EASTERN
HERTFORDSHIRE

WEST
HERTFORDSHIRE

CENTRAL
HERTFORDSHIRE

HERTFORDSHIRE:
DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE

PROPOSAL FOR THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES

CONTENTS

**HERTFORDSHIRE:
DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY**

FOREWORD

THREE UNITARY AUTHORITY MODEL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE: ROOTED IN PLACE, DESIGNED FOR PREVENTION AND BUILT TO DELIVER PROSPERITY

Hertfordshire has for generations been a place of economic dynamism, rural beauty and strong connections to the capital. These treasured qualities – and the people who embody them – demand councils that truly understand their needs.

The three unitary authority model for Hertfordshire is a bold response to the government's call for change that puts our residents first. Developed through strong collaboration, informed by robust evidence and shaped by extensive engagement with the people who call Hertfordshire home, it offers clarity, purpose and a framework fit for the future. This proposal creates three distinct councils: West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire.

At its heart are our people and the places they know. This model follows how people already live, work and connect; with significantly more alignment than the base proposal. It is the natural conclusion for our county's future. The people of Hertfordshire have been clear, and this proposal delivers authorities small enough to preserve local identity and sense of belonging, yet large enough to deliver the strategic leadership, financial sustainability and capacity for essential growth. Services become more accessible, transparent and empowering. One council to contact, one place to go, clearer accountability for the services you use every day.

By design, the model is prevention-led. It tackles root causes, reduces demand pressures and reinvests savings into frontline services. With housing, public health and social care under one roof, councils see the full picture, spot problems early and intervene when it matters most.

This model unlocks devolution and drives economic growth. It speeds up housing delivery and infrastructure investment. Streamlined decision-making attracts businesses whilst ensuring community spirit grows and our residents, businesses and places thrive.

At this historic moment, we can create councils fit for generations to come, preserving the dynamism, pride of place and sense of community that makes Hertfordshire special. In the pages that follow, you will see how this vision becomes reality. A proposal rooted in our people and built to deliver the prosperity our communities deserve.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

For the avoidance of doubt, this document reflects the modified proposal for the establishment of three unitary authorities in Hertfordshire. Notwithstanding this, the base proposal, as presented in the accompanying 'spine' document, for three unitary authorities in Hertfordshire also satisfies the criteria set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). As such, the base proposal is capable of standing on its own merits should the Secretary of State determine not to exercise discretion to modify the existing boundary between Hertsmere Borough Council and Watford Borough Council. However, it is the considered view of the councils supporting three unitary authorities in Hertfordshire that the modified proposal set out herein more effectively meets MHCLG's criteria.

DEVOLUTION

This document frequently references devolution and we acknowledge the centrality of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill in enabling this. Our ambition to move towards a three unitary authority model reflects a firm commitment to the government's objective of rebalancing power away from central government. By establishing streamlined and strategically aligned governance structures, we aim to empower local leaders to drive prosperity and deliver improved outcomes for the people of Hertfordshire.

While we recognise the distinction between local government reorganisation and devolution, our commitment to devolution remains resolute. The references throughout this document are intended to signal that ambition and demonstrate how our strategic direction supports the government's potential opportunities for Hertfordshire.

Mayor's Garden Party, Dacorum

THREE UNITARY AUTHORITY MODEL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire is at a defining crossroads. The proposal to establish three new unitary authorities presents a transformative opportunity to replace the county's current structure of 11 councils with three streamlined, future-ready authorities – reimagining local government to unlock the county's full potential. The model strikes an ideal balance between local and strategic governance, with the voice of community at its core. It sets out a vision for three new councils that are large enough to deliver efficiencies and shared benefits, yet small enough to preserve local identity and community connection.

The three unitary model reflects the reality of Hertfordshire's economy and the strength of its community identities, creating authorities that can lead and grow, whilst remaining responsive and deeply connected to the people they serve. By prioritising the empowering of communities and leveraging scale where it matters, Hertfordshire will set the stage for a future where every community can thrive.

ROOTED IN PLACE

The proposed West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire authorities reflect how residents live, work and connect with their communities. Each aligns with established travel patterns, business hubs and housing markets, offering governance that is both familiar and responsive. These areas are shaped by distinct economic ecosystems and specialist sectors, supported by unique mixes of infrastructure and housing development. Collectively, they are well-positioned to deliver the government's Modern Industrial Strategy and 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy. At the same time, they face shared challenges, housing affordability, pockets of deprivation and skills gaps, that demand targeted, coordinated solutions.

DESIGNED FOR PREVENTION

Each authority is optimally sized to integrate health, social care, housing, education and policing. Multidisciplinary teams working from community hubs will identify risks early and coordinate support before issues escalate, reducing pressure on statutory services and strengthening community resilience. This model aligns with the NHS 10-Year Health Plan, enabling joint commissioning, shared data systems and coordinated workforce planning. By embedding prevention from the outset, rather than retrofitting it, Hertfordshire will lead the shift from reactive services to proactive community support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BUILT TO DELIVER PROSPERITY

The scale of each authority enables it to attract investment, develop specialist skills programmes and deliver major housing and infrastructure projects. The model supports accelerated housing delivery, skills development aligned with 'Get Britain Working', and the transition to net zero through integrated planning. Combined with a Mayoral Strategic Authority, this structure lays the foundation for transformational devolution, empowering local leadership with control over transport, housing, skills and economic development.

A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR TRANSFORMATION

The financial case for restructuring into three unitary authorities is both robust and compelling. By year five, the model will deliver recurring annual net savings of £30-£38million, with cumulative savings reaching £181-£258million over ten years. Transition costs of £91-£111million are fully recovered within four to six years. This configuration strikes a balance between efficiency and local connection, enabling each authority to maintain specialist services, invest in digital transformation, build strong reserves for future resilience, and protect discretionary services. Crucially, the model achieves financial independence without reliance on external equalisation or emergency government support. The three unitary structure will support investment in transformation aligned with our ambition for place, prevention, prosperity.

New Town Square (CGI), Stevenage

THE CASE FOR CHANGE – BUSHEY'S INTEGRATION INTO WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

This document justifies and represents a modification request for the proposed transfer of Bushey (population 28,411) from Hertsmere to West Hertfordshire as part of Local Government Reorganisation. The boundary change aligns administrative structures with community identity, service delivery patterns and economic geography. Appendix 2 provides further detailed information, supporting evidence and data, and establishes how the proposed boundary change underpins the case for strong public services and financial sustainability.

The proposal is to amend the boundary, as per Appendix 2A, to realign the existing Hertsmere wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath so that they fall within the West Hertfordshire Unitary Authority.

Geographic reality

Bushey sits as an isolated enclave in south-west Hertsmere, physically separated from the rest of the district by the M1/A41 corridor and over two miles of greenbelt to Borehamwood. In contrast, less than 0.5 miles of greenbelt separates Bushey from Watford, where urban areas flow together naturally. The proposed boundary along the M1/A41 creates a clear, logical and identifiable dividing line that reflects actual settlement patterns.

Community identity

Bushey's community connections overwhelmingly orient towards Watford:

- 97.6% of Bushey residents visit Watford town centre, with 55% naming it as their most visited destination

- 1,829 pupils (29% of Bushey's school population) have home addresses in Watford

- Over 900 Bushey residents commute to Watford for work

- Historical development since the Victorian era has embedded Bushey within Watford's economic and social fabric

- Public consultation revealed strong resident support for integration with West Hertfordshire.

Service delivery and economic integration

- Eight bus routes and the London Overground Lioness Line connect Bushey directly to Watford

- Walking and cycling between Bushey and Watford occurs along residential streets with complete pedestrian infrastructure, whilst routes to Borehamwood involve longer journeys on rural roads with limited facilities

- Over 1,400 Bushey residents commute to work within the proposed West Hertfordshire area

- Integration enables coordinated transport planning, waste collection, emergency services and infrastructure investment aligned with actual usage patterns.

