



# DELIVERING A STRONGER STAFFORDSHIRE

## A CASE FOR CHANGE

NOVEMBER 2025

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Submitted by

Stoke-on-Trent City Council in partnership with  
Cannock Chase District Council, East Staffordshire  
Borough Council and Stafford Borough Council

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# FOREWORD

Local government exists to serve communities and each community is different, with its own unique characteristics, identity and culture. Each has different needs and priorities. That is why the best councils are rooted in their local places. They strive to understand the communities they serve and know what people care most about.

Fundamentally, people want councils to deliver the best services for their area at the lowest cost. They want organisations that feel familiar and approachable, which can be held to account for their actions, and which care about their communities as much as they do - councils which listen and respond when they tell us about their needs. At the same time they want their council to make a difference - to have the clout to deliver better bus services, to regenerate high streets, to build affordable homes and to improve access to good jobs. They expect councils both to sweat the small stuff and deliver big results.

As a local government leader, my goal is to ensure my council can serve its communities to the best of its abilities, but this is becoming harder to do. Years of austerity cuts and increased competition for scarce resources have left many councils less able to deliver much-needed change. Conflicting priorities between local councils can make it harder to work collaboratively, to make the important strategic decisions.

Our proposal for two new councils for Staffordshire - one for North Staffordshire and one for Southern & Mid Staffordshire, is shaped around the way the people of Staffordshire already live their daily lives. It builds on established communities and local economies where people live, work, study, shop and spend their spare time. It is simple common-sense that our councils should be organised in line with shared transport needs, local industry and single housing markets.

By removing duplication - and aligning with existing realities "on the ground" - we will also generate significant economies of scale. That means we can give parents and pupils more choice about which schools to go to; we can join up transport to make it easier to travel to work or access local services; and we can invest in our towns and cities to ensure they aren't just thriving places, but powerful engines of growth, wealth and employment.

The current system of smaller local councils with dwindling budgets and soaring demand for services is not sustainable. It's not surprising people are increasingly sceptical about local government's ability to deliver on local priorities.

There is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a different system of local government - one that is actually designed around communities' needs. One which not only delivers against the important priorities, but does it more cheaply and sustainably, setting councils up to run in more efficient ways than are currently possible.

Independent analysis shows that our proposed model of local government for Staffordshire will do all of these things. It will also protect the local identities of our communities, enshrine access to local services, protect our cherished civic institutions and empower our residents and communities to have more of say in the decisions about their areas.



Our proposal would solve many of the budget issues facing local government and unite the county's only conurbation, unlocking economic growth, strengthening local partnerships and allowing us to tackle deep-rooted social problems that currently hold us back.

Local government reorganisation can be an opportunity to put the county on a firm footing for decades to come. Let us grasp this chance to build a stronger Staffordshire - for everyone.



*J Ashworth*

**Councillor Jane Ashworth**  
Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Overview

This document presents a comprehensive case for local government in Staffordshire via the creation of two new unitary councils: North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire.

It unashamedly approaches Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as a **once-in-a-generation opportunity to restructure Staffordshire's councils in a way that unlocks growth, brings financial stability, and provides for more effective and efficient services.** But, as the Government's criteria make clear, this can only happen if the revised structures match the economic, demographic and cultural realities "on-the-ground" – reflecting the way people live and work, now and in the future. Local government exists to serve the people it represents and the key test is whether reorganisation enables us to do that better.

This document assesses various models proposed by councils across Staffordshire against the Government's criteria. It demonstrates how the North/Southern & Mid two-unitary split is clearly the best fit with both the letter of these criteria, and their spirit – best positioning all parts of the county for stability and economic growth.

**“Staffordshire's current governance arrangements are no longer fit for purpose”**

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## Why change is needed

Staffordshire's current governance arrangements are no longer fit for purpose. The current two-tier system creates inefficiencies, hampers strategic planning and limits the ability to deliver integrated services.

Our largest cities should function as economic drivers and job creators – yet the current arrangements constrain potential growth in the City of Stoke-on-Trent and limit cross-border co-operation. They exacerbate acute financial pressure driven by high levels of deprivation and demand for front-line support services.

And the current system doesn't do any favours for Southern & Mid Staffordshire either. As a sub region, Southern & Mid Staffordshire needs a critical mass to generate economies of scale, public service innovation and to do serious business with its key economic neighbours, particularly the West Midlands conurbation.

**Detailed public engagement shows people across Staffordshire want local government that delivers reliable, high-quality local services at lower cost, while protecting and enhancing local identities and links. Reorganisation must be shaped in a way that is most likely to achieve lasting results if it is to win long-term public support.**

Both North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire benefit from diverse and growing local economies, but the county's current status as a 'devolution desert' is undermining expansion and local coordination. Staffordshire desperately needs a governance model which can wield devolved powers and funding to sustain economic growth, improve skills, regenerate town centres and better meet the needs of almost 1.2 million residents.

## The core proposal

This proposal recommends replacing Staffordshire's existing county council, unitary city council and eight district and borough councils with two new unitary authorities:

- North Staffordshire Unitary Council – covering Newcastle-under-Lyme borough, the city of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands district; a recognised geographic city region with a current, and growing, population of almost 495,000.
- Southern & Mid Staffordshire Unitary Council – covering the districts of Cannock Chase, South Staffordshire and Lichfield and the boroughs of Stafford, East Staffordshire and Tamworth; a distinct geographical area with a population of almost 657,000.

**Both areas are readily identifiable sub-regions with distinct identities and functioning economic markets. They reflect commuter patterns, transport networks and public service operational footprints.**

North Staffordshire has been a defined cultural geography since medieval times, a status cemented by the area's role in the Industrial Revolution and its rise to prominence as a world capital of ceramics production.

North Staffordshire is home to the county's only conurbation (known globally as The Potteries), which is the key driver of economic and employment growth in all three of the constituent councils. Rural parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands provide a vital balance to the urban core and a more rounded lifestyle offer to residents and visitors. The area functions as an organic whole – reflected in patterns of travel for work and leisure.

Southern & Mid Staffordshire benefits from close economic ties to larger neighbouring economies in Birmingham and the Black Country, as well as the East Midlands and Shropshire, with many residents travelling to work in adjoining cities and districts.

## The options for LGR in Staffordshire

Having discounted options that are obviously non-compliant with the Government's set criteria (see Appendix 1), the following options have been considered:

**Option A** – two unitaries: North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire.

**Option B** – three unitaries: North Staffordshire, South West Staffordshire and South East Staffordshire.

**Option C** – two unitaries: North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire, but with amended boundaries.

**Option D** – two unitaries: East Staffordshire and West Staffordshire.

**Independent analysis in this document clearly demonstrates Option A provides the best balance between financial sustainability, economic benefit, fit with local identity, and public service geographies, and deliverability.**

It would:

- Align closely with the Government's criteria for population thresholds and balance.
- Represent the most sensible geographies, including functioning economic market areas and strong, distinct local identities.
- Present the least complexity, cost and risk of service disruption during the implementation phases and transition to the new unitary arrangements.



- Deliver a model of local government that aligns most closely with public priorities and is supported by other Staffordshire councils (eight out of ten support the establishment of a North Staffordshire Unitary Council).

**Option B** does not align as closely with the Government's criteria, as two of the populations would be too small for the councils to achieve economies of scale; it is sub-optimal in terms of economic planning and weight, and it achieves lower financial savings and less ability to withstand financial shock.

**Option C** has merits in terms of financial balance and economic alignment, but would involve disputed boundary changes which are likely to delay and complicate the implementation and transition process, reducing efficiencies and potentially undermining cooperation around establishing an effective Strategic Authority. The proposal is not actively supported by other councils.

**Option D** represents the least suitable reorganisation option. The creation of an East and West Staffordshire is not supported by any other councils, and would:

- Be based on fundamentally flawed and mis-aligned geographies which do not reflect economic market areas, local cultural identities or public service footprints.
- Divide the county's only conurbation in two, undermining economic growth.
- Create impractical over-extended operational footprints (East Staffordshire would stretch more than 50 miles from Warwickshire to Cheshire).

## The socio-economic case

In North Staffordshire there is a particular need to ensure that reorganisation helps unlock greater economic prosperity and tackle complex problems linked to deprivation, poverty and inequality. It is these problems which have driven up demand for state funded social care and other frontline services, and contributed to Stoke-on-Trent City Council's reliance on Exceptional Financial Support. The North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire option would:

- Provide a stronger basis for tackling concentrations of socio-economic inequalities in North Staffordshire and other pockets of the county.
- Place local government on a sustainable financial footing by rebalancing financial resources and liabilities, as well as local need levels.
- Strengthen strategic leadership - including planning and coordination of major economic infrastructure, transport and regeneration projects, and enabling factors such as education and skills
- Facilitate the delivery of new housing and commercial space, streamlining planning and land use to achieve housing targets and economic growth, aligned with Government priorities.
- Deliver enhanced community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment through a commitment to co-designed and localised decision-making mechanisms.

## The financial case

Option A delivers a good balance between cost, risk, and savings. The ability to build a new unitary council out from an existing unitary council in North Staffordshire, combined with the reduced need for disaggregation of council services in Southern & Mid Staffordshire, makes this proposal relatively cost effective. This model of reorganisation would:

- Create financial balance between the two unitary councils across key indicators.
- Strengthen financial resilience through economies of scale, asset rationalisation and streamlined service delivery, as well as demographic and economic rebalancing.
- Require the lowest one-off transition costs.
- Generate a relatively high level of savings, delivered quicker by facilitating transformation and integration, while minimising risk, disruption and complexity.
- Mirror existing public sector operational footprints, thereby facilitating public service reform.
- Create strong financial foundations for future devolution arrangements.

## The public case

**Engagement with Staffordshire’s residents and businesses has shown clearly that they want high-quality, efficient local services, a stronger economy, better infrastructure planning and investment and the preservation of strong local identities.** They want governance which reflects local needs and decision-making and is accountable to residents. Our main stakeholders want to see simpler governance structures, better cross-border coordination of service planning and delivery and more effective partnership working.

One thing we have tried to avoid in our proposal is demographic engineering. It is very easy to choose a range of demographic indicators, reflecting need and capacity, and then define a geographical configuration that seeks to balance that need. But if that configuration bears no relationship to how places and communities work in practice, then it is a very poor platform for delivering public services. It is for example of little practical benefit to someone who then has to travel hours on public transport simply to access the service they need, or finds it impossible to join up public services because they are working on a completely different configuration. Our proposal seeks to work with the grain of how people in Staffordshire identify themselves and live their lives. Staffordshire has deep historic roots and important traditions. Our proposal respects the past, takes the best of the present and is ambitious for the future of our great county.

**“Our proposal respects the past, takes the best of the present and is ambitious for the future of our great county”**

## Democracy and governance

Working with our partner districts, and liaising as much as possible with other councils, the City Council has developed deliverable proposals for the governance and administration of the new North Staffordshire Unitary council. We have clear plans as to how to protect key civic status and assets. **We are fully committed to double devolution through the development of neighbourhood governance across the two geographic areas,** using both existing models such as town and parish councils, and neighbourhood area committees where they present the preferred approach of local people.

## Implementation and delivery

An implementation framework has already been fully developed with indicative plans for both our North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire Unitary Councils designed to ensure compliance and readiness on day one of the new authorities. The plans have been tested against specific services including children's and adult social care, environmental services and corporate services such as finance and ICT. We have also considered areas for early spread of existing public service innovation across the geography including Government missions and local priority areas such as early years development, regeneration of high streets, neighbourhood health and care, decent homes and tackling urban and rural poverty.



## Conclusion

Our final ranking of the four main options against the Government’s criteria, drawing on all the sources of data and analysis is as follows:

**Table 1 - Scoring of options against the Government’s criteria**

Government Criterion	Option Ranking				Summary
	A	B	C	D	
1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	All options achieve this basic criterion.
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	The evidence shows that the marginally leading option here is Option C - the proposal to create a north-south two unitary solution with changes to district boundaries. However, options A and D are both demonstrably financially sustainable solutions with different strengths and weaknesses, and avoid the main disadvantages of Option C with respect to complexity of implementation and transition.
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Option D would be dogged by the inherent illogicality of the proposed geographies as a service footprint, including lack of alignment with transport infrastructure and other public service geographies. Option B will generate lower economies of scale and will be less productive as a result of sub-optimal size of two of the authorities. And Option C will be slower to deliver benefits because of the complexity of implementation and transition.
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	8 of the 10 councils support a north : south model of unitary local government. Option C is significantly opposed by Stafford and East Staffordshire District Councils which could impact on implementation given the inherent complexity. Only the county council support an East : West model. The proposers of Options A-C all undertook extensive work to understand the public’s views and these have been reflected in the development of proposals.
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.	1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	By a significant distance, the evidence demonstrates that a two unitary structure based on a north-south division that matches the existing economic sub-regions would provide the best building blocks for devolution.
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	The three unitary structure was popular with the public and would overall best reflect local identity. However, this has to be balanced against the significant downsides of lower financial sustainability and resilience, lower savings and more complex implementation and transition. Options A and C are a better fit with existing community structures and relationships than Option D.
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	



**Option A - a two unitary solution split between North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire, based on existing district boundaries, presents the most cost-effective, logical and pragmatic approach to maximising the benefits from the generational opportunity presented by Local Government Reorganisation. The model reflects natural economic market areas, avoids disruptive boundary changes, and is supported by the majority of councils. It is the best model to truly unlock the power of devolution, enabling community empowerment and improving outcomes for residents across Staffordshire, whilst ensuring financially sustainable local government delivering great public services with local partners.**



Photo: Raymond Orton/Shutterstock



# 1 : INTRODUCTION

**This submission by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, developed in partnership with East Staffordshire and Stafford Borough Councils and Cannock Chase District Council, proposes two powerful unitary councils for Staffordshire of similar size and scale: one serving the north of the county and one serving the south and middle of the county.** These new authorities will be well-equipped to meet future challenges and play enhanced roles in improving life-chances and outcomes for citizens, communities and businesses across the county, working in tandem with what we expect will be a new Strategic Authority for Staffordshire, and with local neighbourhoods. The proposal is designed to reflect local identities, maximise subsidiarity and create opportunities for more community decision-making about the local issues that really matter to people.

The proposal, if accepted, would seize the opportunity presented by Local Government Reorganisation and devolution to deliver better and more efficient services to residents in Staffordshire as a whole, which is an important element of the Government's criteria. Our proposal is comprehensive in scope, covering the whole of the county, but inevitably focuses more on the plan for the north of the county, whereas the three districts' proposal focuses more on the plans for the Southern & Mid Staffordshire unitary. They should therefore be read together.

A North Staffordshire Unitary Council would cover the current borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, the district of Staffordshire Moorlands and the city of Stoke-on-Trent. A Southern & Mid Unitary Council would cover the current boroughs of East Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth alongside the districts of Cannock Chase, Lichfield and South Staffordshire.

## **“The proposal scores well on all of the Government's criteria”**

It would ensure that Staffordshire is well-placed for devolution. It sets out a strong case for LGR based on the existing socio-economic distinctions between North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire. It will enable the two areas to grow according to their economic identities and ensure the key urban area of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme can maximise its contribution to the whole county, while being of appropriate size to deliver efficient services to residents and provide financial sustainability on geographical footprints that make sense to local people and align with other public services.

In spite of the best efforts of the City Council, it has not been possible to reach consensus about LGR in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. However, we consider there is much in common between our proposal and the proposals from Staffordshire Moorlands (for a north-south unitary model with changes to district boundaries) and from Lichfield, Tamworth and South Staffordshire (for a three unitary model). All three of these proposals are variations on a North-South model. All have relative strengths and weaknesses.



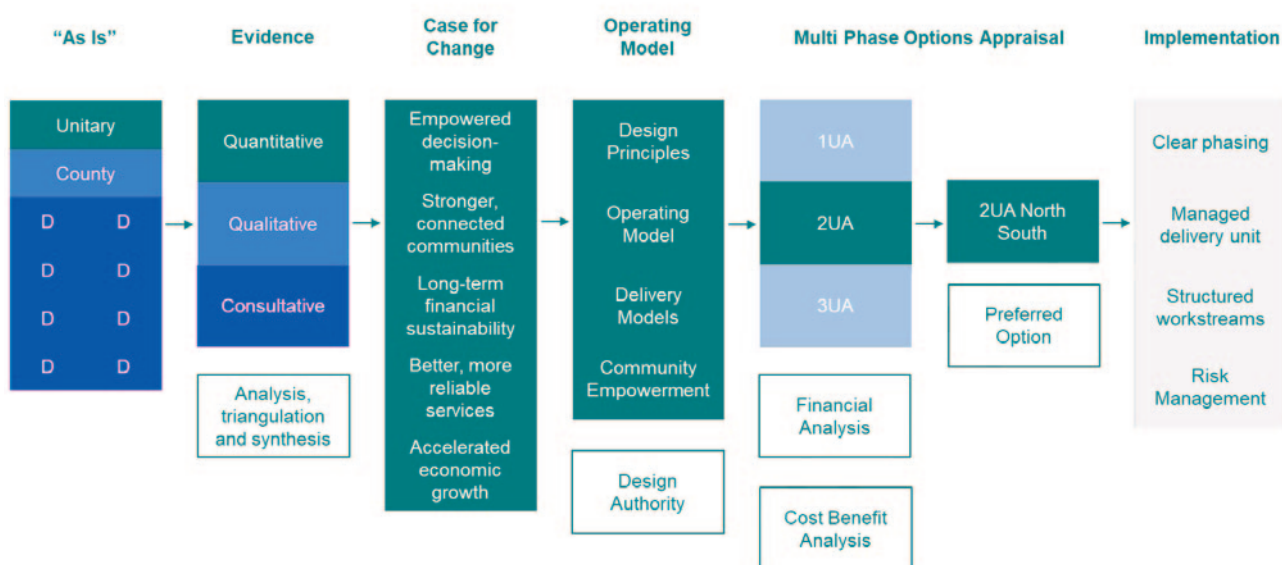
The four partner Councils behind this proposal are united in the view that the adoption of a multi-unitary local government structure, with a Unitary Council for North Staffordshire and a Unitary Council for Southern & Mid Staffordshire, represents the best interests of the whole population, and meets both the Government's criteria as set out in the English Devolution White Paper and the Secretary of State's invitation to councils in two-tier areas. At the same time, Stoke-on-Trent City Council could work with either of the other two models if one of these models is the Secretary of State's preference. The only eligible proposal that the City Council is implacably opposed to (on multiple grounds set out in this submission) is the County Council's proposal for an East-West two unitary model.



## 2 : OUR APPROACH AND THE FUNDAMENTAL CASE FOR CHANGE

Our approach to developing this proposal for LGR in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire is systematic and evidence-led, as illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 1 - Methodological approach to development of the North-South LGR proposal



We began by establishing the current state: mapping out existing council structures, confirming how the county works socially and economically, and establishing starting financial positions. From there, **we built a robust evidence base, combining qualitative insights, quantitative analysis, and extensive consultation, to ensure our case for change is grounded in real-world data and stakeholder perspectives, and commissioned independent appraisal as required to ensure that our approach was robust and to avoid subjectivity.**

The case for change is built around creating a better system of local government that delivers improved outcomes for residents and businesses. Our reasoning is as follows:

- **Empowered local decision-making:** Engagement shows residents and partners want simpler, more accountable local government that delivers reliable services, empowers communities, and protects local identity.
- **Stronger, connected communities:** The current administrative map does not reflect how people live, work, or travel, nor does it align with natural economic areas or local identities.
- **Long-term financial sustainability:** Councils face structural budget gaps, rising demand for services (especially social care), and limited ability to invest in growth and prevention under the current arrangements.

- **Better, more reliable services:** The existing two-tier system leads to duplication, inefficiency, and fragmented service delivery, making it harder to respond to local needs and deliver value for money, and to work effectively with NHS, police and other partners.
- **Joined-up strategic planning:** A new structure would enable more strategic planning, unlock investment, and support economic development, skills, and infrastructure across the county.

Following the establishment of the case for change, the next step was to define the operating model. This involved setting out a series of design principles to guide how local government would function in the future. The focus was on ensuring services could be delivered effectively at a local level, supporting community involvement, and simplifying governance arrangements.

Subsequently, a comprehensive options appraisal was conducted. This involved the systematic evaluation of alternative structural configurations. Each option was assessed using a consistent framework, incorporating detailed financial analysis, cost-benefit modelling, and the identification of critical success factors. The appraisal process applied both quantitative and qualitative criteria, including alignment with government guidelines, projected efficiency gains, financial sustainability, and the capacity to deliver improved outcomes for residents and businesses. This has been summarised into a socio-economic case, financial case and public case, drawing on all the sources of evidence available to us.

**The preferred option was selected based on its overall performance against these criteria, with particular emphasis on long-term viability, building a platform for economic growth and deliverability. We also applied a common-sense test – based on the engagement undertaken, would this option make sense to the people and businesses of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire?**

The final stage of the approach focused on implementation planning. This included detailed consideration of governance and civic considerations, including safeguarding historic statuses and traditions that really matter to people. We considered how the emerging preferred model would support double devolution, particularly with respect to community and neighbourhood empowerment. This all led to the development of a phased transition plan, the design of a delivery unit to oversee the change process, and the design of structured workstreams to address key areas such as service integration, workforce transition, and stakeholder communication. Risk management strategies are embedded throughout, with the identification and mitigation of potential risks to service continuity, financial stability, and organisational effectiveness.

This structured and sequential methodology provides assurance that the proposed reorganisation is both feasible and capable of delivering the intended benefits in a controlled and accountable manner, while crucially, taking the residents and businesses of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire with us through the change process.

# 3: ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT

## 3.1 STAFFORDSHIRE – ONE HISTORIC COUNTY, TWO SUB-REGIONS

Staffordshire is a large county with a population of 1.1 million people and covering over 1,000 square miles. The north of the county, while at the edge of the West Midlands, has many of the characteristics of northern England, having experienced a similar process of industrialisation along the river valleys that flow down from the moorlands and peaks of the neighbouring uplands. The south of the county is made up of a network of historic Midlands towns, each with their own deep historic roots and character, as seats of secular and ecclesiastical importance which then went through the development of their own industrial specialisms, supported by a large agricultural sector. Over time, the south of the county has experienced the magnetic pull of England's second city and its surrounding conurbation so that today, mid and south Staffordshire have a critical economic relationship with the main West Midlands conurbation.

