

Appendix 1 – Outline of Interim Plan

This document sets out the emerging position against the criteria for local government reform (LGR) as set out in the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution's letter of 5 February 2025 to the Leaders of the six Councils in Warwickshire.

The document assumes two possible options for LGR in Warwickshire – a single unitary council or two unitaries (one covering North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth and Rugby Boroughs and one covering Warwick and Stratford Districts).

Each section includes:

- working principles which inform the submission;
- current assessment against the Government's criteria;
- emerging conclusions;
- next steps.

This content will inform the Council's submission to Government of an Interim Plan by 21st March 2025.

Criteria 1.

Seek to achieve for the whole of Warwickshire the establishment of a single tier of local government

Working principles

- **County of Warwickshire**- The future structure(s) should cover the existing Warwickshire boundary and establish a single tier of local government across Warwickshire which meets the Government's criteria.
- **Coventry & Warwickshire footprint** - Preserving and enhancing the Coventry and Warwickshire functional economic geography and public service footprint is crucial.
- **Outcome focused** - The future structure(s) should maximise improvement in priority outcomes in a meaningful way to residents, businesses, communities and visitors (e.g. inclusive economic growth for all; planning, housing and infrastructure delivery; reducing health inequalities; education and skills, tackling climate change, transport and digital connectivity, integrated and accessible services); and
- **Value for money** - The future structure(s) should maximise value for money by improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness (cost-benefit, payback and future financial sustainability across local government in Warwickshire) and look to protect and enhance much valued non-statutory services currently provided at both tiers of local government.

1a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

Over three quarters of residents living in Coventry and Warwickshire also work in the area. A recent West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) study showed very clear evidence of the strength and importance of the Coventry and Warwickshire economic geography.

Warwickshire County Council has secured a Level 2 devolution deal covering Adult Skills, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Compulsory Purchase Order and regeneration powers.

A single tier of local government would cover the whole of Warwickshire County and preserve the economic area.

Financial impacts would vary according to the model. Pooling financial, demand and differential tax base risks could create advantage or disadvantage.

A northern unitary involving North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth and Rugby Boroughs would represent 52% of the population and would have 46% of the council tax base. 21 out of the 22 LSOAs in the 10% most deprived in England are in these boroughs.

In a two unitary model, each new council would have very different financial risk profiles and financial sustainability challenges, with issues of scale potentially affecting financial sustainability. Further work is needed to disaggregate costs to better quantify this risk.

A northern council would be significantly more exposed to the business rates reset, with correspondingly higher grant income than a southern unitary. Conversely, the south would be more exposed to Council Tax risk and impacts of national funding reform which would see grant funding redistributed based on deprivation and Council Tax equalisation in future.

A single unitary would also be significantly exposed to the business rates reset and funding reform. However, a more balanced spread of funding sources would help spread financial risk.

The scale of a larger council would enable financial and funding risks to be more easily managed through the resilience of a larger balance sheet and through much higher savings from reorganisation. This would better protect the future financial sustainability of local government despite the significant challenges it faces. Significant differences in the balance sheets and borrowings of the existing district and borough councils would have a more material impact under a two unitary model, as reflected in the abandoned merger proposals by Warwick and Stratford Districts in 2022.

1b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs

Across Warwickshire, annual National Planning Policy Framework targets have increased by 69%, which requires a step-change in housing delivery. A more effective, quicker planning system is required by bringing together local planning and highways planning functions. All six councils experience challenges with their respective planning functions, particularly around staff capacity, recruitment and retention.

Reorganisation would enable either one or two local plans, rather than five, which would be a positive in the context of a regional Spatial Development Strategy. Moving to an integrated planning function would increase capacity and resilience while maintaining more local footprints for planning activity and decision-making. This would have a greater impact in a single unitary due to workforce capacity challenges and risks of disaggregating highways services.

Whilst currently not a 'Housing Authority', WCC has established Warwickshire Property and Development Group (WPDG). This is a wholly owned, award-winning WCC company which exists to deliver new housing and commercial space and has a pipeline of 2,200 new homes with 1,200 to be delivered in the next five years. To contextualise this, WPDG will deliver roughly 6% of the annual NPPF targets for Warwickshire over the next five years.

WPDG has the potential to increase its impact by accelerating housing supply and potentially providing a pipeline of social/affordable housing for the Housing Revenue Account unconstrained by S106. It could also support the new council/s to regenerate and increase financial resilience through well-targeted asset disposals and better management of leased rent rolls.

However, if WPDG's shareholdings had to be split, the company's scale, reach and clarity of purpose would be affected, which could impact both councils' bottom-line resourcing. There are two other council housing companies owned by District/Borough councils – Milverton Homes and Caldecott Homes - which have different models to WPDG.

The existing Warwickshire councils have different approaches to housing and Housing Revenue Accounts, some with large landlords in their own right, others not. Local government reform brings a real opportunity to streamline and speed up the planning process, increase the pace of housing delivery, including affordable, enhance customer service and achieve synergies across related functions.

Under a single tier of local government, housing functions will operate at greater scale and would have closer synergy with the delivery of adult social care services which would deliver improved outcomes for residents.

The opportunity to merge the current five District/ Borough housing teams would deliver efficiencies and with careful remodelling provide a better service to tenants against a backdrop of variable performance across the County.

1c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement

Warwickshire has strong overall performance but there are long-term challenges across the County, which manifest in different ways in different areas. We know residents' top priorities to improve their places include improving their high street/town centre, access to healthcare and safety, and transport in the most rural parts of the County.

A new unitary model would need to address key challenges facing Warwickshire, summarised in our [2025 State of Warwickshire report](#).

A clear opportunity will be to combine related strategies and develop a much clearer approach to addressing these key challenges with partners across the whole county, for example more effectively bringing together countywide strategies like Adult Social Care and Public Health with local strategies such as leisure, housing and Local Plans.

