

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.

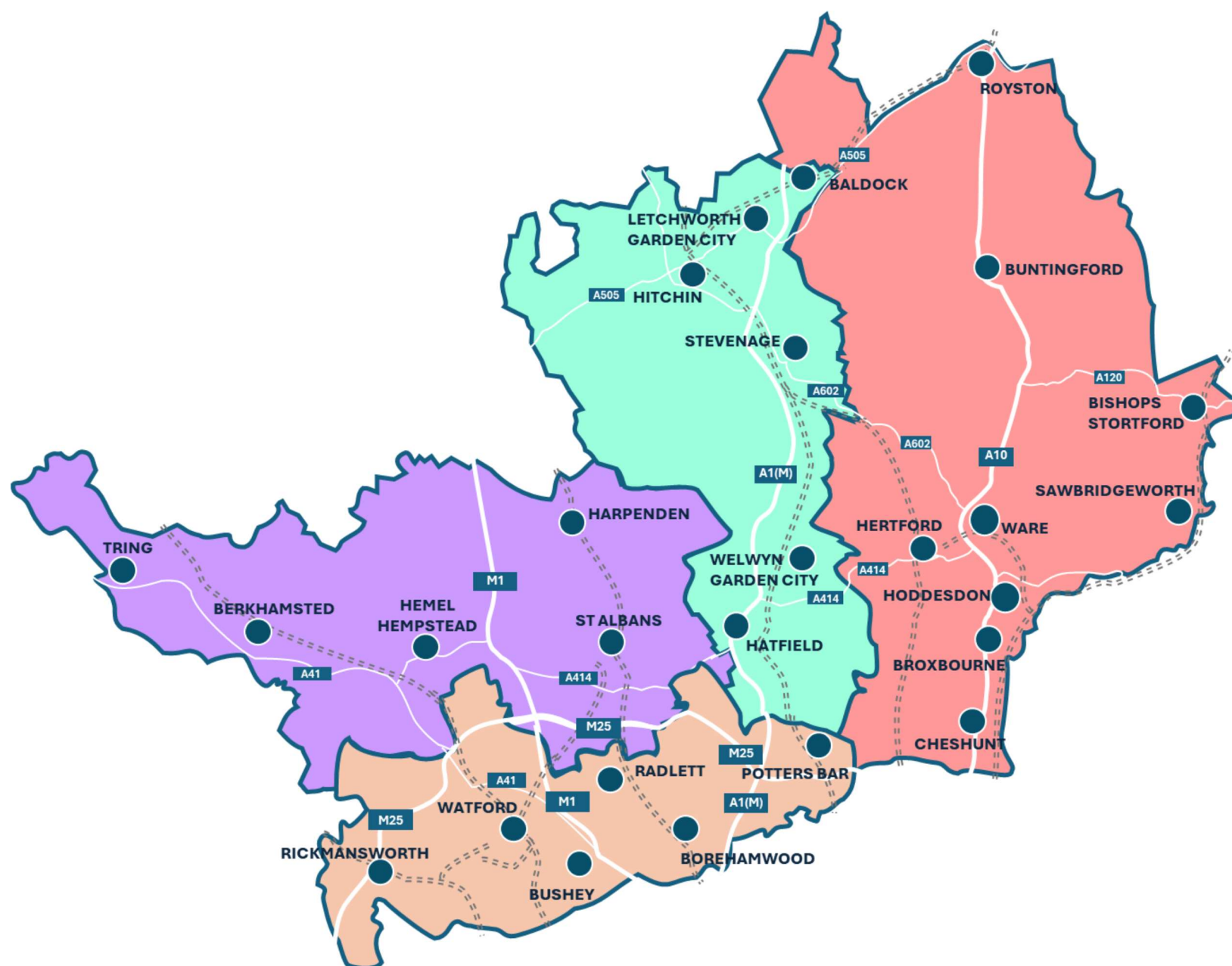
The four unitary model directly advances the Government’s Plan for Change, especially the missions to boost economic growth and accelerate housebuilding. Councils built around real places align local plans with transport, utilities and employment land, identify deliverable development schemes, and plan 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



Population & Place		Economy & Skills		Housing Development		Democracy & Representation	
Population (mid-2024)	313,190	GVA	£14,494*	No. of Households	126,378	No. of Wards	47
2045 Population Estimate	371,000	Active businesses	15,655*	Housing Affordability Ratio	9.36*	No. of Cllrs	89
% Working-Aged	63.20%	Employment Rate	87.31%*	Housing need	2,344*	Population / Cllr Ratio	3,551
Geographical Area	211.46 km ²	Economic Activity Rate	82.35%				
Population Density	1,456	% with L4+ Qualifications	48.40%				

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.

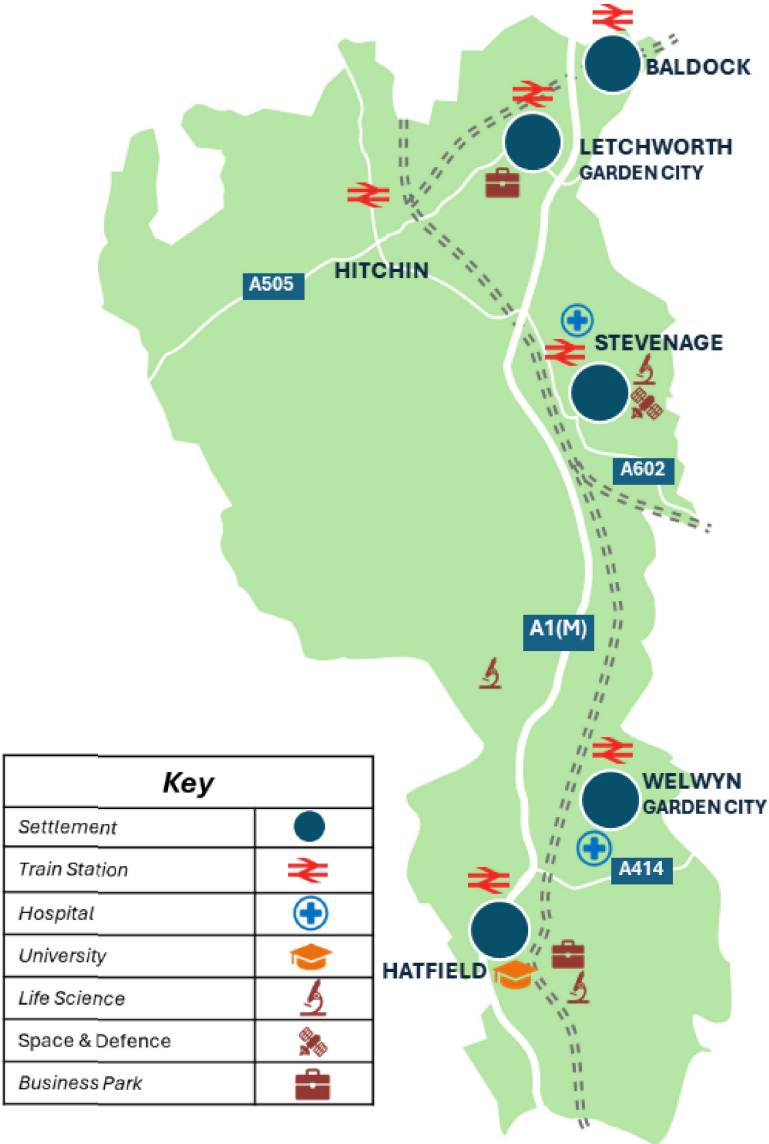
Borehamwood is home to BBC Elstree with the newly refurbished EastEnders set. Following recent approval for investment from Oxygen Studios, the former BBC Elstree Centre, now renamed Fairbanks Studios, will also be

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		Economy & Skills	
Population (mid-2024)	320,795	GVA	£14,494*
2045 Population Estimate	391,000	Active businesses	15,655*
% Working-Aged	64.10%	Employment Rate	87.31%*
Geographical Area	337 km ²	Economic Activity Rate	82.35%
Population Density	936.72	% with L4+ Qualifications	48.40%

Housing Development		Democracy & Representation	
No. of Households	126,378	No. of Wards	47
Housing Affordability Ratio	9.36*	No. of Cllrs	89
Housing need	2,344*	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

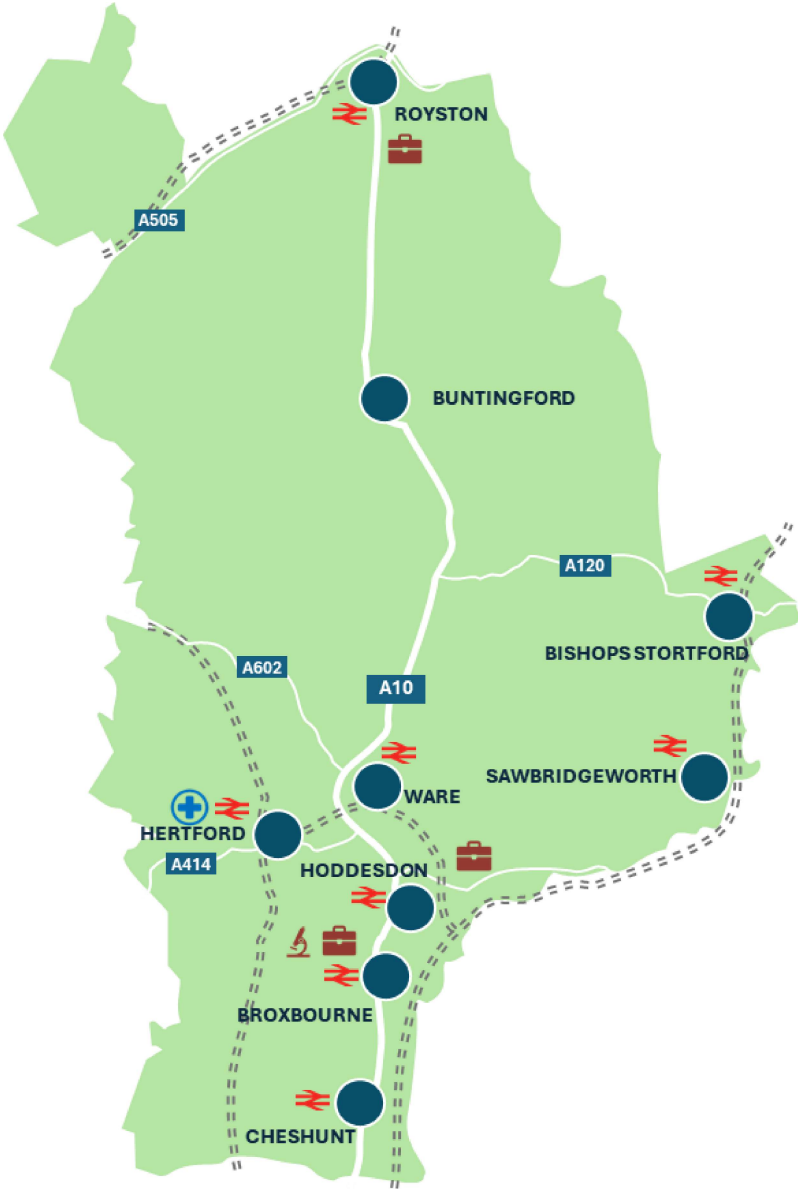
life sciences, advanced manufacturing and engineering. That growth is expected to radiate along the corridor through supply chains and commuting, complementing the headquarters and digital economy further south and the creative-professional base in the northern towns.