It is impossible to say exactly where northern Staffordshire ends and southern Staffordshire begins. In reality, it is a blurred picture. Certainly, the answer does not lie in the administrative boundaries of local government. There are villages to the south of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme which would definitely identify themselves as part of northern Staffordshire but roughly by the time you venture south of Stone and Uttoxeter, the associations, allegiances and direction of focus start to change.

We must also not be over-simplistic. Within the two sub-regions are many local identities. Indeed, there are plenty of people in mid-Staffordshire who would not particularly identify with either north

or south of the county, but much more to their more immediate township or an area that might more accord to a historic 'hundred' or similar. Any approach to LGR must be sensitive to the importance of local identity which is why the question of neighbourhood governance and delivery is so crucial in a place like Staffordshire.

At the heart of North Staffordshire is a city region of national importance, a continuous conurbation that covers all of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and parts of Staffordshire Moorlands. The landscape of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme in particular is so entangled that an aerial view shows a terrain absent of any inner urban boundaries. Visitors to Stoke-on-Trent by motorway and primary roads, are mostly compelled to travel through Newcastle's territory to reach city destinations. In fact, the two districts are as physically bonded as the Potteries' six towns are tied to each other. Their boundaries and gateways merge unnoticeably. In addition to the territorial mix, the communities of the districts have for generations been bound by employment, by commerce, by the housing market, by culture and by recreational pursuits.

The administrative boundaries have probably never made sense. But in 2025, the separation has profound real-world consequences for the economic sub-region, including disjointed and at times even adversarial approaches to cross-border planning for transport, regeneration, investment, environmental sustainability and housing needs.

While North and Southern & Mid

Staffordshire each have their own distinct character, they are linked by shared infrastructure, economic flows, and patterns of daily life that reflect the realities of how people live, work, travel, and access services across the region.

While the predominant daily flows are within each of the two sub-regions, and between the Southern & Mid Staffordshire sub-region and Greater Birmingham, residents in both areas also routinely travel across boundaries for employment, education, healthcare, and recreation, underscoring the need for coordinated planning and investment.

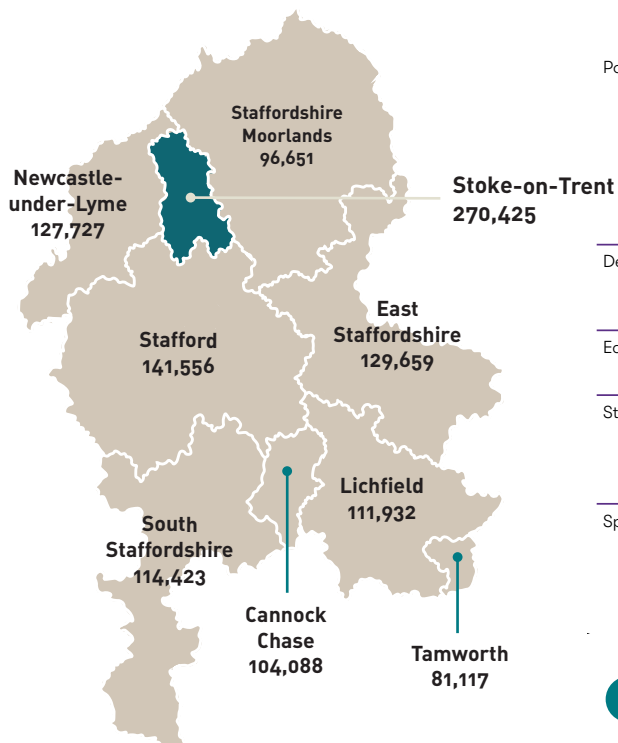
The two areas also share environmental assets and challenges. The River Trent flows through both sub-regions, linking communities and ecosystems from the Moorlands to Burton upon Trent. Green infrastructure, such as Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Churnet Valley, provide recreational

and ecological value across the county. Flood risk management, biodiversity conservation, energy infrastructure and sustainable transport planning are all areas where cross-boundary collaboration is essential, so that the full benefits of key arterial routes such as the M6 and the A50/A500 corridor are realised.

Culturally and socially, Southern & Mid Staffordshire and North Staffordshire are part of a wider Staffordshire identity, but with distinct local nuances. Southern areas tend to have stronger economic ties to the West Midlands conurbation, while northern areas are more closely aligned with Greater Manchester and Cheshire, underlining the reality of two distinct functioning economic market areas. Despite these differences, there is a shared sense of place rooted in Staffordshire’s history, rural heritage, and community values.

## STAFFORDSHIRE AS A PLACE

Figure 2 - Map showing population levels in Staffordshire council areas



Population	<b>1,177,578</b> Population in mid-2024	<b>1,234,221</b> Forecast population in 2030
	<b>17.8%</b> Aged 0-15 in 2024	<b>16.8%</b> Forecast 0-15 in 2030
	<b>21.2%</b> Aged 65+ in 2024	<b>23.7%</b> Forecast 65+ in 2030
Deprivation	<b>9.0%</b> Of LSOAs in the most deprived decile	<b>8.2%</b> Of LSOAs in the least deprived decile
Economy	<b>£29,515m</b> Gross Value Added (2022)	<b>1.5%</b> Of English GVA (2022)
Structure	<b>1</b> County Council <b>1</b> Unitary authority	<b>8</b> District and Borough Councils <b>450</b> Local Council electoral seats
Spending Power	<b>£1.209 billion</b> Core Spending Power (2025/26 Local Government Finance Settlement)	<b>1.9%</b> Of total core spending power by English local authorities (excluding "Other" authority types)



Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority



Staffordshire County Council District and Borough Councils

In practical terms, the relationship between the two areas is one of interdependence. Whether through shared infrastructure, overlapping service demand, or regional economic strategies, the geography of Staffordshire functions as a connected whole. Any future governance and strategic planning arrangements must reflect this reality, ensuring that both Southern & Mid Staffordshire and North Staffordshire can operate effectively in their own right, while continuing to collaborate on issues that span the county.

**Table 3 - Population outcomes data for Staffordshire**

Indicator	Staffordshire	Lowest area	Highest area	West Midlands	National
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>					
Total population	<b>1,151,580</b>	78,600 Tamworth	270,400 Stoke-on-Trent	-	-
Average age (median)	<b>42.3 yrs</b>	38.8 yrs Stoke-on-Trent	46.3 yrs Staffordshire Moorlands	40.0 yrs	40.5 yrs
Children (0-15)	<b>17.8%</b>	12.0% Stafford	20.1% East Staffordshire	19.3%	18.5%
Working age (16-64)	<b>61.0%</b>	58.0% Staffordshire Moorlands	62.5% Stoke-on-Trent	61.9%	62.9%
Older people (65+)	<b>21.2%</b>	17.3% Stoke-on-Trent	24.0% Lichfield	18.9%	18.6%
<b>ECONOMY</b>					
Total GVA	<b>£22.84 bn</b>	£1.25bn Staffordshire Moorlands	£7.02 bn Stoke-on-Trent	£174.6 bn	£2,113 bn
No. of businesses	<b>32,425</b>	2,210 Tamworth	6,700 Stoke-on-Trent	216,145	2,376,615
Adults in employment	<b>78.2%</b>	75.1% Staffordshire Moorlands	84.7% Cannock Chase	74.2%	75.5%
Gross weekly pay by area of residence	<b>£715.60</b>	£608.80 Stoke-on-Trent	£792.30 Lichfield	£689.90	£729.80
<b>EDUCATION &amp; SKILLS</b>					
Achieving development targets by age 5	<b>77.4%</b>	70.0% Stoke-on-Trent	80.3% Lichfield	73.2%	74.9%
Achieving grade 5+ in GCSE English and maths	<b>40.0%</b>	33.3% Stoke-on-Trent	67.8% Lichfield	48.7%	51.9%
Level 3 qualifications and above	<b>62.1%</b>	52.5% Staffordshire Moorlands	73.3% Stafford	63.5%	67.6%
<b>HOUSING</b>					
Stock in Council Tax bands A-C	<b>73%</b>	59% Lichfield	93% Stoke-on-Trent	75%	59%
<b>HEALTH</b>					
Life expectancy (women)	<b>82.3 yrs</b>	78.9 yrs Stoke-on-Trent	81.9 yrs Stafford	80.6 yrs	80.9 yrs
Life expectancy (men)	<b>78.3 yrs</b>	73.3 yrs Stoke-on-Trent	78.5 yrs Lichfield	75.9 yrs	76.5 yrs

## 3.2 OVERVIEW OF NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE

### 3.2.1 Geography

North Staffordshire has been a recognised geographical sub-region since Norman times. Forming the greatest part of the North-West Midlands of England, North Staffordshire comprises:

- Stoke-on-Trent - a polycentric city featuring seven sizeable population centres, comprising Meir and the original six 'Potteries' towns of Hanley, Burslem, Stoke, Longton, Fenton and Tunstall.
- The historic borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme - home to towns and villages such as Kidsgrove and Madeley.
- The district of Staffordshire Moorlands - including the historic market towns of Leek and Cheadle and the former mining town of Biddulph.

Stoke-on-Trent is the only city in North Staffordshire and the main part of the wider functional city region. The area's urban core, spanning almost 50 square miles, also extends into Newcastle-under-Lyme and parts of Staffordshire Moorlands. The polycentric conurbation is composed of a network of towns and parishes, each with distinct local identities. The rural hinterlands of Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Staffordshire Moorlands complement the urban core to provide a balanced North Staffordshire sub-region.

### 3.2.2 Population

North Staffordshire has a combined current population of almost 495,000, which has increased by around 25,000 since the 2011 census. Almost all of this population growth is attributable to Stoke-on-Trent, which has grown by nearly nine per cent to 270,425. Stoke-on-Trent is currently the 14th largest English city based on population and has the 67th highest level of population density out of 309 English local authorities (2021) – a level comparable to metropolitan boroughs such as Dudley and Walsall. The combined population is projected to exceed 500,000 by 2028. It is also significantly deprived, currently ranked 21st in the Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>1</sup>.

Table 4 - Population data for the North Staffordshire council areas (source: ONS)

Local Authority area	Population (2024)	Number of households	Area (sq. km)	Population density
Stoke-on-Trent	270,400	110,399	93.5	2,765
Newcastle-under-Lyme	127,730	53,423	211	585
Staffordshire Moorlands	96,650	42,355	576	166
<b>Total - North Staffordshire</b>	<b>494,780</b>	<b>206,177</b>	<b>881</b>	<b>562</b>

<sup>1</sup> English indices of deprivation 2025 - GOV.UK



North Staffordshire is a widely recognised geography and has a unique cultural identity with a distinct dialect and a rich and diverse industrial heritage, spanning centuries. Culturally, the sub-region's importance was reflected in institutions such as the historic North Staffordshire Regiment and the University Hospital of North Staffordshire (now the Royal Stoke University Hospital). It continues to be represented today through organisations such as YMCA North Staffordshire, the Citizens Advice Staffordshire North and Stoke-on-Trent and the North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust, as well as the draw of its two football league clubs and a host of sub-regional cultural attractions.

The Industrial Revolution made Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire world-famous as 'The Potteries' - a national and international centre of pottery production. Today, 'The Potteries' extends beyond Stoke-on-Trent's boundaries to encompass all of the towns and villages which contributed to historic pottery production, as well as outlying coalmining areas which produced the fuel to fire the pottery kilns and other engines of urban industrial expansion. The Potteries underpins collective identity and is an important driver of tourism.

### 3.2.3 The local economy

North Staffordshire is an economic market area distinct from Southern & Mid Staffordshire. Both areas are characterised by diverse natural economic patterns, shaped by their strengths and local economic assets.

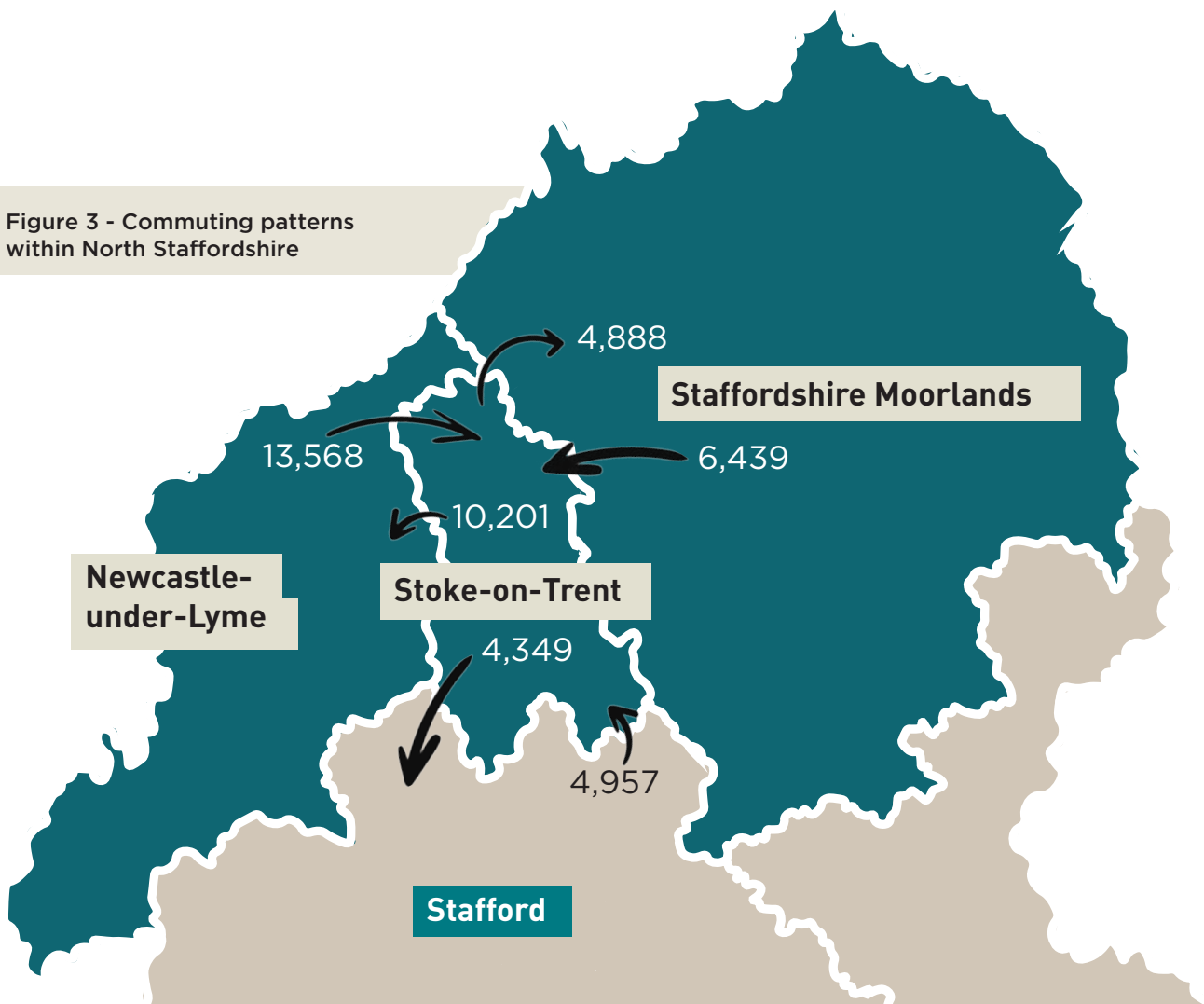
**Economic data demonstrate that North Staffordshire is a cohesive economic geography and a key provider of employment with a gravitational influence that extends beyond the administrative borders of its three constituent local authorities.** It exhibits the characteristics of a small city region, with a centre defined by the conurbation of Stoke-on-Trent and the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme and a suburban fringe which merges into rural and semi-rural areas of Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Staffordshire Moorlands, punctuated by market towns and villages. This agglomeration effect can also be seen quite clearly in the cluster analysis carried out for the Government's Industrial Strategy with particular strengths in advanced materials, digital and creative sectors.

Analysis of post-pandemic travel-to-work data indicates that North Staffordshire is a net importer of labour and displays a stronger economic 'pull' in this regard than neighbouring districts. The largest daily movements of commuters occur between Stoke-on-Trent and its two neighbouring authorities, demonstrating that the sub-region is operating as a discrete functioning economic market area. Stoke-on-Trent alone pulls in an average of more than 29,000 workers each day, the vast majority of whom originate from Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Staffordshire Moorlands.

Table 5 - Economic and workforce alignment in North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Region	Economic Strengths	Key Economic Assets
<b>North Staffordshire</b> (urban and industrial)	Manufacturing, logistics, digital and creative innovation	A50/A500 Economic Corridor, Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone, Fifty500 Midlands Growth Corridor
<b>Southern &amp; Mid Staffordshire</b> (service-oriented and intermediate urban)	Retail, logistics, high-tech manufacturing industries, agriculture	A5 Corridor, i54 Enterprise Zone, Lichfield & Tamworth commercial hubs, East Staffordshire's commuter economy

Figure 3 - Commuting patterns within North Staffordshire



Finally, the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone spans Stoke-on-Trent and parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme and is home to many important businesses. This is increasingly complemented by the Enterprise Park and Innovation District at Keele University in Newcastle-under-Lyme which serves the whole North Staffordshire sub-region.

### 3.2.4 Transportation

North Staffordshire's access to national transportation networks and infrastructure is one of its greatest strategic assets. This includes proximity to national arterial road routes, rail infrastructure, ports and airports. The presence of both north-south and east-west rail and road networks helps to ensure that North Staffordshire functions as a distinct economic area on a critical national crossroads for trade and commerce.

The A50/A500 road corridor provides a particular opportunity for economic growth, a significant part of that corridor lying in North Staffordshire.

Stoke-on-Trent is the hub station of North Staffordshire's passenger train service, providing frequent direct services to

London and Manchester via a branch of the West Coast Main Line, as well as Crewe, Derby and Nottingham via the East Midlands Railway. The station is used by approximately 2.5 million passengers each year. The East Midlands Railway provides the only rail route which links all three of the North Staffordshire local authorities, with stations at Kidsgrove, Longport, Stoke, Longton, Blythe Bridge and Uttoxeter on the Crewe to Derby line.

The local bus network operates on a North Staffordshire footprint. Two dominant provider companies, DG and First Bus Potteries, provide local services from a central hub at Hanley Bus Station. These span the entire urban area of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, as well as the nearby market towns of Biddulph, Cheadle and Leek in Staffordshire Moorlands.

Figure 4 - Map of North Staffordshire's motorway and A-road network



### 3.2.5 Housing and land use planning

**It is very difficult for a sub-region, let alone a single conurbation, to plan effectively for the needs of its areas if it cannot do so across the whole of the geography.** Land use planning should align with the economic and social pattern of that land use. North Staffordshire operates as single travel to work area and a single housing market. It has one infrastructure system and a shared green belt. Without a single plan, there is a risk that sub-optimal decisions are taken that hinder economic growth. And yet that is the position that currently hinders North Staffordshire because of the artificiality of the administrative boundaries.

The combined housing target for the three existing local authority areas of North Staffordshire is almost 2,000 new homes a year. This will require a joined-up approach to maximise the use of brownfield land, as well as tough decisions about use of 'greyfield' sites to protect high-quality

greenfield land. There is also a need to plan for a balanced housing stock that gives people options to stay in the area as their circumstances improve. At present, the city, specifically, has too few larger homes. A joined-up approach to planning would allow planning for a more sensible housing pattern into the future based on mixed-tenure neighbourhoods. This needs to include an improved housing offer for younger high-skilled workers, on whom the continued growth in our digital and creative industries depends.

A similar joined-up approach is required for the planning of new commercial development, in particular to maximise the potential of an emerging innovation corridor that spans from Keele University in Newcastle-under-Lyme, up and across the Etruria Valley to the University of Staffordshire and innovative businesses in Stoke-on-Trent and the Moorlands, broadly along the line of the Leek Road. This includes the development potential in the north east of the city of the Chatterley Valley ex-coliery site as an industrial eco-park.

**Table 6 - North Staffordshire housing typology data (2023)**  
(Source: ONS - 2021 Census)

Area	Detached	% of all housing	Semi-detached	% of all housing	Terraced	% of all housing	Flat/ maisonette/ apartment	% of all housing
Stoke-on-Trent	17,065	14.4	52,560	44.4	33,480	28.3	14,345	12.1
Newcastle-under-Lyme	14,265	25.0	24,775	43.4	10,985	19.2	6,140	10.7
Staffordshire Moorlands*	18,135	40.1	16,690	36.9	7,155	15.8	2,695	6.0
<b>TOTALS</b>	49,465	22.4	94,025	42.6	51,620	23.4	23,180	10.5



### 3.2.6 Culture and identity

One way to understand the extent to which North Staffordshire identifies and functions as a single place, with shared cultural tastes and preferences, is evidenced by the patronage of some of its key institutions, spanning sectors.

We started by looking at the City Council's leisure centres and found that over 15% of the membership lives in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands, with the vast majority of the rest from the city itself.

Taking the two football clubs based in the city, 72% of Stoke City season ticket holders live in North Staffordshire and an incredible 88% of Port Vale FC ticket holders.

The New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme, and the Regent Theatre and Victoria Halls in Stoke-on-Trent are regional venues, and yet in all cases well over half of their visitors in 2024/25 came from North Staffordshire.

North Staffordshire even has its own delicacy, in the form of its oatcakes, which you can still buy from hatches in walls.

Finally, we looked at where people of North Staffordshire go if we they want to venture further afield, for work or pleasure. With help from Avanti Trains, we learned that in 2024/25, there were 650,000 journeys from Stoke-on-Trent to Manchester, more than double the 247,000 to Birmingham, emphasising North Staffordshire's crucial role as a gateway to the North West.



## 3.2.7 Public services

### Education

North Staffordshire operates largely as a single education and skills geography. It is anchored by its two main universities: Keele, where almost half of students are drawn from the local area, and Staffordshire, where the figure is 65 per cent. Together, they have more than 25,000 students. Significant numbers of Keele students live in Stoke-on-Trent and travel into Newcastle-under-Lyme to study. Increasing numbers of young people from Staffordshire Moorlands also enrol at their two local universities.

There is a similar pattern with respect to further education, with three high-performing FE colleges and a sixth-form college drawing students from across North Staffordshire. For example, some 800 students travel from Stoke-on-Trent to Newcastle College each day.

The school system operates effectively on a North Staffordshire geography. Some 1,700 pupils travel from Stoke-on-Trent to Staffordshire Moorlands each day, and up to 700 pupils travel between Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme in both directions. North Staffordshire is therefore a natural geography for admissions.

### Health

North Staffordshire is already a coherent health geography within the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire administrative NHS footprint. Services in the North Staffordshire sub-region are orientated around the Royal Stoke University Hospital. The coherence of the North Staffordshire footprint is further underscored by the distribution of mental health and primary care services and facilities, and plans for a future Community Diagnostics Centre serving Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands.

