

BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

Meeting of Extraordinary Council on 19th March 2025

Interim Proposals for Unitary Local Government in Derbyshire

Report of the Leader

Classification	This report is Public
Contact Officer	Karen Hanson Chief Executive

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

To advise Council of the progress made in developing initial proposals for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby.

To seek approval to submit the proposed interim proposals to Government for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby.

To seek authority for the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any minor technical adjustments to the initial proposal prior to the submission deadline of 21st March 2025.

To seek authority for the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to continue to participate in discussions with authorities across Derbyshire and Derby to develop full detailed proposals in advance of the deadline of 28th November 2025, which will be presented to Council for final approval.

To note the intention of Derbyshire's eight District and Borough Councils and Derby City Council to consult with residents and other stakeholders to inform the development of a full proposal for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby City.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background and Details of the Report

- 1.1 Members will recall the publication of the English Devolution White Paper on 16th December 2024, which can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth>, and subsequent letters from the Secretary of State setting out the broad parameters of reorganisation proposals.
- 1.2 Subsequently, a further letter was received on 5th February 2025 from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (see

Appendix 1), in exercise of their powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), which invited any principal authority in the area of the county of Derbyshire, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government i.e. unitary local authorities. This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals

1.3 On 29th January 2025, Council authorised the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to participate in discussions with authorities across Derbyshire including Derby City Council, regarding local government reorganisation and to present update reports to Council as and when appropriate.

1.4 The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council have therefore worked with their counterparts at Derbyshire's seven other district and borough councils and Derby City Council to review options for local government reorganisation and develop an interim proposal for change, which must be submitted to the Government on or before 21 March 2025.

1.5 There are six overarching criteria that proposals for reorganisation are required to meet:

- 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.

Sitting beneath the overarching criteria are further additional requirements, which can also be viewed at Appendix 1.

- 1.6 Following receipt of the letter on 5th February 2025, the eight District Councils and Derby City Council have collaborated, with support from KPMG to develop the interim proposals as contained within Appendix 2. The County Council was also invited to take part, but declined, with a view to submitting its own proposal based on a whole county unitary council surrounding the City of Derby, which can be viewed [here](#).
- 1.7 Working with KPMG, an initial options appraisal considered a number of alternative options for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby, which are identified in Appendix 3. These were assessed against the Government's criteria and narrowed down to options 12 and 13, which are taken forward in the interim proposal.
- 1.8 The proposed interim submission allows for the creation of two unitary Councils that will preserve the historic boundaries of Derbyshire. These are a northern Derbyshire unitary council that will contain the current Councils of Bolsover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire Dales, High Peak and North East Derbyshire, and a separate southern Derbyshire unitary council that will contain the current Councils of Derby City, Erewash and South Derbyshire.
- 1.9 It is noted that Amber Valley is in a unique geographical position within the County and as such could join either the northern or southern unitary council, with either option based on current data appearing to be of broadly equal merit. Due to this unique position, the Leader and Chief Executive of Amber Valley have been clear throughout discussions that the Council will need to undertake consultation with residents, partners, and stakeholders to inform the final proposal prior to submission in November. Partner Councils have fully respected this view, and it is therefore anticipated that Amber Valley Borough Council will undertake consultation from late spring through to early summer. As a consequence, the interim proposal identifies both possible options, which MHCLG has confirmed is acceptable at this stage of the process.
- 1.10 It is felt that this two unitary model of local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby represents the optimum balance between maintaining local identity and harnessing the efficiencies and scale of two larger unitary councils. Key areas of focus for the Chief Executives and Leaders have been how to optimise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services; evidence efficiency, capacity and financial sustainability; best understand and meet local needs; support existing devolution arrangements; and guarantee stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment. Appendix 2 sets out the interim proposal in full, details the benefits and also provides additional data on the two options in respect of population, geography, gross value added and taxbase.
- 1.11 At this stage, submission of the Interim Proposal is not binding on Bolsover District Council but alongside the other eight councils it is intended to give an indication to the Minister of State and officials at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) of a preferred direction of travel for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby.

- 1.12 The councils will receive feedback on the interim proposal from MHCLG officials and should the commitment remain for all nine to continue to work together, the next step would be for the councils to formally develop a full proposal for submission to the Government on or before 28 November 2025. In submitting such a proposal, the councils must have regard to the Secretary of State's guidance as set out in the Schedule to the formal invitation, and to any further guidance received from the Secretary of State.
- 1.13 To guide the development of the full proposal, the councils will run an extensive and meaningful consultation in the late spring / early summer with residents, businesses, our workforces, partner public bodies, the voluntary sector and other key stakeholders; ensuring all voices are captured and heard.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To respond to the Government's formal invitation to councils in the county of Derbyshire to submit proposals for a single tier of local government. In doing so, councils must have regard to the Minister of State's guidance and the timeline for the process.
- 2.2 To ensure the interests of Bolsover residents, partners and stakeholders are safeguarded for the long term.
- 2.3 To ensure the Council meets the deadline of 21 March 2025 for the submission of interim reorganisation proposals.
- 2.4 To ensure that the District Council can continue to participate in the shaping of any local government reorganisation proposals for Derbyshire and Derby City.

