

## **Frequently asked questions about devolution and local government reorganisation**

### **What is devolution?**

In England, devolution is the transfer of powers and funding from national to local government.

The current Government has made devolution a priority and set out plans to create a new network of Strategic Authorities that will cover the whole of England by 2029. The new authorities will be led by elected mayors and will cover a number of local council areas.

Derbyshire is already covered by a strategic authority, since the election of the East Midlands Mayor and establishment of the [East Midlands Combined County Authority](#) in 2024.

The Government explained these plans in an [English Devolution White Paper](#), published in December 2024.

This paper also set out plans for local government reorganisation.

### **What is local government reorganisation?**

Local government reorganisation is the process by which the geographic remit and the roles and responsibilities of local authorities are restructured.

As part of its plans for devolution, the Government announced a programme of local government reorganisation in areas with a ‘two-tier’ system (as currently exists in areas like Derbyshire), and also of small unitary councils (like the city council that covers Derby) that are part of or neighbour such areas.

In short this means that under the Government’s plans, district, borough, county and small unitary councils will no longer exist. They will be replaced by new unitary councils which will provide all council services to the communities they cover.

The Government believes that local government reorganisation, together with devolution over a larger strategic area, will improve public services and support economic growth.

### **What is the current structure of local government in Derbyshire?**

Derbyshire is a two-tier area served by eight district and borough councils and a county council.

The city of Derby is contained within the boundary of Derbyshire, but all council services are provided by Derby City Council, which is already a unitary council.

In total, 10 different councils provide services across the county:

### **‘Lower tier’ councils**

The lower tier councils covering different areas of Derbyshire are Amber Valley Borough Council, Bolsover District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council, Erewash Borough Council, High Peak Borough Council, North East Derbyshire District Council and South Derbyshire District Council.

Lower tier councils are responsible for services including:

- rubbish collection
- recycling
- housing
- benefits and council tax
- planning
- leisure

### **‘Upper tier’ council – Derbyshire County Council**

Upper tier councils are responsible for services including:

- education
- transport
- social care
- libraries
- waste management

### **Unitary councils – Derby City Council**

A ‘unitary council’ is responsible for providing all council services to the communities it serves.

Each of the 10 councils has its own political leadership and senior management team and sets its own share of the Council Tax bill.

### **Town and parish councils**

Some areas also have town or parish councils which are much smaller in scale and are responsible for services, facilities and public spaces within a community such as parks, village halls, allotments, litter bins, local events, etc.

These councils are not covered by the Government’s plans for local government reorganisation and will not be directly impacted by the proposed changes.

### What does this mean for High Peak?

Unless there is a complete reversal of the policy set out in the Government's English Devolution White Paper, there is currently no route by which we (or Derbyshire County Council or any other of the borough / district councils listed above) can continue to operate as a council in the future.

As things stand, we will become part of a larger unitary council. Most new unitary authorities are expected to be in place from April 2028.

Be reassured that we will continue to put our communities first – and our services will continue to operate as normal until then – while we work through the local government reorganisation process alongside our partners.

### Can councils opt out of this process?

We cannot opt out. All councils must follow the process that is set out in the Government's English Devolution White Paper, and 'no change' is not an option.

The Government has been clear that it wants all councils in two-tier areas and neighbouring smaller unitary councils to bring forward proposals for reorganisation. It intends to deliver this process as quickly as possible, including through legislation, where it becomes necessary to ensure progress.

### What is the timeline for this to happen?

Below are the key dates within the Government's current timetable:

**March 2025** – Derbyshire's eight district and borough councils submitted a joint Interim Plan to Government in March 2025. Some further work was done to develop the options within this plan. What became a Proposal was put out for public consultation from 30 June to 10 August 2025.

**30 June to 10 August 2025** – public engagement about our Proposal took place with communities across Derbyshire, including High Peak. Over 7,300 people had their say, together with views put forward by public sector partners, businesses, community and voluntary groups and a range of other stakeholders across the whole of Derbyshire.

**August to October 2025** – detailed analysis of results and further evidence-gathering took place to help shape and develop a final Proposal.