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		Economy & Skills	
Population (mid-2024)	289,774	GVA	£7,945*
2045 Population Estimate	366,000	Active businesses	13,390*
% Working-Aged	62.90%	Employment Rate	72.19%*
Geographical Area	721 km ²	Economic Activity Rate	81.60%
Population Density	395	% with L4+ Qualifications	47.04%

Housing Development		Democracy & Representation	
No. of Households	114,922	No. of Wards	43
Housing Affordability Ratio	9.6*	No. of Cllrs	75
Housing need	2,040*	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

Proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire

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.

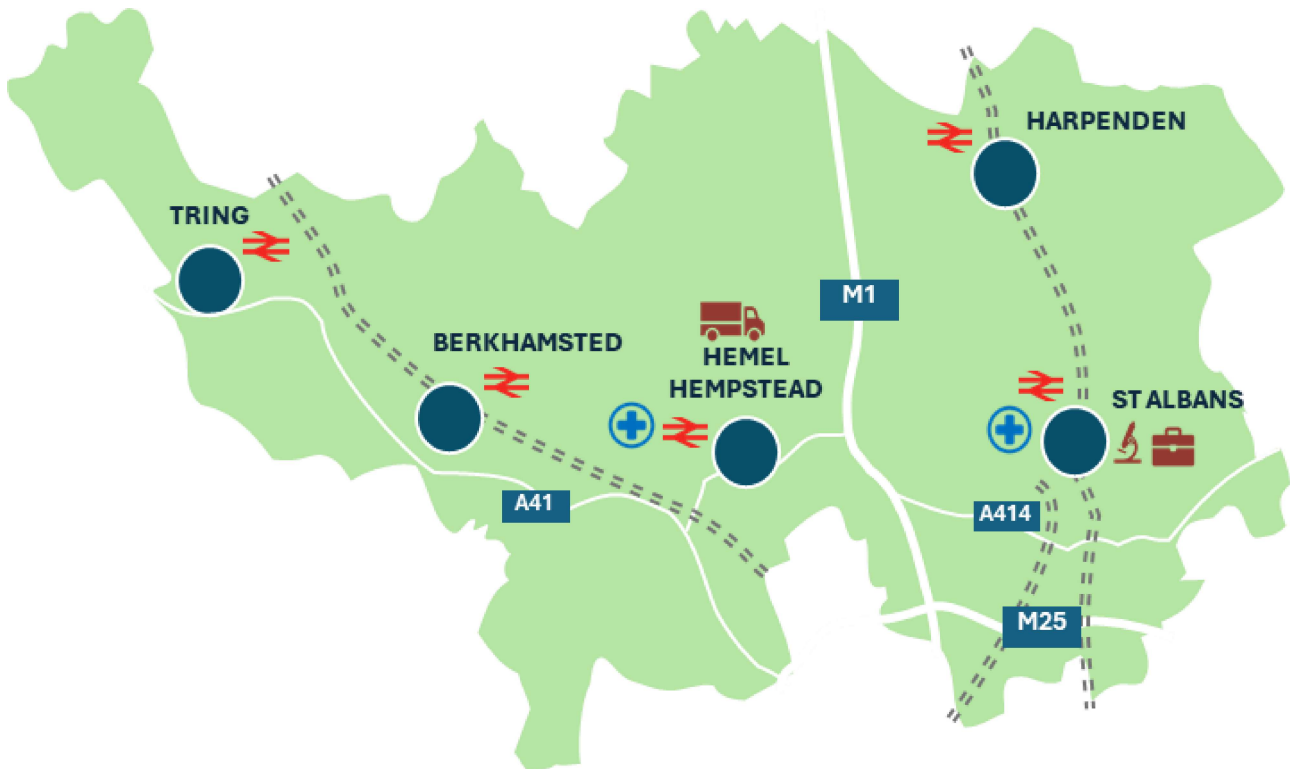
New economic opportunities have been created in Eastern Hertfordshire by the significant growth of the pharmaceutical, biotech and other knowledge-based industries in the region, particularly around Cambridge to the north. Stansted Airport is also a magnet for jobs and has contributed to major growth 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		Economy & Skills		Democracy & Representation		Housing Development	
Population (mid-2024)	312,432	GVA	£15,744	No. of Wards	41	No. of Households	119,768
2045 Population Estimate	371,000	Active businesses	19,765	No. of Cllrs	79	Housing Affordability Ratio	11.36
% Working-Aged	63.20%	Employment Rate	71.13%	Population / Cllr Ratio	3,897	Housing need	2,697
Geographical Area	211.46 km ²	Economic Activity Rate	75.37%				
Population Density	1,456	% with L4+ Qualifications	57.36%				

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,

Proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire

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

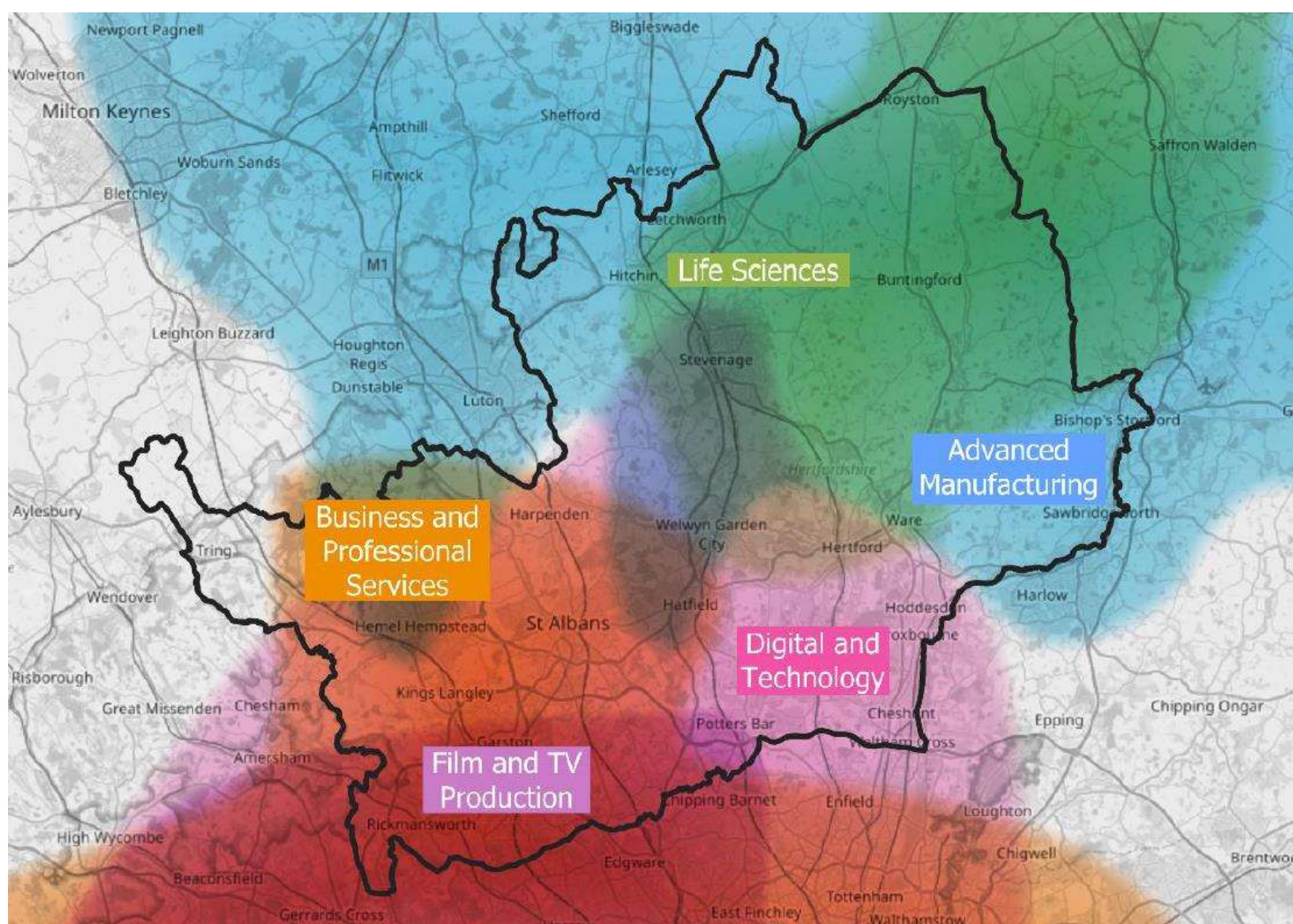
Hertfordshire is ambitious about its future and proposes to work closely with Government and our communities to establish a Strategic Authority with a directly elected Mayor to achieve deep and lasting benefits for our residents and communities.

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.

Proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire

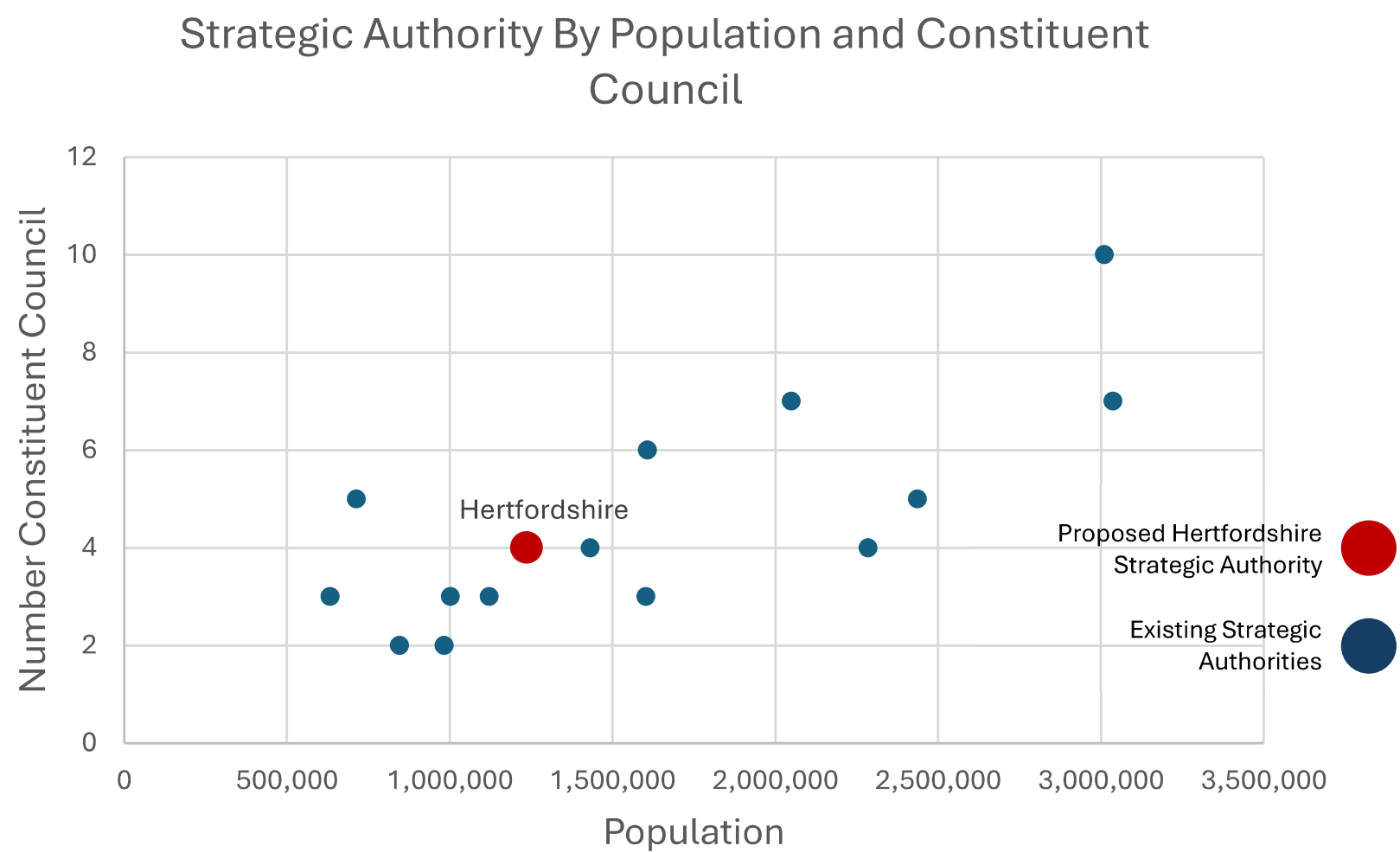


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The conditions that shape success differ across our four footprints and require local leadership, deep relationship with businesses and communities, and tailored plans to maximise the positive impacts for our communities. Central Hertfordshire brings 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 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

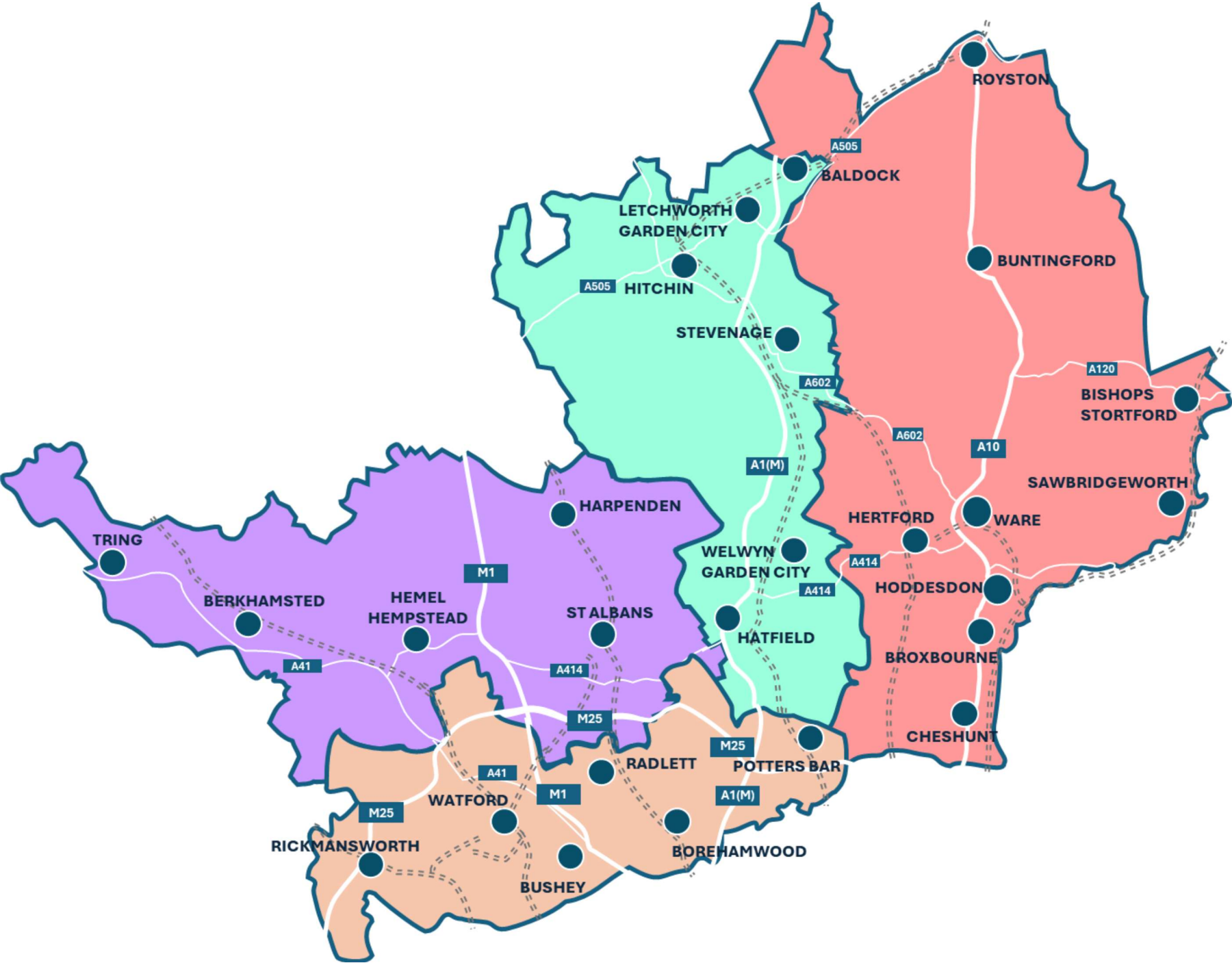
- Stevenage Borough Council is running a housing development programme that puts social and affordable homes first, using private sale and selective land release to cross-subsidise new council housing. More than 620 homes are complete, including 529 council lets of which nearly 100 are let as supported 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.

Proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire

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.

<i>Proposed Unitary Authority</i>	<i>English unitary authorities (62)</i>	<i>London boroughs (32)</i>	<i>Metropolitan boroughs (36)</i>
<i>Central Hertfordshire (320,795)</i>	19 th largest	12 th	14 th
<i>South West Hertfordshire (313,190)</i>	20 th	14 th	16 th
<i>North West Hertfordshire (312,432)</i>	20 th	14 th	16 th
<i>Eastern Hertfordshire (289,774)</i>	23 rd	17 th	20 th

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.