Priority outcomes for residents, businesses and communities would be to:

1. increase the pace of economic growth across the County, which has slowed in recent years, and deliver economic prosperity for residents by providing high quality jobs that reduce the gap in average earnings in the north of the county;
2. in light of an ageing population and falling healthy life expectancy, ensuring the demographic mix continues to provide a sufficiently-skilled workforce to drive economic growth, good access to health and social care services that are financially sustainable and integrated, and addressing the key determinants of health particularly where they are lowest;

3. in light of population growth driven by internal migration, increase the supply and affordability of housing and improve the delivery of associated infrastructure including school places.
4. break down barriers to opportunity, particularly by raising educational attainment and adult skills, especially where it is lower, and driving reform to children's services.
5. improve transport and digital connectivity, particularly in more rural parts of the county.
6. more effectively tackle climate change across the county through an integrated approach, in particular by addressing the impact of transport.
7. deliver simpler, more accessible and better services through integration and the benefits of scale, with clear accountability about who is responsible for what; and
8. improve people's pride in where they live, by improving town centres and high streets.

A new local government structure would be able to deliver these outcomes and provide better value for money:

- **economy** – doing things more cost-effectively through commercial benefits of scale and the ability to simplify, rationalise and streamline the current variations in services and organisational infrastructure and duplication of senior management, support functions, property, ICT and democratic costs.
- **efficiency** – delivering productivity gains from reduced duplication and overhead costs, use of digital and data at scale to enhance customer service and reduce costs, and clearer accountability; and
- **effectiveness** – achieving greater impacts on communities and people's lives through a focus on prevention and upstream working, harnessing the synergies of integrated services (for example adult social care and housing, public health and leisure, planning and housing functions, waste services, and economy/business/skills) and effective place-based working, reducing long-term costs by reducing failure demand and getting things right first time.

For residents, businesses and communities, local government reorganisation and reform should give them:

- a common approach wherever they live or work, for example on recycling, waste collection and disposal, planning and leisure;
- the right support in one place, with a single point of access and no need to call different councils or be passed between them;
- improved support for vulnerable people through joined-up health, social care and housing services;
- a common approach to benefits and Council Tax collection;
- a single 'local plan' making sure development is in the right place and it is easier to secure investment from housing developers to pay for roads, schools and other vital infrastructure;
- joined-up services to business – on growth, regulatory services, skills and investment; and
- clear accountability, with councillors responsible for all local government services and for championing their place.

Evidence of costs/ benefits and local engagement are covered in other criteria.

1d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

The proposal would deliver the outcomes in the following ways to varying degrees depending on the model, with benefits likely to be stronger with a single unitary:

Outcome	How the proposal would deliver
Accelerated economic growth and better jobs to address the gap in gross domestic household income between across the County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic influence over Coventry and Warwickshire economy, supported by enhanced devolution to the county • Working with sufficient scale and reach to attract new businesses, support others to grow and ensure the right jobs and skills are available. • Control of all of the levers of growth so that residents benefit, e.g, by reducing the £9.3k gap in average gross domestic household income between Warwick District and Nuneaton and Bedworth
Increase housing supply and infrastructure delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning all levers of planning and infrastructure delivery in a single organisation • Creating a single local plan and holistic view of land supply • Ability to engage with developers across whole supply chain to accelerate housing growth and streamline S106 process • Ability to extend the impact of WPDG on housing and infrastructure delivery, including affordable housing
Improve healthy life expectancy, which has declined and is lower in the north	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning public health, leisure, housing and adult social care will enable more innovative and systemic approaches to reversing recent decreases in healthy life expectancy • Targeting priority places to tackle the determinants of health in a more effective, integrated way
Break down barriers to opportunity by raising educational attainment and adult skills and reforming children's services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining the current councils will simplify delivery of outcomes relating to educational attainment, adult skills and children, addressing educational attainment gaps and continuing to improve adult skill levels • Aligning planning, education, business support, adult skills and inward investment • Single relationships with key anchor institutions will increase effectiveness progressing these key priorities • Having housing and children's services in one place would allow a more holistic approach to tackling homelessness and children in temporary accommodation, and a more effective care leaver experience through housing, revenues and benefits and leisure.
Improving transport and digital connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining transport, infrastructure and planning will support more rapid improvement of transport and digital links especially in rural areas.
Tackle climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently six councils share responsibility for climate change, meaning the delivery of this cross-cutting, long-term outcome is fragmented and complex, with varying approaches across the county • Aligning these levers will enable faster progress • Ability to lead Local Area Energy Plan and adopt consistent climate standards in planning and waste management

Simpler, more accessible and better services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing services together from the two current tiers will simplify delivery and access to services through a single front door and would drive improved outcomes and value for money.
Improved economy, efficiency and effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savings highest for single unitary with duplication minimised • Scale benefits also offer most scope for innovation and digital technology • Prevention is fundamental to achieving value for money and financial sustainability.

Emerging conclusions - seek to achieve for the whole of Warwickshire the establishment of a single tier of local government

The Coventry and Warwickshire functional economic geography is critical to future economic growth for the area.

Preserving the existing Warwickshire boundary and public service footprint would best serve Warwickshire in terms of economic growth, health and social care and community safety delivery.

Although further work is needed, initial work suggests financial viability risks could create differential impacts on both a northern and southern unitary, which have very different profiles of need, deprivation, tax base and income sources.

There are significant opportunities from reorganisation to increase and speed up local housing delivery and meet need, with greater impact from a single unitary council through an integrated planning team, strategic approach through single local plan, single 'voice' for developers, and no disaggregation of county wide development company.

There are clear priority outcomes to address in Warwickshire. Delivery of all would be facilitated by bringing together the services currently provided at different tiers into a more integrated system. An increased focus on prevention and integrated services and the additional capacity and reduced fragmentation/duplication released through unitarisation would accelerate pace and progress.

Next steps

1. Further analysis and modelling of the financial sustainability and resourcing of the new model, and relative risks associated with creation of one or two unitaries.
2. Engage businesses and representative groups to shape opportunities for the new structure to drive economic growth across Warwickshire.
3. Meet with developer representatives to understand opportunities and priorities for local government reform, particularly to speed up housing and infrastructure delivery.
4. Assess more detailed options for WPDG and other council owned housing companies and estimate the potential impact on recurrent revenue contributions built into Warwickshire County Council's base budget.

Criteria 2.