Democratic alignment

The proposal transfers the existing Hertsmere wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath to West Hertfordshire, whilst keeping the existing Aldenham West ward (and intact Aldenham Parish) within Central Hertfordshire. This approach:

- Avoids fragmenting established parish structures

- Creates more equitable councillor distribution across the three authorities

- Ensures boundaries reflect genuine community identity and functional relationships

- Enhances democratic legitimacy and resident engagement.

Alignment with government assessment criteria

The boundary modification directly supports the government's stated assessment criteria for local government reorganisation:

- Sensible economic areas: the change recognises Bushey as part of West Hertfordshire's functional economic area, with over 1,400 residents commuting to work within the proposed unitary authority and integrated retail, transport and business patterns. This creates a coherent economic geography with an appropriate tax base.

- Right size for efficiency and resilience: the modification creates more balanced unitary authorities with populations in line with government guidance, ensuring each authority has the capacity to deliver efficiencies and withstand financial shocks without creating undue advantage or disadvantage across the three unitary structure.

- High quality and sustainable public services: integration eliminates service fragmentation by aligning administrative responsibility with functional geography. Services can be delivered more efficiently when boundaries reflect actual settlement patterns, travel routes and community connections, avoiding the inefficiencies of cross-boundary arrangements.

- Collaborative approach and local engagement: the modification has political support from all Leaders in Hertfordshire. Public consultation revealed strong resident support, with Bushey residents consistently describing their area as physically and socially closer to Watford than to the rest of Hertsmere.

- Local identity and cultural importance: the proposal responds directly to community identity shaped by over 150 years of shared history, infrastructure and daily interaction with Watford. It rights a historical inconsistency by reconnecting communities divided by arbitrary administrative boundaries.

- Support for devolution: the boundary change strengthens the platform for devolution by creating unitary authorities based on genuine functional economic areas with coherent governance aligned to how residents live, work and connect.

- Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment: boundaries that reflect lived experience enhance democratic legitimacy and enable residents to engage more effectively in local governance, strengthening opportunities for genuine neighbourhood empowerment.

The boundary modification directly delivers the Minister of State's expectations for local government reorganisation by enabling stronger, more strategic local leadership across a coherent functional economic area, creating simpler governance structures by eliminating Bushey's isolation as an administrative island, and delivering greater alignment of public services across the functional area that residents actually use. Most fundamentally, by creating unitary authorities based on genuine community relationships and functional geography rather than arbitrary administrative lines, the modification builds long-term resilience into local government structures, ensuring services can adapt and respond to future challenges more effectively.

In summary

This boundary change rights a historical inconsistency by aligning administrative boundaries with the lived reality of residents. It strengthens alignment to local government reorganisation criteria whilst utilising a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconnect a community divided by arbitrary administrative boundaries. The modification enhances prosperity, improves services and strengthens democracy across the sub-region for decades to come.

The Secretary of State is respectfully requested to approve this modification request as part of the statutory change process.

Bushey Museum, Hertsmere

1. THE PROPOSITION
(MHCLG CRITERION 1)

A FUTURE-FOCUSED, LOCALLY EMPOWERED HERTFORDSHIRE

This proposal marks the beginning of a new chapter for Hertfordshire, one that builds confidently on the strong foundations of the current system of local government and responds positively to the challenges set down by government and the complex demands of public service delivery today.

Our vision for the future is bold: to create three strong, agile unitary authorities – West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire – each with the scale to deliver where it matters, but with the flexibility and local focus to empower every individual and every community. This is not a 'lift and shift' of old models. It is a future-facing transformation that will be safe and legal from day one, providing a stable foundation on which to build a more ambitious, responsive and forward-thinking system of local government. It will be big enough to be efficient and small enough to be local.

The three unitary model for Hertfordshire is rooted in place, designed for prevention and built to deliver prosperity for every community. Each new authority, more so with the boundary modification, is aligned with established patterns of commuting, business clusters and housing markets, ensuring decision making is responsive and logical at a local community and economic level. This approach guarantees clear accountability and more efficient services aligned to the needs of communities, supported and energised by political leaders who understand the unique challenges and opportunities of each area.

The model better aligns natural geographies and groups services more effectively. It will protect and strengthen local identity and community relationships and services will be delivered at a more local level. Distances to administrative centres will be minimised and will be based around existing communities.

There are a number of well-established shared services based on these geographical areas, many of which can easily be adapted and expanded to incorporate the new authorities.

This model is designed to deliver directly on key national policy priorities. Progressive and agile, it will anticipate and adapt to rapid technological, environmental and demographic change. It aligns with Treasury Spending Review principles[1] for public service reform: integrating services so that they are organised around people's lives; improving long-term outcomes through a focus on prevention; and devolving power to local areas with services designed with, and for, people. It supports the 10-Year Health Plan for England[2], with its shift of emphasis to community-based care and prevention as central to health service sustainability. It complements Cabinet Office initiatives, such as Community Help Partnerships, to support adults with complex needs at a neighbourhood level. It supports the Department for Work and Pensions

---

[1] *Spending Review 2025, HMT, June 2025*
[2] *Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England, DHSC, July 2025*

economic inactivity agenda[3] by enabling local flexibility to adapt support to different community circumstances. Finally, it aligns with the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper[4] by enabling local focus on sector strengths and the skills needed to support employment.

Hertfordshire's three unitary model represents far more than administrative reorganisation, it is a platform for fundamental transformation in how public services connect with and serve local communities. By aligning governance with the places people identify with, the functional economic areas where they work and do business, and the transport corridors that shape opportunity, this proposal creates the conditions for inclusive, sustainable prosperity.

We recognise there is no one-size-fits-all solution for empowering our communities. Each locality is unique, with its own identity, challenges and ambitions. That is why each new unitary authority will develop its own target operating model, shaped by local voices and needs, but informed by our strategic ambition. Our approach is to trial, refine and implement, piloting new forms of democracy by active participation, supporting Town and Parish councils and codesigning solutions with the voluntary and community sector.

We will use scale where it delivers real value, to support reducing demand on complex statutory services, while ensuring that decision making and service design happen locally, remaining closer to residents. Integrated, multidisciplinary teams will work from local service hubs based around neighbourhood footprints, focusing on early intervention and prevention, reducing crisis interventions and delivering better outcomes for all.

Prevention is not an add-on; it is the foundation of our model. Rather than retrofit neighbourhood working on to existing structures, we will build it into our governance, culture, systems and ways of working from day one. By identifying risks early and codesigning solutions with communities, we will support vulnerable residents before problems escalate, reinvesting savings into frontline provision and building long-term resilience.

Our ambition is to make community empowerment a lived reality, not just an aspiration. Every resident will have the opportunity to shape their place and future, through mechanisms like participatory budgeting and digital democracy platforms. We are committed to reaching those voices seldom heard, to removing the common barriers to participation and building community capacity and confidence.

To deliver this vision, we are seeking a new partnership with government; one that recognises our ambition and provides the funding and devolved powers needed to make it a reality. The three unitary model provides a firm foundation for devolution, combining strategic leadership with deep local roots, to unlock the full potential of Hertfordshire's people and places.

The three unitary model is ambitious, inclusive and resilient, demonstrating what is possible when structural change and service transformation are planned together with purpose. It places people at the heart of decision-making, empowers communities through locally responsive leadership, and unlocks prosperity by aligning services with the places people live, work and do business. With prevention at its core and scale applied where it matters, the model creates the conditions for sustainable growth and a future-ready Hertfordshire, where every community can thrive, and no one is left behind.

