

Next steps for new unitary councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset

- Local Government Secretary confirms plans to establish new unitary councils
- The move will help ensure local people and businesses receive the high quality services they deserve
- Plans will now be laid before Parliament for approval

Plans for new unitary councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset have taken an important step forward today following approval from Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick.

The plans will move the areas away from a two-tier system of county and district councils to unitary councils, strengthening local leadership and transforming the way services are delivered in these areas.

Establishing these new unitary councils will help ensure the people and businesses across Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset can have the sustainable high-quality local services they deserve.

This reorganisation will bring significant benefits to Cumbria, North Yorkshire, and Somerset, giving the local leaders there tools to help level up opportunity and prosperity across their communities.

For Cumbria two unitary councils will be established – an East unitary council covering Barrow, Eden and South Lakeland and a West unitary council covering Allerdale, Carlisle and Copeland, and in North Yorkshire and Somerset, a new single unitary council will be established for each county area; all subject to Parliamentary approval.

The locally-led plans are being taken forward after a period of consultation which considered views from residents, business leaders and councils.

The Local Government Secretary has asked the existing councils and their partners to work collaboratively and constructively together to drive forward the process of establishing unitary councils.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

I have always been clear that any restructuring of local government must be locally-led and will not involve top-down solutions from government.

Residents, businesses and service providers have had their say on what will work best for their area and now councils in these three areas can start planning for the next step.

Where there is local support, changing the structure of local

government can offer better value for money and improved services for residents.

This follows an announcement by the Prime Minister last week whereby he set out his vision to level up and unite the whole of the United Kingdom. In a speech, he set out the government's role to:

- empower strong local leaders by taking a more flexible approach to devolution, with new 'County Deals'
- focus on growing the private sector by creating the conditions for long-term growth and productivity;
- invest in infrastructure and connectivity;
- ensure that people have access to good public services, and the skills and training needed to get good jobs; and
- improve the quality of life in communities through cutting crime and regenerating towns and high streets

Moving forward, Parliamentary approval will be sought to implement these locally led plans for the area. At the turn of the year, a draft structural changes Order will be laid in Parliament. This will include plans for the necessary transitional arrangements, including for elections in May 2022 for the future unitary councils.

The consultation which was launched in February asked a number of questions about each proposal around value for money, proposed geography of the council and impact of the proposal on local services.

There were over 13,000 responses from residents, councils in neighbouring areas, health providers, the police, Local Enterprise Partnerships, businesses voluntary groups and educational bodies.

The three criteria which had to be met before a proposal was accepted were:

- is likely to improve local government and service delivery across its area;
- commands a good deal of local support as assessed in the round overall across the whole area of the proposal;
- and any unitary councils to be established have a credible geography.