Be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks (population of 500,000 or more)

Working principles

- **Scale and impact** - The existing two-tier system offers neither the scale nor strategic reach required to attract the right level of investment for Warwickshire to realise its future ambitions.
- **Investing in Warwickshire** - A new unitary model must be able to articulate a single, clear offer to central government, partners and businesses in order to attract the right level of long-term investment. This will be essential in driving county-wide sustainable, longer-term economic growth.
- **Whole place solutions** - A new model should have the scale and capacity to develop a whole place approach and accelerate new housing, employment and deliver zonal planning policies, breaking down some of the complexities that currently exist.
- **Removing duplication and inefficiency** - A new model should address current duplication in service delivery, with residents lacking a single point of customer service to access their local services. This is expensive, wasteful and means it is difficult to leverage better contractual arrangements. Services overlap and lack streamlined methods of join up which is time consuming for residents and businesses to navigate.
- **Tracking benefits** – local government reform does not guarantee delivery of benefits. Developing a robust benefits realisation framework to ensure residents, businesses and communities experience genuine improvements will be central to our approach.

2b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal

Warwickshire's estimated population is c620,000. There are no obvious reasons why the 500,000 minimum population figure would not make sense for Warwickshire, nor have any exceptional circumstances currently been identified which could justify the costs and future opportunity costs of disaggregation.

Different places in Warwickshire have different characteristics and needs, but the same can be said of most county areas. Any new unitary model would need to tailor the approaches and offer so as to meet different local need and priorities within their geographies. These issues are well evidenced in the [State of Warwickshire report](#), and [data sets](#) supporting the [Countywide Approach to Levelling Up](#).

Embedding place-based working can ensure service delivery is tailored to different local needs and priorities across the County, while maintaining the necessary scale to maximise financial benefits.

The debate about LGR tends to contrast scale with local reach and connectivity. It is not a binary choice between these things. Any new local government structure must be organised to deliver both, otherwise they will be sub-optimal. Recent case studies, for example North Yorkshire Council, have demonstrated how this combination of scale and local connectivity can be delivered.

A number of county areas that have split into smaller unitaries have experienced significant financial challenges with several already in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support.

2c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money

All six Warwickshire Councils face significant financial challenges to varying extents. In 2025/26, there is a cumulative savings target of £30.1m, which rises to £97.8m by 2028/29. The key risks more generally are:

- Demand and cost pressures particularly in Adult Social Care, Children and Families, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Home to School Transport, homelessness/temporary accommodation, and national policy changes relating to all of these areas.
- Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block (SEND) deficits, which cumulatively stands at £84.7m in Warwickshire.
- Local government funding reform due to take effect in the Comprehensive Spending Review from April 2026, including the delayed Business Rates reset; and
- Funding infrastructure arising from population growth, with linked considerations around borrowing capacity and debt

The total revenue spend across the six Warwickshire authorities was £1.656bn in 2023/24, the last year for which published, standardised data is available. See Figure 1. The two largest elements of spend are employee costs and third party spend.

In terms of how the £1.656bn is funded, £1.025bn (62%) is income specific to the services being delivered, whether in the form of sales, fees and charges or government grants. Only £631m (38%) is general income where there is greater choice at a local level as to how the income is used.

Fig. 1 Local Revenue and Spending 2023/24

	North Warwickshire £k	Nuneaton and Bedworth £k	Rugby £k	Stratford-on-Avon £k	Warwick £k	Warwickshire CC £k	Total £k
Spending							
Employees	9,713	14,940	17,539	10,633	19,871	331,424	404,120
Third party costs of running services	12,157	19,119	25,244	33,663	41,807	949,366	1,081,356
Other current spend (primarily housing benefits)	9,397	23,974	13,814	21,466	23,037	1,290	90,398
Non-current spend (primarily capital financing)	210	3,299	3,039	956	7,428	26,016	40,948
Net contribution to reserves	4,268	1,525	6,388	9,439	-	17,838	39,458
Total spending	35,745	62,857	66,024	76,157	92,143	1,323,354	1,656,280
Financing							
Sales, fees and charges and other income	-£9,998	-£19,935	-£25,039	-£23,841	-£36,531	-£393,870	-£509,214
Service specific grant income	-£10,181	-£26,464	-£15,740	-£26,123	-£25,009	-£412,179	-£515,696
Non-current income (primarily capital financing)	-£1,794	-£2,321	-£4,335	-£4,933	-£8,339	-£36,585	-£58,307
Use of reserves	-£142	£0	£0	£0	-£3,035	-£29,262	-£32,439
Business rate and general government grant	-£7,381	-£4,016	-£11,993	-£7,555	-£6,867	-£88,602	-£126,414
Council Tax income	-£6,249	-£10,121	-£8,917	-£13,705	-£12,362	-£362,856	-£414,210
Total financing	-£35,745	-£62,857	-£66,024	-£76,157	-£92,143	-£1,323,354	-£1,656,280

	North Warwickshire £k	Nuneaton and Bedworth £k	Rugby £k	Stratford-on-Avon £k	Warwick £k	Warwickshire CC £k	Total £k
Spending							
Employees	27%	24%	27%	14%	22%	25%	24%
Third party costs of running services	34%	30%	38%	44%	45%	72%	65%
Other current spend (primarily housing benefits)	26%	38%	21%	28%	25%	0%	5%
Non-current spend (primarily capital financing)	1%	5%	5%	1%	8%	2%	2%
Net contribution to reserves	12%	2%	10%	12%	0%	1%	2%
Total spending	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Financing							
Sales, fees and charges and other income	28%	32%	38%	31%	40%	30%	31%
Service specific grant income	28%	42%	24%	34%	27%	31%	31%
Non-current income (primarily capital financing)	5%	4%	7%	6%	9%	3%	4%
Use of reserves	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	2%	2%
Business rate and general government grant	21%	6%	18%	10%	7%	7%	8%
Council Tax income	17%	16%	14%	18%	13%	27%	25%
Total financing	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Both one and two unitary models would provide opportunities for minimising current duplication in service delivery and enhance efficiencies through:

- Streamlined, integrated planning functions and zonal planning policies delivering housing targets and major infrastructure quickly and at scale
- Integration of connected services e.g. social care and housing to improve the quality of people's lives
- Consolidated support service functions with the scale to maximise the use of data, new technology and innovation, and address risks of workforce capacity and capability most effectively
- Single access points for one-stop customer service, and opportunities for more joined-up, preventative services drawing on predictive analytics
- Streamlining of contractual arrangements for areas such as household waste and recycling, leisure, grounds maintenance, housing, ICT systems and HR payroll systems.
- Increased operational scale which enables financial benefits to be realised through economies of scale.
- Reductions in property costs and more effective management of supply chains for contracting and procurement. Maintaining scale and purchasing power avoids disruption of current, effective market management for highest cost services, with large scale commissioning arrangements delivered across the Coventry and Warwickshire footprint.