Royal Stoke University Hospital (formerly the University Hospital of North Staffordshire) is the main hospital for the north of the county. Although the Royal Stoke operates an integrated discharge hub, it effectively must run two separate systems of step up and step down of patients across North Staffordshire because there are two local adult social care authorities. The creation of a unitary council for North Staffordshire would reduce this issue significantly.

### Policing and criminal justice

Until very recently, Staffordshire Police operated two local policing commands - one for Stoke-on-Trent and one for the rest of the county. These commands oversaw 10 Local Policing Teams, which include four covering the three council areas of North Staffordshire: Stoke-on-Trent North, Stoke-on-Trent South, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands.

Magistrates court services are provided by the North Staffordshire Justice Centre, based in Newcastle-under-Lyme, which handles cases from across the three North Staffordshire council areas. More serious cases are referred to Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court, which also covers the north of the county. Stafford Crown Court performs a corresponding role in the south.

HM Prisons and Probation Service operates on a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent footprint, but manages local probation contact centres in Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford.

## UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF THE CITY OF STOKE-ON-TRENT

Stoke-on-Trent City Council made the transition from district to unitary authority in 1997, taking back its responsibility for delivering all local services in the city, temporarily lost in 1974.

The reorganisation created a unitary City Council for Stoke-on-Trent with an administrative footprint of just 36 sq miles (93 sq km) and a population of around 250,000 (currently 270,400 based on ONS 2024 mid-year estimates<sup>2</sup>). The city's longitudinal, polycentric layout and constrained geography has created fundamental economic and administrative challenges which persist to this day. Despite consistently punching above its weight in economic terms in recent years, the city is characterised by severe and entrenched deprivation. Stoke-on-Trent is ranked as the 21<sup>st</sup> most deprived local authority area in England in the 2025 English Indices of Deprivation.

As a relatively small unitary authority in an area of significant deprivation, the City Council has always struggled to some extent financially. While the Council has experienced similar funding reductions, rising demand for services and more recently, high inflation, as have other similarly deprived, urban settlements, its resilience to cope with these impacts is eroded by the combination of the following factors:

- Higher than average demand for social care services due to the concentration of need.
- Very low council tax base (93% bands A-C).
- Historically low levels of reserves since its establishment as a unitary council.
- Geographical position surrounded by a larger and wealthier county, meaning that the city often has to match rates offered and prices paid by the County Council in order to maintain supply (this is a particular issue with respect of the social care market).
- An expectation from the rest of North Staffordshire that Hanley fulfils the role of a regional city centre but with the City Council not having the means to sustain the required offer.
- Low land and property values, land contamination and empty homes, limiting revenue raised through disposal and minimal New Homes Bonus.

In addition, a lack of suitable development sites within the city's boundaries, coupled with reduced land values and low investment levels, continues to hamper efforts to deliver more higher-value homes. Because of the tightness of the boundaries, there is very limited ability to cross-subsidise between sites.

The evidence indicates that the 1997 delineation of the city's boundaries effectively deprived Stoke-on-Trent of the means by which to escape the ongoing cycle of deprivation, under-investment, increasing demand, widening inequalities and worsening population outcomes.

<sup>2</sup> ONS 2024 mid-year estimates

There is a fundamental misalignment in North Staffordshire between the creation of economic value and local government finances. Stoke-on-Trent generates the highest GVA in North Staffs but has the lowest gross Household Disposable Income per head – value flows out of the city through workers commuting into the city but spending and paying their council taxes elsewhere in the sub-region.

LGR can help resolve these issues and this means two things. First, Stoke-on-Trent must become part of a larger local authority that has financial balance and sustainability. And second, that new authority must, as a minimum, cover fully the whole conurbation of which Stoke-on-Trent forms the largest part. There have been multiple attempts over a period that stretches back well over a century to create a single administrative city region. It is time to realise this opportunity.

**Table 7 - Persistent inequalities: Stoke-on-Trent vs. UK/England averages**

Measure	City data	National data
Housing in Council Tax bands A-C (2025)	93%	59%
Young people aged 16-17 who are NEET (2025)	5.5%	5.6%
Key Stage 4 educational attainment score (2024)	39.6 points	43.9
Children achieving development targets at 5 (2023)	78.7%	81.9%
Percentage of students going to University	c.18%	36.4%
Adults with Level 3+ qualifications (2024)	62.4%	67.6%
Average healthy life expectancy from birth (2024)	55.9 years (men); 55.1 years (women)	61.5 years (men); 61.9 years (women)
Economically inactive who are long-term sick (2024)	37.7%	28.4% (UK avg.)
Gross pay by area of residence (2024)	£608.80 / week	£729.80 (UK avg.)
Children in care per 10,000 children (2024)	191	76
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births (2023)	5.1	3.9
Suicide rate per 100,00 population (2024)	13.1	10.9





## 3.3 OVERVIEW OF SOUTHERN & MID STAFFORDSHIRE

### 3.3.1 Geography

Southern & Mid Staffordshire is a diverse and economically vibrant region within the West Midlands, covering 1,836 km<sup>2</sup> and home to approximately 656,800 residents across 279,400 households (2021 Census). It comprises six District and Borough Councils: Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford, and Tamworth. The area combines historic towns, rural landscapes, and strategic transport corridors, creating a distinct identity and strong economic base.

### 3.3.2 Population

The population is distributed across urban centres like Burton upon Trent, Cannock, Lichfield, Stafford, and Tamworth, alongside rural hubs such as Great Wyrley, Perton, and Uttoxeter. Tamworth has the highest population density (2,548/km<sup>2</sup>), while Stafford is the largest by area (597 km<sup>2</sup>).

The age profile shows a balanced distribution, with Stafford having the largest older population (23,600 aged 70+), while East Staffordshire has the most residents under 19 (28,900), indicating that the sub-region is characterised by both ageing and youthful demographics. Ethnically, the region is predominantly White, although East Staffordshire is the most diverse, with 9.4 per cent Asian inhabitants and higher proportions of residents from mixed and other ethnic groups.

Table 8 - Population distribution and density in Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Area	Population	Number of Households	Area (square KM, rounded)	Population Density
<b>Cannock Chase</b>	100,500	43,500	79	1,274
<b>East Staffordshire</b>	124,000	51,300	390	320
<b>Lichfield</b>	106,400	45,600	331	321
<b>South Staffordshire</b>	110,500	46,100	408	271
<b>Stafford</b>	136,800	60,000	597	229
<b>Tamworth</b>	78,600	32,900	31	2,548
<b>Total</b>	<b>656,800</b>	<b>279,400</b>	<b>1,836</b>	<b>358</b>

### 3.3.3 The local economy

The region is home to a diverse economy with significant strengths in automotive, aerospace, energy, medical technologies, logistics, digital and agritech sectors, which have seen sustained growth in recent years. The area's growing high-value manufacturing base is seen as a key driver of future growth, supporting local supply chains and creating a more balanced economy.

Tourism is also an important economic contributor, with attractions like Lichfield Cathedral, Tamworth Castle, Cannock Chase AONB, Uttoxeter Racecourse, and Shugborough Hall, as well as cultural events such as Burton upon Trent's Sonic Boom music festival.

A central geographical location and strategic connectivity via major road and rail links help to position the area as a vital contributor to the West Midlands economy. Four councils were members of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP), and both Cannock Chase and Tamworth are non-constituent members of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), reflecting strong regional collaboration. These commitments highlight the distinct, West Midlands-focused economic identity of southern Staffordshire and councils' shared dedication to achieving collaborative growth and regional prosperity.

Specific economic sectors and development programmes are covered in greater detail in the 'Socio-Economic Case' section.

### 3.3.4 Transportation

Southern & Mid Staffordshire is served by both the M6 and M54 motorways, linking Stafford, Cannock and smaller South Staffordshire towns to employment sites in the West Midlands and Shropshire. A radial network of A roads links the county town of Stafford to Wolverhampton (A449), Cannock (A34), Rugeley and Lichfield (A513 / A51), and Uttoxeter (A518), as well as west to Shropshire (A518) and north to Stone and Stoke-on-Trent (A34). To the east, the A38 links Lichfield to Burton-upon-Trent, as well as Derby to the north and the West Midlands conurbation to the south. The A5 is also a key east-west road corridor, which links

Tamworth in the south east to the districts of Lichfield, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire.

Rail links include the West Coast Main Line, which features Stafford, Rugeley Trent Valley and Lichfield Trent Valley stations as primary stops and Penkridge, Stone and Tamworth as local stations. Cross Country services from Bristol to Derby link Tamworth with Burton-upon-Trent, and local district lines connect Lichfield and Rugeley to Birmingham and the wider West Midlands.

Bus services in Southern & Mid Staffordshire are delivered by a number of local and regional providers. Many routes traverse the southern districts en route to external regional destinations such as Birmingham, Derby, Wolverhampton and Telford.

Joint transport planning by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council identified two distinct packages of intervention which would be required to enable economic growth and improve intra-regional connectivity: a 'Northern Cross Boundary Transport Package' of measures, spanning Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands, and a corresponding 'Southern Cross Boundary Transport Package'. The southern programme focused on "enhancing connectivity between Staffordshire and the West Midlands conurbation", on the basis that "South Staffordshire, Lichfield, Cannock, Tamworth and the West Midlands conurbation rely on each other for jobs and services<sup>1</sup>." Projects contained in this package include the Wolverhampton to Stafford multi-modal Green Innovation Corridor to create a new Economic Growth Zone and support the continuing expansion of the i54 enterprise zone.

<sup>1</sup> Staffordshire Joint Strategic Transport Statement (p.18 - Southern Cross Boundary Transport Package)

Table 9 - Bus operators in Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Operator	Stafford	Cannock Chase	South Staffordshire	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	Tamworth
Diamond Bus			✓			
Diamond Bus East Midlands				✓	✓	✓
LA Travel				✓	✓	
Chaserider	✓	✓	✓		✓	
National Express West Midlands		✓	✓		✓	
Select Bus	✓	✓	✓			
Trent Barton				✓		
Arriva Midlands	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 10 shows that there is a clear divide between the most used bus services in North Staffordshire, which tend to travel within the city region or the fringes of East Cheshire, and those in Southern & Mid Staffordshire, which are more likely to begin or terminate in the West Midlands or Derbyshire.

Table 10 - Most popular bus routes in Staffordshire

Route	Route description
3/3A/4/4A	Hanley (City Centre) - Crewe (Bus Station) via Tunstall, Kidsgrove and Alsager Hanley (City Centre) - Talke Pits via Tunstall and Kidsgrove Hanley (City Centre) - Waterhayes via Festival Park, Newcastle and Chesterton Hanley (City Centre) - Kidsgrove via Festival Park, Newcastle, Chesterton and Talke Pits
25	Hanley (City Centre) - Keele (University) via Stoke Rail Station, Stoke and Newcastle
101	Hanley (City Centre) - Stafford (Rail Station) via Newcastle, Tittensor and Stone
110	Tamworth - Birmingham
9	East Midlands Airport & Gateway to Ashby, Swadlincote, Burton and Queens Hospital, Burton
74*	Cannock - Stafford
8*	Stafford - Parkside - Redhill - Stafford
X51	Birmingham - Walsall - Great Wyrley - McArthur Glen - Cannock
7*	Stafford - Moss Pit

(\*These routes are wholly within Staffordshire)

### 3.3.5 Housing and planning

A new Southern & Mid Staffordshire Unitary Council would have the opportunity to build on the southern districts' strong track record of housing delivery, which has seen the six councils collectively exceeding their allocated delivery targets in recent years.

Establishing a unified planning framework could accelerate delivery, reduce associated bureaucracy and enable the new council to deliver an estimated 53,040 homes across the southern areas by 2040. This would ensure that the new council is able to align its housing delivery approach with national planning policy and the Government's economic and housing growth priorities.

Similarly, the integration of infrastructure planning within the unitary authority could enable more coordinated and holistic approaches to investment in transport networks, regeneration, and employment, in order to maximise socio-economic benefits.

### 3.3.6 Public services

As with the north of the county, health and care services in Southern & Mid Staffordshire are coordinated by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS, which comprises both the city and county councils, as well as all of the NHS Trusts operating in the area.

The main hospital in the south is the County Hospital, in Stafford, which is managed by the University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust, which also operates the Royal Stoke University Hospital. The County Hospital provides 180 beds, an outpatients department and a range of acute services, including A&E, acute medicine and MRI diagnostics.

Patient data indicates that almost half of all patients from the ICS area actually travel outside the county to access hospital services. Of 431,000 inpatient stays involving Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent residents, only 52 per cent received treatment in the county's hospitals. Of the remainder, almost 63,000 (14.6 per cent of all inpatient stays) went to the Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust. These are likely to have mostly been patients from East Staffordshire and Lichfield, as well as some from the eastern edges of Staffordshire Moorlands. A combined total of more than 92,000 patient stays (21.4 per cent) related to hospitals in Birmingham or the Black Country. These are most likely to have been patients living in Southern & Mid Staffordshire. These findings further illustrate the strong links between southern parts of the county and the neighbouring West Midlands conurbation.

Table 11 - Inpatient activity for resident population (SSOT ICB)

Main providers within ICB	Inpatient spells
University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust	225,114
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>225,114</b>
Main providers outside ICB	Inpatient spells
University Hospitals of Derby & Burton NHS Foundation Trust	62,898
The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust	46,205
University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust	27,344
Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust	13,099
Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust	10,446
The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust	8,056
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>168,048</b>
Other providers (304 providers)	37,859
<b>Total inpatient activity for ICB residents</b>	<b>431,021</b>
<b>Proportion of activity delivered by main providers with ICB</b>	<b>52%</b>

# 4 : APPRAISAL OF THE OPTIONS

This section assesses the four main, distinct models of LGR being proposed for Staffordshire against the evaluation criteria set out by the Government. It highlights the areas of stronger or weaker alignment in each case, and concludes with a summary of the findings and the relative strengths of each proposed model. This analysis is underpinned by the independent report undertaken by Grant Thornton (attached at Appendix 1). We have omitted a couple of the options included in the Appendix, because they obviously fail on some combination of essential criteria and strength of case, such as population size.

## 4.1 THE MAIN OPTIONS

### Option A geography

This is a two-unitary option based on a north-south configuration.

- North Staffordshire would comprise the contiguous boundaries of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands, including the towns of Newcastle, Leek, Cheadle, Biddulph, and the six towns of Hanley, Burslem, Stoke, Longton, Fenton and Tunstall which make up Stoke-on-Trent. This would create a unitary council with an area of 881 km<sup>2</sup> and average population density of 562 per km<sup>2</sup> with 494,780 inhabitants.
- Southern & Mid Staffordshire would amalgamate the existing boroughs of Stafford, East Staffordshire and Tamworth, and the districts of Cannock Chase, Lichfield and South Staffordshire. This unified area would include the city of Lichfield and principal towns of Stafford, Cannock, Burton upon Trent and Tamworth, as well as smaller towns such as Rugeley, Burntwood and Wombourne. The unitary council would serve 656,800 residents within a combined area of 1,836 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of 358 per km<sup>2</sup>.

### Option B geography

The North Staffordshire Unitary Council would serve the same geography as Option A. However, the remainder of the county footprint would be divided into two unitary areas:

- South West Staffordshire would comprise the contiguous areas of Stafford Borough and the districts of Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire. This would create an administrative area of 1,084 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 347,800. This area would have a population density of 321 per km<sup>2</sup>. The area would include Stafford and Cannock, as well as key towns such as Rugeley and Stone.
- South East Staffordshire would bring together the district of Lichfield and boroughs of East Staffordshire and Tamworth from the rest of southern Staffordshire. The resulting unitary authority would cover 752 km<sup>2</sup> and serve a population of 309,000, with a combined population density of 411 per km<sup>2</sup>. This area would include Lichfield and the key towns of Burton, Tamworth and Uttoxeter.

## Option C geography

Although it proposes a North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire configuration, the boundary changes sought would mean that North Staffordshire would gain the town of Stone and surrounding parishes from Stafford borough, as well as Uttoxeter and its environs from East Staffordshire.

- A larger North Staffordshire unitary would have a population of approximately 536,200 and cover an area of 880 km<sup>2</sup>. The population density would be 609 per km<sup>2</sup>. The unitary would include the existing Stone Rural North and Stone Urban electoral divisions from Stafford borough, as well as the Aston Parish ward of Stone Rural Parish Council and the St Michael's East ward of Stone Town Council. It would also incorporate the Uttoxeter Rural and Uttoxeter Town electoral divisions from East Staffordshire.
- A smaller Southern & Mid Staffordshire unitary would serve an area of 1,833 km<sup>2</sup> containing around 598,300 inhabitants and resulting in an average population density of 326 per km<sup>2</sup>.

## Option D geography

This two-unitary proposal is unique in advocating an east-west split, rather than a more conventional north-south configuration.

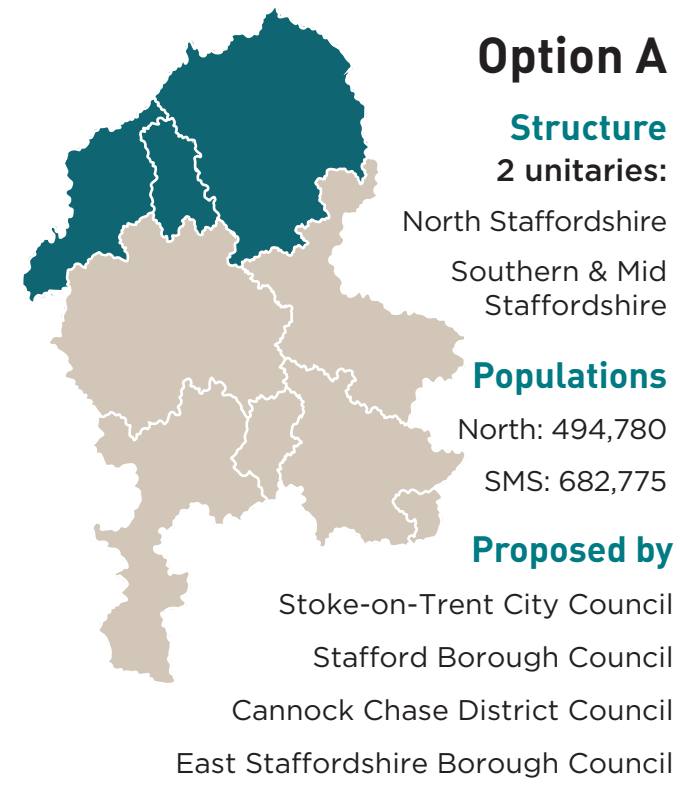
- The East Staffordshire unitary authority would comprise the cities of Stoke-on-Trent and Lichfield and the urban borough of Tamworth alongside the predominantly rural Staffordshire Moorlands and East Staffordshire, creating an area of 1,465 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of almost 689,800 and a population density of 471 per km<sup>2</sup>. The resulting unitary would deliver services across a longitudinal expanse stretching more than 50 miles from East Cheshire and Derbyshire in the north to the southern boundaries with Warwickshire, Leicestershire and the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- The West Staffordshire council would cover 1,325 km<sup>2</sup> and serve around 487,800 inhabitants, with a population density of 368 per km<sup>2</sup>. This would split the North Staffordshire conurbation by separating the conjoined communities of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent, instead merging Newcastle with Stafford, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire. This unitary area would also span almost 50 miles from its southern boundaries with Worcestershire and Dudley to East Cheshire in the north.





# OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION MODELS

Figure 4 - Summary of the proposed LGR models for Staffordshire



## Option B

### Structure

#### 3 unitaries:

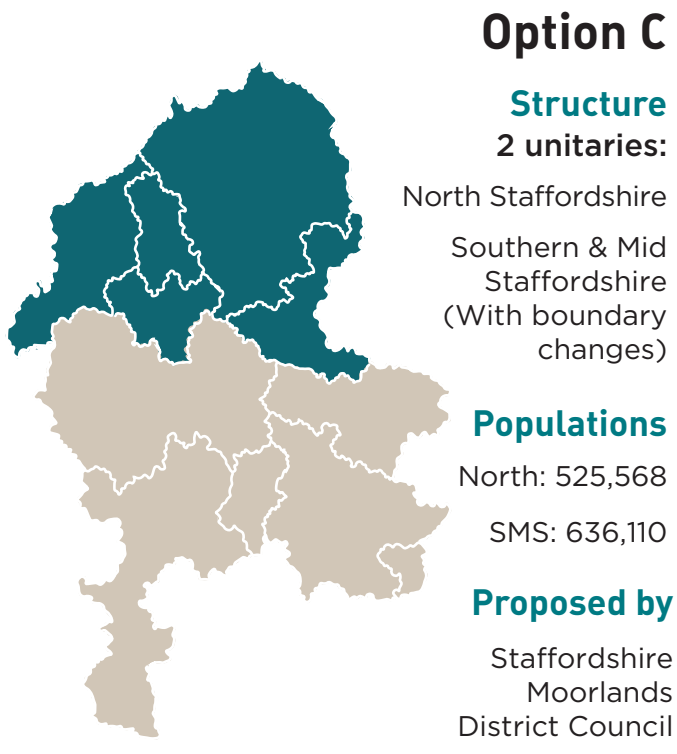
- North Staffordshire
- South West Staffordshire
- South East Staffordshire

### Populations

- North: 494,780
- SWS: 356,603
- SES: 318,073

### Proposed by

- North Staffordshire
- South West Staffordshire
- South East Staffordshire



## Option D

### Structure

#### 2 unitaries:

- East Staffordshire
- West Staffordshire

### Populations

- East: 677,015
- West: 484,663

### Proposed by

- Staffordshire County Council

## 4.2 HIGH LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS

### 4.2.1 Option A: Two Unitaries – North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Government's key criteria for unitary local government	Option A
1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensible geographies</li> <li>• Functioning economic market areas</li> <li>• Balanced populations</li> <li>• Reflects distinct historic and cultural identities</li> </ul>
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both unitaries have sufficient populations to ensure critical mass</li> <li>• Maintains contiguous boundaries</li> <li>• Proposals will rebalance financial characteristics (especially in North)</li> <li>• Local government finances will map to functional economic areas</li> </ul>
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model minimises disaggregation costs and disruption to services.</li> <li>• Transition framework enables transformation, continuous improvement and public sector reform</li> </ul>
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model is most supported by other councils</li> <li>• North Staffordshire element is supported by 8 out of 10 councils</li> <li>• Joint working on final proposals</li> </ul>
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two Unitary Councils can facilitate a Strategic Authority that covers the whole of Staffordshire.</li> <li>• Allows for delegation of Strategic Authority functions as appropriate e.g. business support for ceramics managed in the north, industries linked to West Mids in the south.</li> </ul>
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model proposes making better use of existing parishes and introducing Neighbourhood Area Committees where desirable</li> <li>• Commitment to co-design neighbourhood empowerment approach(es) with communities</li> </ul>

### 4.2.2 Key findings – Option A

Based on a high-level assessment, the main strengths of this model are:

- Strong alignment with recognised geographies and functioning economic areas.
- Clear reflection of local history and cultural identities.
- It has been developed in collaboration with other councils.
- It is supported by more councils than any other model.
- The proposal reflects public engagement findings around financial sustainability, strategic planning and community empowerment.
- The model would support the establishment of effective, sustainable unitary councils and a cohesive and influential Strategic Authority.