**November 2025** – the final Proposal was considered by each of the nine councils' decision-making meetings.

**28 November 2025** – final proposals submitted to Government.

**Early 2026** – before implementing any proposal, the Government must legally consult any local authority that is affected by a proposal and any other stakeholders, including members of the public. This statutory consultation is expected to take place in early 2026.

**Summer 2026** – the Government has indicated it will make a final decision about which model of local government reorganisation will be implemented.

**May 2027** – elections for new shadow authorities would take place.

**April 2028** – new councils would start to operate.

### **What is the Government's criteria for local government proposals?**

Government set out criteria which local councils must follow when drawing up proposals, which include:

- a proposal should seek to achieve the establishment of a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned
- new councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
- new councils must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens
- new council structures must support devolution arrangements (in Derbyshire, this means working with the [East Midlands Combined County Authority](#))
- new councils should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

### **What if councils don't agree on one plan?**

The Government has said it would like all existing councils to work together and ideally reach agreement on the best way forward. However, the Government anticipates that in many county areas different final proposals will be submitted.

In Derbyshire, five proposals have been submitted to Government – the four options submitted under our joint 'One Derbyshire, Two Councils' plan (covered in more detail below), and a separate proposal from Derbyshire County Council, to create one large unitary council covering Derbyshire and Derby's 1.1 million residents.

### **Who will have the final say?**

The final decision on proposals for local government reorganisation will be taken by the Government, with a decision expected in the summer of 2026.

These proposals must be supported by evidence that shows they meet the Government's criteria.

### **What is your proposal for local government reorganisation in Derbyshire?**

In response to the Government's call for local councils to work together, Derbyshire's eight district and borough councils, and Derby City Council, have been working in partnership to draw up a joint approach.

In November 2025, Leaders of seven of Derbyshire's district and borough councils, together with the Leader of Derby City Council, officially submitted their local government reorganisation proposals to the Government – setting out the clear benefits of creating two new unitary councils to deliver all services to local people in the future.

The 'One Derbyshire, Two Councils' plan proposes to reduce the number of local authorities covering Derbyshire from 10 to two, with one covering the north of the county, and one covering the south.

The final 'case for change' document details the Leaders' collective vision 'for Derbyshire to be a place where people proudly work, live, belong and thrive' and how creating two new unitary councils would:

- Keep councils connected to local people – big enough to deliver but close enough to listen and respond to local needs.
- Better enable the provision of effective and value for money services – councils with the ambition and financial stability to transform the services residents receive, especially those relating to adult care, children's services, SEND and homelessness.
- Preserve local identity and protect Derbyshire's historic boundaries, cultural heritage and environmental assets.
- Meet Government's criteria for unitary local government – with the two councils each serving populations of around 500,000 people.
- Support the Mayor of the East Midlands and East Midlands Combined County Authority to grow an inclusive economy, reform public services and secure better outcomes for the region's communities.

The 'One Derbyshire, Two Councils' plan includes four separate proposals differentiated on the basis of where the boundary line between the northern and southern unitary councils could be drawn:

- Proposal A (supported by Amber Valley Borough Council):

- Amber Valley joins the northern Derbyshire unitary council with High Peak, Derbyshire Dales, Chesterfield, North East Derbyshire, and Bolsover.
- The southern council includes Derby City, South Derbyshire, and Erewash.
- Proposal B (supported by South Derbyshire District Council):
  - Amber Valley joins the southern Derbyshire unitary council with Derby City, South Derbyshire, and Erewash.
  - The northern council includes High Peak, Derbyshire Dales, Chesterfield, North East Derbyshire, and Bolsover.
- Proposal A1 (based on Proposal A, and supported by Bolsover and North East Derbyshire):
  - A boundary change is proposed using the geographies of existing parish councils within Amber Valley borough as the building blocks for the proposed configuration of the two new unitary councils, with the populations of the named parish councils either being part of the northern Derbyshire unitary council or the southern Derbyshire unitary council.
- Proposal B1 (based on Proposal B, and supported by High Peak, Chesterfield, Derby City and Erewash):
  - A boundary change is again proposed but this time using the geographies of different parish councils within Amber Valley borough as the building blocks for the proposed configuration of the two new unitary councils, with more of Amber Valley borough's population falling under the remit of the southern Derbyshire unitary council.