Greater operational scale provides greater savings, lower costs and faster payback for a more financially resilient model, which is a material factor given the £97.8m financial gap across the six councils by 2028/29 and wider risks to resource levels from funding reform

and business rates reset. Maximising these benefits would also make it more likely that much valued, non-statutory local services could be maintained.

Recently unitarised councils face the same underlying pressures and financial risks as their predecessors. However, the savings from reorganisation help mitigate some of those risks, remove unnecessary costs and help create a more financially sustainable and resilient council. While this requires high-quality implementation, significant opportunities exist for wider transformation to create more resilient and sustainable local government.

Fig.2 Approximate costs and benefits of the two models, based on updated estimates

The figures below provide working draft estimates updating the relative costs, benefits and payback of one and two unitaries. This data will be validated ahead of submission.

Key metrics (£m)	Single unitary	Two unitaries	Difference
Total annual benefit	c 21	c 17	c 4
One-off transition costs	- c 18	- c 25	- c 7
Annual disaggregation cost	NA	- c 10	- c 10
One-year impact of disaggregation	NA	- c 19	- c 19
Net benefit after 5 years	c 82	c 8	c 74
Recurring benefit after 5 years	c 21	c 7	c 14
Payback period (years)	1	4	3

Evidence from new unitaries performance suggests that the estimated £21.1m recurrent savings for a single unitary are realistic for a County the size of Warwickshire. North Yorkshire Council, established in April 2023, reports that unitarisation has enabled delivery of more than £40 million in savings by March 2026.

Two unitaries offers significantly lower benefits due to the additional costs of service provision across two councils and the requirement for additional overhead such as two sets of senior managers, heads of service and support services, which increases cost and reduces economies of scale.

Value for money benefits would be significantly lower as a result of existing county council delivered services such as education, children and families and adult social care being disaggregated. This could have the following impacts:

- Increased cost through loss of market influence and scale, duplication of management and loss of existing partnership working across health and care systems.
- Risks creating winner and loser between two new councils. Further work is needed to understand how budgets and funding would split between the two unitaries but the loss of scale, and likely equalisation of Government grants would be a material risk.
- The SEND deficit is likely to create serious financial sustainability risk for any configuration of new councils, but two unitaries would have weaker balance sheets to manage it.
- Increased competition for workforce by increasing demand for roles in an employment market that is already struggling to fulfil demand nationally.
- Potential long-term disruption for workforce recruitment and retention
- Increased complexity for service delivery for social care functions
- Increased risk of disruption to critical services and safeguarding arrangements
- Resource, experience and knowledge of individuals could be unequally distributed between the two authorities
- Greater difficulty maintaining important local services, often non-statutory, without the maximum financial savings from reorganisation.

- Additional competition for third party providers which could lead to instability in the care markets and impact the quality and capacity of commissioning
- Fragmented strategic oversight, impacting information sharing and simplicity of the system

The WCC 2020 Case for Change modelled two further, more transformational scenarios, with much higher potential savings and associated increases in implementation costs. Additional benefits were higher, and implementation costs lower, for a single unitary compared with two. This suggests further, longer-term savings are achievable above the base case that has been modelled previously.

Developing a clear benefits realisation framework will be a key priority for the final business case. This will ensure transparency and accountability to residents and stakeholders for achieving the financial and service benefits of local government reform in Warwickshire.

2d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

For a single unitary model, our latest working estimate of the one-off transition costs is around c£18m, generating estimated annual savings of c£21m leading to a payback period of one year and a net financial benefit of c£82m after five years.

In a two unitary model our working estimate of the one-off transition costs totals c£25m, generating estimated net annual savings of c£7m leading to a payback period of four years and a net financial benefit after five years of c£8m.

We would expect the existing councils to be able to fund transition costs proportionately from reserves. This is more affordable for the lower costs of a single unitary.

Flexible use of capital receipts would be the contingency option and a mechanism to fund longer-term, more fundamental transformation savings subject to business case. This would increase borrowing costs.

The additional implementation costs of two unitaries would limit the potential scale of transformation and make it more likely the new councils would need to rely more heavily on flexible use of capital receipts to fund transition costs.

Emerging conclusions - be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

The evidence shows that a single unitary council for Warwickshire is the only option which meets the Government's minimum population size guiding principle of 500,000. There is currently no evidence to justify Warwickshire being exceptional. Both one or two unitary councils would need to tailor services to the different needs, profiles and priorities in different parts of Warwickshire.

The evidence shows a single unitary delivering a materially higher level of savings, for a lower implementation cost, and with a faster payback period. There are significant additional costs, opportunity costs and delivery risks of disaggregating major services currently provided on a countywide basis, risking quality and continuity of service for the most vulnerable residents.

There is a very strong and clear value for money case for a single unitary which avoids the duplication and complexity of having more than one council in the area with populations too small to generate the scale benefits that accrue with populations above 500,000.

Significant financial pressures and risks will impact on any future local government structure, A single unitary would be able to spread risk across a stronger balance sheet and benefit from significantly higher financial savings from its scale.

Estimated transition costs are 28% lower for a single unitary council and are therefore more affordable and of a scale current reserve levels could support.

Next Steps

Work to commence with services to produce full analysis of costs, efficiencies and savings in each of the two models which will include:

1. Developing a more granular understanding of different service delivery models across the county, and opportunities to redesign services and harmonise policies, service offers and delivery methods.
2. Building a consolidated picture of central support services, delivery models, staffing and costs to more fully understand opportunities to rationalise and streamline provision.
3. Identifying medium- and longer-term contractual commitments for externalised service delivery which may impact the delivery of savings.
4. Calculation of any workforce implications from the estimated reduction in employee costs under both scenarios.
5. Gaining a better understanding of where income levels are a particular risk.
6. A more detailed balance sheet analysis to understand financial resilience and risks to financial sustainability across both scenarios, including specific investigation of balance sheet issues identified during the initial phase of work.
7. Detailed development of scenarios and options for Council Tax harmonisation based on initial work.
8. Develop a clear benefits realisation framework and clear metrics to include in the final business case to ensure transparency, grip and accountability for delivering genuine improvements for residents, businesses and communities.