Jive Swing, Watford

[3] *Get Britain Working White Paper, DWP, September 2025*

[4] *Post-16 Education and Skills, HM Government, October 2025*

ONE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT: HERTFORDSHIRE'S THREE UNITARY AUTHORITIES

Hertfordshire's strength lies in its diversity of landscape, history and civic identity. The proposal to establish three new Unitary Authorities, West Hertfordshire, Central Hertfordshire and Eastern Hertfordshire, directly reflects the county's authentic sense of place and the lived experiences of its people.

This model marks a transformative step for Hertfordshire, replacing the complexity of the current two-tier system of 11 councils, with a streamlined single tier. Each council is rooted in a coherent and functional economic area, ensuring that the realignment, demonstrated by the modification request, is not merely administrative, but a strategic transformation that brings local government closer to how people live, work and do business.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S CONTEXT SUPPORTS THE THREE UNITARY APPROACH

Surrey's reorganisation into two unitary authorities demonstrates the viability of larger-scale local government reform. Hertfordshire's proposal builds on similar principles of financial resilience and simplified governance but is designed specifically for our county's strengths and circumstances. Operating from a position of financial stability, Hertfordshire can prioritise optimal scale that balances strategic capability with community connection. The three unitary model provides the critical mass needed for excellence in complex statutory services, particularly Adult Social Care and Children's Services, while ensuring each authority remains closely aligned with distinct economic areas and community identities. This configuration delivers the financial sustainability and governance simplification essential to any unitary model, while maximising local responsiveness and democratic accountability for Hertfordshire's 1.2 million residents.

Inside the Harlequin shopping centre, Watford

THREE UNITARY HERTFORDSHIRE

ROOTED IN PLACE

The populations of the three proposed unitary areas enjoy a diverse mix of lifestyle benefits, each offering distinctive blends of countryside landscapes, vibrant towns and rural villages. This variety supports economic success by helping businesses attract and retain skilled workers who value both career opportunities and quality of life. Each area provides attractive places to live and work, with access to green spaces, leisure and cultural amenities, historic environments and modern urban facilities that meet the needs of diverse communities and contributes to quality of life.

The proposed councils are shaped by the historical development of settlements, industry, transport and constitutional boundaries that give Hertfordshire its character and identity. The county has served for centuries as a key interface between London and the counties beyond, a role that continues to define its economic geography and civic culture. The reorganisation proposal is informed by this legacy, ensuring that identity with place and sense of belonging are respected and preserved, whilst at the same time enabling future prosperity. Appendix 2 sets out the statistical evidence that demonstrates how the Bushey modification aligns to the place-based approach taken by the three unitary model.

ALIGNED WITH FUNCTIONAL ECONOMIC AREAS

Travel-to-work patterns, business clusters and transport infrastructure all demonstrate the economic coherence of the proposed authorities. Each area is defined by distinct economic ecosystems and specialist sectors, all poised to make a significant contribution to future growth and the delivery of the government's Modern Industrial Strategy[5]. Additionally, the unique mix of infrastructure and housing development in each area directly supports the government's 10-year Infrastructure Strategy[6].

The three proposed unitary authority areas, strengthened by the proposed modification, each benefit from a distinctive combination of strategic transport connections, underpinning their economic strengths and enabling the development of key growth sectors. These corridors not only support access to skilled labour, customers and supply chains, but also enable communities to reach essential services and employment opportunities within their localities, reflecting established economic geographies.

Bus services in Hertfordshire

[5] *The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy 2025, DBT, June 2025*

[6] *UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy, HMT, June 2025*

BUILT TO DELIVER PROSPERITY

Hertfordshire's heritage fuels rather than constrains ambition: the same innovative spirit that created Letchworth Garden City and established world-class studios, now drives enterprise in life sciences, creative industries and digital technology. The three unitary model harnesses this confidence, providing governance rooted in place and identity, whilst also equipped to deliver transformational growth.

Each Unitary Authority is built around coherent economic geographies that reflect real patterns of sectoral specialisation, business clustering and labour markets. This structure directly supports the government's Modern Industrial Strategy by enabling focused investment in high-value sectors where Hertfordshire demonstrates global competitiveness. It also reflects the government's ambitions for post-16 education and skills, with each area home to high performing Further Education (FE) colleges or universities which deliver against this agenda to meet the needs of residents, employers and contribute to economic growth.

The three unitary model brings together recognisable geographies to achieve scale and critical mass in key sectors. West Hertfordshire will concentrate support for creative industries, professional and business services and emerging data centres. Central Hertfordshire will coordinate interventions for research and development, digital technology and logistics. Eastern Hertfordshire can leverage its position within the UK Innovation Corridor to connect world-leading life sciences clusters, advanced manufacturing and defence. By creating governance structures that match functional economic areas, each authority can implement targeted interventions that respond to sectoral needs whilst operating at sufficient scale to attract national and international investment.

ACCELERATING HOUSING SUPPLY

The delivery of 120,000 new homes over the next 10–15 years requires governance operating at strategic scale with clear accountability. The three unitary model provides this capacity through major projects already planned or underway across each area, supported by alignment between housing growth, transport infrastructure and employment opportunities. Each area demonstrates commitment to housing delivery at scale through transport-led regeneration, new garden communities and urban renewal projects that integrate homes with employment, education and green infrastructure.

Each Unitary Authority will produce a detailed Local Plan allocating specific sites, working within the framework set by the Strategic Authority's Local Growth Plan and Spatial Development Strategy. The three unitary model creates the necessary coherence to attract investment whilst ensuring development respects local character and responds to community needs; an approach that directly supports the government's housing targets and the National Planning Policy Framework's emphasis on sustainable, well-connected communities.

PARTNERSHIPS TO DELIVER REGENERATION

The three unitary model provides a strong foundation for advanced joint ventures and investment vehicles, enabling the attraction of institutional capital alongside public sector resources. Building on the successful experience of Hertfordshire authorities, where several effective joint ventures are already in place, this model draws on proven approaches and existing expertise in partnership working. Each unitary authority has the scale to form equal partnerships with developers, housing associations and institutional investors, typically through corporate joint ventures or limited liability partnerships. Land assets are transferred into the joint vehicle and matched by equivalent private sector capital, ensuring a balanced and mutually beneficial relationship.

Recent government programmes, such as the £2billion social housing investment initiative, increasingly prioritise partnerships between investors and local authorities, particularly for projects ready for immediate development. The three unitary structure is well placed to meet these priorities, offering pooled land assets across former district boundaries, development insight and capability, and the Strategic Authority's ability to negotiate on equal terms with major projects. This model enables local authorities to access specialist regeneration skills while retaining equal control over developments, sharing both risks and rewards. Strategic capacity is enhanced, supporting the effective negotiation and delivery of complex projects.

A key strength of these partnership models is their ability to support place identity and community engagement through strategic allocation of responsibilities. Local authorities typically lead resident engagement and consultation, developers contribute planning and construction expertise, and community partners ensure local voices shape decisions such as site plans and architectural design. This helps developments reflect local character and principles like healthy place-making and the prevention of adverse health outcomes. Leading regeneration projects show how combining private capital, public land, and community insight can create vibrant, sustainable communities with a strong sense of place. The scale enabled by the three unitary geography supports a cohesive strategy, preserving neighbourhood connectivity and ensuring inclusive, community-led development and long-term stewardship.

Affordable homes, Robin House, Watford

CASE STUDY – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS ACCELERATING HOUSING AND REGENERATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire councils are already delivering what many authorities aspire to, strategic partnerships that accelerate housing delivery and unlock millions in private investment.

Three Rivers District Council is partnering with Countryside Properties and Home Group to deliver the £150million South Oxhey Initiative, a mixed-use regeneration providing 514 new homes (private and affordable), retail space including a supermarket, high-quality public spaces, improved station access and a market square for community events. The scheme is creating employment and training opportunities alongside new housing, demonstrating how partnership approaches transform established communities at scale.