Number of current councils by population range

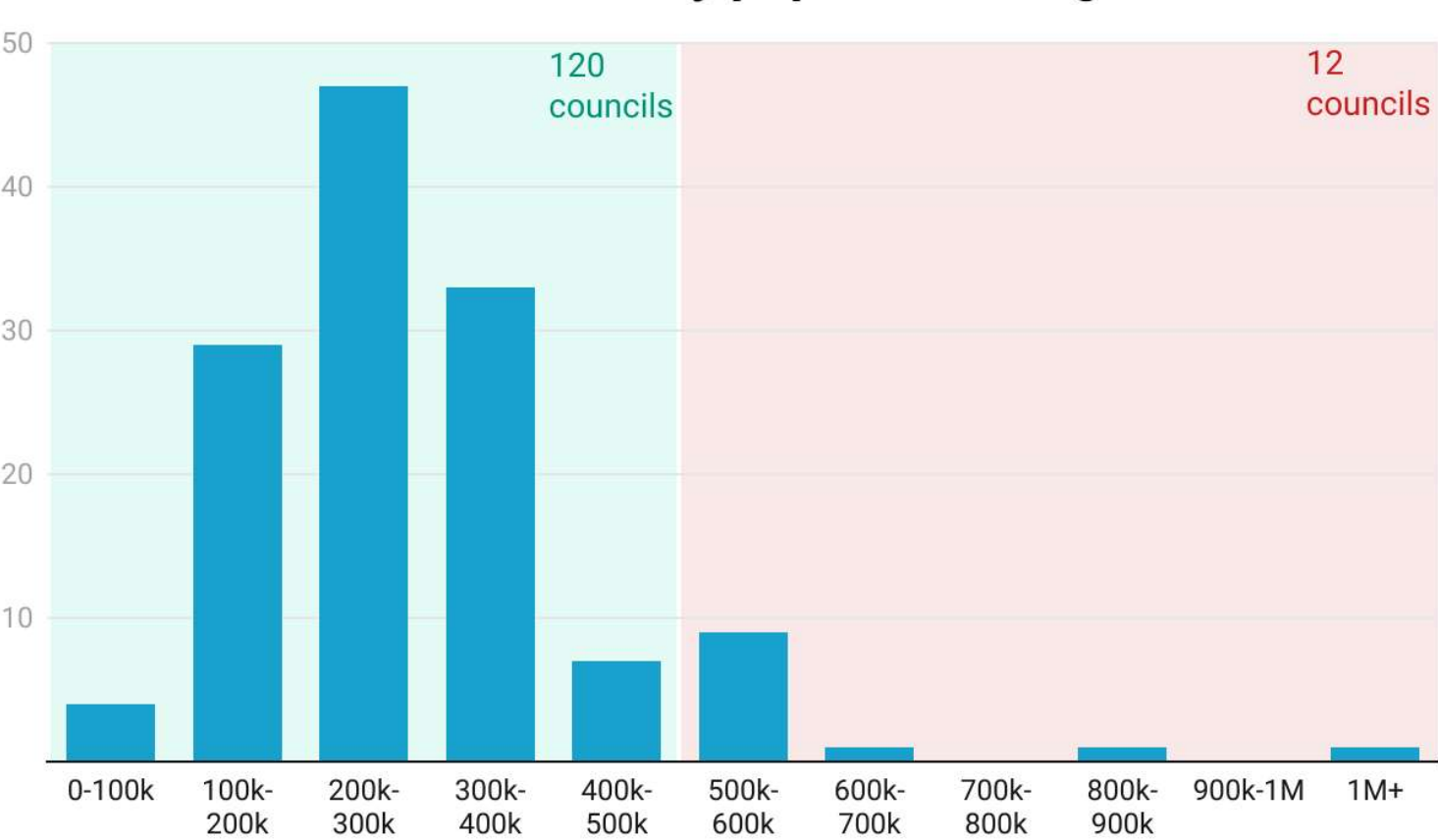
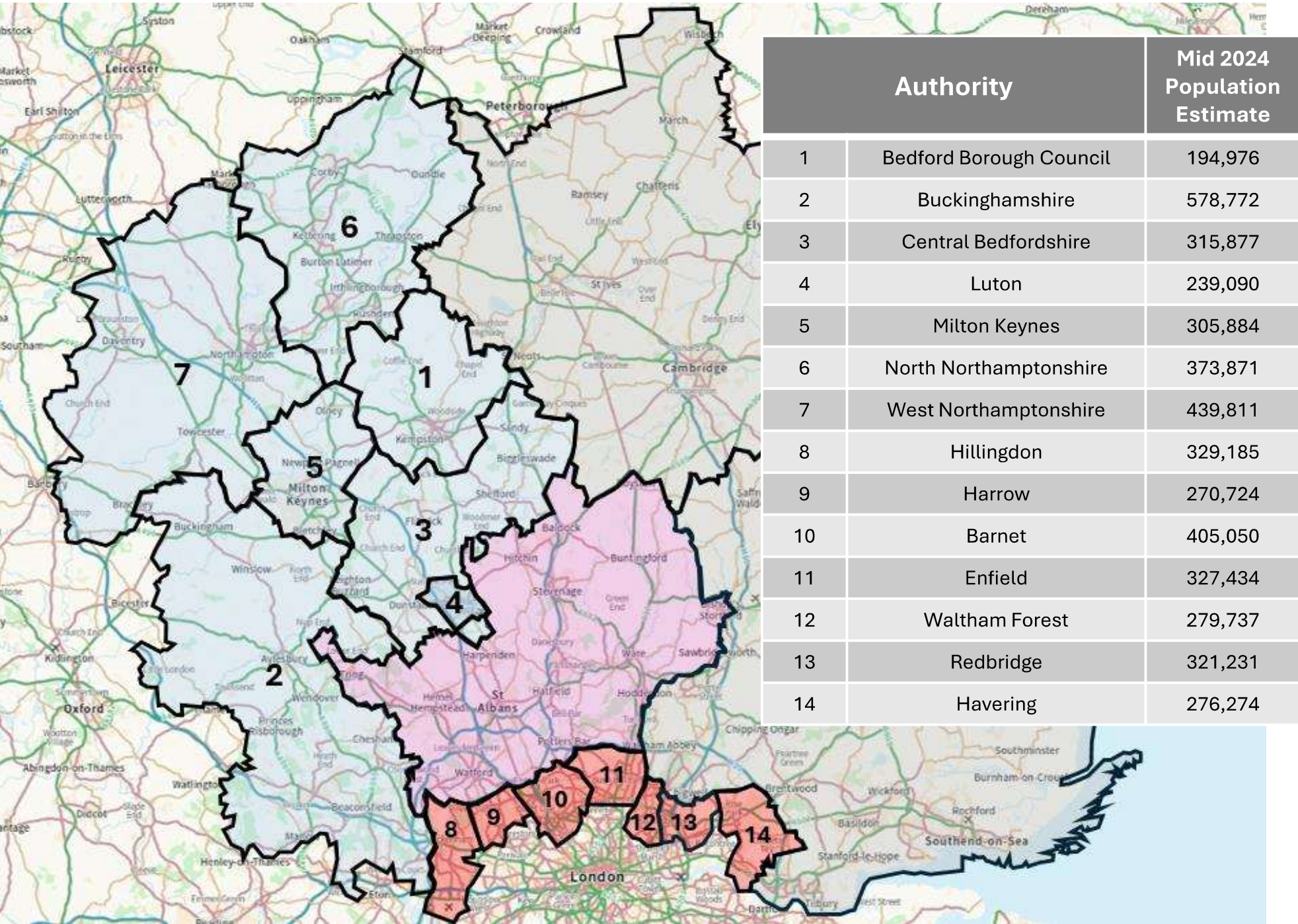


Chart: DCN • Source: LG Inform • Created with Datawrapper

Proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire

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.

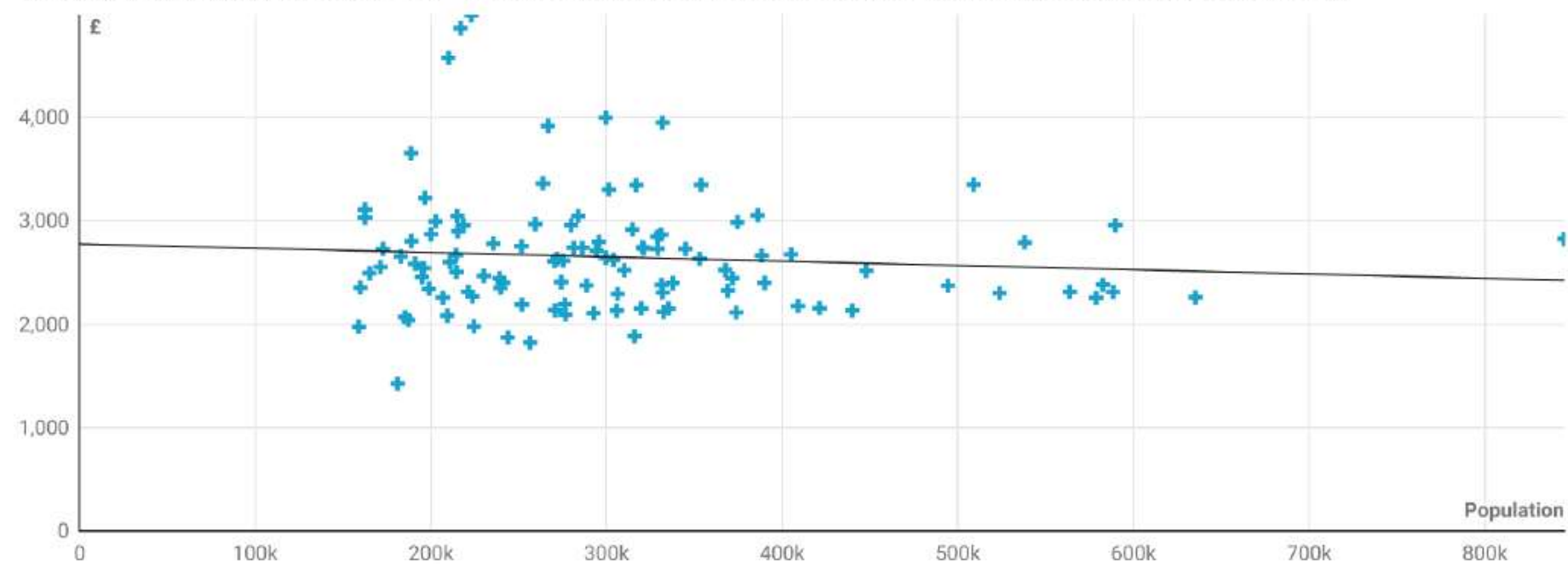


Sector analysis from the District Councils’ Network (DCN) tested whether council population is linked to value for money, financial sustainability and service delivery. It compared all 132 English single tier councils using published datasets and regression analysis, controlling for factors such as deprivation 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.

Total revenue expenditure on all services per head of population (£)

Covering councils with populations over ~157,000. This range covers all the proposed new councils being created under LGR.



Total revenue expenditure is spending on all services, per head of population, including employee costs and running expenses | Data is missing from 7 councils | Technical definition: Adjusted $R^2 < 0$ | $p = 0.369$ and $R^2 = 0.007$

Chart: DCN • Source: LG Inform • Created with Datawrapper

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:

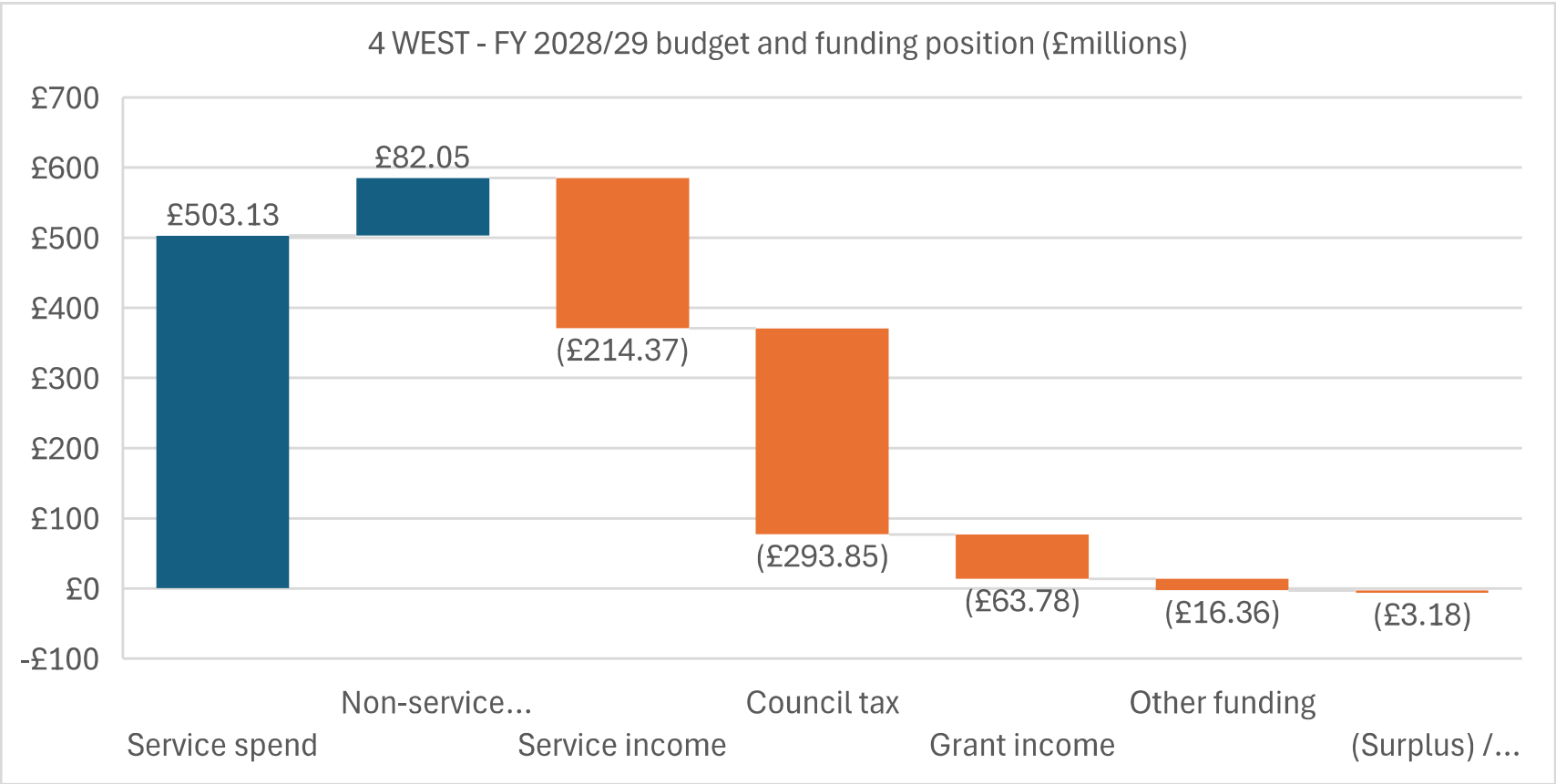
- The four unitary authority option “outperforms” the two-tier baseline in 2032/33 in the lower-cost scenario and 2034/35 in the higher cost scenario. This means that the cumulative net savings from LGR alongside the capacity to raise additional council tax, if future authorities choose to do so, mean 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 – MODELLLED BUDGETS AND FUNDING POSITION FOR YEAR ONE (2028/29)