Criteria 3: Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens

Working Principles

- **Prioritising prevention** - Prevention should underpin the design of services in a unitary Council, maximising the benefits of service integration in a single tier; residents, businesses, VCSE bodies and partners should notice an improved, more joined-up service offer because of unitarisation bringing key value streams together. The new model should design services based on a clear understanding of service purpose from residents' perspective and identifying and removing failure demand to improve outcomes and value for money.
- **Universal access and joined up services** - The new model should bring together access to services into a common framework with a choice of access channels; one front door, phone number and website replacing the current multitude of access points. The benefit this would give residents who currently must navigate different councils for different services would be felt immediately. Scale should allow the development of a single, integrated customer platform, building on the County's work to support effective digital services, creating capacity for the new council to maintain face-to-face and phone channels for those who need or prefer them.
- **Digital, data and innovative solutions** - The effective use of digital and data at large scale can underpin service delivery and facilitate preventative approaches. Effective use of data and insight will enable interventions to be targeted where they will achieve the most impact; monitor and evaluate that impact, and so improve overall value for money. Artificial Intelligence can be used to support staff decision-making and release capacity to improve productivity and value for money.
- **System wide data sharing** - The new model should embed quicker, easier data sharing with partners to support effective service design and delivery, in particular prevention and predictive analytics, and support services can be integrated, focus on adding value to front-line delivery, and designed to address current workforce pressures and challenges.
- **Public service reform** – the same principles would underpin public service reform, as well as a need to develop strong place-based approaches to support integrated neighbourhood teams and preventative approaches to service delivery.
- **Disaggregation** – proposals should minimise the risks and negative impacts of disaggregating services best delivered at scale.

3a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services

The main opportunities to improve value for money are:

Economy - doing things at less cost

- Increased purchasing power and ability to achieve contract management savings through increased buying power and scale.
- A need for fewer councillors and senior managers, smaller support functions, fewer offices and IT systems than the current set of organisations.
- Investment in digital, data and infrastructure will be cheaper on a wider scale, saving money in the long-term.

Efficiency - doing more for the same or less

- Improved administrative, business support and other support services, maximising the benefits of AI to digitise manual and time-consuming activities at scale

- More efficient provision of central support functions
- Rationalise services currently provided at both County and District/Borough level, such as Waste, and Planning where responsibilities are split across the two-tier model.

Effectiveness - doing things better

- Ultimately, early intervention and getting things right for individuals and communities at the earliest opportunity can prevent future, long-term demand and reduce costs of systemic failure. For example, savings have already been delivered by helping people live more independently, reducing delayed transfers of care.
- Reduce failure demand in customer service through a single point of access and accountability for service provision and a more holistic, joined-up service. For example, bringing together economic growth, business support and skills; housing, infrastructure and a single, integrated planning service; a unified arts and culture offer; and aligning green spaces, leisure and public health.
- Bringing together Adult Social Care and Housing to create a holistic approach to complex issues, including homelessness, mental health, unstable accommodation and joblessness can save money in the long-term through early, life-changing intervention across the complex range of needs.
- Bringing together Public Health, Leisure and Social Care to reduce demand on the care system by improving wider determinants of Health, early years outcomes, and integrating the prevention offer
- Taking a strategic approach to innovation, for example supporting priority families, and applying 'what works' on a broader scale and in a targeted way, informed by predictive data and analytics. This will improve results and reduce costs.

A single unitary model would avoid fragmentation of services currently delivered on a county wide footprint such as Social Care, Education, Highways, Fire and Rescue services, the Warwickshire Pension Fund and Warwickshire Property and Development Group. It would also enable aggregation and potential economies of scale of services currently delivered at district/ borough level.

A single unitary model would support continuity of delivery, avoid duplication and interruption of critical changes such as the Families First for Children pathfinder, the Resourcing to Risk operating model in Fire, pension reform, housing delivery at scale through WPDG, and development of integrated health and social care services across the ICS footprint.

Two unitaries would join up services across two geographies, providing some efficiencies in delivery through synergies between services currently provided over two tiers. In each case this effort would be duplicated and there would be a risk of fragmentation of approaches currently provided on a county footprint as well as disruption to current public service delivery partnerships and footprints. There would also be negative consequences of disruption, duplication, additional cost and loss of scale from disaggregating major service areas currently provided successfully on a countywide footprint.

To avoid disaggregation, 'Trust models' have been established in other areas which have moved forward with a two unitary model. Trust models remain an option but lose the benefit of service delivery synergies that exist within a unitary model. In addition, there can be a risk to financial and organisational resilience given to non-statutory services and shared service arrangements.

Recent efforts to create a South Warwickshire 'super-district' council did not progress. The reasons for this, as set out in a recent *lessons learned* report, remain relevant factors in considering a two unitary model for Warwickshire.

3b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.

There are public service reform opportunities to embed prevention, delivering efficiencies through more joined up service delivery and earlier intervention. Such approaches reduce future, long-term demand, build stronger communities and reduce long-term cost to public services.

Integrated neighbourhood services, underpinned by predictive data analytics and digital/AI models, can support a more solutions-focused approach to supporting people. Joining up local authority and partner services is critical to improving outcomes and reducing long-term costs.

A single unitary offers an aligned service footprint with Warwickshire Police, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service, Social Care and Public Health and the Integrated Care System. This would be the case with two unitaries, yet delivery and partnership working would be more complex and the opportunity for public service reform would be more challenging across the system.

Investment in digital, data and infrastructure is more cost effective on a wider scale, saving money in the long-term and maximising the scope for digital transformation and innovation both within the new council/s and with partners. This would facilitate decision-making, support AI applications, use of productivity tools to make best use of valuable staff time, and use of technology to automate tasks currently undertaken by staff, transforming the workforce and saving significant cost and time.

Benefits are likely to be higher in a single unitary scenario, and up-front costs reduced. There would be scope for collaboration between two unitaries on digital transformation to reduce cost and duplicated effort.

