have proposed a number of workstreams and high-level activities to support delivery at pace.

	Preparation*	Foundational	Shadow Authorities	Officer Leadership	Go Live
People	• Communication with staff regarding timeline and plan • Gather and categorise single view of all staff and other delivery bodies • Skills and capability assessment	• Develop visions • Initial workforce modelling, including roles, accountabilities and ways of working • Understand skills and capability gaps and develop plan to address	• Delivery of agreed milestones • Staff and partner communication and support • Priority appointments (Interim Head of Paid Service, S151 and MO) • Other senior appointments	• Delivery of agreed milestones • Staff and partner communication and support	• Staff and partner communication and support
Technology	• Form technology working group • Review infrastructure (including security assessment and certification) and scenario planning • Gather and categorise single view of all systems • Identify core system contracts	• Identify treatment of systems and contracts • Delivery of agreed milestones • Infrastructure connectivity and security • Workplace (e-mail) collaboration including elections and Shadow authorities ICT • Contact centres • Digital presence and branding • Physical access • System integration and disaggregation	• Delivery of agreed milestones • Shadow authorities ICT support including councillors web presence	• Delivery of agreed milestones	• Hypercare • Aftercare • Post-reorganisation transformation delivery

	Preparation*	Foundational	Shadow Authorities	Officer Leadership	Go Live
Finance	- Form working group of S151 Officers - Review of savings required prior to vesting day - Gathering data on companies, traded services, asset, policies and treasury including PFI - Identify key reporting requirements - Agree baseline budget - Identify pensions costs, risks and opportunities	- Develop service delivery models - Aligned charts of accounts - Baseline MTFPs align savings and scenario planning - Build reporting workstream - Define processes (MTFPs, Treasury management, capital, procurement) - Agree approach to pension scheme, council tax and business rates	- Delivery of agreed milestones - Independent oversight and assessing pension implications of decisions	- Delivery of agreed milestones - S151 initiation	Delivery of agreed milestones
Contracts and Legal	Data gathering and scenario planning	- Identify treatment of contracts - Legal support to key contracts and systems - Delivery of agreed milestones	Delivery of agreed milestones	- Delivery of agreed milestones - MO initiation	Delivery of agreed milestones
Property and Estates	Data gathering and scenario planning	- Capital plan optimisation - Establishment of an integrated major projects pipeline - Develop headquarters and estates strategy - Asset rationalisation opportunities	Delivery of agreed milestones	Delivery of agreed milestones	Delivery of agreed milestones

	Preparation*	Foundational	Shadow Authorities	Officer Leadership	Go Live
Data Hub	• Data cleansing and management • Set up a data hub to enable data sharing • Establish single taxonomy for service, budget and HR data • Gather data regarding staffing, infrastructure and systems, contracts, policies and strategies, property, estates and assets	• Support and model key decisions • Track progress • Maintain or update data	• Support and model key decisions • Track progress • Maintain or update data	• Delivery of agreed milestones	• Delivery of agreed milestones
Comms and Engagement	• Stakeholder mapping and strategy • Identify or setup partner and providers forums • Identify communication channels • Identify branding requirements	• Engagement of staff and communities • Engagement with partners and suppliers • Development of the new unitary councils branding	• Delivery of agreed milestones	• Delivery of agreed milestones	• Delivery of agreed milestones

*During preparation there are key activities that our sovereign councils, or groupings of councils across the unitary footprint, can undertake to prepare for LGR.

LGR risks and mitigations

We recognise and understand the risks associated with reorganisation and are proactively addressing them through our programme structure and approach. Transitioning to new structures in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight involves disaggregating and reorganising county, unitary and district council services and redefining boundaries. To navigate this complexity, we will work closely with the Local Government Boundary Commission, learning from previous local government reorganisation programmes, and start Day 1 planning early to ensure readiness.

ICT underpins every aspect of the programme and is vital to the legal and operational integrity of the new councils. We will bring together ICT managers from across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to share system data, licences and infrastructure insights, helping us streamline preparations and reduce pressure on capacity. This will build on our existing data sharing agreement across the 15 councils.

Reorganisation requires strong cooperation across councils, government tiers and political lines. We are building on existing partnerships, identifying shared initiatives that can be delivered now and establishing clear protocols for how we work together. Our approach will ensure that current services remain strong while we build the foundations for successful new authorities.