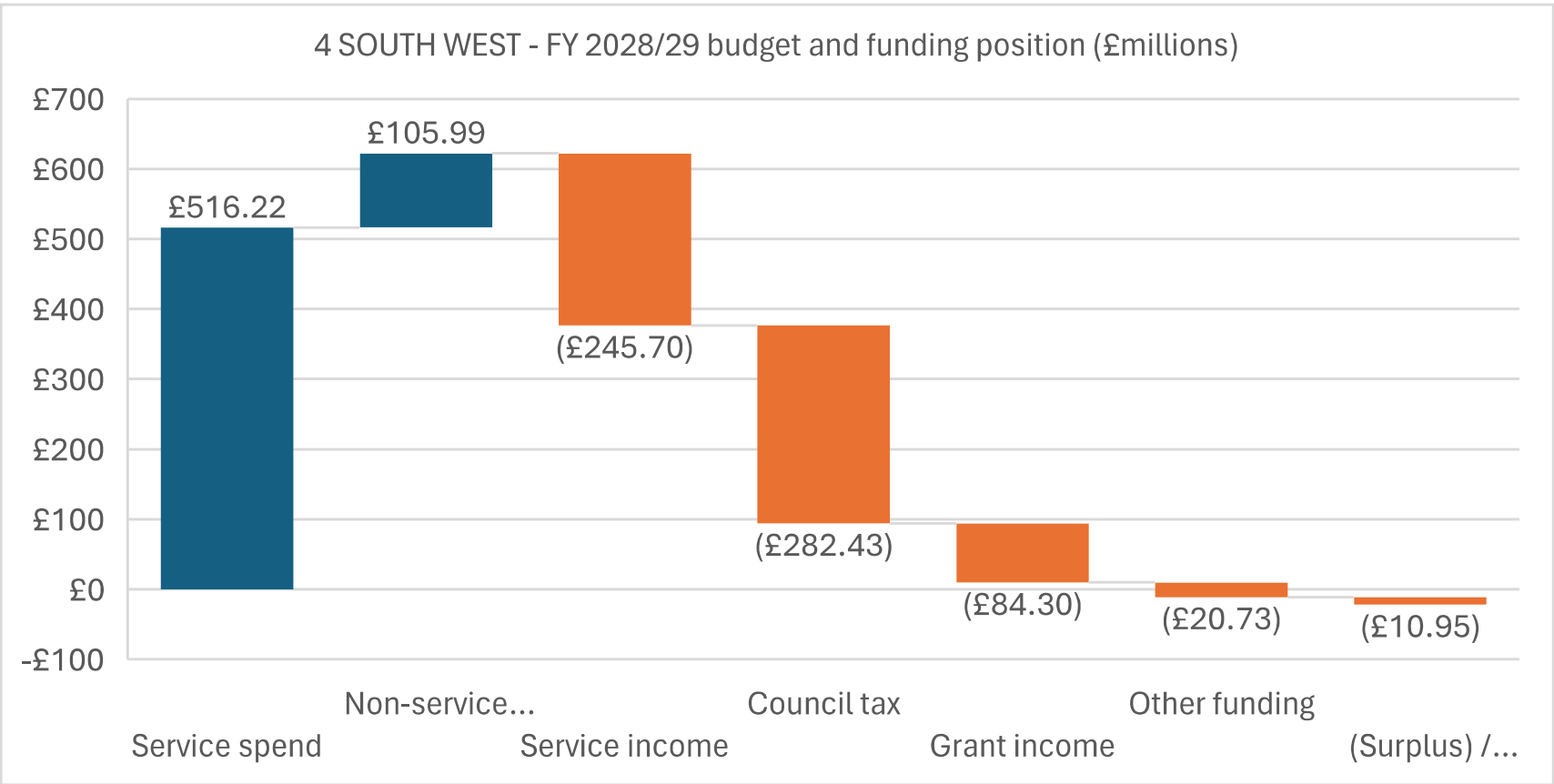
The graphs below show the anticipated year one budget for each proposed new unitary authority, excluding the initial costs and savings from LGR. On current assumptions and to different extents, new authorities will begin with opening surpluses or deficits based on modelled demand and service expenditure, 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.

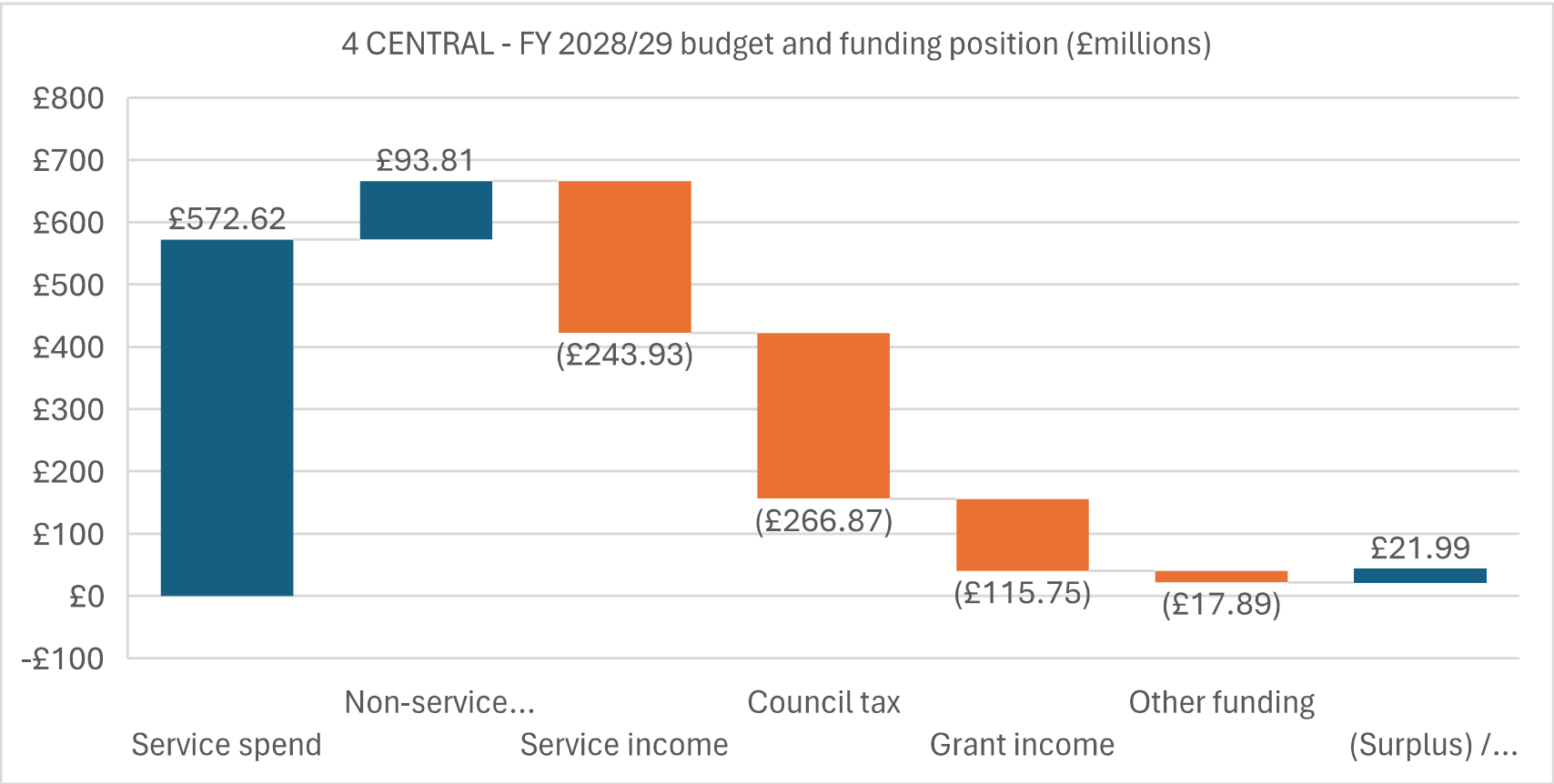
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 WEST