- It would minimise transition complexity, disruption and cost more effectively.
- It would rebalance local government finances to improve sustainability.

### 4.2.3 Option B: Three Unitaries – North, South West and South East Staffordshire

Government's key criteria for unitary local government	Option B
1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensible geographies</li> <li>• Functioning economic market areas</li> <li>• Reflects distinct historic and cultural identities</li> <li>• Southern unitaries' populations are too small</li> </ul>
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains contiguous boundaries</li> <li>• Proposals will rebalance financial characteristics (especially in North)</li> <li>• Southern unitaries may be too small to achieve economies of scale</li> <li>• Three councils will increase duplication, complexity and costs</li> </ul>
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model requires more complex disaggregation of services.</li> <li>• Greater risk of operational inefficiencies due to smaller size of southern councils</li> </ul>
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The model is supported by public engagement results in southern Staffordshire</li> </ul>
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three Unitary Councils can facilitate a Strategic Authority that covers the whole of Staffordshire, as a minimum</li> </ul>
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is public support for more localised governance structures</li> <li>• Smaller councils may not achieve the same positive outcomes as a two-unitary model</li> </ul>

### 4.2.4 Key findings – Option B

Based on a high-level assessment, the main strengths of this model are:

- Alignment with recognised geographies and functioning economic areas.
- Clear reflection of local history and cultural identities.
- It has been developed in collaboration with other councils.
- The proposal aligns with public desire for more localised structures and services.
- It would rebalance local government finances to improve sustainability.

However, the model does not align with the Government's criteria in key areas:

- The envisaged populations for the southern unitaries are well below 500,000.

- The creation of a third unitary risks duplicating services and structures, undermining potential efficiencies from reorganisation.
- The three-unitary solution will complicate an already complex implementation and transition process, increasing the risk of disruption to services and transformation programmes.
- The three-unitary model will deliver lower savings than a two-unitary solution.

### 4.2.5 Option C: Two Unitaries - North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire (with boundary changes)

Government's key criteria for unitary local government	Option C
1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensible geographies</li> <li>• Functioning economic market areas, perhaps the best fit in this respect of all the proposals</li> <li>• Balanced populations</li> <li>• Reflects distinct historic and cultural identities</li> </ul>
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both unitaries have sufficient populations to ensure critical mass</li> <li>• Proposals will rebalance financial characteristics (especially in North)</li> <li>• Model does not maintain contiguous boundaries</li> </ul>
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two unitary solution will maximise efficiency</li> <li>• Boundary changes will further complicate service disaggregation process</li> </ul>
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of local support for enlarged North Staffordshire geography</li> <li>• Not supported by several other councils due to potential impacts of boundary changes</li> </ul>
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two Unitary Councils can facilitate a Strategic Authority that covers the whole of Staffordshire, as a minimum</li> <li>• Risk of friction from boundary changes undermining county-wide cohesion</li> </ul>
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposes Neighbourhood Area Committees to facilitate community engagement</li> <li>• Unitaries are of sufficient scale to deliver improvements to communities and neighbourhoods</li> </ul>

### 4.2.6 Key findings – Option C

Based on a high-level assessment, the main strengths of this model are:

- Strong alignment with recognised geographies and functioning economic areas.
- Clear reflection of local history and cultural identities.
- The model achieves balanced populations for both unitaries.
- The proposal can enable improved efficiency through economies of scale and removing redundancy and duplication.

However, the model does not fully align with the Government’s criteria in key areas:

- Crucially, the proposal necessitates boundary changes, which are at odds with the requirement for contiguous boundaries to be maintained.
- The boundary changes impinge on other areas, potentially complicating the implementation and transition process around disaggregation and integration of services and processes.

## 4.2.7 Option D: Two Unitaries - West Staffordshire and East Staffordshire

Government’s key criteria for unitary local government	Option D
1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model does not use sensible geographies</li> <li>• Proposal breaks up functioning economic market areas especially the conurbation of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, the only source of agglomeration effects in Staffordshire.</li> <li>• Solution does not reflect cultural or historical identities</li> </ul>
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both unitaries have sufficient populations to ensure critical mass</li> <li>• Maintains contiguous boundaries</li> <li>• Proposals rebalance financial characteristics (especially in North)</li> <li>• Chosen geography will undermine economic growth and impact on financial sustainability</li> </ul>
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographies do not align well with other public sector operational footprints (e.g. health, education)</li> <li>• Geographies are inefficient, with long distances north to south in both east and west</li> <li>• Model should have low disaggregation costs in West Staffordshire.</li> </ul>
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model is not supported by any other councils</li> <li>• Proposal has not been developed collaboratively and has been introduced very late in the process.</li> </ul>
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two Unitary Councils can facilitate a Strategic Authority that covers the whole of Staffordshire, as a minimum</li> <li>• However, lack of coherence of the two proposed geographies in terms of economic flows means they are not good building blocks for devolution</li> </ul>
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposes Neighbourhood Area Committees to facilitate community engagement</li> <li>• Unitaries are of sufficient scale to deliver improvements to communities and neighbourhoods</li> <li>• At aggregate level, proposed unitary areas do not align well with recognised community identity and sense of place.</li> </ul>

## 4.2.8 Key findings – Option D

Based on a high-level assessment, the main strengths of this model are:

- Like Options A and C, the model achieves balanced populations for both unitaries and can enable improved efficiency through economies of scale.
- It rebalances local need, demand, debt and spending power profiles to achieve a more even distribution of resources and liabilities.
- The model would reduce the cost and complexity of service disaggregation in the West Staffordshire unitary, which is currently all two-tier.

However, the model does not fully align with the Government's criteria in key areas:

- Fundamentally, the model is based on flawed and mis-aligned geographies which break up existing economic market areas and ignore local historical and cultural identities, weakening community cohesion.
- This proposal would split the county's only conurbation in two, jeopardising economic development and employment growth in the north of the county.
- It would create impractical operational footprints spanning up to 50 miles, and would see the county's only large city – the 13th largest city in the UK – presumably having to be governed from Lichfield, a civil parish of only 35,000 people.
- The East-West model does not align with the findings of public engagement in terms of preferred unitary configurations.
- The model is not supported by any of the other councils in Staffordshire due its lack of any alignment with established local economies and communities.
- The proposal's balanced populations and economic characteristics have been achieved using an illogical geographical solution which will result in additional and avoidable complexity and risk around the implementation and transition process.
- The enlarged geographical spreads envisaged by this model are likely to undermine internal cohesion and service efficiency, leading to service disruption and placing forecast financial outcomes in doubt.
- The model has prioritised data rebalancing over strategic clarity, as evidenced by the lack of any compelling rationale for the East-West division. This lack of strategic clarity will make it harder to maximise the benefits from reorganisation or, ultimately devolution.

## 4.2.9 Initial conclusion

**Evidence indicates that, against the key criteria, the North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire two-unitary model is the most advantageous, credible and pragmatic solution both for reorganising local government on a firm footing and delivering effective devolution in Staffordshire.** As this proposal demonstrates, the model is strongly supported by both public engagement and economic analysis. It aligns with how people live and work, it offers financial and operational advantages, and it supports strategic economic growth and devolution. It represents the most viable option for LGR in Staffordshire, offering a balance of service continuity, financial resilience, operational efficiency, strategic alignment and community identity.



The next sections test the logic of this starting position more deeply in terms of socio-economic opportunity, the financial case and the outcomes of public engagement

## 4.3 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CASE

### 4.3.1 Overview of the Options Appraisal

Based on the independent analysis undertaken (set out in some detail at Appendix 1) and using a basic scoring system from 0 to 5 (where the higher score indicates a likely stronger contribution to socio-economic wellbeing) we have scored the main options on the key socio-economic indicators as follows.

Table 12 - Scoring of options against the Government's criteria

Critical issue	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Commentary
Recognised economic geography	5	4	5	2	Staffordshire operates as two distinct sub-economies – north and south. There is no sense in which the county operates as western and eastern sub-economies. The only real alignment of the east-west model is the western relationship between Staffordshire and Shropshire but there is no evidence that this is of great economic or social significance.
Recognised sense of local identity and how people live their lives	4	5	4	1	People's principal identity in Staffordshire is very local to where they live but beyond that they tend to associate with the north or south of the county. Someone in Tamworth is unlikely to see themselves as having anything in common with someone in Tunstall, other than they are both part of the historic county of Staffordshire.
Benefits of agglomeration	5	4	5	1	All the global evidence is that cities and conurbations are the most significant geographical drivers of growth, because of the known benefits of density and agglomeration. Options A and C recognise this and prioritise the strategic relationships driven by working across and with urban conurbations. Option B does this in the north but to a lesser extent in the south.
Local transportation planning	5	3	5	2	The local transport systems work predominantly on a northern and Southern & Mid Staffordshire sub-regional basis. Option D – the east-west option would slice down the middle of how the local transport systems function.
Fit with cultural offer	5	4	5	1	The cultural and sporting offer of the county is largely organised on a northern and mid-southern sub-regional basis, reflective of local patronage and allegiances. Cultural programmes reflect those differences, particularly around distinct cultural histories.

Critical issue	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Commentary
Planning and supporting business growth	5	3	5	2	A whole range of programmes and institutions already operate on a combination of a whole county and a north-south basis.
Supporting planning and delivery of homes in a recognised housing market	5	4	5	2	North Staffordshire is a recognised and functioning housing market. South Staffordshire is made up of a small number of discrete local housing markets. There is no sense at all of the Staffordshire housing market working on an east-west basis, which means that land use planning under Option D would continuously have to work against the grain.
Fit with current model of local public service provision – health & social Care	4	4	4	2	As set out in the opening chapter, north-south is the natural split in how the health system functions in Staffordshire. It makes sense to organise social care services to fit this health service geography.
Fit with current model of local public service provision – education & skills	4	4	4	2	North Staffordshire operates as a discrete education and skills geography, across schools, colleges and universities. Southern & Mid Staffordshire is made up of several education and skills geographies that overlap with different parts of the West Midlands conurbation and to some extent, into Leicestershire, Shropshire and Derbyshire as well.
Fit with current model of local public service provision – crime and community safety	4	3	4	3	As the policing model is based on a whole county basis, the interface between the policing model and the new councils would need to be worked through. However, in terms of logistical coverage, the north-south model offers many advantages over the east-west model, not least in terms of policing a major conurbation in a coherent way.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>18</b>	

Having established that in socio-economic terms, the two-unitary North-South models (options A and C) are significantly more advantageous than the East-West option (option D), we next look in more detail at why that is the case and how we could derive maximum benefit from LGR combined with devolution.

### 4.3.2 Socio-economic overview of North Staffordshire

North Staffordshire is a functioning economic market area based around the urban area of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, which is the primary driver of economic activity and employment across the sub-region. The previous local government reorganisation in 1997 did North Staffordshire no favours, separating the more deprived city from its wealthier hinterland and restricting the ability to plan and deliver infrastructure, business development and public services on a coherent basis.

Despite these significant drawbacks, the area has emerged from industrial decline, capitalising on emerging clusters in high-growth sectors including advanced manufacturing, digital and createch, creative industries and logistics. However, sustained growth now requires a greater focus on cross-border strategic planning to deliver the housing, development land, transport links and other vital infrastructure to support and catalyse further expansion to benefit the wider sub-region and county.

### 4.3.3 North Staffordshire - Main economic opportunities

North Staffordshire's current and emerging economic opportunities include:

- Concentrated cluster activity, linking northwards into East Cheshire and Greater Manchester, in advanced manufacturing, creative industries and the digital sector. The digital sector in Stoke-on-Trent has evolved organically to become one of the most productive tech clusters in the UK, with enormous potential for growth. Emerging research by the two local universities suggests the supply of graduates in computing and digital subjects is the most important factor explaining the strength of the digital economy in North Staffordshire.
  - Strong foundation sectors, including transport and distribution, health and care services and a growing visitor economy linked to the area's strong leisure and cultural heritage offers.
  - A strong knowledge economy, with two leading universities who are closely involved in industry-focused innovation and R&D work. The University of Staffordshire is a specialist digital skills hub for the region, while Keele University supports more than 50 knowledge-intensive industries and sectors based on its 70-acre Science and Business Park as well as leading status in energy and environmental science.
- The Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone (CVEZ) has secured significant development and investment, modern manufacturing and sustainable business growth across six sites spanning Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme.
  - Stoke-on-Trent was the first city in the UK to install a citywide high-speed digital network with complementary 5G coverage to support business expansion, digital innovation and inward investment. However, rural areas are still struggling to access fast, reliable digital connectivity.
  - The three North Staffordshire councils are closely involved in regional economic development projects such as the A50/A500 Corridor, which is set to create thousands of new jobs and homes along key transport routes in the area.

### 4.3.4 Realising economic growth in North Staffordshire

A number of important factors are likely to determine the future pace and trajectory of economic activity and expansion in the sub-region in the medium-to-long term future:

- Addressing the causes and impacts of entrenched inequalities and multiple forms of deprivation, which are most concentrated in and around Stoke-on-Trent. This requires the creation of a local authority model that aligns service delivery with the needs of the local economy.
- Getting more adults into sustainable work, particularly those who have been out of work due to long-term ill health. This requires a size and density of footprint that maximises access to skills opportunities and aligns the provision of health services to the local labour market.
- Closing the education and skills gap to other parts of the UK to open up more employment and earning opportunities for local residents. This requires a joined-up approach between local skills providers and the local employer base.

- Delivering local transport network improvements, including better transport integration across the sub-region and cheaper, more reliable and extensive public transport services to connect more people to employment and vital services. This would include making use of all the west-east transport investment that has been made over the last 10-20 years, including the A527 (Wolstanton Link Road), the Etruria Valley Link Road, improvements to the A52 and 53 and to the A50/A500 corridor.
- Ability to maximise the potential of what is a single housing market to enable and facilitate economic growth and meet the needs of the population
- Enabling the continued expansion of high-growth and higher-value sectors, through infrastructure investment, innovation, strategic planning and skills development. While some of this work will fall to the Mayoral Strategic Authority, the North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire geographies provide the most obvious planning and delivery footprints.

### 4.3.5 Case Study – Improving transport across North Staffordshire

The City Council is already planning and delivering key interventions through the Northern Cross-Boundary Transport Package to further improve connectivity and access to jobs and local services across the City, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands:

- North Staffordshire Bus Rapid Transit – Creating a fast, reliable, and high-quality bus network linking key urban centres to encourage a shift from private car use.
- MRN A52 and A53 Multimodal Access for All Corridors – Enhancing east-west connectivity with zero-emission buses, better walking and cycling routes, smart traffic management, and major road maintenance.
- Rail Station Improvements – Upgrading existing stations and developing new ones to improve capacity, accessibility, and connections between rail, bus, walking, and cycling networks.
- Mobility Hubs – Providing local transport access points, especially in low-car areas, to connect communities where fixed bus routes are not viable.
- Improved Cycling Network and People-Friendly Streets – Delivering a safe, connected cycle network and prioritising walking and cycling in local neighbourhoods.
- M6 Junction 15 Upgrade – Enhancing safety and reducing congestion at a critical junction linking local and national transport networks.
- EV Charging Infrastructure Network – Expanding access to residential and public EV charging to support zero-emission travel and the growth of electric buses.
- Newport Lane Link Road – the City Council is investing £9m over the next three years through its Bus Service Improvement Plan to construct a new bus-only route to improve connectivity at key employment sites in Etruria Valley and the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone.

All this work would be enhanced by the creation of a single unitary council for North Staffordshire.



### 4.3.6 Socio-economic overview of Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Although the economy of Southern & Mid Staffordshire is performing well, more rapid expansion is being undermined by low workforce skill levels, particularly in the Cannock Chase and Tamworth districts. Supporting more residents to improve their education and skill levels will enable them to benefit from the higher-paid employment opportunities being created locally.

The Southern & Mid sub-region also faces challenges in ensuring that town centres remain relevant and attractive destinations following the post-pandemic decline in physical retail activity and high street footfall. Staffordshire County Council's most recent economic strategy lists town centre and high street regeneration as a top economic development priority. The council said that it recognised "the importance of reshaping and reimagining our high streets to create places that people value and have pride in".<sup>2</sup> Proposed approaches included the development of town centre investment prospectuses and maximising the use of council assets to support redevelopment projects.

Business support is another key county-wide priority which a Southern & Mid Staffordshire Unitary Council would be expected to address for key sectors of high local importance. Staffordshire as a whole lags behind the UK average in terms of the numbers of business start-ups and expansions, as well as in levels of innovation within the local economy.

### 4.3.7 Socio-economic opportunities for Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Southern & Mid Staffordshire's current and emerging economic opportunities include:

- The development of strategic corridors connecting parts of Southern & Mid Staffordshire to neighbouring economic areas. The primary examples are the A5 Corridor and the A38 Corridor. The aim is to use transport infrastructure improvements to create corridors of innovation and employment growth, supported by high-quality housing.
- Opportunity to build a better and stronger strategic relationship with the West Midlands conurbation area, reflecting economic flows between the geographies.
- Ability to plan economic and social infrastructure over the most sensible geographical area, again maximising the inter-relationship and indeed, inter-dependency with the west Midlands conurbation.
- Continued expansion of the successful i54 Business Park, situated off the M54 motorway between Wolverhampton, Cannock and Telford. The i54 South Staffordshire project is being delivered jointly by the district council, the County Council and Wolverhampton Council. The 2.5 million sq ft site is home to Jaguar Land Rover and a host of other advanced manufacturing companies, employing more than 2,700 people in total.
- Development of the West Midlands Interchange project, which will create the largest rail-served logistics development in the UK, creating around 8,500 new jobs on an eight million sq ft site close to Junction 12 of the M6 and the West Coast Main Line at Penkridge, near Stafford.
- Development of Logic54 to create up to 1,700 new jobs on the site of a former Royal Ordnance site at Featherstone, just outside Wolverhampton. The 1.7 million sq ft development is located between the M54 motorway and A449 linking Stafford and Wolverhampton. The site will accommodate a range of industrial and warehouse units.

<sup>2</sup> Staffordshire County Council Economic Strategy 2023-30 (page 18)

### 4.3.8 Key determinants of economic growth in Southern & Mid Staffordshire

A number of important factors are likely to determine the future pace and trajectory of economic activity and expansion in the sub-region in the medium-to-long term future:

- Ability to plan commercial development, infrastructure over a logical geographical area. This will be enhanced by joining up the six districts into one local authority area.
- Potential to create a local authority in the south of Staffordshire that has the clout to do effective business with the likes of the Black Country local authorities, Birmingham, Solihull and Derbyshire and Leicestershire.
- Ability to maximise the economic potential of the east-west growth corridors, working with the neighbouring authorities in the West Midlands conurbation.
- Unified focus on maximising the growth and innovation potential of the industrial clusters that work across the Southern & Mid Staffordshire/West Midlands conurbation area, including work with the relevant universities both in the WMCA area, but also Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

### 4.3.9 The socio-economic opportunity of the combined North and Southern & Mid model

Bringing all of this material together, the combination of the two Unitary Councils would bring sharper strategic leadership and planning to focus on issues which affect the two sub-regional economies, as well as developing and implementing more holistic approaches to the area's deprivation-related challenges in order to transform population outcomes.

- Resources can be allocated more effectively, enabling North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire to focus on their own priorities.
- A two-unitary solution provides a more balanced population structure and redistributes factors such as deprivation, dependency, employment and wealth more evenly.
- The North-South division aligns economic priorities, enabling better-targeted investment and workforce development. And the joined-up approach allows a more effective management of all the factors that drive the attractiveness of a location e.g. skills, sites, size of workforce, transport, infrastructure, culture, housing, education.
- The North-South model builds on everything that has come before, including the two distinct Local Enterprise Partnership areas, two Chambers of Commerce and the work of the Constellation Partnership that covered Cheshire and North Staffordshire. It also maximises the sunk investment of all the transport improvements that have deliberately enhanced east-west connectivity in both the sub-regions.
- Critical services, including children's and adults' social care, can be tailored to the specific needs of each sub-region, ensuring that issues such as deprivation challenges in the North and rural service delivery in the South are managed effectively (while recognising that both types of challenge exist to some extent in both geographies).
- More joined-up strategic planning will enable the sub-region to maximise the benefits of inward investment, development and regeneration, as well as improving the planning and delivery of housing and transport to meet local needs.

- Collaborative approaches to boosting skills and educational attainment on natural geographies will enable more people to access emerging employment opportunities in both areas of the county.
- In focusing on North Staffordshire as an area of significant deprivation, independent analysis by Grant Thornton has found the following added value benefits of moving to a single unitary council for North Staffordshire against the status quo based on economic impact.

**Table 13 - Forecast direct economic benefits from LGR in North Staffordshire**

Assumed Benefit	Potential impact of LGR in N. Staffs
Total additional jobs	300-900
Additional skilled jobs	200-300
GVA (£m, over next 60 years)	£230-690m
1-year GVA (£m)	£3.9-11.5m

- Independent analysis indicates that a North Staffordshire Unitary Council could generate between £4 million and £12 million in additional GVA each year over the first 60 years of its lifespan. In addition, LGR has the potential to generate further GVA benefits by facilitating more strategic approaches to securing commercial development space, strengthening high-growth sectors, investing in innovation and R&D, and delivering targeted approaches to improving population health and education outcomes.