Watford Borough Council has built an exceptional track record through flexible joint ventures. The award-winning Riverwell project with Kier plc has transformed a contaminated brownfield site, delivering over 1,600 mixed-use homes (including affordable housing), 156,000 square feet of light industrial space, extensive public realm and infrastructure supporting the redevelopment of Watford General Hospital. A partnership with Mace Group is regenerating the town centre to deliver 100s of homes, a health hub and vibrant civic spaces.

Dacorum Borough Council has established the Dacorum Investment Partnership with The Hill Group as an equal partnership to accelerate affordable housing delivery and drive major regeneration across the borough. The Hemel Place project is revitalising Hemel Hempstead town centre into a thriving culture and leisure hub with new homes, commercial spaces and leisure opportunities.

Stevenage Borough Council is partnering with Mace for long-term town centre renewal. Within 18 months of formalising the partnership, planning approval was secured for SG1, a 14.5 acre redevelopment delivering homes, retail, leisure facilities and a public sector hub.

Dacorum, Hertsmere and Watford have all established joint ventures with Watford Community Housing to deliver new housing, including significant social housing, on underutilised council land and brownfield sites. These initiatives are delivering hundreds of new homes, proving the model's effectiveness for affordable housing delivery.

The lesson is clear: councils that establish equal partnerships early, maintain strategic control whilst leveraging private sector capability, and focus on long-term transformation rather than quick transactions consistently outperform traditional approaches.

For Hertfordshire's three unitary authorities, these partnerships demonstrate what becomes possible with enhanced strategic capacity and streamlined decision-making. The three unitary model enables authorities to pool land assets across wider geographies, negotiate with major developers from positions of strength and attract the scale of investment that transforms communities. The track record exists, the three unitary model scales this success county-wide.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY AND TACKLING INEQUALITY

Despite Hertfordshire's economic strengths, a significant number of foundational roles that are lower paid exist, exacerbating affordability pressures and creating barriers to opportunity. Significant pockets of deprivation persist across all three areas and require targeted interventions.

The new authorities will implement targeted skills interventions aligned with the Get Britain Working and the Post 16 Education and Skills white papers, investing in digital skills and literacy to ensure workers can adapt to technological change, particularly the rise of AI. They will work with universities, colleges and employers to address labour shortages, tackle economic inactivity and create pathways into high-value employment in growth sectors. Each authority will align skills provision, employment support, transport access and housing delivery in ways that address the specific barriers facing disadvantaged communities. The new authorities will each be served by a FE college, allowing for local focus on skills development and securing post-16 opportunities for young people. Strong partnerships with and across local colleges will support young people at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) into education and employment as part of the focus on prevention. This place-based approach, operating at sufficient scale to attract government funding and employer investment, can deliver the transformative change essential for inclusive growth.

ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY AND NET ZERO

Each unitary authority is positioned to drive the transition to net zero whilst ensuring levels of sustainable growth that protect and enhance environmental quality. The governance structure aligns with transport corridors, enabling integrated planning for sustainable transport, housing, employment and energy infrastructure.

All areas bring distinctive contributions: clean growth and green technology development in innovation quarters, sustainable transport promotion along major rail corridors, and environmental stewardship balancing development with protection of biodiversity and agricultural land. The three unitary model combines the governance capacity essential for implementing sustainability strategies at scale with the ability and agility to remain responsive to local environmental characteristics and community priorities. The three authorities can coordinate planning across housing, transport, employment and energy infrastructure in ways that a unified structure enables, whilst the Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) ensures county-wide coherence on issues including climate adaptation, biodiversity and resource management.

DESIGNED FOR PREVENTION

Each unitary authority will embed neighbourhood-level public service reform from the outset, working to establish integrated teams that bring together council services including, social care, housing, community safety, early help and community development with partners from the NHS, police, housing associations and the voluntary sector. These teams will be organised around neighbourhood footprints

aligned with NHS Primary Care Network (PCN) boundaries, ensuring seamless coordination between health and social care. Crucially, this approach is universal across all neighbourhoods, creating a robust infrastructure that flexes to meet local circumstances and strengthen operational health relationships.

Operating at the scale of functional economic areas enables each authority to deploy specialist expertise, develop sophisticated insights into neighbourhood needs, and maintain the financial resilience required for sustained investment in prevention. At the same time, neighbourhood teams remain close enough to communities to build trust, understand local contexts, and support a shift from council-led to community-led approaches, empowering residents to shape their own futures. This balance between strategic scale and local responsiveness makes the three unitary model the optimal foundation for transforming public services across Hertfordshire.

STRATEGIC CAPACITY, LOCAL CONNECTION

The three unitary model creates the right proportional relationship between local and strategic governance, avoiding both the imbalance of unitaries that are too large when compared to the strategic area, and the fragmentation of smaller, more numerous authorities. Each unitary authority will have the scale to be resilient and effective from the outset, with populations ranging from approximately 350,000 to 475,000 that will grow towards and beyond 500,000 as housing delivery progresses across major projects. This ensures sufficient capacity to deliver complex local services, attract and retain skilled staff, achieve operational efficiencies and withstand financial shocks, but also close enough to communities to understand and respond to local needs.

This is local government reorganisation pursued with vision and ambition, a model designed not just for today, but for the decades ahead.

Awards ceremony 2025, Broxbourne

DEFINING PLACE

### WEST HERTFORDSHIRE: POWERING BRITAIN'S CREATIVE, DIGITAL AND GREEN FUTURE

West Hertfordshire is a dynamic economic powerhouse, home to over 20,000 businesses and with a population projected to reach nearly 463,000 by 2045. Anchored by the M25, A41 / West Coast Main Line and M1 corridors, the area combines the thriving urban hubs of Watford and Hemel Hempstead with the rural beauty of the Chilterns, offering exceptional connectivity to London, the Midlands and the North West. The Metropolitan Line underground and London Overground services provide rail connectivity to the capital, and the area also has strong connections via the M25 towards London Heathrow airport.

The clearly defined transport corridors within West Hertfordshire ensure the area enjoys strong commuting patterns both within the area and towards London, particularly from Watford and Three Rivers, where an average of 42% of commutes are into the capital. Outside London commuting, Watford, including Bushey, and Three Rivers share a reciprocal relationship of being each other's top commuting destination and both areas have strong commuting outflows towards Hemel Hempstead and the wider Dacorum area.

The area's economic strengths align directly with the government's Modern Industrial Strategy. Creative industries flourish here, led by Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, a global centre for film and media production that has generated over £2bn in investment to date, with the Harry Potter franchise, including the hugely successful studio tour, also proving a major driver for UK tourism. Forming the heart of a wider creative cluster that extends to the east and west, this represents one of the UK's most significant concentrations of film and TV production capability outside London. Planning permission has been granted for the Langleybury Film Hub which, along with the expansion of Warner Bros. Studios, will continue the history of significant private investment into the sector in West Hertfordshire. Professional and business services locate around Watford, with major employers including KPMG, TJX Europe and Epson driving productivity growth. Croxley Business Park is a leading M25 business location with fast-growing strategic and regional importance. Northwood Headquarters is the UK's principal military HQ site and home to five operational HQs for 2,000 personnel.

The established digital and technologies ecosystem around Hemel Hempstead is now attracting additional investment from major data centres, positioning West Hertfordshire at the forefront of AI and digital infrastructure development. Whilst facilitating growth in AI and digital innovation, this sector requires careful strategic planning to manage resource and land implications. Hemel Hempstead's Maylands Business Park advances clean growth and sustainable infrastructure, aligning with net zero ambitions and a green jobs strategy. Prologis Park supports advanced manufacturing and logistics, with firms like Biomel and Vitabiotics serving national supply chains.