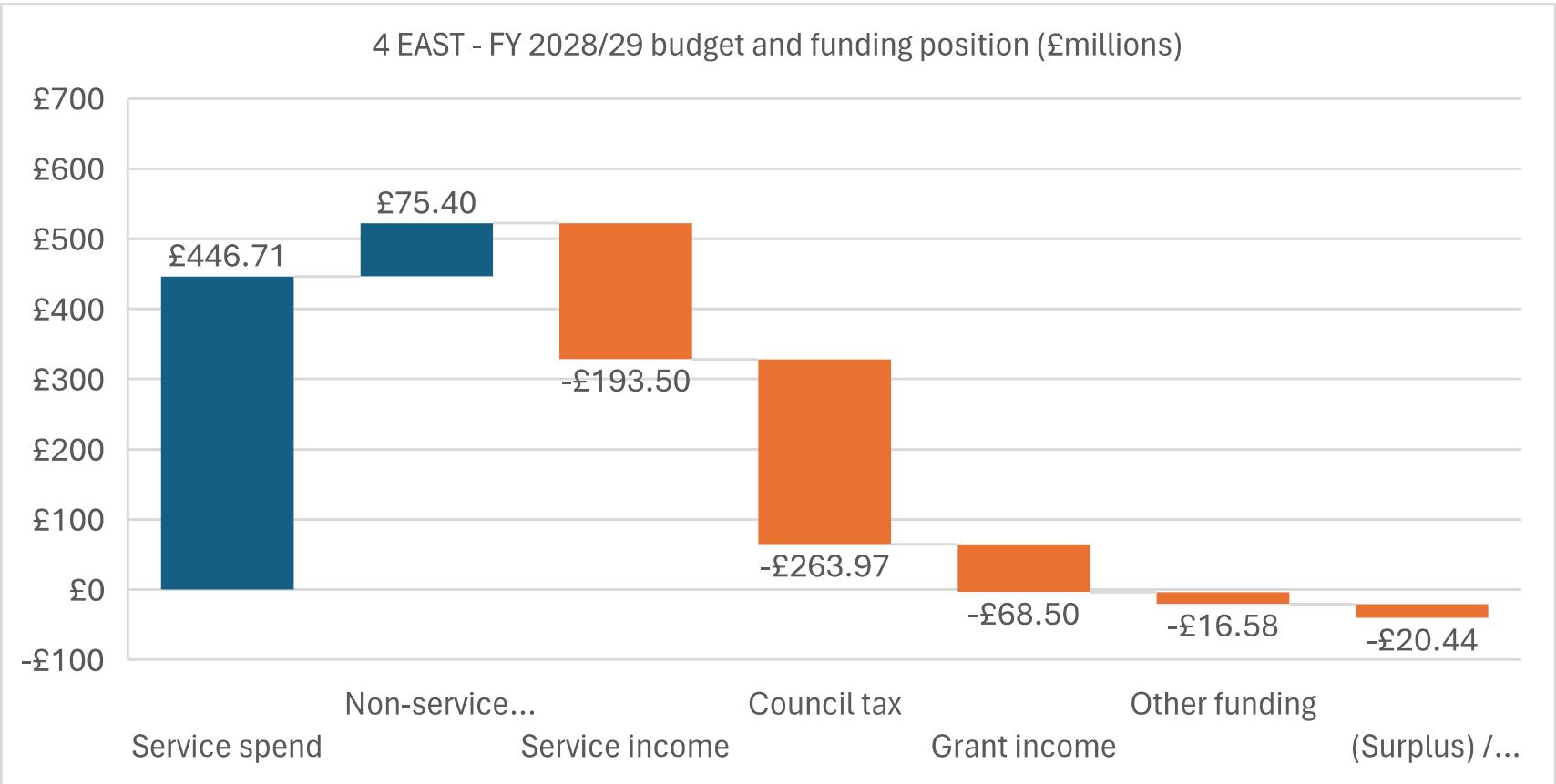
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 SOUTH-WEST



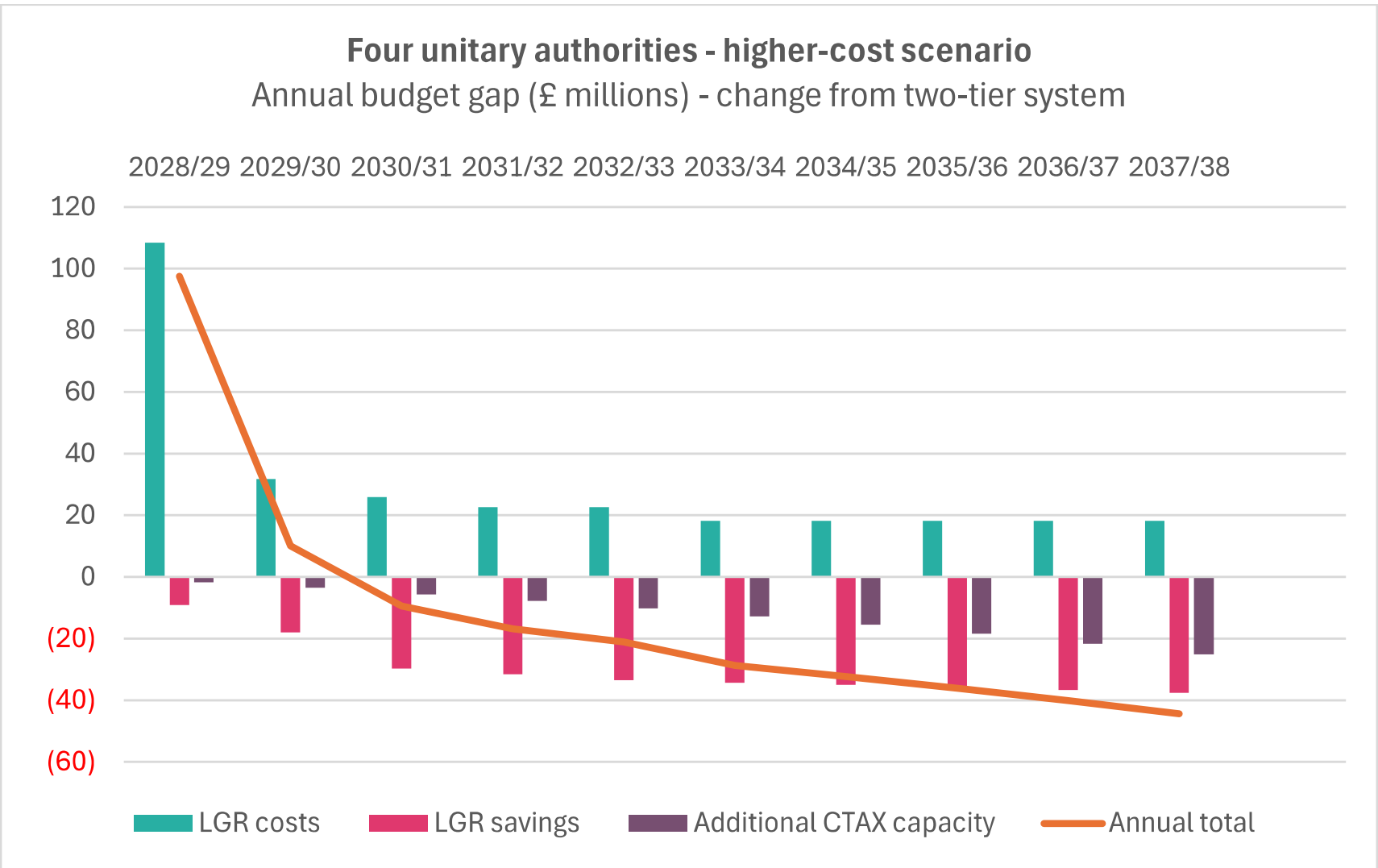
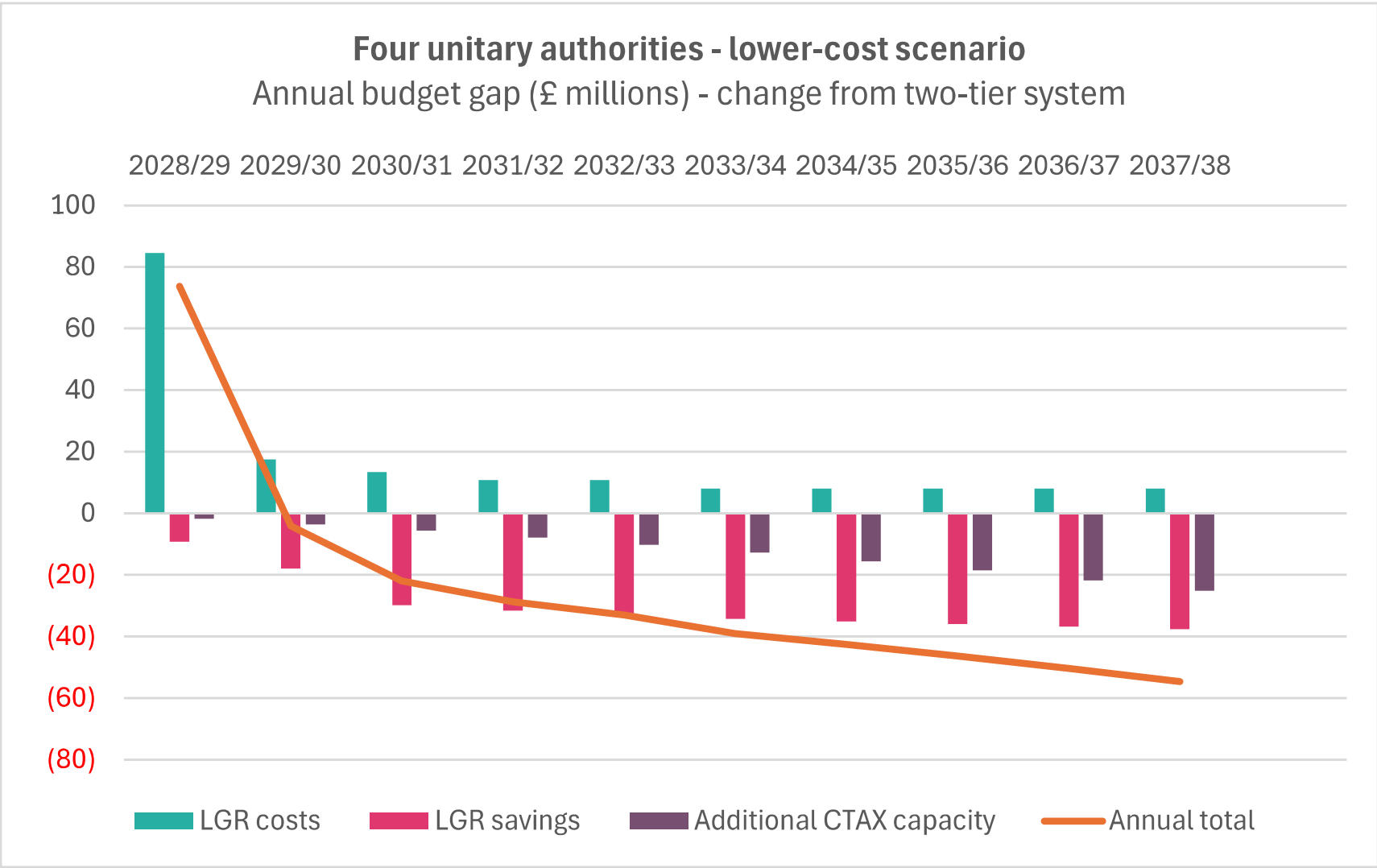
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 CENTRAL



YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – 4 EASTERN



PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE TWO-TIER BASELINE OVER TIME

