

Government invites Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset to submit locally-led proposals for unitary local government

The government has today (9 October 2020) [invited councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset](#) to submit locally-led proposals for unitary local government, responding to requests from these areas.

Councils in these 3 areas now have the opportunity to develop and submit their proposals for how they want to restructure local government in their area to establish unitary local government. This would mean moving from a two-tier system of county and district councils, to a system where there is a single tier for any given area.

For example, earlier this year legislation was signed to abolish 8 councils in Northamptonshire and replace them with 2 new unitary councils, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire.

In April this year, the county council and 4 district councils in Buckinghamshire were abolished and the new Buckinghamshire Council took on full local government functions and powers.

Invitations are being issued to councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset as these 3 areas are advanced in their discussions about local government restructuring and councils in these areas have asked for an invitation to be issued. Formally inviting them to submit proposals is the first step in the legal process towards restructuring.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset are already working on developing their locally-led unitary proposals and I am now giving them the opportunity to submit them for consideration.

Where there is local support, changing the structure of local government can offer better value for money and improved services for residents. We have always been clear that any restructuring of local government must continue to be locally-led and will not involve top-down solutions from government.

Councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset will now have the opportunity to decide whether to develop and submit their locally-led proposals with the aim of any new unitary councils being established in these areas by April 2023.

The government may receive more than one locally led proposal for each area reflecting the local debates. In the event of this, the Local Government Secretary will consider all proposals received and decide which, if any, subject to consultation and Parliamentary approval, to implement.

He will assess any locally-led proposal he receives against the longstanding criteria for unitarisation. These are that a proposal should improve the area's local government, command a good deal of local support across the area and cover an area that provides a credible geography.

The size of any unitary council will be considered, but should always take into account local identity and local geography, as well as economies of scale.

The government has also re-affirmed the broad principles on local government re-organisation, as set out in a written ministerial statement in July 2019.

Restructuring local government through moving to a unitary structure can improve decision-making and deliver value for money for local residents, however councils can also opt for different administrative reforms including merging district councils, joint committees, adopting joint plans, sharing back-office services, special purpose vehicles to promote regeneration like local Development Corporations, or delivering cost-savings through efficiency measures.

The government will not impose top-down restructuring of local government and will continue to follow a locally-led approach for unitarisation where councils can develop proposals which have strong local support.

This has been the government's consistent approach since 2010 and the introduction of the Local Government Act 2010. Those in an area will know best – the very essence of localism to which the government remains committed.

Councils in North Yorkshire invited to submit proposals include:

- Craven District Council
- Hambleton District Council
- Harrogate Borough Council
- North Yorkshire County Council
- Richmondshire District Council
- Ryedale District Council
- Scarborough Borough Council (Whitby Scarborough Filey)
- Selby District Council
- York City Council

Councils in Somerset invited to submit proposals include:

- Somerset County Council
- Bath and North East Somerset Council
- North Somerset Council
- district councils in the area: Mendip; Sedgemoor; Somerset West and Taunton; South Somerset

Councils in Cumbria invited to submit proposals include:

- Cumbria County Council
- district councils in the area: Allerdale; Barrow-in-Furness; Carlisle; Copeland; Eden; South Lakeland

Formally inviting councils to submit unitary proposals is the first step in the legal process towards restructuring under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007