



Report to: Extraordinary Full Council Meeting - 19 March 2025
 Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Paul Peacock, Strategy, Performance & Finance
 Director Lead: John Robinson, Chief Executive, Ext. 5200

Report Summary	
Report Title	Local Government Reorganisation in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire
Purpose of Report	To provide an overview of the Government’s requirement for plans for local government reorganisation to be developed in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire; to outline the work undertaken to respond to the requirements; and to endorse the submission of an interim plan for the area of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) That the interim plan for local government reorganisation in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire as attached at Appendix C to this report be endorsed for submission to Government by 21 March 2025; b) That based on the work undertaken to date and having regard to the Government’s criteria, that Full Council express a preference towards option 1e as set out in the interim plan; c) To note the reference within the interim plan seeking support from Government for adjustments to District/Borough boundaries where they are considered to provide more “sensible geography”, it being noted that such adjustments would be unlikely to take effect until after the establishment of the new unitary Councils; d) To engage with Town and Parish Councils in the development of the next phase of work, recognising the importance of ‘sub-structures’ that will sit beneath the new unitary Councils; and e) To continue to work collaboratively with other Nottinghamshire authorities with a view to developing a proposal for a single tier of local government in Nottinghamshire for submission to Government by 28 November 2025.
Reason for Recommendations	To ensure that the Council meets the requirements of the statutory invitation from government to submit an interim plan for local government reorganisation for the area of the County of Nottinghamshire by 21 March 2025.

1.0 Background Information

- 1.1 On 16 December 2024, the Government published the [English Devolution White Paper](#). The White Paper aims to devolve greater powers to regions and local areas to improve public services and drive economic growth through:
- Widening and broadening devolution so that all areas of England have a devolution settlement;
 - Deepening devolution through the development of a stronger set of powers and resources available to local areas through the new Devolution Framework;
 - Progressing local-government reorganisation in two-tier areas to support a move to simpler structures, unlock further devolution and deliver sustainable public services.
- 1.2 The White Paper describes a new architecture of streamlined government, with the following tiers and functions:
- National government – responsible for the delivery and coordination of national level services, such as defence and macroeconomic policy, and services where national consistency is crucial, such as health;
 - Strategic authorities – responsible for coordinating levers relating to local growth and issues crossing council boundaries, such as infrastructure planning, transport, and spatial planning, while convening partners for public service reform;
 - Principal authorities – responsible for delivery of local public services, place shaping and local public service reform.
- 1.3 Under this proposed architecture, the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) would become a Mayoral Strategic Authority, with the potential, over time, to become an “Established” Mayoral Strategic Authority, unlocking additional funding, powers and greater local flexibility.
- 1.4 The White Paper outlines that principal authorities are to be unitary councils and sets an expectation that all two-tier areas and smaller or failing unitaries develop proposals for reorganisation. The case for change outlined is that unitarisation can simplify public service delivery, can deliver significant efficiencies and improve local accountability. Strong, unitary councils are seen as the building blocks for effective combined county authorities.
- 1.5 Alongside the publication of the White Paper on 16 December 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to the Leaders of the nine councils in the area of the County of Nottinghamshire (the County Council, the City Council and the seven district and borough councils), outlining his intention to formally invite proposals for local government reorganisation, with the requirement to submit an interim plan, by March 2025 (**Appendix A**).
- 1.6 On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State issued a formal invitation to the nine council leaders, asking each leader to work with other council leaders in the area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation (**Appendix B**). The timeline outlined asks for interim plans to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025, with feedback to be provided by MHCLG officials, prior to the development of final proposals to be submitted by 28 November.

- 1.7 The letter outlines six criteria against which proposals for local government reorganisation will be assessed when considered by Government.
- a. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
 - b. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
 - c. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
 - d. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
 - e. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
 - f. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.
- 1.8 The full detail of each criterion can be found in Appendix B.
- 1.9 In terms of the requirement to develop and submit an interim plan, Government recognises that local areas will be at different stages of development, therefore the level of detail available will vary. The expectation of Government is for one interim plan to be jointly submitted by all councils in the area but with a recognition that this plan may include more than one potential proposal under consideration. The interim plan is expected to set out an area's progress in developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance.

Developing the Interim Plan

- 1.10 Since the publication of the White Paper in December 2024, Chief Executives of the nine councils have met on a weekly basis, to develop and maintain a collaborative approach to developing proposals for local government reorganisation in line with government expectations, and specifically in the short term, developing the interim plan.
- 1.11 Leaders/Mayors of the nine councils have met three times to steer the work:
- On 13 January 2025, to agree the collaborative approach to developing the interim plan, including the joint commissioning and funding of external technical support from Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) to independently develop and appraise potential options for local government reorganisation;
 - On 14 February 2025, to receive a progress update in terms of options development and to steer the final phase of work in developing the interim plan; and
 - On 5 March 2025, to agree the interim plan to be put forward to each Council for consideration.
- 1.12 The principles of the collaborative approach which councils are working to are as follows:
- Collaborative
 - Open, honest and transparent
 - Focussed on improving outcomes, services, financial sustainability