**Table 14 - Further economic benefits of a North Staffordshire Unitary Council**

Category of benefit	Additional GVA per annum (£m, 2025 prices)		
	Low	Central	High
Increasing commercial space	12	24	36
Strengthening sector specialisms	13	25	38
Fostering innovation, research and development	20	39	59
Increasing employment from improved health outcomes	4	7	11
Increasing employment from improved education outcomes	13	26	39
Improving transport connectivity	4	8	12
Enhancing the visitor economy	14	27	41

(based on independent analysis by Grant Thornton)

- A North-South split aligns more closely with existing economic ties and the daily lives and needs of people living in Staffordshire. There is much lower commuter movement across a North-South boundary division than across an East-West divide, demonstrating a much better fit with economic sectors and influences.

### 4.3.10 Conclusion

All the available evidence indicates that dividing Staffordshire into two unitary areas would provide a more balanced alignment of socio-economic factors and key metrics such as deprivation, GVA and demand for critical service provision. However, the precise configuration of this divide is crucial, and analysis demonstrates that the North-South model would be significantly more effective due to its strong alignment with existing economic market areas and sensible service delivery geographies. Adoption of this model would support the management of more acute social needs prevalent in Stoke-on-Trent by providing a larger funding base and being able to achieve greater economies of scale, which would also make the devolution region more financially resilient. But unlike the East-West model, it creates this balance without resorting to an entirely artificial geographical split that has nothing to do with either economic geography or social identity.



Photo: Vivid Brands/Shutterstock



## 4.4 THE FINANCIAL CASE

The English Devolution White Paper and subsequent ministerial guidance has highlighted the urgent need to ensure that local government becomes more financially sustainable and is able to deliver increased efficiencies as well as ensuring that important population outcomes improve.

In North Staffordshire there is a particular requirement for LGR to enable Stoke-on-Trent City Council to achieve a firmer financial footing. Despite evidence from a mix of audits and reviews that all Staffordshire councils are well run in terms of financial stewardship and governance, the City Council has struggled to achieve financial sustainability in recent years and is currently in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), entirely due to the level of presenting acute need in children's social care services.

The critical importance and complexity of the financial case regarding reorganisation is further highlighted by the requirement to disaggregate existing two-tier services in most parts of the county and reconfigure them under the new unitary councils. This process will involve significant costs and potential disruption, as well as the need to plan financially and strategically for the smooth dissolution of existing structures and seamless transition to the new model. Stoke-on-Trent city Council has already commenced this work, as set out later in the submission.

Financial sustainability also represents a central tenet of the Southern & Mid Staffordshire unitary proposal. Existing councils in Staffordshire are managing substantial budget gaps, rising social care and housing pressures and constrained funding growth. The current two-tier system also leads to duplication of roles, fragmented service delivery and inefficiencies. In this context, reorganisation provides an opportunity to streamline governance, transform services tailored to local needs, and identify and unlock efficiencies.

### 4.4.1 Addressing specific financial challenges

Financial issues which the LRG process must address and help to resolve include:

- An uneven distribution of financial resources, assets, liabilities and commitments across the Staffordshire geography.
- Addressing Stoke-on-Trent's current financial situation, which the Government has made a compulsory element of any reorganisation proposal for the county.
- Capitalising on the economic potential of a unified North Staffordshire city region and a unified Southern & Mid Staffordshire sub-region to deliver the economic expansion needed to help make local government finances more sustainable in the longer term by building a local tax base and reducing service demand.
- Supporting the management of the acute social needs which are more prevalent in Stoke-on-Trent, and which drive demand for support services.
- Council Tax harmonisation, which will be complicated by the scale of the current disparity between Stoke-on-Trent's low tax base and rates and those in other areas of North Staffordshire (but this issue would be the same whatever the chosen configuration).



## 4.4.2 Key financial opportunities linked to reorganisation

As well as strengthening councils' financial position through supporting and enabling economic growth and redistributing the key drivers of demand for services, there are financial benefits which the reorganisation process can unlock:

- Significant efficiency savings in relation to:
  - Consolidating senior management roles and functions.
  - Back office centralisation.
  - Estate rationalisation.
  - Service delivery efficiencies.
  - Streamlined governance and democratic services.
- Economies of scale - evidence from previous studies indicates that operational efficiency peaks in councils serving populations of 400,000 to 800,000 residents, indicating that a two-unitary solution would deliver optimum economies of scale in Staffordshire.
- Harmonisation of different Council Tax rates required following reorganisation may generate additional revenue. Areas which currently set lower levels of Council Tax may stand to gain from harmonisation at a higher rate, although consideration must be given to the impact on residents in areas with considerable financial hardship.
- Debt and asset management - Redistribution of councils' current debts and liabilities will spread financial risk and improve resilience. Council areas with higher debts as a proportion of their net revenue expenditure will benefit most from this redistribution.
- Savings and efficiencies through service aggregation and the development of more efficient operating models.

## 4.4.3 The key financial tests

Reflecting on the criteria set by Government and the guidance issued, we consider that there are five essential tests for judging the relative merits of different reorganisation options with respect to the financial case. They are:

- Financial Sustainability and Resilience
- Fairness and Perceived Fairness in Future Use of Resources
- Alignment to Local Supply Markets and Opportunity for Community Wealth Building
- Approach to Council Tax Harmonisation
- Level of Costs and Savings Achievable Through Reorganisation

The independent modelling and analysis undertaken to underpin this submission has included benchmarking new unitary models based on financial performance data for existing unitary councils. This analysis examined the characteristics of each model based on the proposed geography and demographics. From these, it was possible to identify and extrapolate Lower Layer Super Output Area data in relation to deprivation levels, labour market profiles, economic performance and housing targets. This has provided an overview of current financial positions and enabled realistic modelling in relation to future financial sustainability and resilience. Data from this analysis is summarised in Table 15 below and set out more comprehensively in Appendix 1.

Table 15 - Financial appraisal of reorganisation models

LGR Model	Option A		Option B			Option C		Option D	
Indicator	North Staffs	South & Mid Staffs	North Staffs	South West Staffs	South East Staffs	North Staffs(+)	South Staffs(-)	West Staffs	East Staffs
Population (2023)	487,002	674,676	487,002	356,603	318,073	525,568	636,110	484,663	677,015
Population (est. 2040)	512,004	708,849	512,004	388,169	320,680	552,539	668,534	528,637	692,256
Dependency ratio	59.5	59.5	59.5	62.8	61.2	60.2	61.7	61.2	60.8
Population aged 85+	12,700 (2.6%)	18,642 (2.8%)	12,700 (2.6%)	10,705 (3.0%)	7,937 (2.5%)	17,267 (2.7%)	14,075 (2.7%)	14,422	16,920
Most deprived decile	18%	2%	18%	1%	4%	17%	2%	1%	15%
Least deprived decile	3%	12%	3%	12%	13%	3%	13%	10%	7%
Gross value added	£11,423m	£18,092m	£11,423m	£8,543m	£9,549m	£12,899m	£16,614m	£11,245m	£18,720m
Employment rate	79%	78%	79%	77%	80%	79%	78%	82%	76%
Annual housing target	2,133	3,854	2,133	2,013	1,841	2,332	3,655	2,606	3,381
Core spending power	£549m	£661m	£549m	£350m	£311m	£586m	£623m	£478m	£731m
Core spending power per dwelling	£2,458	£2,206	£2,458	£2,195	£2,219	£2,440	£2,206	£2,198	£2,396
Council Tax base (Band D equivalent)	142,962	227,838	142,962	121,422	106,416	155,751	215,048	160,611	210,188
Retained Business Rates (including top-up/tariff)	£109m	£115m	£109m	£64m	£51m	£115m	£109m	£82m	£142m
General fund debt (% of net revenue expenditure)	202%	100%	202%	102%	97%	196%	100%	102%	176%
Projected funding gap 2028/29	£18m (4.1% of net rev. exp.)	£37m (6.3% of net rev. exp.)	£18m (4.1% of net rev. exp.)	£18m (5.8% of net rev. exp.)	£18m (6.9% of net rev. exp.)	£20m (4.1% of net rev. exp.)	£35m (6.4% of net rev. exp.)	£23m (5.3% of net rev. exp.)	£33m (5.5% of net rev. exp.)
DSG deficit as at 31 March 2025	(£35m)	(£43m)	(£35m)	(£21m)	(£21m)	(£38m)	(£40m)	(£29m)	(£49m)
Total service expenditure unit cost (£/person)	£1,136	£944	£1,136	£947	£941	£1,122	£945	£954	£1,075
% of net expenditure on social care	86%	78%	86%	75%	80%	86%	78%	75%	85%
% of service expenditure on social care	64%	62%	64%	61%	63%	64%	62%	60%	64%

Considering then each of the key tests in turn:

#### 4.4.4 Financial sustainability and resilience

It is clear from table 15 that in terms of the core financial indicators, each of the options is relatively well balanced. Option C is arguably the best balanced but this is achieved by the proposed change in district boundaries and a judgement has to be made as to whether the marginal gains in balance are worth the inherent complexity of the proposed implementation which will inevitably increase costs and, at least in the short term, erode savings. Option B is balanced across the authorities but there is a serious question in terms of whether the two southern unitary authorities would be of sufficient scale to withstand future financial shock. This can be seen in their core spending power levels but also the small size of their individual business rate bases.

Comparing the two unitary models (Options A and D), the table below shows the relative balance between the main financial indicators.

Measure	Comparison of financial balance between new unitary councils under Options A and D				Ratio between min & max of measure per scenario		Greater Parity
	Option A		Option D		100% = Parity		
	South	North	West	East	Scenario A	Scenario D	
Core Spending Power (£m)	£661	549	478m	731m	120%	153%	A
Debt (General Fund Capital financing requirement) (£m)	502	830	383	947	165%	247%	A
Council tax base	227,838	142,962	160,611	210,188	159%	131%	D
Retained Business Rates (£m)	115	109	82	142	106%	173%	A
MTFP gap as %	6.3%	4.1%	5.3%	5.5%	154%	104%	D
DSG deficit (as at 31/03/25) (£m)	43	35	29	49	123%	169%	A
Total service expenditure unit cost (£/person)	944	1,136	954	1,075	120%	113%	D marginal
% of net expenditure on social care	78%	86%	75%	85%	110%	113%	A marginal
% of service expenditure on social care	62%	64%	60%	64%	103%	107%	A marginal

The table clearly shows that the two options are relatively equally balanced in core financial terms, with differing strengths. In their proposal in support of Option D, the County Council make significant play of two additional factors:

- the importance of balancing levels of social need and service capacity
- addressing the weakness of the City Council’s financial position and the scale of wider resilience that requires.

Unsurprisingly, the four Councils supporting Option A have also looked at these questions and the underlying evidence base, and have a different perspective.

### Balancing social need

On the question of balance of social need and capacity, what is critical in terms of fair comparison of options is the indicators that are chosen. Selecting those indicators that are significant drivers of need and therefore resource pressure, paints the following picture:

**Table 17 - Demographic and social balance between Options A and D**

Measure	Scenario A				Scenario D		Ratio between min & max of measure per scenario
	Scenario A		Scenario D		100% = parity		
	South	North	West	East	Scenario A	Scenario D	Greater Parity
Overall Population (2024)	682,775	494,803	487,794	689,784	138%	141%	A marginal
Dependency Ratio	62.1	59.5	61.2	60.8	104%	101%	D marginal
Numbers of 85+ (2023)	3%	3%	3%	3%	108%	120%	A
Most Deprived (LSOAs in most deprived decile)	2%	18%	1%	15%	900%	1500%	A
Gross Value Add (£m)	18,092	11,423	11,245	18,720	158%	166%	A marginal
Employment Rate	78%	79%	82%	76%	101%	108%	A marginal

What this demonstrates is that Options A and D both have positive balances on different key social need and economic indicators, and many of the differences are marginal. This therefore provides no real basis for differential judgement on which is the preferable option in terms of financial impact.

There is, however, one further factor that is differential in terms of balance. **Successful places create a social system that is mutually supportive in terms of meeting social need.** This means alignment and integrated working between different public services to reduce overhead and increase productivity. This social system is also reflected in the composition and role of the voluntary and community and faith sector, of business CSR and of philanthropy. It enables networks of provision to arise that work across recognised geographies, from cadet groups to food banks. It means that the assets of wealthier parts of an area become available to less wealthier communities because of a shared sense of identity and place. This alleviates significant pressure from the public sector and is a tremendous social good. Options A-C all harness that sense of place and belonging. Option D doesn't, because in the pursuit of empirical balance, it has chosen a configuration that diminishes the concept of place, the idea of 'how things actually work around here'. And over time, that will result in increased pressure on the local state.

## Dealing with the financial position of Stoke-on-Trent

The second issue is the question of what is required to place the city of Stoke-on-Trent on a sustainable financial footing. There are three key points we would make on this question.

### 1. The weakness of Stoke-on-Trent's recurrent revenue financial position tends to be exaggerated.

**'The council has made good progress in reinforcing its financial management and governance arrangements...The council still has challenges in securing financial resilience and sustainability, but has robust and developing plans in place and focussed financial governance arrangements.'**

Stoke-on-Trent City Council External Assurance Review, September 2024, CIPFA for MHCLG

While it is true that the City Council has required a relatively low and decreasing amount of Extraordinary Financial Support in the last few years, this has been entirely due to abnormal levels of costs in children's social care placements, with the rest of the Council balanced in terms of its finances. The table below shows the actual underlying projected financial position of the City Council once the position in children's social care is corrected down to statistical neighbour level. This is also before the impact of the Fair Funding Review and the rebasing of the Council's employer pensions contributions which are set to reduce substantially from April 2026.

**Table 18 - Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy position (MTFS) if numbers of children in care were at average level of other local authorities that are statistical neighbours**

MTFS	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s
Approved Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26	11.0	10.8	14.1	12.3	15.9
Assume statutory neighbour level of 690 children in care in all years	(18.5)	(13.6)	(9.5)	(3.7)	(0.7)
<b>Remaining Budget Gap</b>	<b>(7.5)</b>	<b>(2.8)</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>15.2</b>



This reality is reflected in the independent modelling undertaken and described in Appendix 1. It concludes that under Option A, Stoke-on-Trent would be part of the unitary council that would be facing the lower level of revenue financial pressure by 2028/29. Under option D, it would be in the local authority area facing the higher level of pressure.

## 2.The debt levels are in line with other urban unitary authorities reflective of the investment requirements of a city

First, to understand the City Council's relative level of debt, it is of limited value to compare with other authorities in Staffordshire that have completely different types of responsibility to the stewardship of a significant dense and deprived city with complex infrastructure, significant amounts of heritage and low land and property values. What matters is how Stoke-on-Trent compares in terms of its level of borrowing to other unitary authorities with similar characteristics. The table below shows how the city compares with similar urban authorities - that our position is quite normal for the type of authority.

Table 19 - How the city debt levels compare with similar urban authorities

Authority	Gross External Debt	RANK (highest to lowest)	Population (2023 estimates)	Gross External Debt per head	RANK (highest to lowest)	Dwellings as at Sept 2024	Gross External Debt per dwelling	RANK (highest to lowest)
Sheffield	£1,162,417k	1	573,252	£2,027.76	12	261,707	£4,441.67	12
Nottingham	£946,849k	2	329,276	£2,875.55	7	147,060	£6,438.52	7
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	£876,501k	3	311,976	£2,809.51	9	140,444	£6,240.93	8
Kingston-Upon-Hull	£870,556k	4	271,942	£3,201.26	3	125,007	£6,964.06	4
Wolverhampton	£850,113k	5	272,425	£3,120.54	4	113,966	£7,459.36	3
<b>Stoke-on-Trent</b>	£775,004k	6	263,157	£2,945.03	6	119,628	£6,478.45	6
Plymouth	£762,645k	7	268,736	£2,837.90	8	123,273	£6,186.63	9
Barnsley	£754,764k	8	248,449	£3,037.90	5	115,406	£6,540.08	5
Rotherham	£750,260k	9	271,195	£2,766.50	10	121,996	£6,149.87	10
Portsmouth	£746,383k	10	210,297	£3,549.19	2	94,111	£7,930.88	1
Gateshead	£717,172k	11	199,139	£3,601.36	1	95,376	£7,519.42	2
Sunderland	£715,208k	12	281,058	£2,544.70	11	134,455	£5,319.31	11

Second, a significant amount of this debt represents investment in income generating assets. Stoke-on-Trent has never been a council that spends significant money on third party commercial assets. Instead, it owns its own assets, that generate income that support directly the revenue position. The Council has also invested in key infrastructure such as the Etruria Valley Link Road that has unlocked significant amounts of commercial development, which is now providing additional business rate income, as well as the wider social and economic benefits.

In short, the level of debt is manageable and well within the bounds of prudential borrowing limits, and that is also the judgement of the Council's auditors and CIPFA.

### 3. LGR will strengthen the reserves position

Since its creation in 1997, Stoke-on-Trent has struggled with relatively low level of reserves, partly due to the flawed way in which it was carved out from the county as a unitary council. LGR provides an opportunity to correct this. If the reserves are split based on the current reserves positions of the current authorities then it is the case that in absolute terms, Option D provides a more balanced position than Option A.

Table 20 - Levels of reserves of new unitary councils under Options A and D based on existing councils

Useable Non-Ringfenced Reserves based on Existing Councils			
Option A		Option D	
North	South	West	East
£175m	£466m	£302m	£339m

However, we would make three key points. The first is that while the North/South split does reflect a significant differential in reserves, it is in part a product of different population sizes. The second, is that the Option A reserve position would still place Stoke-on-Trent in a much healthier position than it is today. And third, and most importantly, there is no rule that states that in creating new unitary councils, reserves have to be split based on the position of the existing councils. They could and probably should be split on a different basis that gives each of the new unitary councils positive resilience. One option for example would be to treat all the non-ringfenced reserves as a single pool and distribute them based on relative population size. If this was done it would provide the following split:

Table 21 - Levels of reserves of new Unitary Councils under Options A and D based on pro rata distribution

Useable Non-Ringfenced Reserves based on Population Pro Rata Distribution			
Option A		Option D	
North	South	West	East
£269m	£372m	£267m	£374m

Arguably, this could be further adjusted to reflect relative levels of deprivation if there was a desire to do so.

### Business rate income

Finally, one concerning characteristic of Option D is the large differential in business rate base between the proposed West Staffordshire and East Staffordshire. This could raise questions about the long-term resilience of West Staffordshire as a Council, thinking for example of what has happened to neighbouring Shropshire over recent years. Option A is far better balanced in this respect.

### 4.4.5 Fairness (and Perceived Fairness) in Future Use of Resources

In any local authority area there is an acceptance that more money is raised in some parts of the geography and more money is spent in others. This acceptance has become more strained over time as an increasing proportion of raised revenue is spent on social care at the expense of universal services. What holds this social contract together is the sense of shared identity and a common perception of belonging to one place; also, a sense of shared resources and assets. If resources are spent in regenerating a particular city centre or town, or a major park, then it is one that all the residents can enjoy and benefit from. If money is invested in affordable housing, then it may be 'my' children or parents that benefit.

This really matters in areas where there are significant differences in wealth. For example, in a conurbation, it is likely that land values on the edge of the settlement are significantly higher than difficult brownfield sites in the urban area. In planning and executing its capital programme, a local authority needs the freedom to balance receipts and investment for the benefit of the whole settlement.

We raise this issue explicitly because it underlines a critical difference between Options A-C and Option D. In the first three options, the defined geographies have a common sense of place, of people belonging to the defined sub-regions. Option D does not do this at all. It is fanciful to think that someone living in Tamworth, deep in the south east of Staffordshire feels much, if any, sense of collective belonging and mutual responsibility with someone living in Chell in the north of Stoke-on-Trent. And yet, with significant differentials in levels of need and land values in different parts of the county, a local authority for East

Staffordshire would have no choice but to transfer generated income and receipts between those communities. It would be a recipe for long-term resentment that would be reflected from day one in the Council Chamber and ultimately, could undermine the long-term sustainability of the authorities as well as community cohesion.

### 4.4.6 Alignment to local supply markets

All Councils spend a significant amount each year on commercial contracts and spot purchasing of many types. Extrapolating from Stoke-on-Trent's expenditure levels, this is likely to be a gross figure for Staffordshire of over £1 billion per annum. This requires local authorities to operate successfully in many markets, ranging across examples as varied as foster care, residential care, waste and recycling, repairs and maintenance, and facilities management. Most progressive councils will be committed within their commissioning and procurement models to supporting local businesses and facilitating local supply networks and chains. This is particularly important in more deprived areas, to keep as much of the local £ in the area as possible, commensurate with best value requirements.

Management of some of these local markets is a continuous and complex relationship, that requires expert management. This is particularly the case in areas such as children and adults social care, and SEN & educational alternative provision. The key to success is to build trusted relationships with the local market on a geographical basis, balancing supply and demand while keeping the market resilient. When done well, it can result in both higher quality and lower cost provision.

Options A-C all recognise the criticality of aligning council shapes and sizes to local markets. Option D does the opposite. Instead it draws a vertical line straight

through a whole number of those supply markets, that will inevitably make management of supply relationships inherently more difficult and expensive. While it is impossible to put a figure on this imposition of higher transactional and frictional costs, it is likely to run into millions of pounds every year for both authorities, and this should therefore be factored into any consideration of projected savings from the different options.

#### 4.4.7 Council tax harmonisation

The decision with respect to council tax harmonisation impacts all options under consideration. Taking the two unitary models, Options A and D, the impact of whatever choice is taken is set out in the table below.

Table 22 - Impact of council tax harmonisation across Staffordshire

Impact on aggregate council tax income of harmonisation at different levels (£)		
	Option A	Option D
Set at lowest current level	-21m	-25m
Set at average current level	+3m	+4m
Set at highest current level	+24m	+20m

The particular difficulty is that it is Stoke-on-Trent that has the current lowest levels of council tax. Any harmonisation process other than the minimum will lead to a sizeable increase in council tax for the residents of the area of greatest deprivation. However, if the minimum is selected for what would either be North Staffordshire or Eastern Staffordshire (depending on the model) it has a significant negative effect on the financial sustainability of those councils in terms of the recurrent position. There is no easy answer to this question as it arises from the process of reorganisation itself and as it impacts all options considered in this submission, we leave it as a question that needs to be answered in partnership with Government, once a decision is made.



## 4.4.8 Delivery of savings and efficiencies

Independent analysis of the financial implications of reorganisation has identified a number of potential long-term savings which reorganisation can be unlocked with the right model of unitarisation. The Staffordshire councils have used shared data and independent analysis to create the financial cases underpinning their proposals for the four models of LGR. Despite this collegiate approach, it is conspicuous that individual proposals differ in terms of the financial outcomes' findings - even for the same model. This variation is particularly evident in the modelling of the transitional costs and cumulative savings arising from different configurations of reorganisation. Nevertheless, as there is no exact answer to this question, we have seen the different approaches as each having value, essentially providing a range estimate.