We have incorporated learning from previous local government programmes into our approach, such as Cumbria who reflected on having good collaboration, a dedicated PMO team and allocated Programme Managers, regular monitoring of delivery plans through Day 1 Board, early set up of Shadow Unitary Boards to support service development and engagement with

elected members to understand their priorities. Our advisors, KPMG, supported Cumbria through that process and are bringing that expertise and learning to our approach.

We also recognise the importance and risks around service continuity in key areas such as social care through the transitional period and welcomed the letter from MHCLG on the 24th July 2025 with key considerations:

Service continuity: We will enhance collaboration between councils to maintain service delivery and improve outcomes for residents.

Partnership working: We will build on existing collaborative structures and engage with local residents, care providers, and the voluntary sector to enhance service delivery and innovation.

Leadership and workforce: We will plan effectively for leadership transition, building our talent pipeline, and build shared recruitment and retention strategies for social care staff.

Service planning and delivery: We will integrate service delivery with existing infrastructure and coordinate frontline services to minimise disruption.

Collaborative commissioning: We will focus on joint commissioning efforts to improve value for money and resilience against market shocks, including market shaping, capacity building, and using data to understand population needs and drive care quality improvements.

Strategic collaboration: We will build on our existing strong partnership working between our new unitary authorities, statutory and local partners.

Risk of disaggregation and false claims about 'greenfield unitaries'

We recognise that Hampshire County Council (HCC) and East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) have made misleading statements that you have to base a new unitary on an existing upper-tier council, even though we understand that their own proposal does not mirror the same boundaries as any existing upper-tier authority. Of course, establishing any new unitary authority carries potential risks regardless of boundary. However, our understanding of local government reorganisation is that while new unitaries will build on lessons learned and inherit certain aspects from existing sovereign councils, each newly created unitary is fundamentally and legally a new entity and so, to use the HCC and EHDC language, is a 'greenfield unitary'. Historically, every local government reorganisation programme has resulted in the formation of greenfield authorities. For instance, prior to reorganisation in Cumbria, there was one upper-tier authority - Cumbria County Council. Following local government reorganisation, two new upper-tier authorities were established: Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council.

The primary risks associated with new unitary authorities typically relate to financial sustainability and the continuity of key services, particularly adults' and children's services. These risks are often driven by the disaggregation of large county councils, such as Hampshire. We have fully addressed these concerns through a robust financial case, including detailed modelling of disaggregation and implementation costs, benefits and payback periods, which incorporates transformation opportunities.

Evidence from the new Cumbrian authorities demonstrates that when county functions are disaggregated with a clear focus on transformation and the creation of right-sized authorities with distinct characteristics, it can lead to positive cultural change. This transformation is enabled by having the right resources, ambition, and local focus to improve outcomes for residents.

A notable example is the improvement in children's services. Prior to local government reorganisation, Ofsted rated Cumbria County Council's children's services as 'Requires Improvement' in their 2022 inspection. Since the establishment of the two new unitary authorities, both councils have been rated 'Good' by Ofsted in their 2024 inspections. This improvement reflects the benefits of creating new unitaries with a strong emphasis on transformation based on local needs. Similar progress has also been observed in adult services (as noted by the CQC), as well as in areas such as net zero initiatives, diversity and inclusion, housing and customer engagement.

Planning for Day 1 and beyond

We will ensure seamless continuity of services, setting up our new unitaries to be safe, legal and effective. Our focus is also transformational, and we will be identifying opportunities early on prior to Day 1 alongside existing agreed improvements in our sovereign councils ahead of vesting day (to be integrated with Day 1 Board).

We have already commenced our transformation journey, as highlighted through our service design work across eight major service areas. Our colleagues have an excitement and ambition to redesign services which reflect the distinct communities we serve. We recognise change is needed and the desire to build on this existing design work is evident. Collaboration has underpinned our process to develop this full proposal and will be continued to be maintained through to Day 1 and beyond, working together to:

- Establish Unitary Delivery Groups and a programme management office (PMO) to coordinate and oversee implementation.
- Bring together service leads to review and align policies, processes, and contracts, identifying opportunities for integration and improvement.
- Cleanse and standardise data across all councils to support seamless reorganisation and inform the development of a central data hub.

- Assess and address skills and capacity requirements, exploring opportunities for shared roles and skills exchange across councils.
- Develop and agree a charter guiding how sovereign councils will operate prior to vesting day, ensuring collective commitment and accountability.
- Establish robust governance structures, including a local government reorganisation programme board and supporting tools, to drive progress.

Further work will continue post implementation for our new unitaries to continue transformation, reflecting the unique populations and geographies they serve.