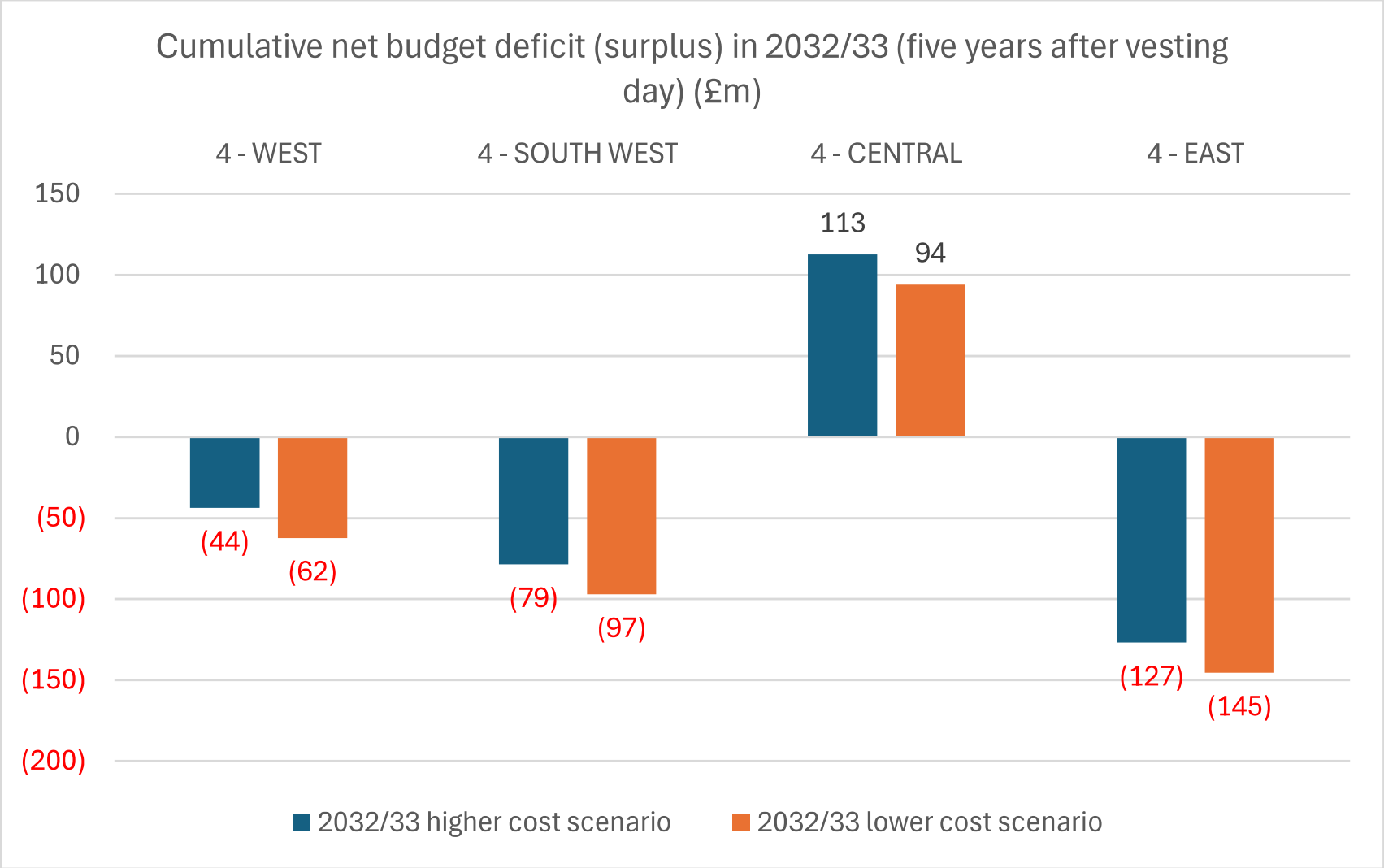


These two graphs show the in-year difference from the two-tier baseline that is delivered by LGR under this option. The modelled two-tier baseline is shown as zero, and the estimated impacts of LGR are shown as increases or (decreases) from that baseline. The key finding is that despite significant up-front 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

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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.

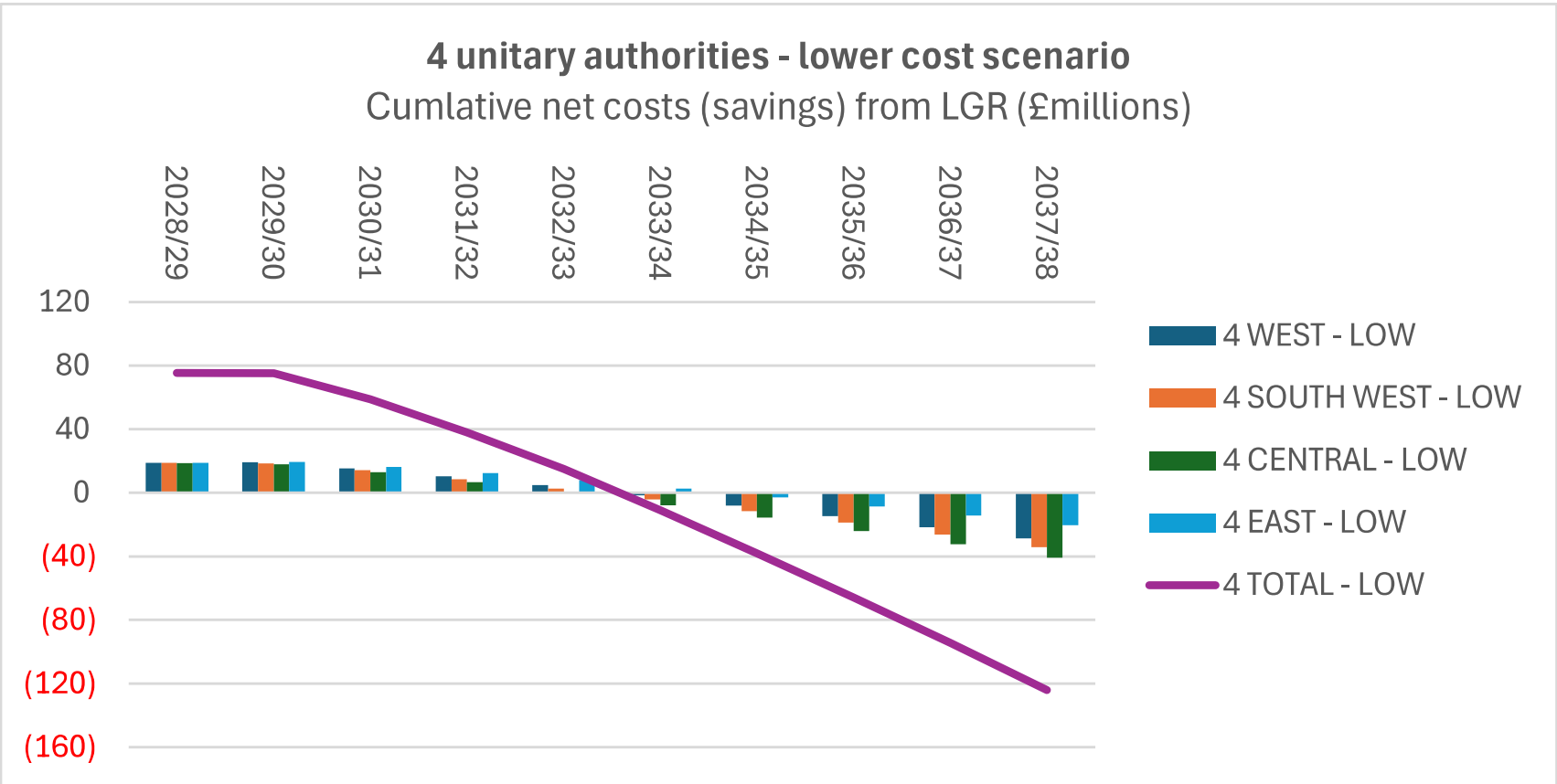
The surpluses shown here for three of the four unitary authorities indicate that there will be some level of resilience in the event of any (or a combination) of the above occurring in these areas, although 4 Central is unlikely to be viable on current assumptions without further interventions.

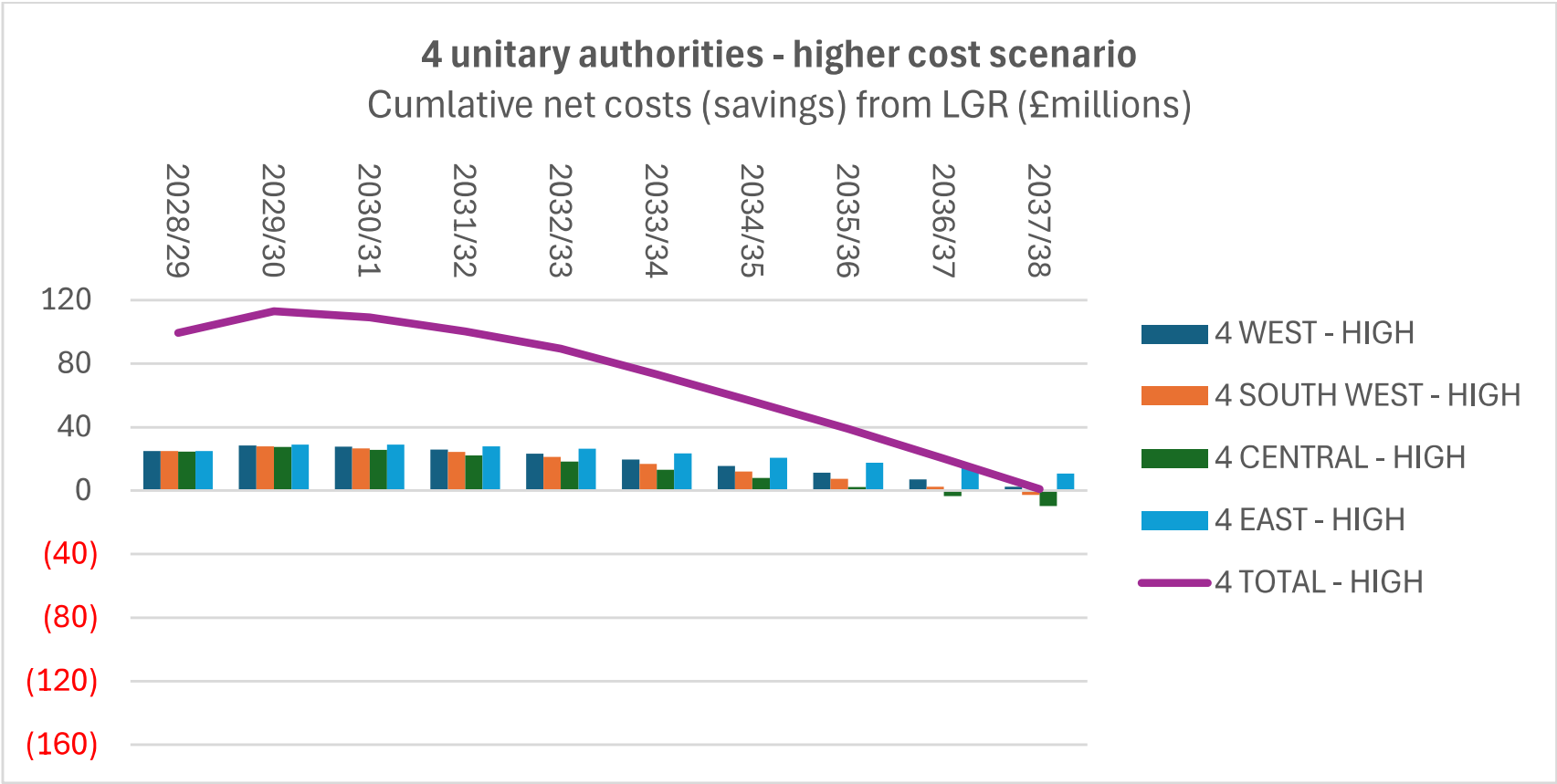
Firstly, the model, although developed, has not considered a number of options that the new unitaries would consider such as transformation, efficiency, additional business rates growth. This is explored below in the ‘additional levers to improve financial sustainability’ section and highlights the various 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.