West Hertfordshire's regeneration potential is vast. Projects like Watford Junction and Hemel Garden Communities, which also straddles Central Hertfordshire, will deliver thousands of new homes and jobs, supporting both urban densification and family-friendly neighbourhoods. Watford Junction will deliver 3,000 homes and 7,000 jobs, and Hemel Garden Communities will provide family-friendly homes integrated with employment space and green infrastructure, creating some 10,000 new jobs. Together, these projects will deliver in the region of 10,000 new homes, directly supporting the government's national target of 300,000 homes annually.

WEST HERTFORDSHIRE
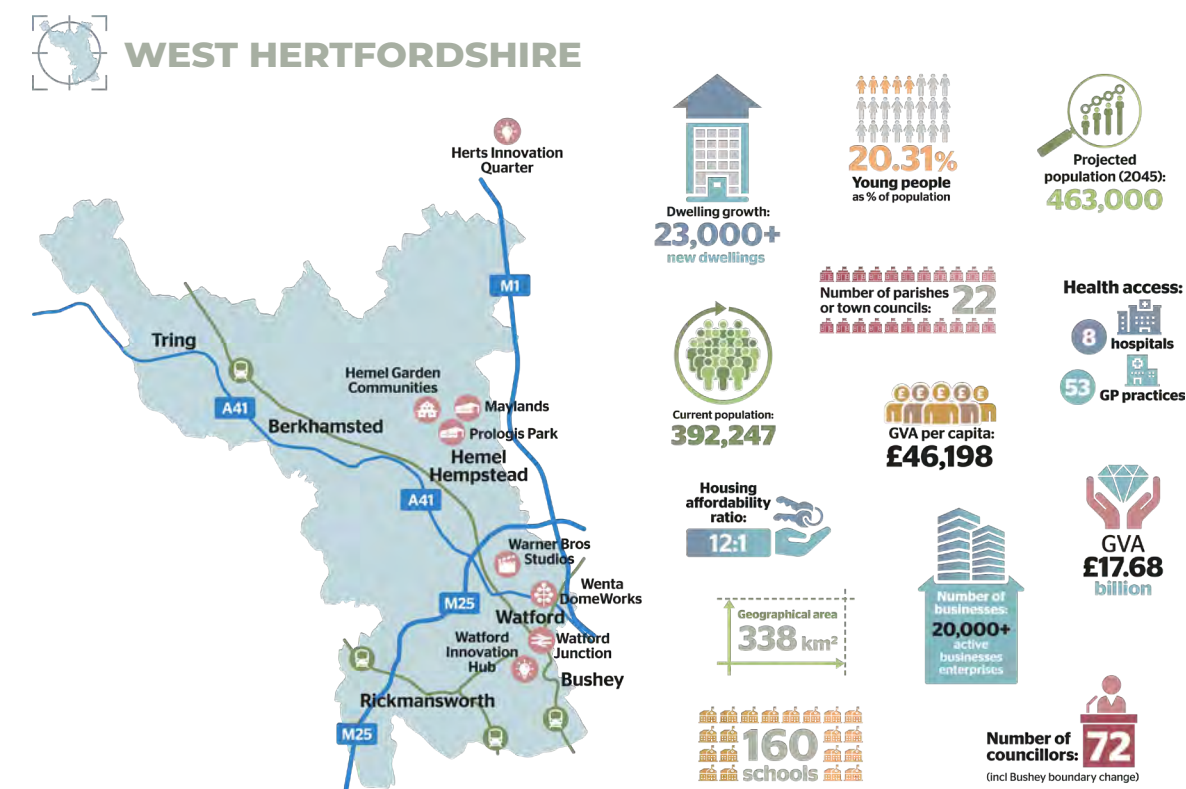
However, affordability remains acute, with average prices at £475,000 and an affordability ratio of 12:1 (based on existing borough boundaries). Eight neighbourhoods[7] rank within the top 20% most income-deprived in England. In addition, the rise of AI could significantly impact professional and business jobs in Watford and Hemel Hempstead, requiring proactive investment in digital skills and literacy.

The new Unitary Authority will provide the scale and focus to accelerate affordable housing delivery, implement targeted interventions aligned with the government's 'Get Britain Working' plan, and harness sectoral clustering benefits. West Herts College, with its campuses in Watford and Hemel Hempstead, will support young people to develop the skills needed by local businesses, preventing them becoming NEET, and work with Job Centre Plus and the Jobs and Careers Service to help adults develop the skills needed to secure employment. Local initiatives such as the Watford Innovation Hub and Wenta's

[7] *Primary Care Network (PCN) neighbourhoods*

Enterprise Centre, being expanded to become the DomeWorks, actively help build entrepreneurial capacity and upskill the workforce. By creating an innovation district connecting Watford's historic economic core with Hemel Hempstead's growth areas, and by leveraging clustering around the clean growth agenda, film and TV production, professional services and data centres, the new authority can act as a facilitator for the exchange of knowledge. It can also achieve the scale essential to compete internationally, whilst addressing inequalities and ensuring workers in lower-paid foundational roles can access opportunity and affordable housing.

West Hertfordshire's connectivity supports growth and provides access to jobs and skills. A three unitary model would enable a greater focus on urban mobility and modal shift within major towns like Watford and Hemel Hempstead, where high population density and good rail connectivity create opportunities for cycling networks connecting residential areas to stations and town centre regeneration, prioritising pedestrians. It would also enable a focus on supporting existing commuting patterns from more rural locations towards major employment areas through on-demand and improved bus services. West Hertfordshire is uniquely placed to advance government goals for accelerated housing delivery, decarbonisation of the transport network and innovation-led economic growth.


Watersmeet, Three Rivers

CENTRAL HERTFORDSHIRE: DRIVING INNOVATION, ENTERPRISE AND OPPORTUNITY

Central Hertfordshire is polycentric in nature, with strong connections to London, but also linked to Luton airport by the M1 / Midland Mainline corridor and to Yorkshire and the North-East by the East Coast Main Line. Its position along the M1 corridor positions the area at the heart of the London-Luton-Milton Keynes arc and make it a centre of innovation and enterprise with distinctive strengths in research and development, digital technology and logistics, with a population projected to exceed 414,000 by 2045.

Hertsmere has the strongest commuting relationship with London of all of the Hertfordshire districts with nearly 59% of commutes being into the capital. Outside London commuting, all three areas have strong commuters flows with every area being within the top three commuting destinations of the others, excluding London. This is reflective of the polycentric nature of the area and the economic cluster this creates.