Derbyshire Dales District Council resolved not to approve the main 'One Derbyshire, Two Councils' case for change, but did formally support Proposal A1 as its preferred option for local government reorganisation in the area of the county of Derbyshire.

### **Why do you think creating two unitary councils is the best option for Derbyshire?**

This is a complex issue – but the people and places of our historic county have been at the heart of our work to develop a proposal for Derbyshire.

Our shared vision proposes a future where services are simpler, communities feel supported, and every part of our county thrives - together with a commitment to significantly transform the services that local people rely on.

We propose a new structure that:

- keeps councils connected to local people – big enough to deliver but close enough to listen and respond to local needs
- can provide effective and value for money services – with the vision and financial stability to transform the services residents receive
- preserves local identity and protect Derbyshire’s historic boundaries, cultural heritage and environmental assets
- meets the Government’s criteria for reorganisation, these include:
  - providing high quality and sustainable public services
  - working together to understand and meet local needs
  - creating opportunities for stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment
  - improving efficiency, capacity and financial resilience
  - supporting devolution

Derbyshire stretches from the borders of Manchester to Leicestershire, encompassing diverse communities from rural Peak District villages to market towns and the city of Derby.

Our approach recognises that local services cannot be one-size-fits-all. Two councils will be large enough to deliver efficiently whilst remaining close enough to our communities to understand and meet local needs.

The two new councils will collaborate where it makes sense to do so but can also tailor services to the needs of the local the areas they serve.

Opportunities for savings:

Reducing the number of councils from 10 to two will generate long-term savings through things like:

- reduced duplication of services
- fewer council buildings
- fewer councillors and senior managers
- better economies of scale

Financial analysis within the final proposal forecasts cumulative savings of £167m in the first six years, and an annual saving of £44m from year six onwards – equivalent to 3% of the total budget of all current Derbyshire councils.

Maintains Derbyshire's historic border:

Our proposal preserves local identity and protects Derbyshire's historic boundaries, cultural heritage and environmental assets.

Creates new opportunity for our future:

At a strategic level, reorganisation offers opportunities to:

- eliminate artificial boundaries that can hamper service delivery
- create stronger local leadership with enhanced capacity for transformation and modernisation
- develop more strategic approaches to economic development, regeneration and county-wide infrastructure development
- improve coordination between local services and external partners  
strengthen Derbyshire's voice in regional and national forums

The new councils will also be able to work more efficiently with the East Midlands Mayor and East Midlands Combined County Authority, which guides large-scale investment across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

Meets Government criteria:

Importantly, this approach meets the Government's criteria for reorganisation - if councils don't come up with a viable proposal for their areas, the Government has indicated it will impose (through legislation) a solution that it thinks will work for Derbyshire.

### **Have you considered other options?**

Leaders of the district and borough councils, along with Derby City Council, have been working together in response to the Government's request for proposals for local government reorganisation.

Since the start of 2025, a range of potential options have been explored and assessed in line with our priority to put people and places first, along with the Government's criteria for reorganisation.

We believe our final proposal puts us in the strongest position to create councils which are big enough to deliver, but close enough to listen and respond to our communities.

### **Are there any other proposals for Derbyshire?**

Derbyshire County Council was not involved in the initial development of the proposals by the boroughs, districts and the city.



It has developed its own proposal to create a single unitary council for the whole of the county. This would serve a population of £1.1million people - making it the second largest council in England, and Europe, and of a size similar to Birmingham City Council.

We don't believe a council this big would be able to effectively meet the needs of Derbyshire's diverse communities.

Although Derbyshire County Council has been developing a separate proposal to submit to Government, all ten councils have worked together to share information and ensure robust and accurate data is included to support the submission of proposals to Government.