3 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 3.1 Not to approve the submission of the interim proposal. This is not recommended, given the formal position set out in the Minister of State's 5 February 2025 letter. The letter confirms that in circumstances where a joint proposal cannot be agreed, this will not be a barrier to progress and that the Government will consider any suitable proposals submitted by any of the relevant local authorities.
- 3.2 Derbyshire County Council has already resolved to submit an interim proposal for a single unitary council covering the whole of Derbyshire, excluding Derby, and serving a population of over 800,000 residents. The Leaders of Derbyshire's eight district and borough councils and the Leader of Derby City Council do not believe this is the right approach. The new unitary council would be too large, and too far removed from the diverse communities that we serve. It would create a 'doughnut effect' around the city – leading to inefficient delivery of services and stifling economic and housing growth – and significant disparity between the two unitary councils, in terms of both size of population and taxbase.
- 3.3 It is critically important that Bolsover District Council has the ability to influence the future construct of local government in Derbyshire and Derby and at this juncture the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council consider the interim proposal attached at Appendix 2 to this report to be the best option for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 1. That Council approves the submission of the interim proposals for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire by the deadline of 21st March 2025, as detailed in Appendix 2.
- 2. That the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any minor technical adjustments to the interim proposals that may be required prior to the deadline for submission.
- 3. That the Chief Executive be authorised in consultation with the Leader of the Council to continue to participate in discussions with authorities across Derbyshire and Derby City Council to develop full detailed proposals for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire, in advance of the deadline of 28th November 2025, which will be the subject of a further report to Council.
- 4. To note the intention of Derbyshire’s eight District and Borough Councils and Derby City Council to consult with residents and other stakeholders to inform the development of a full proposal for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby City.

Approved by Councillor Jane Yates, Leader of the Council

IMPLICATIONS:

<u>Finance and Risk</u> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Details:		
The financial implications of the preferred model for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby, including transition costs and prospective transformation savings, will be developed and presented as part of the final proposal to be submitted to the Government by 28 November 2025.		
		On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection) Yes No

Details:

This process has been triggered by publication of the Government's English Devolution White Paper and formally by the statutory invitation issued on 5 February 2025 by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to all principal authorities in the area of the county of Derbyshire.

The legal implications of the preferred model for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire and Derby, including all necessary constitutional provisions, will be developed and presented as part of the proposal to be submitted to Government by 28th November 2025.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Staffing Yes No

Details:

Change on this scale is inevitably unsettling for the council's employees. It is important that the employees continue to feel valued and engaged in the process. Staff will continue to be kept informed and supported.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

Equality and Diversity, and Consultation Yes No

Details:

None arising at this point.

Environment Yes No

Details:

Not applicable.

DECISION INFORMATION:

Please indicate which threshold applies:

Is the decision a Key Decision?

A Key Decision is an Executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more wards in the District or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:

Revenue (a) Results in the Council making Revenue Savings of £75,000 or more or **(b)** Results in the Council incurring Revenue Expenditure of £75,000 or more.

Yes No

(a) **(b)**

<p>Capital (a) Results in the Council making Capital Income of £150,000 or more or (b) Results in the Council incurring Capital Expenditure of £150,000 or more.</p> <p>District Wards Significantly Affected: <i>(to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the District)</i> Please state below which wards are affected or tick All if all wards are affected:</p>	<p>(a) <input type="checkbox"/> (b) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>All <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i></p> <p>If No, is the call-in period to be waived in respect of the decision(s) proposed within this report? <i>(decisions may only be classified as exempt from call-in with the agreement of the Monitoring Officer)</i></p> <p>Consultation carried out: <i>(this is any consultation carried out prior to the report being presented for approval)</i></p> <p>Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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<p>Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment, Housing</p>
<p>Due to the cross-cutting and all-encompassing impact of Local Government Review on the Council, there are links to all key themes and priorities contained within the Council Ambition.</p>

DOCUMENT INFORMATION:

Appendix No	Title
1	Letter from the Secretary of State for Local Government and English Devolution dated 5 th February 2025
2	Interim proposals for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire
3	Overview of long list options

Background Papers

(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive, you must provide copies of the background papers).

- English Devolution White Paper
- Minister's Letter – Publication of the English Devolution White Paper
- Minister's Letter – Leaders of all two-tier councils and neighbouring unitary authorities
- Ministers Letter – 5th February 2025 Developing proposals and criteria