There are opportunities to rationalise service delivery in areas such as waste collection and disposal, recycling, planning, housing & rent management, council tax collection, parking management & enforcement, and use technology to make those operations significantly more efficient, effective and economical.

The current model involves significant failure demand in customer service through residents not understanding which council to contact, confusion about who is responsible for what and a fragmented delivery system. Unitary local government should deliver a single point of access for residents, accountability for service provision and a more holistic, joined-up service.

3c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety

The process of disaggregating Adult and Children's Social Care functions is likely to add a layer of complexity to service delivery and increase the risk of disruption to critical services and safeguarding arrangements. It is also likely to disrupt performance trajectories which in most areas are positive, especially Children's services which moved from 'requires improvement' in 2017 to 'good' in 2022 and is now a trailblazing national pathfinder for the

Stable Homes Built on Love reforms. Children's Services now provide support to other Local Authority children's services' improvement journeys.

The majority of Adult Social Care costs are in commissioning services to support residents. Disaggregation introduces additional parties into the social care system which could create a competitive environment for third party providers. Whilst market competition is healthy, it can also create instability in care markets and impact on the capacity and quality of commissioning. Warwickshire County Council's adult social care costs are low as a result of effective market management and oversight over many years. Loss of scale and influence is very likely to affect the ability of successor councils to maintain such competitive pricing.

Through the DfE's Delivering Better Value programme, Warwickshire County Council has invested significantly in SEND provision and is on a positive trajectory in terms of outcomes, which are good for SEND children in the county. There are very significant financial pressures, however, with a large, unsustainable and growing High Needs Block deficit. Disaggregation would mean this being apportioned to two new councils with weaker balance sheets to manage the financial risks. This could impact quality of provision and outcomes.

In either model, homelessness services would be provided at a greater scale than currently, which would bring synergies and efficiencies and opportunities for integration with Public Health, Welfare services, Revenue and Benefits, and Social Care. Cost and complexity issues would be higher in a two unitary model.

In terms of community safety, there would be benefits of unitarisation through integration of district and county community safety functions. These would need effective locality approaches in any model, but strategic partnership working would be most effective at a countywide level given existing structures and the relatively small size of both Warwickshire Police and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. There are particular disaggregation risks for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service in a two unitary scenario which would likely require creation of a Combined Fire and Rescue Authority. This would carry an increased overhead and complexity of delivery at a time of significant reform to fire service delivery through implementation of the countywide Resourcing to Risk model.

Emerging conclusions - Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens

There are significant risks of disaggregating major countywide services, not only Adult and Children's Social Care and Education but also Fire and Rescue, Highways, Home to School Transport and the Warwickshire Pension Fund. There are particular risks of disrupting high quality service delivery in Warwickshire's Children's services (which are a national pathfinder rated 'good' by Ofsted), adult social care services and the education system including SEND.

Some of the benefits of unitarisation, such as an integrated Waste Service, would be relatively more challenging to deliver in a two unitary scenario.

Quality of service would be affected by the financial position of the new structure, and there are greater risks to much valued non-statutory services with two smaller new unitaries with lower financial savings and weaker balance sheets to absorb risk.

Public service reform benefits will flow in either scenario, particularly synergies from bringing together services currently provided by different tiers. However, there would be additional complexity, cost and variation from doing so across two unitaries rather than one. Existing arrangements across the Coventry and Warwickshire public service geography, particularly

with the ICS and Police, would be complicated by splitting current countywide services into two.

Implications for partner agencies is a consideration to be addressed. Whilst it is not central to this interim submission, it is a key consideration for this County, which is committed to dedicated Warwickshire Police and Fire Services.

Irrespective of the final model, it will be essential to embed effective place-based working and neighbourhood working in localities. Integrated teams, effective use of data, predictive analytics and digital will allow greater targeting of services and embed a preventative approach.

Next Steps

1. Further consideration of national analysis of the estimated costs of disaggregating County Council services in a two-unitary solution will be taken from the work on adult and children's social care and education.
2. Detailed analysis to allocate service costs to two unitaries and estimate the allocation of funding between the two councils.
3. Work to commence with services to produce full analysis of impacts of both models on service planning, delivery and partnerships with supporting data and forecasting
4. Engage with Warwickshire District and Borough Councils to create a workstream looking at digital and data systems, strategies and initiatives across Warwickshire Councils, and identify opportunities to rationalise and transform through digital and data.
5. Engage with Warwickshire District and Borough Councils to identify opportunities for public service reform through rationalised and integrated service delivery models.
6. Identify procurement/contract management opportunities for major savings through scale, for example licences, consolidation of 'reusable components' in the ICT architecture, and develop an early ICT systems roadmap for the new council/s.

Criteria 4.

How councils have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

Working Principles

- **Work with all local authorities** – engagement with Districts, Boroughs, Town and Parish Councils will underpin development of proposals.
- **Engage all key stakeholders** - engagement with wider stakeholders will underpin development of proposals, particularly Coventry and Warwickshire Anchor Alliance partners, the VCSE sector and community groups, and business.
- **Collaborate on solutions** – getting the right balance between a collaborative approach and clarity to move as quickly as possible to developing a firm business case for a specific proposition.
- **Represent local identities** - Our engagement approach will reflect the diversity of Warwickshire's places, and the culture and identity of the county and places within it.

4a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal

- Meeting the needs of residents must be at the heart of local government reform in Warwickshire.
- Whilst it has not been possible to engage directly with stakeholders ahead of the submission of the interim plan, this will be part of the next phase between April and final submission in November.
- A regular meeting of the County, Borough and District Council Leader and Chief Executives has been established, and there has been initial dialogue with Town and Parish Councils, business groups, key strategic partners, public service providers and wider stakeholders.

Chief Executives have also met with representatives from MHCLG to share our approach and inform the proposals and Interim Plan content.

4b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.

Warwickshire has a rich and diverse history with globally recognised sites and assets in all District and Boroughs. Warwickshire is 'Shakespeare's County' and much more. With a recognised county brand – people know Warwickshire.

Recognition and respect for the county's cultural, historic and local identities will be critical to successful local government reform in Warwickshire. The locality approach is set out in more detail under Criterion 5.