CENTRAL HERTFORDSHIRE
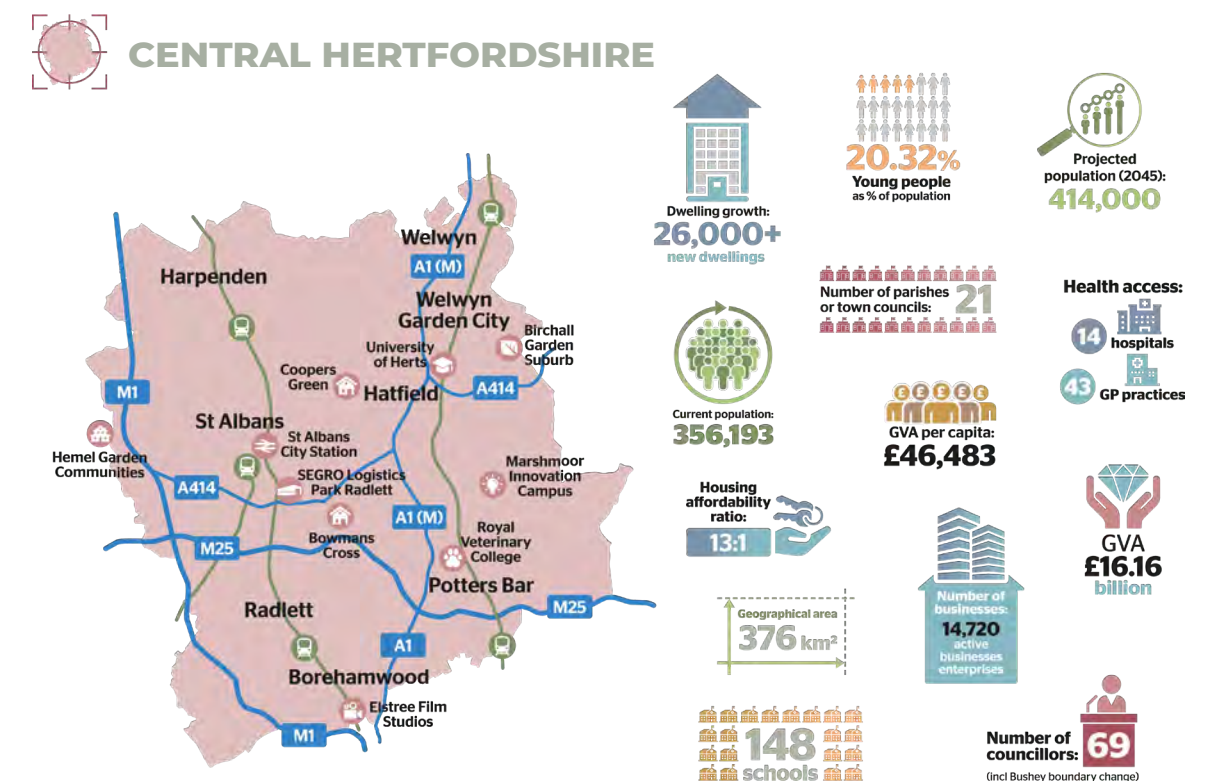
Its towns, St Albans, Borehamwood, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, blend historic economic cores with planned communities, combining quality of life with economic opportunity.

The area exemplifies the government's vision for a knowledge-driven, high-wage economy. The University of Hertfordshire, designated a University Enterprise Zone, drives research commercialisation, supports start-ups and builds innovation clusters, providing the skills pipeline essential for high-value sectors. Their enterprise focus encourages business engagement and investment to help their staff develop higher level skills in priority sectors, utilising the Growth and Skills Levy, to help maximise

business productivity and contribute to Central Hertfordshire's economic growth. Major employers, including Tesco and Ocado, along with the Royal Veterinary College, act as anchors for local strength in logistics, distribution and life sciences. Digital and technology sectors concentrate in St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield, with 59.2% of the population of the area educated to Level 4 or above and weekly earnings at £817.97, both significantly above national averages. The area is attracting investment in new technology as illustrated by the recent planning approval of a state-of-the-art data centre in South Mimms, an 85-acre campus near the M25 and the Elstree grid connection.

The Marshmoor Innovation Campus will provide modern commercial space and innovation facilities, attracting high-growth businesses and supporting essential knowledge exchange between academia and industry. SEGRO Logistics Park Radlett, a nationally significant freight hub along the A414 corridor, reinforces established strengths in the logistics sector, presenting an opportunity to focus on decarbonisation of the wider logistics network including zero-emission freight vehicles and infrastructure, consolidation centres reducing urban delivery traffic and rail freight connections. Film and TV production clusters around Elstree and Borehamwood, benefit from proximity to London, whilst life sciences and manufacturing capabilities are developing in Welwyn Hatfield. This diversity of sectors provides economic resilience and opportunities for cross-sector innovation, including AI and digital technology applications across traditional sectors.

The Sky Studios Elstree North project will deliver 10 extra stages and expand the current Borehamwood complex to 22 stages across 65 acres and 470,000 sq ft. Construction is scheduled to start in 2026 and will create around 600 jobs. The expansion will also grow the Sky Up Academy Studios, offering training and career pathways for 11–18-year-olds.

New settlements at Hemel Garden Communities, Bowmans Cross and Coopers Green will provide garden communities integrating housing with employment, education and green infrastructure, and Birchall Garden Suburb delivers urban regeneration whilst respecting heritage. These projects, aligned with transport corridors, support government housing targets and create sustainable, well-connected communities. However, affordability pressures remain acute, with average house prices at £559,000 and an affordability ratio of 13:1 – amongst the highest nationally – creating challenges for residents and businesses recruiting staff, particularly in lower-paid foundation sectors.

Despite economic strengths, pockets of deprivation persist. New and garden towns like Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield exhibit greater separation between work and home life, compared to historic centres like St Albans, creating additional challenges for residents accessing employment.

The new unitary authority will enable responsive, locally focused leadership that can deliver interventions tailored to community needs. By working with the University of Hertfordshire, Oaklands College, businesses and communities, the authority can implement targeted skills programmes aligned with the Get Britain Working and the Post-16 Education and Skills white papers, address labour shortages, tackle economic inactivity and invest in digital skills. By enabling sectoral clustering and knowledge exchange across its network of towns – connecting St Albans' visitor economy, founded on its rich Roman heritage and historically significant Cathedral, with Welwyn Hatfield's dynamic manufacturing and life sciences and Borehamwood's globally renowned creative industries – Central Hertfordshire can unlock the scale and critical mass essential for international competitiveness and ensure the benefits are felt across all communities.

Minster House council housing, Welwyn Hatfield

EASTERN HERTFORDSHIRE: LEADING LIFE SCIENCES, ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Eastern Hertfordshire, with a population set to surpass 600,000 by 2045, is positioned to become a global leader in life sciences, advanced manufacturing and digital innovation. Strategically aligned with both the A1(M) / East Coast Main Line corridor and the A10 / M11 routes to Cambridge, Stansted Airport and the East of England, the area sits at the heart of the UK Innovation Corridor, combining internationally significant economic assets with urban centres and rural landscapes.