- Acting in longer-term interest, particularly in use of resources, reserves and decision making in the interim
- Evidence-informed, based on data
- Resident-focussed
- Valuing and preparing employees for the future at a time of uncertainty and change

1.13 The interim plan (**Appendix C**) has been developed by officers from across the nine councils, with independent support and advice from PwC. It seeks to meet the government's requirements by covering the following elements:

- a. identification of any barriers or challenges where further clarity or support would be helpful.
- b. identification of the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.
- c. inclusion of indicative costs and arrangements in relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.
- d. inclusion of early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.
- e. inclusion of early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.
- f. inclusion of a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with further plans for wide local engagement to help shape proposals.
- g. setting out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.
- h. setting out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.

1.14 At a meeting of Leaders and Chief Executives held on Wednesday 5 March, all nine councils recommitted to working together on a collective response to the Government's invitation. It was noted that the submission of a collective interim plan is part of the Government's required process but no decision is being made at this point (though feedback will be provided by Government). All nine Councils are committed between now and November to further exploration of data to ensure that final proposal(s) are

evidence-based. It was accepted that some councils may wish to continue to explore alternative proposals beyond the three being included within the interim plan. The Government has given all councils a deadline of 28 November to submit final proposals.

2.0 Proposal/Options Considered

2.1 The interim plan is included at Appendix C and contains the following three options for unitary structures in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

- A new unitary authority combining Nottingham City, Broxtowe, and Gedling, with a second new unitary authority covering the remaining County including Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Newark & Sherwood and Rushcliffe. (described as Option 1(b))
- A new unitary authority combining Nottingham City, Broxtowe, and Rushcliffe, with a second new unitary authority covering the remaining County including Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Gedling, Mansfield and Newark & Sherwood (described as Option 1(e)).
- One unitary authority covering Nottingham city (current arrangement); with a second unitary covering the County of Nottinghamshire (described as Option 2)

2.2 At this stage, there is no requirement to express a preference on the options contained within the interim plan though it is understood that a number of Councils may do so.

2.3 If Full Council is minded to express a preference as part of the Interim Plan submission, it may wish to give weight to the following.

2.4 Option 2, the creation of a single, County unitary authority is something that Full Council has considered previously. At our Full Council meeting on 11 December 2018, Newark and Sherwood District Council “affirmed its opposition to a single Unitary Council for Nottinghamshire”, though members should note that at that time, there was no requirement to ‘unitarise’. In the development of the interim plan, a number of neighbouring Councils have expressed concerns about this option, citing its failure to meet the Government’s population criteria or to enable the growth and expansion of the City.

2.5 Option 1e in the interim plan is most aligned to the preferred option discussed and considered at the members’ workshop on 12 February 2025, though it is important to bear in mind that consideration of ‘what makes sense’ in terms of a future unitary structure was largely considered in terms of geography, community identity, economic growth and housing market areas. These factors are all relevant but PwC’s analysis also covers financial and service delivery factors too.

2.6 As highlighted in PwC’s independent appraisal, Option 1e offers a number of potential benefits and could be argued to provide the most ‘sensible geography’, especially for those Councils who serve mid and North Nottinghamshire. Interest in this option has also prompted consideration of adjustments to Borough and District boundaries, something that again was considered at our own members’ workshop. The Government has made it clear to Councils to base their proposals on existing boundaries, suggesting

that a marker be put down for the future if changes to boundaries are considered to be necessary. Such a marker is included within the interim plan.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

3.1 Financial Implications (FIN24-25/1097)

The financial viability assessment supporting the Interim Plan is, at this stage, only a partial assessment. It is based on analyses of debt to reserves per capita and social care demand to council tax and the data used for the analyses has not been validated by the section 151 officers. Further detailed work will need to be taken on validating this data between now and the final submission in November and understanding the costs of the proposed new organisation and the efficiencies and costs in reducing the number of Councils to a smaller number. In addition, the financial viability assessment that will underpin the final submission will need to include the costs of all services provided by councils and not just social services and will need to take into account all other elements of core spending power; in particular business rate baseline and business rate growth and any potential direction of travel and sensitivity analysis regarding wider local government financial reform.

3.2 Legal Implications (LEG2425/4627)

Full Council is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report. Structural and boundary change in England is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. If, following due process including statutory consultation, a structural change is approved by Government, a structural change order will be made by way of secondary legislation to implement the change and establish a single tier of local government and abolish the relevant councils. An order would include provision for transitional arrangements and elections.

3.3 Consultation

Consultation and Engagement are fundamental building blocks in democracy and considerations on how Councils can involve their residents in these key proposals should be at the forefront of any planning discussions. Whilst it is acknowledged that the views of the public will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in our area this has not yet been possible due to the guidance and timelines received by government. Any future engagement should include the relevant Mayor, Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector. Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.