4c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed

To date local engagement has focused on the development of the interim plan and engagement with local councils (districts, boroughs and Town and Parish). Initial stakeholder engagement conversations have also taken place.

A web page has been created to provide basic factual information and shared across Warwickshire councils.

The County Council met for an Extraordinary Meeting LGR Debate on 18th February with invitations extended to all District and Borough Leaders. Unanimous agreement resolved to submit a proposal to the Minister.

Emerging conclusions - how councils have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

Councils in Warwickshire are developing alternative, different proposals. As outlined elsewhere, all councils are engaged and working collaboratively.

Next Steps

1. Engagement with local councils (district and borough and Town and Parish) will continue.
2. A full stakeholder engagement plan will be developed and delivered from April 2025 to seek views on, and build understanding of, the options and evidence base.
3. Engagement will take place with relevant stakeholders to shape full proposals.
4. Plans for continuing engagement with Council staff and Trade Unions will be developed.
5. Shared opportunities for engagement will be explored with the District and Borough Councils.

Criteria 5.

Support devolution arrangements

Working Principles

- **Coventry & Warwickshire** - Warwickshire should seek a strategic authority which preserves the fundamental importance of the Coventry and Warwickshire functional economic geography and public service delivery footprint;

- **Credible County** - One strategic authority should cover the whole of Warwickshire, in line with the Government's principle of 'alignment' between devolution and public sector boundaries;
- **Ambition for further devolution** - Reflecting a high ambition for devolution of both powers and resources, Warwickshire will seek the most ambitious level of devolution available, in line with priorities agreed by Warwickshire County Council's Member Working Group on devolution; and
- **Alignment of agendas** - There must be a connection between the identity of Warwickshire and the Strategic Authority, and sufficient proximity for residents to engage with the Strategic Authority and hold it to account.

a) Early views as to the councillor numbers of each new unitary authority that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area

Both models would significantly reduce the number of Councillors. Residents will have clarity about representation and accountability for all local government services and time will be saved in terms of handling queries which are for the other tier of council.

A move to a single unitary authority would likely result in a range of 80 - 120 councillors, a reduction from the current 257 council seats. This is based on average ratios from other areas that have moved to a single unitary council and would be subject to the outcome of a Boundary Commission Review

Based on current population figures and ratios from other areas which have moved to a two unitary model, a South Warwickshire unitary authority would likely have 48-62 councillors and a North Warwickshire unitary authority, 52-66 councillors. This would increase the cost of democracy.

However, these are working assumptions, and any democratic changes would be made following a Full Business Case and an independent Boundary Commission review.

In the event that a Boundary Commission Review were not concluded in time for elections, councillor numbers for the shadow authority arrangements and/or the new council(s) would be developed with Government.

b) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

See below.

c) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

Warwickshire alone does not meet the minimum population size set by government of 1.5m for a strategic authority.

Whilst sharing a border with six other counties and the WMCA area (Coventry, Solihull and Birmingham) the only strategic authority in the region is the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) which is an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority .

The WMCA was formed in 2016 on the footprint of the three Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) – Birmingham and Solihull, the Black Country and Coventry & Warwickshire.

All six Warwickshire local authorities are non-constituent members of the WMCA. Coventry City Council is a full constituent member of the WMCA and is not seeking to leave the WMCA to form another arrangement.

Warwickshire councils are engaged in the work of the WMCA, and whenever possible, ensure our strategic approaches align and interface with each other. With Coventry being a full member of the WMCA and also the other half of the Coventry and Warwickshire economic footprint, it is essential that this alignment, if not integration, continues.

There are many examples of Warwickshire working hand in hand with the WMCA. Warwick District is the location for the Coventry & Warwickshire Gigapark which is a key part of the West Midlands Investment Zone, and brings significant financial benefits to Warwickshire (£5.5 billion private sector investment, 30,000 new jobs by 2034, £1.5bn business rates retention over 25 years and significant benefits specific to Warwick District Council from business rates retention, and a share of £160m Government investment).

Consequently, full membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority appears the logical option in terms of maintaining the critical Coventry and Warwickshire economic geography, driving housing delivery and addressing climate change. At the same time, it would enable Warwickshire to access the fullest suite of devolution benefits. This would require consent of the new Warwickshire Council/s, the Mayor and the Secretary of State.

Surrounding Warwickshire, other Strategic Authority alliances are emerging. None of these appear to offer the synergies and economic strategic alignment right for Warwickshire.

Under a single unitary model, the County would be able to offer considerable economic benefit, influence and scale to a Strategic Authority, and more easily build on existing strategic partnerships and relationships.

d) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

Given Warwickshire's size it should be possible to join a Strategic Authority which meets Government criteria and ensures sensible population size ratios. This would be the case if full membership of WMCA was the final direction, with timelines aligning and the next WMCA mayoral elections scheduled for 2028.

Emerging conclusions - support devolution arrangements

Further work is needed to identify a way forward for the next stage of devolution for Warwickshire which already enjoys a foundation non-mayoral devolution agreement.

Full constituent membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority would require consent of the new Warwickshire Council/s, the Mayor and the Secretary of State. Warwickshire County Council has not yet had any discussion with the Mayor or the WMCA. Should MHCLG indicate support for opening such discussions then this would be addressed.

Alternatively, there are a number of potential strategic authority configurations with various neighbouring authorities, none of which have obvious synergies and each of which would

create challenges due to geographical size, including accountability, identity and the challenge of a legitimate mayor over such a geography.

Next Steps

1. Continue to assess the Devolution and Strategic Authority options for Warwickshire and produce a more detailed options appraisal.
2. Engage with regional partners and stakeholders, including the Mayor of the WMCA, to explore Strategic Authority options for Warwickshire.
3. Engage with MHCLG on the Strategic Authority options for Warwickshire in the context of a single unitary and a two unitary model and the implications in terms of timeframes and process.

Criteria 6.

Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Working principles

- **Strategic scale with local connection and accountability:** the new structure should balance strategic services, scale and influence with local, place-based working and proximity, with clear democratic and scrutiny processes which should facilitate local planning, decision-making and scrutiny;
- **Building community power, civic pride and capacity;** the new operating model should drive community powered working by involving communities in decision-making, working alongside communities to take practical action, and enabling communities to lead. Flexible arrangements should allow Town and Parish Councils and local community groups to take on responsibility for assets and services, and ensure local civic pride is embedded in the new structures. Investing in communities to build capacity and social fabric must be central to new ways of working for the Council(s);
- **Place-based working:** wherever possible, service-delivery should reflect the overarching 'place' footprints to be further defined and aligned to wider partnership models. Combining the local proximity of the existing lower tier councils alongside strategic scale, to allow fully joined-up thinking about need, local priorities and impact through a more preventative model;
- **Joined-up neighbourhood teams and services with a visible Council presence in communities:** council, partner and community services should be delivered through locally based and integrated teams, focused on prevention. Existing Council assets, including libraries and local offices could act as the main neighbourhood access point to Council services and support; locality teams should act as the 'glue' in their local area, working horizontally across services and partners to support place-based working to meet different local needs and priorities;
- **Data, resources and impact:** strong locality data and evidence, including local resident and business views, should underpin clear locality plans, resource allocation and evaluation; and
- **Council culture:** community-powered, place-based working at the core of future organisational culture, values and behaviours.

6a. Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged

At the Council meeting of 18th February 2025, County Councillors emphasised the critical importance of engaging with communities on local government reform and considering any proposals from the perspective of residents and service users.

Warwickshire has a rich combination of very different places and communities, with different needs, characteristics and priorities. Robust and meaningful engagement with residents' needs should be at the forefront of the design and delivery of any new unitary structure(s) for Warwickshire, building on existing mechanisms to flex countywide services to different local needs.

The ambition is to place communities at the forefront and heart of the new unitary structure(s), creating the conditions and opportunities for people and places to flourish in resilient and self-reliant communities.

Flexible, scalable arrangements should underpin the new model, with strategic countywide service delivery underpinned by working at place. Locality-based working on a footprint of local population is possible under both a single and two unitary model, and size of footprint will need to be configured and optimised.

A standing representative residents' panel, 'The Voice of Warwickshire', already exists and could evolve to combine countywide feedback with more tailored local engagement.

A key opportunity presented by a single, larger Council will be balancing strategic reach, scale and influence with a flexible model to work at place level. Modelling for place-based arrangements will be developed following further engagement.

As part of that, a major opportunity is the ability to develop community networks and associated community boards on a local, community footprint aligning as far as possible with ward, health and Community Safety Partnership geographies.

There are opportunities to align and devolve resources to places and localities, which could involve:

- increased pooling of budgets at place across the Integrated Care System and potentially beyond, as integrated neighbourhood working matures.
- pooling existing Councillor and community grants from across councils into a new community grant system aligned to new Community Boards. This could also expand and embed existing community-powered grant schemes such as the Social Fabric Fund and Green Shoots Community Climate Change Fund, giving local communities more control of resources; and
- Expanding LSOA pilots, developed as part of the countywide approach to Creating Opportunities, within future place, community and neighbourhood ways of working.

There is a significant opportunity to utilise the full public asset base to provide visibility and access to services locally. Town Halls, Libraries and office buildings could provide space for partners and VCSE groups to develop innovative services to support prevention and improve outcomes, with a particular focus on cross-cutting issues like worklessness and skills, welfare, debt and homelessness, children outside school, parenting, children's health, and mental health. Clearly, such co-location opportunities would benefit the wider 'public purse'.

6b. Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

There is strong potential to build on and enhance Warwickshire’s vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector and Community Powered Warwickshire programme. This programme has been developed with ‘New Local’ and partners, as a foundation of a new operating model, ways of working and organisational culture.

The County Council’s [Creating Opportunities Programme](#) and Community Powered Warwickshire approach (see below) are testing new models of public sector reform. Initiatives such as the £1m Green Shoots Community Climate Change Fund, the £2.5m Social Fabric Fund (investing in the 22 most deprived LSOAs in the County), and the Social Impact Fund which invested in communities most affected by Covid-19, have all shown the impact of giving communities resources to progress their key priorities and build social infrastructure, targeting the places with the highest need of support.

Figure 3. Creating Opportunities Programme.



Currently, all Warwickshire councils organise services on local place footprints. By definition, the district and borough councils have excellent community reach and connections. Bringing these strengths together into a single council at a local place level offers the opportunity to reform public service delivery in Warwickshire by combining strategic scale and efficiencies with genuine place-based and locality working.

Locally, there is a major opportunity to grow localism by devolving resources, powers and decision-making to Town and Parish Councils where there is the will, capacity and capability to do so. This will enhance the connection between very local and countywide decisions. There is scope to extend the coverage and role of Town and Parish Councils across the whole County geography. This will enable offering a flexible menu of options for Town and Parish Councils to take on responsibility for local services, budgets and assets, and review and refresh the Parish Council Charter to reflect new arrangements.

Emerging conclusions - enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

There are no significant differences between the models against this criterion.

Both models require strong community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment to maximise the benefits of reorganisation. Both should be able to deliver this very effectively, working with Warwickshire's vibrant voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, along with local businesses.

Next steps

1. Working with partners and stakeholders, undertake an options appraisal working at place level to enhance public service reform.
2. Work with partners and stakeholders to fully scope the options for place-based arrangements including formal governance structures such as Place Committees and Planning Committees and also local Community Networks/Boards.
3. Work with WALC and TAPC to scope up double devolution options for willing Town and Parish Councils. Schedule regular extended meetings of the County Council's existing Town and Parish Reference Group, to discuss local government reorganisation and devolution to ensure parish voices are heard and help shape the final submission.
4. Conduct a Community Governance Review, working with partners to develop specific plans and options for extending Town and Parish Councils to cover the entire geography.
5. Develop proposals to maximise financial resources available to support place-based and locality working, for example place-based budget opportunities, particularly through discussions with the ICB, Town and Parish Councils and VCSE groups

Meeting the Interim plan requirements

- a. Any barriers or challenges – None identified at this stage
- b. Options for the size and boundaries of new councils. – Criteria 1 and 2
- c. Indicative service transformation planning costs – Criteria 2
- d. Early views as to the councillor numbers - Criteria 5
- e. Early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions. – Criteria 5
- f. Summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views - Criteria 4
- g. Indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team and capacity funding across the area - Criteria 2
- h. Arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward – Criteria 4