The Stoke-on-Trent commissioned modelling found that:

- Moving to a two-unitary system would create recurring net benefits of between £12.6 million and £17.9 million annually, depending on the geographical configuration being used.
- It is estimated that the resulting efficiency savings would cover the one-off transition costs of establishing the new unitaries within two years.

These potential savings comprise:

- Senior management: £8.2 - £9.6 million as reducing the number of councils will significantly reduce the need for management roles and structures across all levels of organisations.
- Back office: £2.1 - £2.6 million through consolidating IT infrastructure, streamlining procurement and eliminating redundant roles and structures.
- Property: £1.0 - £3.0 million through rationalising buildings and assets and reduced maintenance costs and overheads.
- Service delivery: £0.6 - £0.9 million through the standardisation and transformation of newly-integrated services.
- Democratic Services: £0.7 - £1.9 million due to fewer councillors and elections, and streamlined governance structures and processes.

The detail of the methodology used and the basis for these estimates is set out in some detail in the independent report at Appendix 1.

For comparison, the Southern & Mid Staffordshire proposal estimates the one-off implementation cost of establishing the two new unitaries at £31.5 million, but forecasts that the transition will deliver average annual savings of £24.8 million, rising to £29.9 million after the first three years due to the impact of ongoing transformation in extracting additional efficiencies from the new operating models.

Financial implications of transition	2 Unitaries
Recurrent net benefit (£m)	12.6-17.9
One-off transition costs (£m)	20.6-24.7
Payback year (First year net benefits will repay transition costs)	2029/30

Table 23 - Forecast costs and savings resulting from a two-unitary solution - Independent analysis for Stoke-on-Trent City Council



**Table 24 - Forecast costs and savings - Southern & Mid Staffordshire LGR proposal**

Summary of forecast costs and savings	Cost (£ million)	Benefit (£ million)
Recurring savings from year 3 onwards	-	29.9
Cumulative benefit/cost after 5 years	-	124.2
One-off implementation cost by year 3	31.5	-
Net impact after 5 years (2032/33)	-	92.7
Payback period	1.4 years	

Similarly, financial modelling by the County Council for the East-West proposal (Option D) estimates the implementation costs for both this model and the North-South model as being £31.9 million. It forecasts a gross annual savings benefit for both models of £28.8 million.

**Table 25 - Financial modelling of costs and benefits by Staffordshire County Council**

LGR Option	Gross annual benefit	Additional annual costs	Recurring net annual benefit	One-off transition cost	Payback period	Net benefit after 1 year	Net benefit after 5 years
<b>Option A (North-South)</b>	£28.8m	-£7.5m	£21.3m	£31.9m	3.6 years	-£25.9m	£28.4m
<b>Option B (3 unitary councils)</b>	£24.5m	-£15.9m	£8.6m	£39.6m	9.2 years	-£41.5m	-£36.0m
<b>Option C (North-South with boundary changes)</b>	£28.8m	-£7.5m	£21.3m	£35.7m	3.8 years	-£28.9m	£24.5m
<b>Option D (East-West)</b>	£28.8m	-£7.5m	£21.3m	£31.9m	3.6 years	-£25.9m	£28.4m

What these different analyses clearly demonstrate is that a two-unitary solution will be significantly more beneficial, both in terms of one-off transition costs and recurring benefits, than a three-unitary model, and beyond that, there is very little to choose between them. However, we would make two important observations.

It should be noted that Stoke-on-Trent's forecasted benefits are at the conservative end of the spectrum when viewed alongside the modelling which underpins the other proposals, and that this is for a very good reason. The methodology that underpins our estimates is based on deep independent analysis of the actual savings that have been achieved in new unitary councils across the country since 2017. They are based on hard, cold reality of establishing a new unitary council, in terms of what has happened to unit costs over time.

#### 4.4.9 Summary of the financial considerations

From all the financial modelling and analysis of the options we have undertaken, we would draw the following main findings:

- All four options would provide a reasonably balanced position between the resulting unitary councils.
- Option D – the East-West unitary would create a significant imbalance in business rate base, which reflects the fact that this options makes no sense in terms of balanced and coherent economic geographies. Over time, this could become a sustainability problem for West Staffordshire depending on the future model of local government finance.
- Option B – three unitaries, raises a question around critical mass, with relatively low core spending power for two of the three authorities, which will impact on their levels of resilience and ability to generate economies of scale.
- Making Stoke-on-Trent part of a larger authority area would even out its need profile relative to its neighbours, and would also even out the Council Tax and business rates base and help to achieve greater economies of scale for the wider sub-region, strengthening financial resilience.
- Stoke-on-Trent would be part of an expanded unitary authority that has lower projected funding gaps and better alignment of spending power and service needs under Option A than under Option D. Given that one of the stated objectives of Government is that Stoke-on-Trent’s financial position is stabilised, points in favour of Option A, as Stoke-on-Trent would be part of an authority with half the size of projected recurrent finding gap (these figures are of course prior to the application of the outcomes of the Fair Funding Review).
- Option D performs better than Option A in terms of distribution of current balance of reserves but this depends entirely on the model of reserves distribution selected, and can be readily addressed through choice of methodology of allocation between the new authorities.
- Options A-C perform better than Option D in terms of alignment to recognised local supply markets and will better support community wealth-building.
- Council tax harmonisation will provide a challenge whichever option is selected because of the current lower rates in Stoke-on-Trent. A decision will need to be taken post-decision on the best approach to harmonisation, but this will need to reflect the relative deprivation of the city and thus the affordability of council tax for Stoke-on-Trent residents.
- Independent financial modelling and analysis indicates that a two-unitary model of reorganisation will be more cost-effective in terms of cost of implementation and potential to generate savings than a three unitary model, with Options A and D likely to generate a similar equation, at least in the short term. In the longer term, benefits of geographical coherence are likely to give rise to greater transformative impact. Option C would therefore be a trade-off between higher costs and lower savings in the shorter term against potentially higher long term transformative benefits.

All of this analysis results in the following scoring for the financial case on the same 1-5 scale. Because of the criticality of the first issue, we have ascribed double marks.

Table 26 - Scoring of all LGR options on the strength of each financial case

Critical issue	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Commentary
Financial Sustainability and Resilience	8	4	10	8	Option C would provide the optimum balance of need and financial resilience, but is very complex to deliver. Options A and D offer close to the same level of positive financial balance with different strengths.
Fairness (and Perceived Fairness) in Future Use of Resources	4	4	4	2	Options A-C all align far better with recognised sub-regional geographies with a defined sense of place, easing the balancing of resource strength and asset value across the geographies.
Alignment to Local Supply Markets and Opportunity for Community Wealth Building	4	5	4	2	Again, Options A-C provide better alignment to recognised markets and are far better placed to harness the strengths of other sectors to reduce burden on the State.
Approach to Council Tax Harmonisation	3	3	3	3	This is a significant issue to resolve whichever option is chosen.
Level of Costs and Savings Ascribed to Reorganisation	4	2	2	4	Options A and D have very similar cost/savings profiles although arguably Option A provides the better platform for driving long-term transformational benefits because of better alignment with other public service geographies.
TOTAL	23	18	23	19	



#### 4.4.10 Conclusion

While both a North-South and an East-West two unitary structure would be financially sustainable options, the North-South configuration (Option A and C) better supports longer term financial resilience by enabling economies of scale, rationalisation of assets and streamlined service delivery on sensible geographical footprints.

Options A and C avoid the financial fragmentation and duplicated overheads that would result from splitting integrated services across East-West boundaries. By rebalancing financial pressures, resources, assets and tax bases, at the same time as reducing service aggregation costs due to having an established unitary council to integrate into, Option A will achieve the same redistribution outcomes for less cost and lower risk of disruption. In the longer term, only a North-South configuration can achieve financial rebalancing while also catalysing economic expansion based on coherent socio-economic geographies and strengthening the case and structures for regional devolution.

The fact that there is not too much that separates the relative strengths of the two-unitary models in terms of financial case effectively places even greater emphasis on economic growth and population outcomes benefits as the deciding factors. In this context, it is even more important that reorganisation models reflect sensible geographies and support functioning economic market areas – something which only the North-South model achieves.



Photo: Caron Badkin/Shutterstock

## 4.5 THE PUBLIC CASE

The programme of public engagement in North Staffordshire is fully described in Appendix 3 in the form of the independent report commissioned from expert public opinion organisation, Cratus, who carried out the public engagement work across North Staffordshire. This work and the findings that flowed from it, along with the similar work carried out in Southern & Mid Staffordshire, have been used to underpin the development of the North-South reorganisation proposal.

In Southern & Mid Staffordshire, councils undertook a comprehensive public engagement campaign focused on residents, businesses, and local and regional stakeholders. This aimed to gather views on early reorganisation concepts, as well as identifying the most important priorities for local communities. In total, 16,756 responses were received and analysed, providing valuable insights that helped shape the proposals and inform the evaluation of options for reorganisation locally.

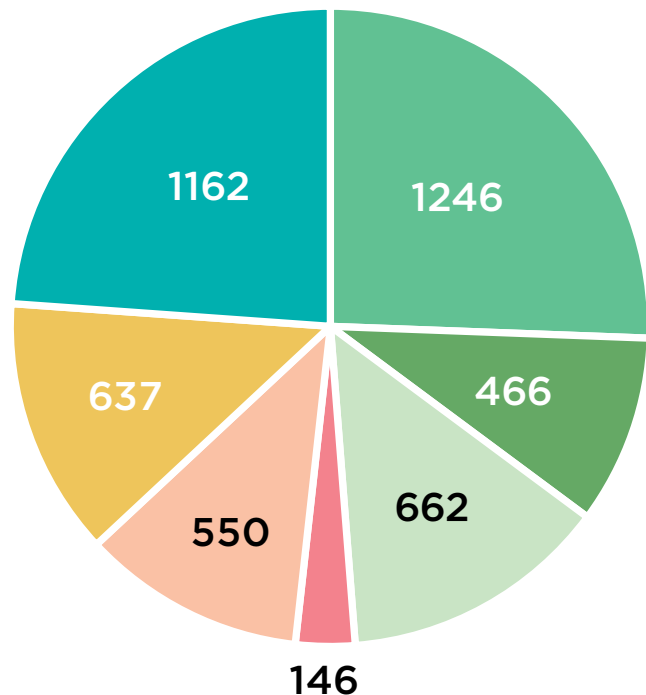
### 4.5.1 Insights from North Staffordshire

The key steer that people in North Staffordshire have given to the authorities is that they want the focus to be on delivery of high-quality, efficient local services, effective local decision-making and building a strong local economy. They are not preoccupied with the precise configuration of local government, but they would prefer it to be as localised as possible and protection of local identity is an issue for many.

Figure 6 - North Staffordshire residents' LGR priorities (from engagement survey)

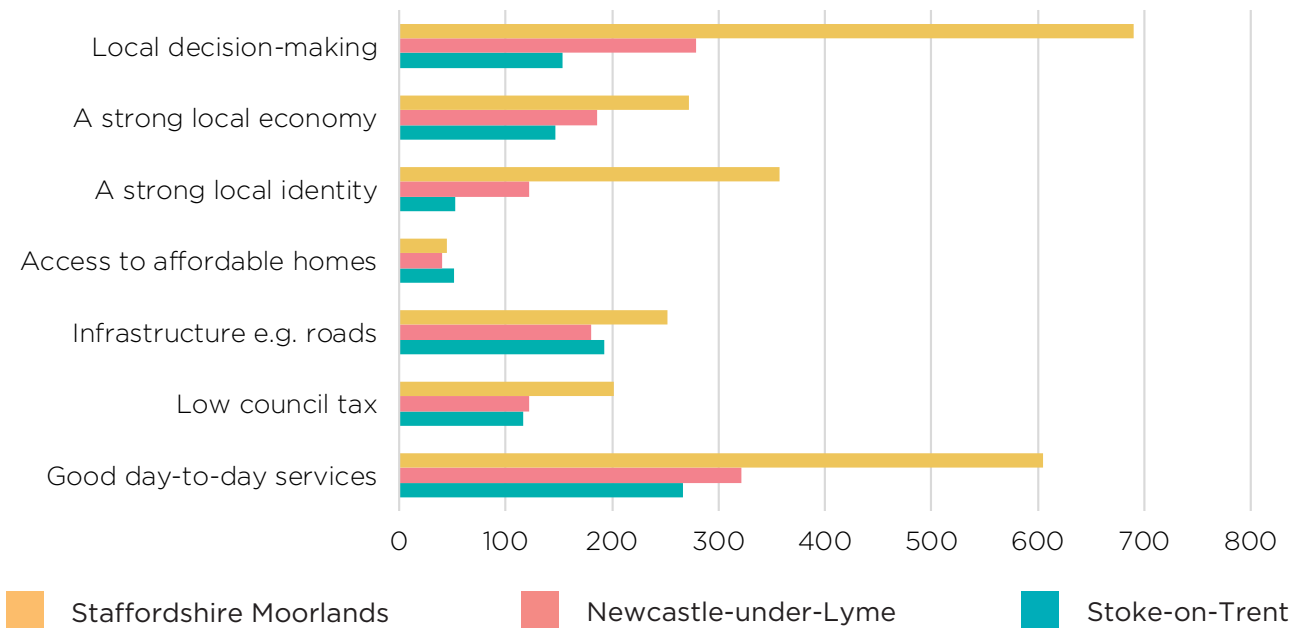
#### KEY

- A strong local economy
- Local decision-making
- Good day-to-day services
- Low council tax
- Infrastructure e.g roads
- Access to affordable home
- A strong local identity



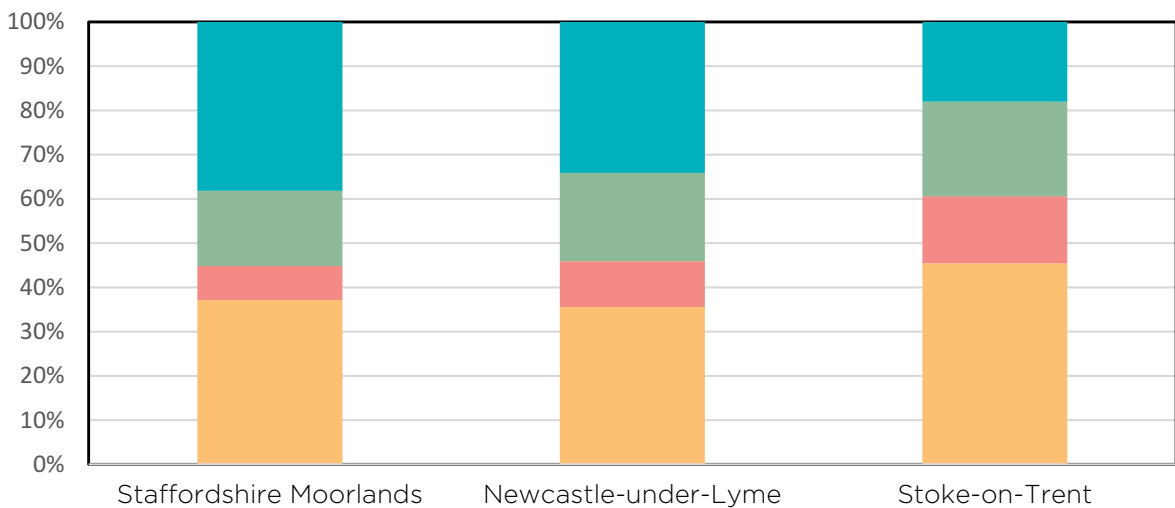


**Figure 7 - North Staffordshire residents' LGR priorities (from engagement survey)**



Residents favoured a North Staffordshire Unitary Council model over a county-wide alternative, with 38 per cent of those questioned expressing a preference for a sub-regional governance footprint.

**Figure 8 - North Staffordshire residents' views on council structures**

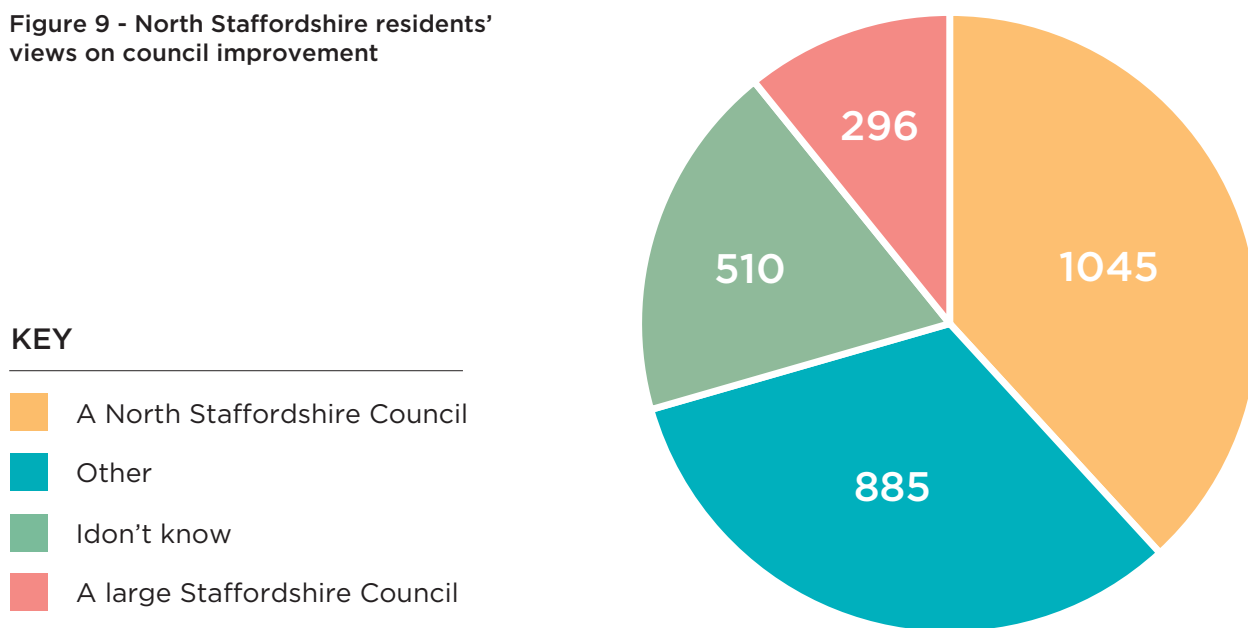


**KEY**

- A North Staffordshire Council
- A large Staffordshire Council
- Other
- I don't know

When asked which model would be likely to deliver better local services over the longer term, residents registered a clear preference for the North Staffordshire Unitary Council option.

Figure 9 - North Staffordshire residents' views on council improvement

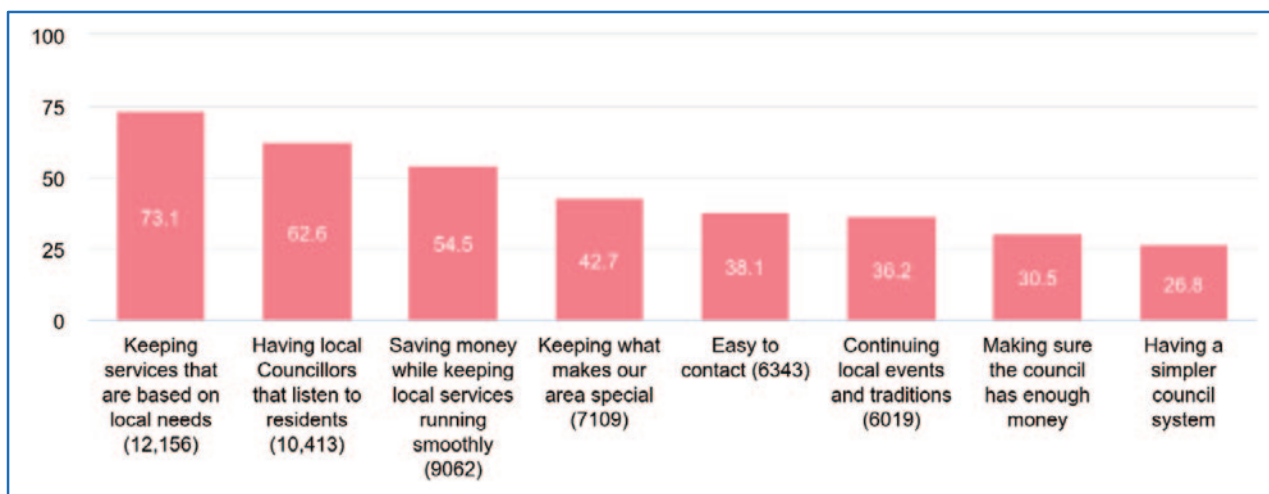


Unfortunately, we were unable to test public opinion directly on the relative merits of a north-south vs east-west unitary model, because the proposal for an east-west model only emerged late in the process, during mid-September. However, given the clear public preference for planning and delivery of services on a more localised footprint, it is highly unlikely that there would have been much support for a model of local government that would have created an area of local administration that stretches from Newcastle-under-Lyme to south-west of Birmingham in the west, and from Tunstall (three miles from the Cheshire border) to Tamworth (six miles from the Leicestershire border) in the east, while leaving the North Staffordshire conurbation split in two, including households living on different sides of the same street. And an option where The Potteries of North Staffordshire, known all over the world, would, for the first time in their near 300-year industry, become The Potteries of East Staffordshire! It is quite possible to surmise what the North Staffordshire public would think of that notion without even asking them.

#### 4.5.2 Insights from the Southern & Mid Staffordshire consultation

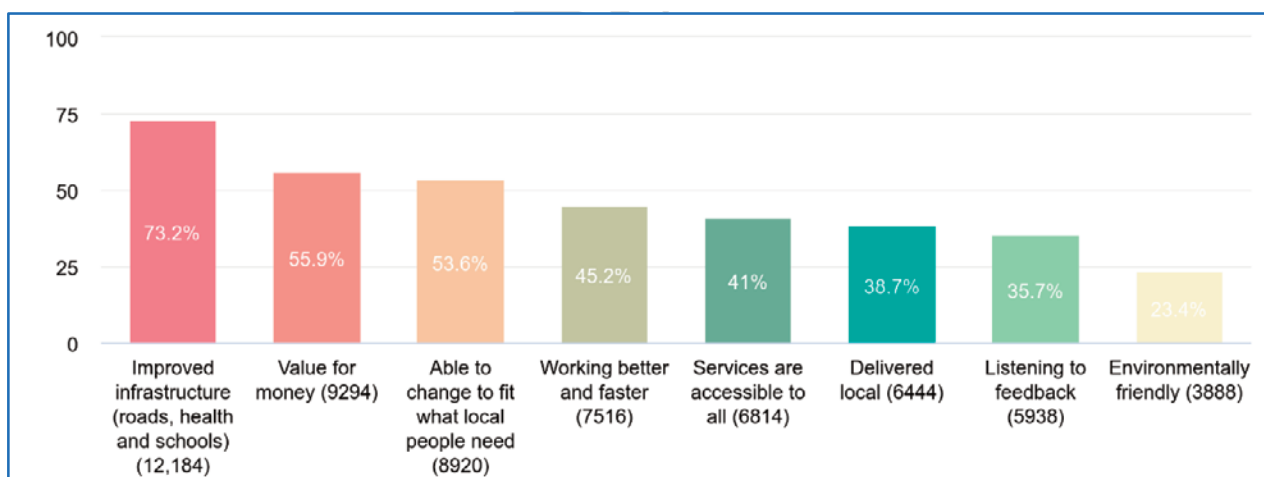
The engagement work in Southern & Mid Staffordshire identified similar views to LGR. There was a strong sentiment that future arrangements must reflect local needs and decision-making. Respondents also felt that the new councils should deliver efficiency savings while protecting the distinct local identities of places and communities.