Eastern Hertfordshire is generally less reliant on London commuting than the other Hertfordshire areas (less than 25%), with the exception of Broxbourne. The area enjoys strong internal commuting relationships, particularly between Stevenage and North Herts, with each area being the top commuting destination for one another within the Eastern Hertfordshire area. Broxbourne and East Hertfordshire also hold strong commuting relationships with one another, but also outside of the area to locations such as Harlow, Uttlesford and Epping Forest.
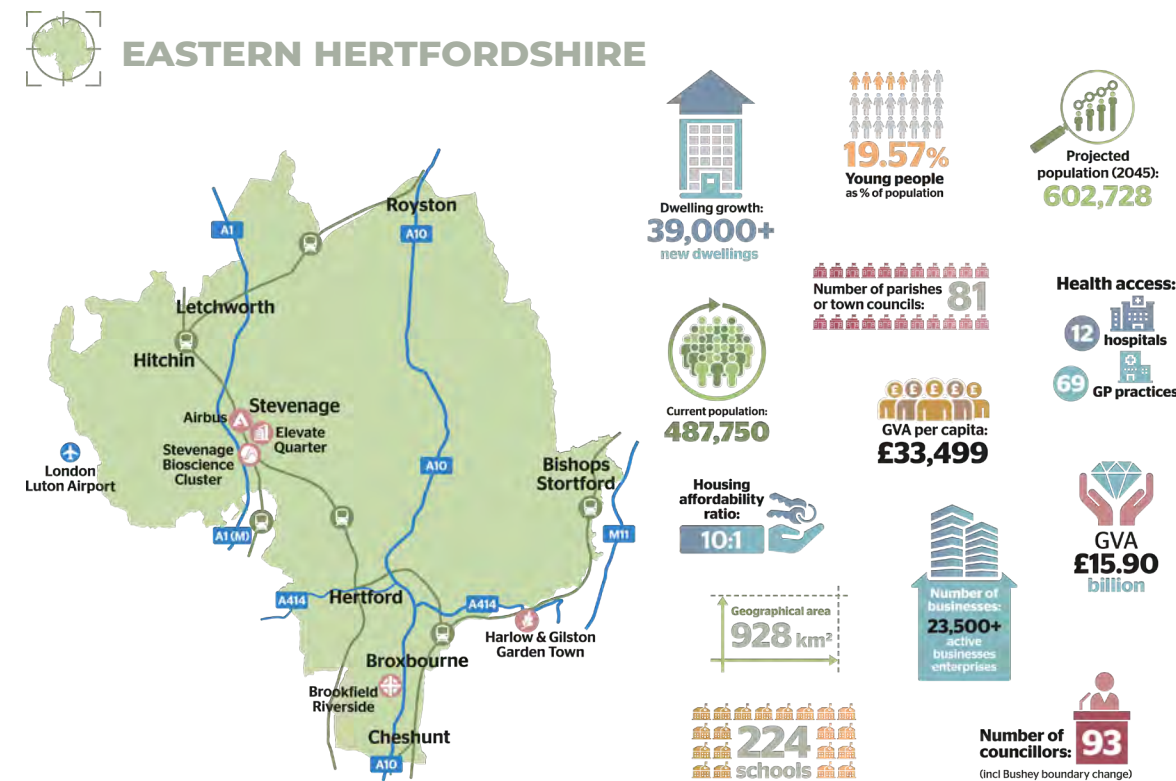
The area's economic strengths directly support the government's life sciences ambition and defence priorities. Stevenage hosts the UK's largest cell and gene therapy cluster, with the Stevenage Bioscience Cluster providing world-class facilities for early-stage companies and the Elevate Quarter offering a mixed-use innovation district that integrates commercial space, housing and community facilities. Expertise in life sciences and the defence sectors are represented by major employers, including GSK and Airbus, providing high-value employment and supporting extensive supply chains. Advanced manufacturing and life sciences companies concentrate in the towns to the north of the region, creating networks that facilitate knowledge exchange and growth in productivity, whilst defence sector specialisms in Stevenage support critical national capabilities.

Southern areas around Broxbourne demonstrate significant strength in the digital and technology sectors. Google's £5billion data centre investment in Broxbourne represents one of the largest private investments in UK digital infrastructure, positioning Eastern Hertfordshire at the forefront of AI and cloud computing capabilities. Broxbourne's strategic location on London's edge, combined with excellent transport connectivity, supports logistics and distribution serving regional and national markets. The area's SME base and rural economy add diversity and resilience, with strengths in agri-tech, rural enterprise and market towns providing employment across dispersed geographies.

Eastern Hertfordshire's two FE colleges play a major role in supporting economic growth, with North Herts College hosting the £2.5m Airbus Defence and Space Centre for STEM, which will help deliver skills needed for future growth of a UK priority sector. Along with Hertford Regional College, they are also helping prevent young people becoming NEET and helping economically inactive adults gain the skills needed for employment.

Major projects demonstrate commitment to delivering growth at scale. Harlow & Gilston Garden Town will provide over 10,000 new homes integrated with employment space, education, transport infrastructure and green networks. Brookfield Riverside will deliver a riverside community combining housing with leisure and commercial space, plus urban renewal in Stevenage and Hitchin will regenerate town centres and provide new housing that respects local heritage.

With average house prices at £394,000 and an affordability ratio of 10:1, Eastern Hertfordshire offers relative affordability, though pressures remain significant, given lower-paid foundational roles. Educational attainment varies significantly: some communities achieve greater than 50% educated to Level 4 or above, whilst attainment falls to 30.1% in Stevenage and 40.9% in Broxbourne. This variation creates inequality of opportunity and limits residents' ability to access high-value employment and constrains business recruitment.

The new unitary authority will deliver targeted interventions that enhance skills, employment and digital access through collaboration with industry, education and communities. This includes programmes aligned with 'Get Britain Working', investing in digital skills for AI and technological change, addressing economic inactivity and creating pathways into employment in growth sectors. A three unitary model enables Eastern Hertfordshire to focus on rural transport resilience and last-mile connectivity critical for dispersed communities, addressing challenges through demand-responsive transport in rural areas, community transport solutions for isolated villages, EV charging in rural locations and integration of rural services with main transport hubs. By connecting Stevenage's life sciences and defence strengths with Broxbourne's digital capabilities and advanced manufacturing clusters to the north, Eastern Hertfordshire can unlock the scale, strength and combined expertise to compete on the global stage, whilst ensuring all communities benefit from growth and maintain the distinctive character that makes the area exceptional for living, working and investing.

2. SCALE, EFFICIENCY AND CAPACITY (MHCLG CRITERION 2)

STRATEGIC SCALE AND PROPORTIONATE STRUCTURE

As a guiding principle, the government has set out that unitary areas should cover a population of around 500,000, with the Strategic Authority covering a population of approximately 1.5 million. Three Unitary Authorities working alongside a MSA for Hertfordshire provides the optimum model.

Hertfordshire currently has a population of 1.2 million, and with future growth by 2045, will deliver the population principles outlined by government. As evidenced in the following table, it is forecast that by 2045 West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire unitary areas will grow broadly proportionately to closely align with the government's principles for devolution and a single-tier of local government:

POPULATION AND PLACE	CURRENT POPULATION	FORECAST POPULATION (2045)
West Hertfordshire	392,247	462,887
Central Hertfordshire	356,193	413,737
Eastern Hertfordshire	487,750	602,728
Total	**1,236,191**	**1,479,352**

Under a three unitary model, each Unitary Authority will have the scale to be resilient and effective from the outset. The scale of the model provides sufficient capacity to deliver complex local services, attract and retain skilled staff, achieve operational efficiencies and withstand financial shocks, protect discretionary services, whilst remaining close enough to communities to understand and respond to local needs. The model eliminates fragmentation, builds critical mass for sectoral clustering, enables strategic infrastructure investment, and provides the capacity for substantial prevention programmes that address needs early on, before they become crises.

This is governance that is both deeply rooted and boldly ambitious, respecting what makes Hertfordshire's diverse communities distinctive and equipping them to seize the opportunities of a rapidly changing economy. Working in partnership with a MSA, the three Unitary Authorities will deliver responsive, place-based leadership to help every resident and business in Hertfordshire recognise their potential and thrive.

BALANCE OF NEED AND PROVISION ACROSS THE THREE UNITARY AUTHORITY AREAS

The data demonstrates carefully balanced distribution of provision and need across the three new unitary authorities, ensuring each has the resources to address pockets of greater need within their footprint without creating unsustainable financial or service delivery pressures.

DEPRIVATION: SHARED CHALLENGE

The three authorities show very balanced overall deprivation levels within a narrow three-percentage-point range. No single area carries disproportionate burden. Critically, across nine individual deprivation domains, no authority consistently appears as most or least deprived. West shows particular challenges in living environment quality and income deprivation but lower barriers to housing and services. Central demonstrates higher crime-related deprivation and income deprivation affecting older people but lower educational and employment challenges. Whilst Eastern experiences the highest employment and education deprivation but lower income deprivation affecting children.

This distributed pattern means each authority faces distinct challenges requiring tailored local responses, whilst none carries overwhelming concentration of disadvantage that would compromise financial sustainability.