Assumption	LGR costs and savings (£ m)									
	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									

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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

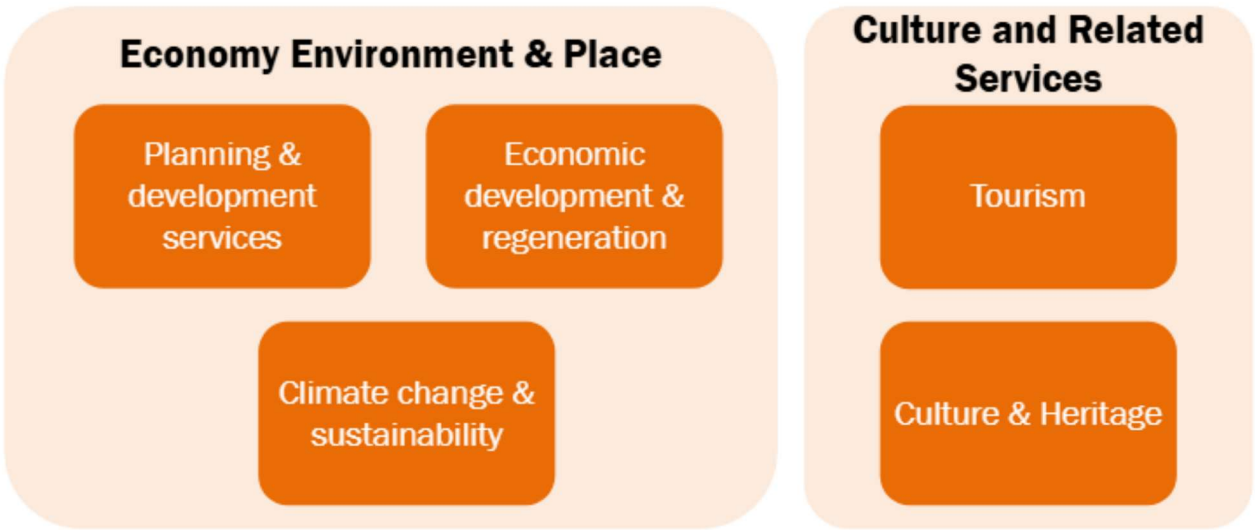
The needs of residents must be at the heart of new unitaries, with their views and ideas shaping provision. Involvement should be easy and timely, in ways that make sense for people. The opportunity is to engage residents in service design through a range of methods from quick pilots to walkabouts, to 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 Hertsmeres 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.

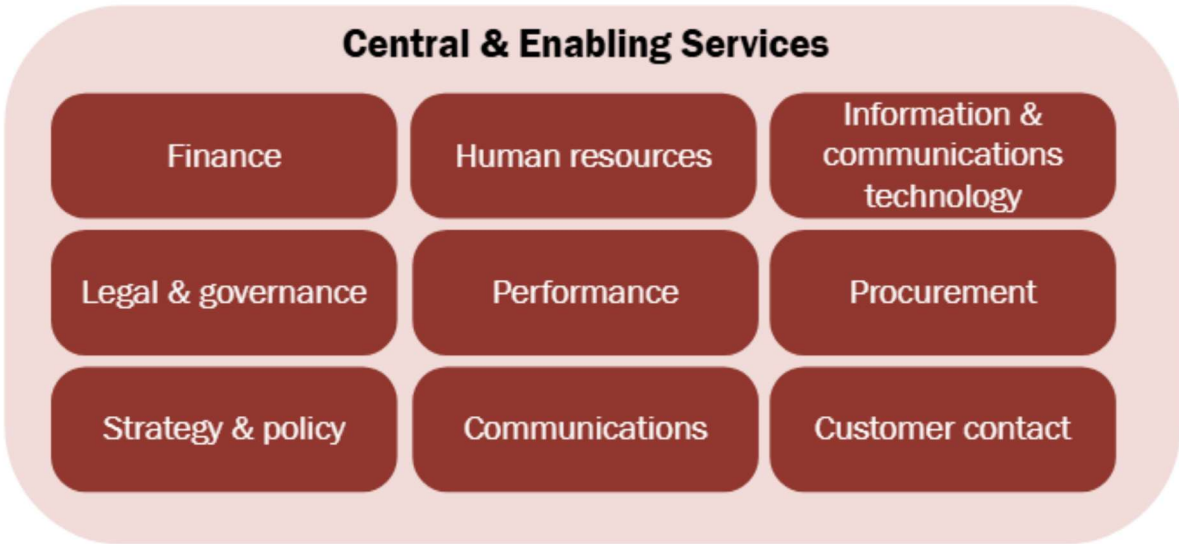
The town centre regeneration programme represents a forward looking approach to revitalising a mid-sized town. Through mixed-use development, community engagement and emphasis on sustainability, the scheme aims to create a resilient and attractive urban centre fit for future generations.

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*

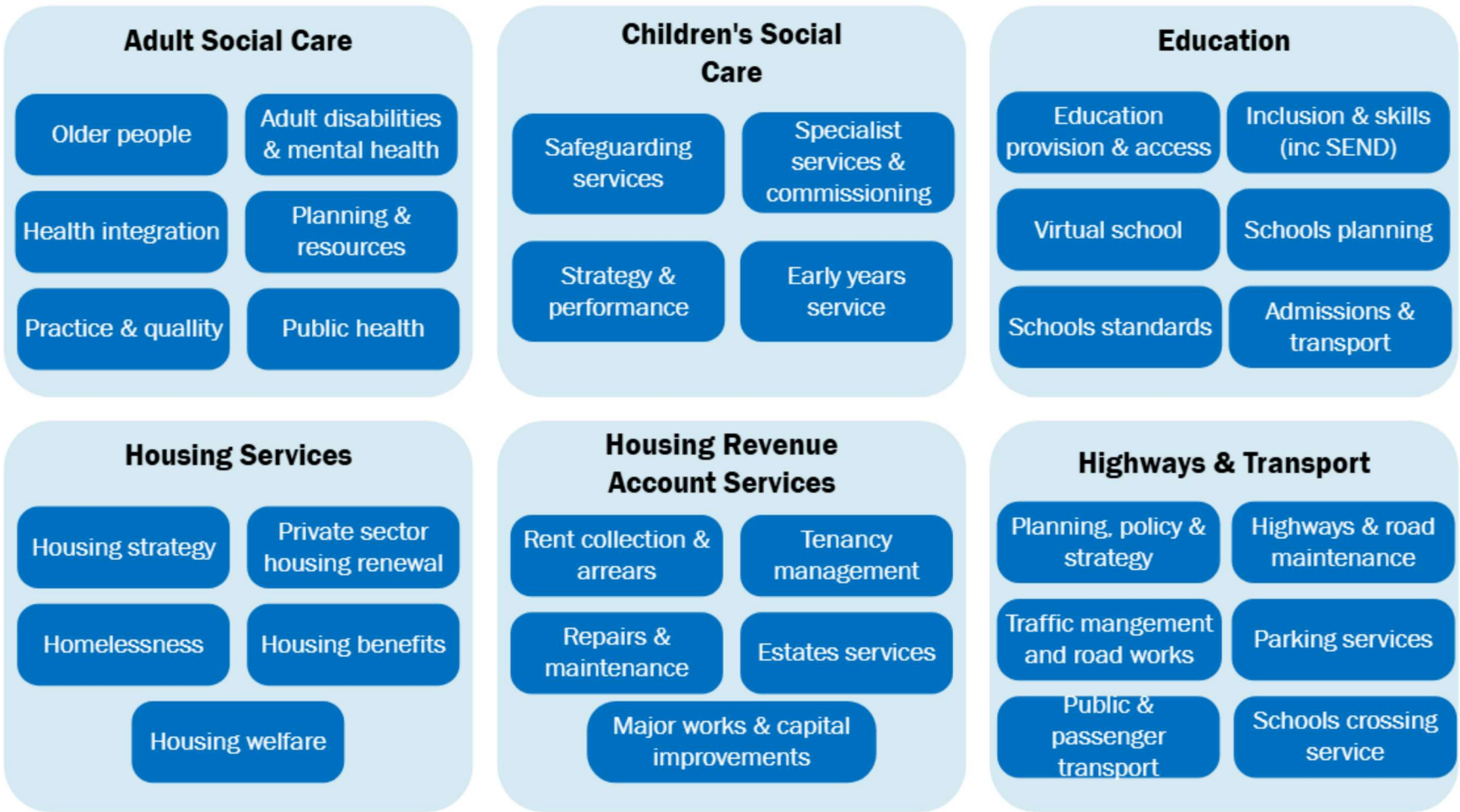
End-to-end digitised customer journeys also freed staff from time-consuming administrative processes, eliminated mountains of paperwork and improved accuracy. When the COVID-19 lockdown came in March 2020, most office-based staff transferred easily to working from home on their council laptops with access 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:



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 for 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.

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.

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.

Proposal for four unitary authorities in Hertfordshire

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 transitional 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.

Strategic Housing (General Fund)		Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	
- Housing Strategy - Private Sector Housing - Allocations - Housing Welfare - Affordable Housing Enabling	<i>Housing Options</i> <i>Homelessness</i> <i>Temporary Accommodation</i> <i>Rough Sleeping</i> <i>*Identified as critical</i>	- Rent Collection - Tenancy Management - New Homes Development - Resident Engagement	- Repairs & Maintenance - Major Works & Capital Investment - Estates - Asset Management
All District & Borough Authorities		Dacorum St Albans	Stevenage Welwyn Hatfield

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.	“More joined up planning for large housing and infrastructure. Make sure there are enough Transport staff.” – Dacorum council staff
Responses: • Infrastructure 57%	“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.