Figure 10 - Southern & Mid Staffordshire residents' views on priorities for reorganisation



Responses demonstrated significant concerns around the need for the new councils to be able to strengthen infrastructure planning, provide local and accessible services and be accountable to residents, while also delivering improved value for money.

Figure 11 - Southern & Mid Staffordshire residents' views on how future council services should be delivered



### 4.5.3 Stakeholder feedback

Joint interviews with stakeholders across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire highlighted a number of key themes, including broad support for the principle of LGR and the need for reform of existing structures. There was strong support for:

- Simplifying governance structures
- Improving service coordination
- Enhancing partnership working, particularly in relation to health, education, and economic development.

**Table 27 - Summary of stakeholder views on reorganisation**

Themes	Specific stakeholder comments
Potential benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased service efficiency and cost savings</li> <li>• Simplified governance</li> <li>• Empowerment of parish and town councils</li> <li>• Fairer funding of services and communities</li> <li>• Integrated, place-based working</li> <li>• Alignment of services around needs of citizens</li> <li>• Increased scope for innovation and economic development</li> </ul>
Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to address infrastructure planning gaps</li> <li>• Current system is failing people with SEND</li> <li>• Insufficient partnership working between NHS and councils</li> <li>• Councils being too large to have a meaningful local presence and focus</li> <li>• Potential fragmentation of key services and programmes</li> <li>• Possible loss of focus on shared strategic priorities</li> </ul>
Potential risks to be managed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff morale in existing councils</li> <li>• Stewardship of heritage assets</li> <li>• Public disengagement</li> <li>• Business relationships</li> <li>• Continuity of support for local enterprise</li> <li>• Maintaining focus on prevention work</li> <li>• Need to maintain neighbourhood-level working</li> <li>• Service continuity and coordination</li> <li>• Need to focus on changing organisational cultures, as well as structures</li> </ul>

However, there were also concerns about the retention of local identity and community connections in a unitarised system of governance, and possible risks around maintaining existing partnerships and levels of responsiveness to local needs.

In short, stakeholders recognised the potential benefits of LGR but stressed the need for careful implementation, strong communication, and protection of existing partnerships and frontline services.

#### 4.5.4 Conclusion

The North-South model stands out as the logical response to the public's response on LGR while still meeting the essential criteria set by the Government. **The proposal aligns best with the community's wishes for local government and decision-making to be rooted in the local area and protective of distinct local identities.** Crucially, for the north of the geography, this model is proven to be reflective of how communities already interact across Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands and indeed how some essential services are already delivered.

Residents' top priority was clear: reliable, everyday services. Waste, roads, transport and visible frontline provision must not be disrupted by reorganisation, and should ideally be improved and made more efficient as a direct result of the changes being introduced. The North-South model addresses this directly, simplifying responsibilities and strengthening finances so frontline services can be delivered more consistently and efficiently.

Residents also recognised that economies cross council lines and need joined-up planning in order to create much-needed employment and business growth and raise skill levels. North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire authorities would create unified frameworks for growth – attracting investment, backing local businesses, and opening pathways into employment. They will provide the scale to compete for funding while staying connected to local needs. The North-South model also enables joined-up decisions on transport, housing and infrastructure, aligning investment with how people actually live and travel.

Similarly, senior stakeholders have said that reorganisation should prioritise service improvement, continuity and integration, with more effective strategic planning, greater community empowerment, more joined-up, place-based service delivery and a greater focus on partnership working to address issues that matter most to local people and businesses. The North-South reorganisation model is best placed to address all of these priorities and concerns, as the model is based around existing local areas and incorporates service integration and 'bottom-up' transformation to shape approaches around local needs, strengths and opportunities.

On the issue of preserving local identity, the North-South model offers reassurance by providing councils that are small enough to remain relevant to daily life, but large enough to create efficiencies and deliver improvements for local areas. The model's focus on co-designing new approaches to community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment will enable local voices to be preserved while gaining the benefits of scale.

**“The proposal aligns best with the community's wishes for local government and decision-making to be rooted in the local area and protective of distinct local identities”**



## VISION AND OPERATING MODEL FOR A NEW NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE UNITARY COUNCIL

- The North-South model of reorganisation will deliver a future in which Staffordshire is no longer a ‘devolution island’, but a fully-empowered region with streamlined governance, capable of delivering transformative economic and social outcomes.
- This model will unlock crucial devolved powers and funding by creating structures that are strategically capable, financially resilient, and democratically accountable.
- It will use collaboration, simplicity and local empowerment to shape governance arrangements that reflect how people live and work and enable communities to shape their own futures, while preserving local cultural identities.
- And it will deliver vital transformation to ensure that local government is not only more efficient and responsive, but also better equipped to meet the needs of its diverse communities for generations to come.
- The model will also use the established network of unique towns and communities in North Staffordshire as a strong foundation on which to build governance arrangements while harnessing the intrinsic benefits of bigger scale and increased diversity.
- The governance arrangements of the North Staffordshire Unitary Council will be developed through close consultation and engagement with local people, communities and businesses. This will help to ensure that arrangements meet the needs of local places while taking advantage of economies of scale of a larger unitary council serving a population of 500,000.
- The proposed governance framework will support local empowerment through mechanisms such as community asset transfers, neighbourhood planning committees, and enhanced ward-level budget arrangements to allow communities to influence decisions and manage local priorities more directly.
- Double devolution is also about how councils spend resources. Building on the current Towns Programme and past initiatives such as New Deal for Communities, there is an opportunity to make long-term commitments to North Staffordshire neighbourhoods and communities most in need of social capital and regeneration, helping them to shape their own plans for investment and renewal.
- This vision is underpinned by the core values of transparency, accountability, trust and empowerment, which are embedded and reinforced throughout all aspects of the proposal.

# 5 : DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

The English Devolution White Paper set expectations for the governance and democracy implications of LGR and devolution in affected areas. These included requirements for councils to provide evidence that:

- Proposed new unitary structures can support devolution arrangements.
- Proposals will enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment.
- Proposals are based on existing administrative and electoral boundaries or provide strong justification as to why more complex boundary arrangements may be required.
- Local identity and cultural and historic importance have been considered in any submitted proposals.

This section examines the current context in relation to governance and democracy across Staffordshire, highlighting pertinent issues which are likely to be affected by, or have an anticipated impact upon, the future implementation of LGR and devolution in the county.

## 5.1 THE CONTEXT FOR NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE

### Local government structures

There is currently a mix of unitary and two-tier councils operating in North Staffordshire. While Stoke-on-Trent City Council has operated as a smaller unitary authority since 1997, in governance terms it retains the legal status of a district council with the powers of a county council. Neighbouring Newcastle and Staffordshire Moorlands share service delivery responsibilities with Staffordshire County Council.

In addition, Staffordshire Moorlands has participated in a formal shared services agreement with High Peak Borough Council, in Derbyshire. The two councils currently operate as strategic partners with a shared management structure and workforce, shared political and managerial oversight of budget setting and performance management, as well as the development of joint service plans. In proposing its variation of the North Staffordshire Unitary Council model, Staffordshire Moorlands has committed to ending this strategic partnership and disaggregating the affected services as part of the wider process of restructuring to a single-tier system of local government.

### Community engagement and empowerment

In most of the current lower tier districts of Staffordshire, town and parish councils act as the democratic voice closest to communities. They provide a platform for residents to raise concerns, shape priorities, and influence decisions directly affecting their neighbourhoods. They deliver a range of local services to their communities and identify and address local issues. Tertiary local government bodies play an important role in signposting residents to the correct points of contact in higher levels of local administration, which can be more difficult to navigate in two-tier council areas.

Town and parish councils are not distributed evenly across Staffordshire as a whole. Two of the eight districts have no tertiary councils, and districts that are parished vary significantly in terms of the number, size and coverage of established tertiary councils.

Two of the three council areas comprising North Staffordshire are parished, but with very different numbers of constituent tertiary councils. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, which is mainly rural, is fully parished and has by far the largest number of town and parish councils. The Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme is parished outside the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme itself, while Stoke-on-Trent has no parishes. This is largely because the City was formed through a federation of its six towns in 1910, prior to the granting of city status in 1925, which negated the need for individual town councils.

**Table 28 - Existing town and parish councils in North Staffordshire**

Area	Town councils	Parish councils	Total tertiary councils
Stoke-on-Trent (unitary)	N/A	N/A	0
Newcastle-under-Lyme	1	10	11
Staffordshire Moorlands	3	38	41

## Electoral arrangements

Stoke-on-Trent City Council comprises 44 councillors. They serve 34 wards, comprising 26 single-member wards, six two-member wards and two three-member wards. Members are elected in all-out elections on a four-yearly cycle. Following boundary changes imposed in 2022, the average number of electors per councillor in the city increased from 3,989 in 2021 to 4,214 in 2026. While this ratio has increased, it is still far below the equivalent figures for the County Council, where the average electorate per division member is 10,762.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council also has 44 councillors. They serve 21 electoral wards, of which four are single-member, 11 are two-member and six are three-member wards. The next elections are scheduled to take place on 7 May 2026.

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has 56 councillors serving 27 wards; of these, 10 are single-member, five are two-member wards and 12 return three councillors. Like Stoke-on-Trent, the next whole council elections are currently scheduled to take place in 2027.

It should also be noted that 16 Staffordshire County Council members represent county seats in Newcastle-under-Lyme (nine members) and Staffordshire Moorlands (seven members). Electoral arrangements for the County Council are discussed in more detail below.

## 5.2 THE CONTEXT FOR SOUTHERN & MID STAFFORDSHIRE

### Local government structures

All six districts in the Southern & Mid Staffordshire operate within a two-tier local government system, with Staffordshire County Council delivering county-wide services.

Two of the districts, Cannock Chase District Council and Stafford Borough Council, have had a service-sharing agreement in place since 2011. This initially covered back-office service provision and a joint leadership team, including a shared chief executive, covering both authorities. The sharing arrangement was extended in 2023 to include most elements of service provision, apart from managing elections and maintaining Cannock Chase's council housing stock. Any move towards unitarisation of councils in the south of Staffordshire will therefore be required to take this sharing agreement into consideration when developing plans for integration and transition to new local government structures.

### Community engagement and empowerment

As in the north of Staffordshire, the six southern districts vary significantly in terms of the distribution of tertiary local government bodies across the geography. The more rural boroughs of East Staffordshire and Stafford and the districts of South Staffordshire and Lichfield district each have more than 20 town and/or parish councils, while semi-urban Cannock Chase district has only eight and Tamworth borough has none.

Table 29 - Existing town and parish councils in Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Area	Town councils	Parish councils	Total tertiary councils
<b>Cannock Chase</b>	2	6	8
<b>East Staffordshire</b>	2	38	40
<b>Lichfield</b>	2	23 (incl. 8 warded parishes)	25
<b>Stafford</b>	1	35 (incl. 2 parish meetings)	36
<b>South Staffordshire</b>	0	27	27
<b>Tamworth</b>	0	0	0

## Electoral arrangements

Staffordshire County Council comprises 62 elected members serving 62 single-member wards, with an average electorate of 10,762 per councillor. However, the aggregate ratio for the County Council geography, including both district and county councillors, is currently 1,694 electors. This is far lower than the average for the city and is approximately half the size of the ratios which have emerged from the most recent examples of LGR.

Electoral data relating to other districts in Staffordshire are detailed in the table below.

**Table 30 - Current electoral arrangements in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**

LA area	Registered electors (Dec 2023)	Attainers (Dec 2023)	Councillors	Wards*	Electorate per cllr	County cllrs
Staffordshire County Council	667,255	1,544	62	62	10,762	-
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	177,791	282	44	34	4,214	-
Cannock Chase DC	76,864	190	36	12	2,135	7
East Staffordshire BC	90,657	213	37	16	2,450	9
Lichfield DC	82,671	201	47	22	1,759	8
Newcastle-under-Lyme BC	91,225	163	44	21	2,073	9
South Staffordshire DC	85,917	198	42	20	2,046	8
Stafford BC	102,215	283	40	23	2,555	9
Staffordshire Moorlands DC	78,156	166	56	27	1,396	7
Tamworth BC	59,550	130	30	10	1,985	5

\*County divisions for Staffordshire County Council



## 5.3 KEY GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY IMPLICATIONS OF MOVING TO A NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE UNITARY COUNCIL

### Size and structure of the new council

Following initial discussions with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), we understand there is an expectation that LGR proposals should set out the number of councillors who will represent any shadow councils or new unitary authorities at the outset, pending the outcome of any subsequent boundary reviews regarding the affected areas. **Our working assumption in relation to a future North Staffordshire Unitary Council is that 84 councillors will be required to enable effective representation, decision-making and scrutiny functions with a new single-tier system.**

There are currently 144 city, district and borough councillors representing 82 electoral wards across the three existing North Staffordshire councils. Creating 144 seats for the proposed new North Staffordshire Unitary Council is not considered a viable proposition and would be too unwieldy to be effective. This figure does not include the 16 county councillors who currently represent Staffordshire County Council wards in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands. We anticipate they will serve out their remaining terms in office until the abolition of two-tier councils but will not play any continuing role in either the shadow council or the new North Staffordshire Unitary Council.

The City Council's ratio of 4,214 electors to each councillor is broadly in line with levels which were adopted following other recent local government reorganisations. For example, the ratio for the new Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council established in 2019 was 3,884 per councillor after an electoral review reduced the number of councillors from 125 to 76. The recently formed Cumberland Council's ratio was reduced from 4,369 to 3,654 electors per councillor following an LGBCE review in 2024.

Applying the City Council ratio to the other North Staffordshire districts would reduce the number of councillors in Newcastle-under-Lyme borough from 44 to 22, and in Staffordshire Moorlands district from 56 to 18. This would reduce the overall number of councillors across North Staffordshire from 144 to 84. Implementing this proposal would necessitate a comprehensive overhaul of current ward boundaries in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands to achieve parity with Stoke-on-Trent in terms of ward sizes and the ratios of electors to councillors.

An additional consideration informing any final decision regarding the size and structure of a new North Staffordshire Unitary Council will be the need to review the balance of single-member and multi-member wards to allow for flexibility between urban, suburban and rural areas across the expanded geography. It is important to note that community identity, and not just elector equality, should be a key consideration influencing any future warding patterns for the sub-region.

The governance and working practices of the new North Staffordshire Unitary Council will be underpinned by the strong constitutional framework and proven governance structures of the unitary Stoke-on-Trent City Council. By building on the proven foundation

of a leader and cabinet model of governance that all three local authorities operate, the new authority's decision making will provide the required level of clarity on responsibility and accountability from its inception.

In practice, it is expected that these arrangements will closely mirror the system already in place in Stoke-on-Trent City Council, including:

1. A Leader of the Council and Cabinet at the centre.
2. Overview and Scrutiny Committees reflecting the functions of directorates to ensure scrutiny activity is aligned with the delivery of frontline services and strategic priorities.
3. A core framework of non-executive Regulatory Committees to discharge statutory responsibilities – including committees for planning, licensing, and audit and standards – which they may do directly or by delegation to panels and sub-committees.
4. A statutory Health and Wellbeing Board with a jurisdiction and footprint reflective of the new unitary council's boundaries and appointed in accordance with legislative requirements to provide a formal mechanism for joint leadership and integration across health, care and public health.
5. Robust and transparent arrangements for local democracy and community engagement, including engagement with Parish and Town Councils and Area Committees, reflecting and reinforcing strengths of local identity.
6. All-out elections once every four years.

## **Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment**

In many areas of North Staffordshire, parish and town councils provide a focal point for residents in the community, to preserve and enhance the identity of the local area and to deal with local issues as they arise, alongside looking after community assets like allotments, playing fields and historic monuments. We see these factors having increased importance after LGR when the new North Staffordshire Unitary Council we propose would have a wide range of responsibilities for around 500,000 people.

The new North Staffordshire Unitary Council would have a range of options for delegating some of its powers and responsibilities to a more local level. As well as Town Councils and Parish Councils, it could use community asset transfers and neighbourhood committees.

**The reality is that while different models may work best in different areas covered by the Unitary Council, the underlying principles will be based on achieving a clear and balanced decision-making framework that optimises delegation, enhances portfolio holder engagement and empowers communities.**

The new governance model will provide for meaningful local influence through enhancements to current mechanisms such as the ward level budget arrangements in operation in Stoke-on-Trent. The overall aim would be to maximise subsidiarity.

## 5.4 KEY GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY IMPLICATIONS OF UNITARISATION IN SOUTHERN & MID STAFFORDSHIRE

This is covered in more detail in the linked submission of Stafford and East Staffordshire Borough Councils and Cannock Chase District Council. In short, increasing the ratio of electors to councillors in the south of Staffordshire to align them with anticipated changes involved in the creation of a North Staffordshire Unitary Council would have significant implications for democracy and governance. For example, applying the Stoke-on-Trent ratio of 4,214 electors to each councillor would reduce the number of councillors in one or more unitary councils covering the six current districts in the south of Staffordshire from 232 to 118.

As with the two-tier districts in North Staffordshire, the ward boundaries in those six districts in the south would need to be redrawn comprehensively to reflect any homogenisation of elector-councillor ratios, either in relation to individual unitary areas or across the whole geography of Staffordshire.

The Southern & Mid Staffordshire partners also view the proposed reorganisation of the existing Councils into a single unitary authority as presenting a valuable opportunity to establish new, innovative mechanisms for neighbourhood and community engagement. These reforms would aim to enhance democratic participation, strengthen local accountability, and improve the quality of local governance.

As part of the new Council's implementation, residents may want Neighbourhood Area Committees introducing in their local areas to give their communities a stronger voice in shaping local priorities. These committees would serve as a platform for residents to influence policy development and service delivery, complementing the important role already played by Parish and Town Councils, where they exist.



## PRESERVING KEY CIVIC AND CEREMONIAL STATUS AND FUNCTIONS IN NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE

Stoke-on-Trent was officially granted its Royal Charter and city status in Letters Patent issued by King George V on 5th June 1925, which elevated the borough to the status of a city. The city's motto, 'Vis unita fortior' (United strength is stronger) was chosen at this time to reflect the union of the six towns that formed the City. The right for the Mayor (and Deputy Mayor) of the City to be styled as Lord Mayor (and Deputy Lord Mayor) was granted in subsequent Letters Patent in 1928. Following local government reorganisation under the Local Government Act 1972, renewed Letters Patent were issued on 28th May 1974.

In 2025, Stoke-on-Trent has been celebrating the centenary of being granted city status by royal decree in 1925. To ensure that Stoke-on-Trent retains its city status and the office of Lord Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent continues following local government reorganisation, these rights will need to be preserved. We will therefore continue exploring ways in which this can be achieved via appropriate legal and constitutional avenues, including the establishment of Charter Trustees. It is noted that a Structural Changes Order may make provision to preserve the rights and privileges contained in the 1974 Letters Patent, including the establishment of Charter Trustees and other arrangements.

The same considerations apply to preserving Newcastle-under-Lyme's borough status and the office of Mayor in any future arrangements for North Staffordshire. King Henry II granted a Royal Charter to the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1173, which established it as a borough with special rights and privileges including the right to hold markets. Subsequent charters have confirmed and extended the town's rights. The most recent charter, from Queen Elizabeth II in 1950, established a corporation to govern the town. The charters are a significant source of local civic and cultural pride, which was demonstrated by the celebrations in 2023 marking 850 years since the granting of the town's first Royal Charter. The town has had a mayoralty since 1251, and the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Newcastle-under-Lyme currently represent the borough at civic functions and community events.

Similar considerations and provisions will be required in relation to any corresponding civic institutions which currently exist in other parts of Staffordshire, and which may be affected by the abolition of two-tier local government structures. Particular focus will need to be given to markets and market authorities.

For example Cheadle was granted a market charter by King Henry III in 1250. The market has been held in the town's Market Square continuously for the last 775 years, making it an important element of the town's cultural history and character.





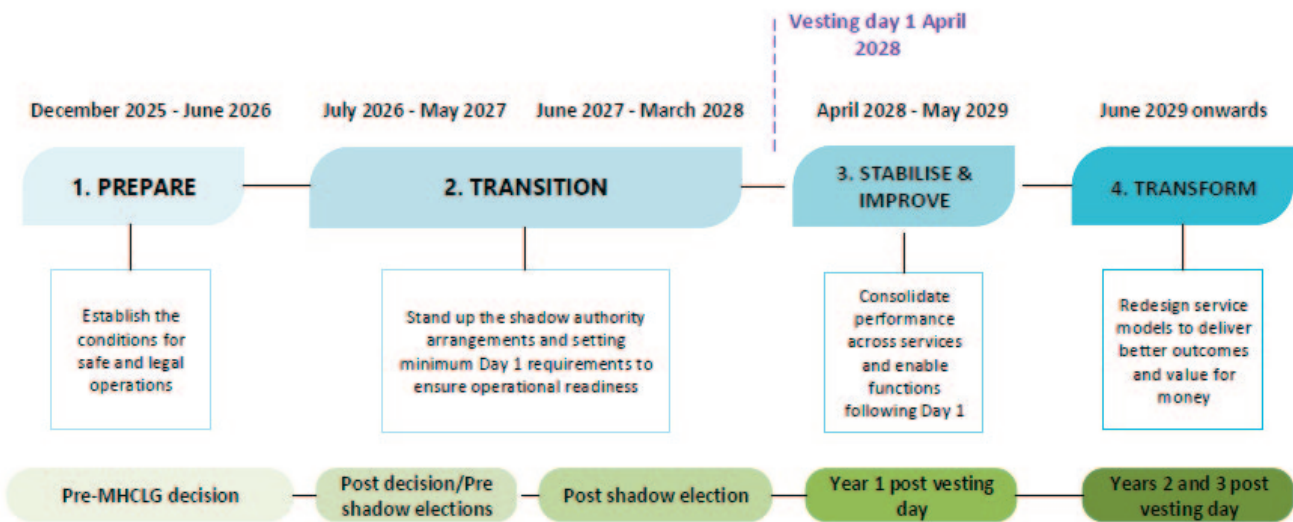
# 6 : ENSURING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AND DAY-ONE READINESS

## 6.1 THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The scale of change and its management requires clear leadership, planning, and good governance. Our LGR proposal for North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire is supported by a detailed implementation framework (attached at Appendix 4).