### **Will the proposal save money?**

Reducing the number of councils from 10 to two will generate long-term savings through things like:

- reduced duplication of services
- fewer council buildings
- fewer councillors and senior managers
- better economies of scale

Financial analysis\* within the final proposal forecasts cumulative savings of £167m in the first six years, and an annual saving of £44m from year six onwards – equivalent to 3% of the total budget of all current Derbyshire councils.

\* The financial forecast is based on substantial research and analysis but can only ever be an estimation at this early stage and is subject to change.

### **How will these changes be paid for?**

The initial investment required to set up the new councils would be paid for out of the reserves of the existing councils. One-off investment costs need to be put into context of the overall £3.8 billion gross budget for the 10 Derbyshire councils.

Financial analysis within the final proposal forecasts that the initial investment would be recouped within roughly three-and-a-half years after their launch.

### **Which services would the new councils provide?**

Each of the two new councils would provide all council services to their area, rather than being split between the two tiers of local government as currently happens.

### **What will it mean for my current council services?**

If you live in a borough or district, where services are split between a district or borough and the county council, it means your services will ultimately be provided by a single 'unitary' council.

If you live in Derby, all your services will continue to be provided by a single council, but the area covered by the council will change.

### **Will my council services be disrupted during local government reorganisation?**

We know that it is really important to local people that we keep disruption to a minimum and ensure that our high quality local public services continue to support local communities during the transition.

We will make sure that all essential council services work together seamlessly. That covers everything from waste collection and housing support to public health and social care referrals.

There are already many examples of bringing together shared or joint services across Derbyshire and we will use this experience to minimise disruption for residents, businesses and staff.

### **Will you be closing any of the main council offices?**

We have not yet taken any decisions around things like the location of council offices.

However, as part of this process there will be opportunities to make savings and rationalise our 'assets' including council offices, and we will consider this as part of the development of our plans.

But please be reassured that we are committed to ensuring councils have a strong and visible presence in our communities.

### **Will Council Tax go up or down following reorganisation?**

It's too early to say what will happen to the level of Council Tax yet, as many other factors affect the rate it is set at.

What we do know is that councils which come together to form new unitary councils have to consider how they set a single level of Council Tax that people in the new council area pay. This is known as 'Council Tax harmonisation.'

### **Have local people had a say on your proposals for local government reorganisation?**

Council services have an impact on the everyday lives of people and organisations across our communities – and it's important that local people have a say about how these services are delivered in the future.

Local residents, businesses, public sector partners and community and voluntary groups were invited to put forward their views on our One Derbyshire, Two Councils proposal as part of extensive engagement activity , which ran from 30 June to 10 August 2025.

We gathered detailed feedback from organisations and partner networks from across the county, to ensure the views of our varied communities were represented.

Our engagement activities included a survey, in which over 7,300 residents participated in, we facilitated 27 in-person sessions that included hundreds of conversations, and interviewed all our key partners including the NHS, police and local businesses, which has provided valuable insights and information.

Feedback included valuable information contained within the ‘open’ questions, which allowed respondents to share their views outside of the structured questions, and tell us - in their own words - what is important to them, now and in the future.

An independent provider ran the survey and analysed the results on behalf of the nine councils.

The feedback we received from local people, businesses and partner organisations - along with a range of other evidence - have helped to shape our final Proposal.

Once a final proposal has been submitted, it will be for the Government to decide on whether it should be taken forward and there will be a further statutory consultation at that time. This will likely take place mid to late 2026.

### [What did people say and where can I see the results?](#)

The extensive survey and engagement activity generated a whole range of varied views and responses from residents, businesses and organisations across all parts of Derbyshire.

Feedback included valuable information contained within the ‘open’ questions, which allowed respondents to share their views outside of the structured questions, and tell us - in their own words - what is important to them, now and in the future.

The consistent message coming through from Derbyshire’s diverse communities was that people want simpler council structures that:

- remain close to residents
- improve services
- use public resources and money carefully

- a report setting out the full results of the public consultation has been produced by the independent provider which ran the survey on behalf of the nine partner councils (Public Perspectives)

It was published alongside the reports which were considered by High Peak Borough Council on Wednesday 5 November 2025 available to view [here](#)

**Read the detailed proposal**

Add link to Case for Change proposal and appendices