The diagram below sets out four high level phases and key milestones for our local government reorganisation.

Figure 12- LGR implementation programme timeline



The guiding principles of the implementation framework are promoting public value, demonstrating accountability and improving resilience. These underpin a sequential programme of transition to stabilise, improve, and transform services. The framework recognises that effective delivery will entail balancing the needs for speed, safety and positive experiences of residents.

The framework is evidence-based, informed by previous experience and lessons learned from other local authority reorganisations, and designed to be fully risk-aware to minimise potential disruption to service delivery

Our strategic objectives are:

- Minimising disruption, particularly to statutory and critical services.
- Maintaining robust financial control.



- Supporting staff through changes and shaping an inclusive, unified corporate identity.
- Keeping communities informed and protecting local identity.
- Anticipating and neutralising risks at every step.
- Delivering a safe and timely phased transition and transformation programme.

To ensure successful delivery of transition and transformation, we will organise the programme across relevant functional themes, each with a defined scope, milestones, and interdependencies, and overseen by a central programme management office (PMO). The PMO will consist of a team of transformation experts who will call on specialists and those with subject matter expertise when needed to ensure the programme is resourced with appropriate levels of capacity and expertise.



## 6.2 Structure of the implementation programme

The effective delivery of change needs to be organised to provide direction, coordination, manage risk and be ready for vesting day on 1 April 2028. Establishing two new unitary councils for North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire will require the following work streams to be put in place.

**Table 31 - LGR implementation programme work streams**

	<b>Work streams</b>	<b>Actions</b>
1	Plan and design	<p>A single, collaborative process involving all participating Councils across both the North Staffordshire and the Southern &amp; Mid Staffordshire geographies, with a focus on establishing the robust foundations necessary for successful transition and transformation.</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement will be a core priority during this phase, with focus on raising awareness, fostering cooperation, and building consensus across central and local government.</p>
2	Building the foundations	<p>Development of a detailed implementation plan and the establishment of the legal basis for creating the new authorities and interim governance arrangements during the shadow period.</p> <p>Shadow authorities will build a comprehensive understanding of current organisational structures and operating models to enable the development of a complementary Target Operating Model aligned to the needs of the new unitary councils.</p>
3	Shadow authorities	<p>Shadow authorities for Staffordshire will be established to support a smooth and coordinated transition to the new arrangements on vesting day. These bodies will oversee critical activities such as service integration planning and operational transition.</p> <p>The transition process will include elections in May 2027 to form the shadow councils. The organisational and operating model will be refined during this phase to ensure it meets the strategic and operational needs of the new unitary councils.</p>
4	Leadership	<p>The strategic recruitment of Tier 1 to Tier 3 management to each new unitary council to ensure continuity and drive transformation, alongside comprehensive service planning.</p> <p>Development of Draft Council Strategies and Plans and Medium-Term Financial Plans will define the strategic direction and financial framework of each unitary council, supported by the development of key policies and strategies.</p>
5	Go live	<p>Ensuring a seamless transition for residents and partners in each unitary council area, focusing primarily on providing uninterrupted service continuity for all critical services.</p> <p>A comprehensive public communications campaign and a proactive partner and stakeholder engagement plan will keep people informed and reinforce strong collaborative relationships.</p>
6	After vesting day	<p>Focusing on stability, the new unitary councils will ensure continuity of critical services for the most vulnerable citizens prior to embarking on a multi-year programme of service transformation and continuous improvement.</p>

Transparency builds trust. Accordingly, there will be a performance and financial reporting framework which balances key performance deliverables, quality, equity and value for money. Significant decisions will be supported by proportionate business cases that set out options, costs, benefits and risks.

## 6.3 Managing risk

Robust management of risk is an essential part of any major change programme. The biggest risks inherent in transition are to maintaining delivery of critical statutory services across multiple geographical areas and workforces during the process of integrating and consolidating services. To ensure all risks and issues are dealt with effectively and efficiently, clear risk management principles will be applied and managed through the PMO. Key risks are identified in Table 32.

**Table 32 - Key risks of LGR implementation programme**

	<b>Risk description</b>	<b>Mitigation approach</b>
1	<b>Governance and leadership conflicts</b> – power struggles, lack of alignment between political leaders and unclear roles and responsibilities may adversely impact upon decision-making	Establish clear governance structures and shared leadership protocols, with clear escalation paths and policies.
2	<b>Service disruption</b> – implementation may temporarily disrupt key public services	Identify critical services and build robust continuity plans.
3	<b>Cultural misalignment</b> – differences in organisational cultures between merging councils may lead to internal conflict, low morale and reduced productivity	Foster a shared organisational culture through comms, engagement and training.
4	<b>Workforce and HR challenges</b> – redundancies, unclear job roles, TUPE complications may demotivate staff and/or lead to employment law disputes	Use transparent HR planning and policies, with early consultation with unions and clear comms with staff.
5	<b>IT and data integration</b> – mismatched or incompatible IT systems may result in data loss, security vulnerabilities and inefficiencies	Develop and resource a fully costed digital LGR implementation programme that goes beyond planning to include delivery mechanisms, supplier management, and workforce resilience. Prioritise cyber security and data integrity throughout, with contingency planning for key person risks and supplier dependencies.
6	<b>Financial uncertainty</b> – cost overruns, inaccurate financial forecasts or unequal debt burdens may lead to budgetary instability	Use independent financial modelling, transparent audits and strong fiscal governance.
7	<b>Loss of local identity and representation</b> – communities may feel that their needs or voices are diluted in a larger authority, or that they no longer receive the same level of service they previously had	Preserve and enhance local democratic structures so residents feel that their voices are being heard, and their needs are being taken account of.



8	<b>Legal and statutory non-compliance</b> - failing to meet statutory requirements during the transition period may lead to legal action and/or government intervention	Appoint a legal advisory team to oversee compliance and risk management.
9	<b>Public resistance and reputational damage</b> - poor communication may fuel mistrust, public opposition and negative media coverage	Engage stakeholders and partners early and transparently through consultation and regular updates using a range of comms channels to reach a wide audience.
10	<b>Ineffective programme management</b> - poor coordination and management of the implementation may lead to delays, scope creep and missed benefits	Use a robust programme management framework with dedicated structures, clear milestones and critical paths, and accountability for programme delivery.

## 6.4 What this means in practice: Three case studies

### Children’s Social Care services

The two Unitary Councils will need to integrate services from both two-tier areas and the unitary City Council. Under the Framework, they will achieve this by initiating a process of stabilising people and practice and will only progress to full integration and optimisation of structures and system when evidence indicates that sufficient stability has been achieved.

The improvement phase will be characterised by relentless attention to culture, robust practice standards and quality assurance. Improvements in data integrity and reporting will be key to monitoring improvement and strengthening management oversight. A ‘bottom-up’ approach to service transformation will enable coproduction of redesigned pathways with families, schools and health partners to support improvements to early help, safeguarding and SEND support.

There will also be a spirit of collaboration between the two Unitary Councils with a focus on developing joint commissioning and market management across children’s (and adults) services.

### Waste services

The new Unitary Councils will need to integrate differing delivery models across the existing councils. For example, in North Staffordshire, currently, Stoke-on-Trent delivers waste management (collection and disposal) in-house with fortnightly collection; Newcastle-under-Lyme’s waste collection is also fortnightly and delivered in-house, and they charge for garden waste collection, and Staffordshire Moorlands’ waste collection is delivered by their environmental services local authority trading company.

A key priority for the new councils will therefore be harmonisation of policies and delivery models to facilitate smoother integration and minimise service disruption. An initial discovery process would assess collection regimes, cost and performance baselines, asset condition and contract positions to identify the most competent delivery platform. A harmonisation business case would set out costed options to enable early standardisation of policies and processes. The physical roll-out of the integrated waste service would be phased by geography, with defined intensive monitoring periods after each implementation tranche. A new commercial strategy will focus on issues such as fleet procurement lead-times, and interface agreements with disposal partners to avoid downstream bottlenecks.

### **Integrating shared services and local authority trading companies (LATCs)**

One important issue to reference with respect to North Staffordshire is that Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and High Peak Borough Council currently operate a strategic alliance comprising shared in-house delivery and three LATCs. Handling this more complex transition will require consideration of factors such as governance, workforce, systems and commissioning arrangements.

Under the transition framework, ownership of the LATCs will transfer to the new unitary, which will decide whether to continue this approach, bring services in-house or commission them in a different way, based on value for money, service quality, strategic alignment, and management capacity.





# 7 : MAKING THIS REAL : IMPROVING PUBLIC SERVICES

The previous chapter described a robust and rigorous process for ensuring successful implementation of local government reorganisation. However, the obvious question is: for what purpose? What would be different for the people of North and Southern & Mid Staffordshire? The great news is that there is brilliant practice already happening in all of the councils of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, so the obvious answer is to spread that great work and therefore increase the reach and benefit.

To bring this idea to life we have brought together a number of case studies. There is an inevitable balance of focus on North Staffordshire but there are several other brilliant Southern & Mid Staffordshire case studies in our partner councils' complementary proposal document.

## Case Study One : Help in the harder times

In Stoke-on-Trent, the city council and voluntary and community sector partners have collaborated to address hardship and poverty with notable results. Their three priorities - money, food, and energy - focus on maximising incomes through unclaimed benefits, creating sustainable alternatives to food banks while maintaining emergency food access, and reducing fuel poverty by promoting energy efficiency and distributing financial support to those in need.

Citizens Advice, Saltbox, and Disability Solutions have delivered "Money MOTs" in communities, identifying over £4 million in previously unclaimed benefits for 7,850 residents over two years. This approach could be extended across North Staffordshire, to bring support directly to market towns and rural villages. A Sustainable Food Network, led by YMCA North Staffordshire and VAST, aims to improve food availability, affordability, and sustainability, moving beyond food banks as the only solution. Both organisations, along with other partners, already operate across North Staffordshire.

Affordable warmth is championed by Beat the Cold, a charity supporting residents with energy discounts, payments, and advice. They have assisted around 400 Stoke-on-Trent residents monthly and distributed fuel vouchers funded by the household support fund. Currently this is available for Stoke-on-Trent residents only but would benefit North Staffordshire communities too.



## Case Study Two : Thrive at Five, thrive for life

Thrive at Five brings communities and families together with local authority, health, school and charity partners in areas of need to ensure all children are given a strong foundation in their early years for life and learning. It plans long-term, sustainable increases in the proportion of children reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) at age five. Thrive at Five recruits local backbone teams of early years specialists with experience of direct, evidence-based work with children and families and broader systems change and connects them with best-in-class national expertise.

The first Thrive at Five programme in Stoke-on-Trent was launched in Abbey Hulton and Bentilee in 2021. During the 2024-2025 academic year, the proportion of children eligible for free school meals achieving a GLD in Thrive at Five's seven partner primary schools in Stoke-on-Trent increased by 11.4%. Thrive at Five delivered the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) to children needing extra support in the partner schools by recruiting and training local university students to deliver NELI. 97% of children who received NELI in the 2024-2025 academic year improved their communication skills, and the number of children whose language skills were developing as expected increased by 62%.

Scoping is underway with Stoke-on-Trent City Council to expand the programme into new wards in the city in 2026 and there is ready potential to spread into other parts of North Staffordshire where the benefit would be significant. Thrive at Five is developing a replicable, scalable model with a practical 'playbook' for applying their model widely in local communities with high levels of need to improve outcomes in early childhood.

**Thrive at Five has worked with 433 professionals across 31 organisations**

**It's Talking Time programme has seen a 51% reduction in number of nursery school aged children with significant language delays**

**It has supported a five-fold increase in the number of weekly parent, baby toddler groups**



### Case Study Three : A brew, a listening ear and more

Stoke-on-Trent City Council leads in community-led adult social care and health, using a hyper-local approach through the Communities Together programme, which has delivered 18 Community Lounges across the city. These lounges provide spaces for conversation and access to resources such as housing, financial advice, food, social care, mental health, and befriending. Each lounge is unique, reflecting the needs of its community, and this approach has gained national attention, supported by local and academic evidence.

Community-led principles are central to strength-based social care practice, shaping commissioning strategies and service development. A recent example is the neighbourhood integrated health and care model in north Stoke-on-Trent, where communities co-designed solutions for managing frailty. Local partners, councils, and NHS organisations collaborate to ensure services are relevant and values-based, building on the success of the Community Lounges.

This model creates sustainable, effective services because those who use them play a key role in their design and delivery. The Stoke-on-Trent experience demonstrates that hyper-local, community-driven approaches can be scaled to benefit wider areas in North Staffordshire, embedding expertise and values across a broader region.





## Case Study Four - Delivering Awaab's Law - a partnership approach

In November 2024, Stoke-on-Trent City Council launched a new Registered Provider Charter to improve living conditions and service standards for tenants living in the 25,000 social rented homes in the city. They are managed by over 30 Registered Providers, with around 17,000 of those homes owned and managed by the City Council. The Charter is a key part of the City Council's commitment to tenants and follows six months of partnership working with Registered Providers across the city. It sets out a shared vision to ensure all tenants can live in safe, secure and well-maintained homes and neighbourhoods.

Every Registered Provider signed up to the Charter has committed to upholding a package of rights for every tenant. Among them are rights to a safe, secure and well-maintained home kept free from damp and mould; a good standard of customer service that is accessible, responsive, personalised, professional and effective; and a voice and involvement in determining solutions to issues affecting them, and the opportunity to shape services.

The obvious opportunity for spread across North Staffordshire is that most of the Registered Providers in the network have stock in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands, reflecting the nature of North Staffordshire as a single housing market. Indeed, some of the Registered Providers are headquartered in those other districts. The opportunity to make this a single, comprehensive North Staffordshire is there for the taking with the potential to include larger private landlords as well.



## Case Study Five - Breathing new life into high streets – learning from the Moorlands

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has a successful track record of sustainable high street transformation by targeting Government funding in major regeneration schemes. It has made substantial investments in its principal towns of Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph through collaborative strategic planning and delivery with partners. Investing in key assets like markets and leisure facilities has enhanced the distinctive character and heritage of the towns and improved their infrastructure, environment and accessibility for residents, businesses and visitors.

The Council's masterplans to attract investment and guide development have focused on creating vibrant, accessible town centres with a wide range of services, supporting local businesses and enhancing the visitor economy. The support for local independent retailers has helped mitigate the impact of national chain closures and contributed to above-national-average shop occupancy rates.

Leek, "Queen of the Moorlands", has benefitted from a major town centre improvement programme, and UK Shared Prosperity Funding is being invested in cultural events and tourism campaigns across the district. The refurbishment of historic buildings in the town, and redevelopment of the leisure centre with new pools, fitness facilities, and adventure play areas, has improved community health and wellbeing and attracted more visitors to the area.

There is a ready-made opportunity to learn from this best practice and spread to other parts of North Staffordshire.



Photo: Carol Tyers/Shutterstock



## Case Study Six : Tackling homelessness – building on the spirit of partnership

Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council collaborate closely to prevent and relieve homelessness, especially rough sleeping, recognising shared boundaries and frequent movement of individuals between areas. Joint services include a single Rough Sleeping Coordinator, a jointly commissioned outreach service, a Homeless Healthcare Service, coordinated rough sleeper counts, and shared emergency protocols. Both councils attend drop-ins and forums, with similar service delivery models - such as the Homeless Hub at Navigation House in Newcastle mirroring Hanley Connects in Stoke-on-Trent, offering daily drop-ins, support, meals, and accommodation. However, there are differences: the Borough Council uses in-house service navigators, while the City Council commissions externally, leveraging mature local partners for rapid mobilisation.

A North Staffordshire Unitary Council would enable a consistent approach across the conurbation, improving access and outcomes. Stoke-on-Trent's additional services - mental health practitioners, peer mentors, floating support, specialist officers and accommodation options - could be expanded regionally. A North Staffordshire Unitary Council would also facilitate sharing best practice, broaden accommodation choices, and remove local connection barriers, increasing housing options. The City Council's experience with supported housing programmes and collaborative commissioning in related areas (substance misuse, domestic abuse) would benefit the new authority and deliver economies of scale while maintaining place-based services.





## Case Study Seven – A boost for nature in Southern & Mid Staffordshire

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a key part of local authority planning services, ensuring natural habitats are protected and enhanced for residents. However, developers often lack the expertise to fully realise BNG’s potential. Lichfield District Council’s Biodiversity Brokerage Service addresses this gap by connecting developers with experts, recommending suitable land, and supporting the delivery of environmental improvements.

The service has led to successful habitat restoration through rewilding and has generated revenue, which is reinvested into public services. This approach not only protects the environment but also supports the financial sustainability of local services.

With the proposed Southern & Mid Staffordshire Unitary Council, there is an opportunity to expand the Biodiversity Brokerage Service across a wider area, especially in rural districts. As the region plans to build over 53,000 homes between 2024 and 2040, the service can ensure that development protects and enhances rural landscapes. Expanding the Brokerage Service would extend environmental and financial benefits from Lichfield to the whole of Southern & Mid Staffordshire, supporting both nature and public service.



# 8 : CONCLUSION

Local government reorganisation in Staffordshire represents a generational opportunity to revise current structures and processes and develop a new model of local government which can deliver better outcomes for all communities and businesses across our diverse areas and economies. It can provide a platform not only for devolution but also accelerated delivery of the Government's missions. To maximise the potential benefits of this transformation, it is vital that change must be evidence-led and informed by the needs and priorities of the populations which local government exists to serve.

Nowhere will the benefits of reorganisation be felt more acutely than in North Staffordshire, where previous attempts at systemic change have hobbled local economies and created deeply entrenched inequalities fuelled by intractable poverty, deprivation and a vicious cycle of underinvestment and worsening population outcomes. By matching the geography of public finances to economic activity, reorganisation offers the opportunity to rectify the failure to deliver the social benefits that reflect Stoke-on-Trent's and indeed the county's strong economic performance.

In considering the four main options, we have commissioned deep independent analysis and assessment of both the socio-economic and financial cases, we have listened to the public and stakeholders (facilitated by an expert, independent organisation) and we have considered the process of implementation and transition. At the end of this process, we consider that it is possible to rank, with a high degree of objectivity the four proposals against the main criteria.

Both North Staffordshire and Southern & Mid Staffordshire are coherent and functional economic geographies. North Staffordshire is anchored by Stoke-on-Trent's polycentric urban core and complemented by the rural and market towns of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands. With a population nearing 500,000, the area meets the Government's threshold for unitary councils and demonstrates strong internal commuting, shared public services, and cultural identity.

Southern & Mid Staffordshire is characterised by its strong economic links to the West Midlands conurbation, and already meets the population size threshold. The proposed new Southern & Mid Staffordshire Unitary Council will demonstrate the corporate values of 'Establish', 'Economise', and 'Engage' in shaping a resilient and forward-looking organisation. The new council will be a catalyst for positive change; delivering better outcomes, stronger partnerships, and a renewed sense of place for all.

The North-South model is bold and innovative. It reflects natural economic market areas, avoids disruptive boundary changes, and is supported by the majority of councils. It enables strategic planning across housing, transport, and infrastructure, and supports economic growth through unified governance. The model also aligns with existing service footprints in health and education, reducing transition complexity and cost.

**Table 33 - Scoring of options against the Government's criteria**

Government Criterion	Option Ranking				Summary
	A	B	C	D	
1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	All options achieve this basic criterion.
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	The evidence shows that the marginally leading option here is Option C - the proposal to create a north-south two unitary solution with changes to district boundaries. However, options A and D are both demonstrably financially sustainable solutions with different strengths and weaknesses, and avoid the main disadvantages of Option C with respect to complexity of implementation and transition.
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Option D would be dogged by the inherent illogicality of the proposed geographies as a service footprint, including lack of alignment with transport infrastructure and other public service geographies. Option B will generate lower economies of scale and will be less productive as a result of sub-optimal size of two of the authorities. And Option C will be slower to deliver benefits because of the complexity of implementation and transition.
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	8 of the 10 councils support a north : south model of unitary local government. Option C is significantly opposed by Stafford and East Staffordshire District Councils which could impact on implementation given the inherent complexity. Only the county council support an East : West model. The proposers of options A-C all undertook extensive work to understand the public's views and these have been reflected in the development of proposals.
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.	1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	By a significant distance, the evidence demonstrates that a two unitary structure based on a north-south division that matches the existing economic sub-regions would provide the best building blocks for devolution.
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	The three unitary structure was popular with the public and would overall best reflect local identity. However, this has to be balanced against the significant downsides of lower financial sustainability and resilience, lower savings and more complex implementation and transition. Options A and C are a better fit with existing community structures and relationships than Option D.
OVERALL	1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	



With strong unitary councils in both the north and south, a future strategic authority will be able to reach into both the West Midlands and the North West to take opportunities to collaborate on economic growth. At the same time, stronger local service delivery capability will enable the targeted delivery of services that reflect the socio-economic situation at a place level. And the core urban centre of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme will offer the opportunity to generate the benefits of agglomeration to benefit the whole of the combined geography, such as facilitating the retention of graduates from the two universities.

This model represents the best fit between Government-set criteria and public preferences. Residents prioritise reliable services, local decision-making and protection of local identity. The model's scale allows for strategic investment while remaining connected to community needs. It also enables double devolution, empowering neighbourhoods through more localised decision-making.

**In conclusion, the Northern and Southern & Mid Staffordshire two unitary reorganisation model offers the most balanced, pragmatic, and future-proof solution for Staffordshire. It aligns with economic realities, supports financial and operational efficiency, and reflects the aspirations of local communities. It is the only model capable of delivering the scale, coherence, and strategic capacity needed to unlock devolution and improve outcomes across the county. We can't wait to help make this a reality and so unlock Staffordshire's true potential.**





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