Splashland, Stanborough Park, Welwyn Hatfield

AREA	NEED	WEST	CENTRAL	EASTERN
Deprivation - percentage of lower layer super output areas in most deprived Hertfordshire decline	Index of multiple deprivation	9%	9%	12%
	Income	12%	8%	11%
	Employment	9%	6%	14%
	Health deprivation and disability	12%	9%	9%
	Education, skills and training	10%	6%	13%
	Barriers to housing and services	6%	10%	13%
	Crime	8%	11%	11%
	Living environment	13%	8%	10%
	Income deprivation affecting children	9%	10%	11%
	Income deprivation affecting older people	11%	12%	8%
Adult care services. Rate per 100,000 population aged 18-64	New requests for support	1,253	1,153	1,151
	Assessments (adults)	390	354	395
	Assessments (carers)	213	172	189
	Statutory adult care plan reviews	783	678	745
	Adults in long term nursing	8	15	16
	Adults in long term residential	41	83	36
	Adults in long term homecare	87	92	91
	Adults in long term supported living	242	215	175
	Adults with a long term direct payment	324	283	308
Adult care services. Rate per 100,000 population aged 65+	New requests for support	12,008	10,578	11,529
	Assessments (adults)	7,082	5,492	5,458
	Assessments (carers)	1,059	984	1,223
	Statutory adult care plan reviews	8,310	7,014	8,667
	Adults in long term nursing	376	333	435
	Adults in long term residential	745	662	688
	Adults in long term homecare	1,421	1.192	1,440
	Adults in long term supported living	167	125	83
	Adults with a long term direct payment	690	571	495
Children's Services. Rate per 1,000 population aged 0-17	Referrals to Children's Services social care	5.2	4.6	5.2
	Assessments	4.4	4	5
	Children in need	4.7	4.4	4.1
	Child protection plans	2.1	2	2.8
	Children looked after	3.6	3.6	3.7
	Education and health care plans	51.4	48.1	61.3
Free school meals. Rate per 1,000 pupils	Number of pupils eligible	158	147	169
Children looked after. Rate per 10,000 children	Children looked after	35.6	36.1	37.3
SEND. Rate per 10,000 children	Children with an education and health care plan	514.1	481.2	612.5
Early help	Total children in fostering for adoption	983	811	1,178
	Number of young carers	101	127	130
Homelessness	Households in temporary accommodation	508	424	410

ADULT SOCIAL CARE: COMPARABLE PRESSURES

Demand for Adult Social Care amongst working-age adults demonstrates marked consistency, with new requests clustering within a narrow range. Assessment activity is similarly consistent, indicating comparable gateway pressures across all authorities.

Substantial variation appears in how care is delivered rather than in underlying need levels. Rates across nursing care, residential care, home care, and supported living indicate different historical service models and provider markets rather than fundamental differences in need.

For older adults, demand variation remains within manageable parameters, approximately thirteen per cent. All three authorities will face substantial but broadly comparable demand. Variations in delivery models represent genuine opportunity for shared learning whilst retaining autonomy to respond to genuine local differences.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: CONSISTENCY IN CORE DEMAND

Core Children's Social Care activity demonstrates striking consistency. Referral rates show minimal variation, with the proportion of Children in Need varying by less than one child per thousand. Most significantly, rates of children looked after are virtually identical across all three authorities, demonstrating comparable levels of acute need.

SEND provision shows more variation, with Eastern demonstrating notably higher rates. The three unitary model creates opportunity to understand these variations and ensure equitable access.

Free school meal eligibility shows modest variation, reinforcing the pattern: each authority faces meaningful challenge, but none carries unsustainable burden. All three authorities will require robust, well-resourced Children's Social Care departments with specialist expertise.

HOUSING: COMPARABLE CAPACITY

There is balanced provision of council and registered provider housing stock. Critically, each authority includes significant council retained stock, ensuring all three possess Housing Revenue Account capability and direct delivery experience. Temporary accommodation placements remain similar across all three authorities. Pressures present consistently but challenges manifest differently, reflecting national pressures on affordable housing. The three unitary structure provides the best platform to respond across the entire county enabling both locally tailored approaches and strategic coordination on major housing delivery programmes.

A BALANCED MODEL ENABLING SUSTAINABLE DELIVERY

The three unitary model achieves carefully balanced distribution of provision, need and service demand. Deprivation is distributed across all three areas, with different authorities experiencing higher levels in different domains rather than one carrying overwhelming disadvantage. Adult Social Care demand, Children's Social Care activity, and looked-after children rates show manageable variation rather than stark differences.

The balanced distribution means each authority can independently raise the council tax revenue necessary to support pockets of greater deprivation within their footprints, without requiring cross-subsidisation between authorities or dependency on redistribution mechanisms. This creates genuine financial resilience and local autonomy.

The three unitary model achieves an ideal configuration: sufficient balance that each authority is financially sustainable and capable of meeting need, whilst preserving sufficient distinction that locally tailored approaches remain appropriate and valuable. This balance provides the foundation for the prevention focused community empowered service transformation at the heart of the three unitary model.

Brodie Court, Stevenage

	PROVISION/METRIC	WEST	CENTRAL	EASTERN
Health	NHS Health and Care Partnership Neighborhoods	2	3	5
	Hospitals	8	14	12
	Primary Care Networks	11	8	10
	GP Practices	53	43	69
	GP Practices per 10,000 people	1	1	1
Education	Further Education Colleges	1	1	2
	Further Education College campuses	2	1	6
	Schools with key stage 5	23	24	31
	Total schools	160	148	224
	Schools per 1,000 children	1.8	1.9	2.2
	Number of special schools	8	8	10
	Total special schools per 10,000 pupils	0.9	1	1
Waste & Recycling	Number of Recycling stations	4	5	7
	Number of Waste Transfer stations	11	7	14
Adult Social Care	Residential/Nursing settings	73	94	82
	Residential/Nursing settings per 10,000 adults	2.4	3.4	2.1
	Home care/supported living settings	93	106	121
	Home care/supported living settings per 10,000 adults	3	3.7	3.3
Children's Social Care	Children's homes and residential special schools	8	12	31
	Children's homes and residential special schools per 10,000 children	0.9	1.5	3
	Children's homes and residential special school places	32	47	185
	Children's homes and residential special school places per 10,000 children	3.7	5.9	17.8
DWP	Job Centres	2	3	4
Voluntary Sector	Council for Voluntary Service locations	2	3	2
Police	Police neighboring teams	2	2	2
	Police stations	7	6	8
Fire	Fire stations	8	9	12
	Fire stations per 10,000 people	2	3	3
Housing	Total Registered Provider and Local Authority Housing Stock	26,686	36,134	27,908
Community	Leisure centres	8	12	11
	Leisure centres per 10,000 people	2.1	3.5	2.3
	Libraries	15	15	16
	Libraries per 10,000 people	4	4	3
	Number of civic offices	8	5	9
	Number of cemeteries and crematoria	11	6	12
	Registry offices	2	2	4
	Registry offices per 10,000 people	5	6	8

FINANCIAL CASE

Restructuring Hertfordshire's local government into three new Unitary Authorities delivers a financially sustainable model that achieves early payback, generates substantial recurring savings, creates capacity for transformational investment in prevention and service improvement, and protects discretionary services.

By year five (2032/33), the model will deliver recurring annual net savings of between £30million and £38million. Over ten years, cumulative net savings reach £181million to £258million. The transition costs of £91million to £111million will be fully recovered within four to six years. Critically, this model achieves financial independence without reliance on external equalisation or emergency government support.

Three Unitary Authorities represent the optimal configuration, delivering sizeable efficiency gains while mitigating disaggregation costs and maintaining the scale necessary for specialist services and strategic investment. This model will enable investment in transformation aligned with our ambition for place, prevention and prosperity for every community.

THE FINANCIAL MODEL AT A GLANCE

- Transition costs: £91million to £111million (phased to 2032/33)

- Payback period: 4 to 6 years

- Annual recurring savings by Year 5: £30million to £38million

- 10-year cumulative benefit: £181million to £258million

- Funding approach: Self-financed through existing reserves, asset realisation, and flexible use of capital receipts.

TRANSITION COSTS

The total investment required to establish three new unitary authorities ranges from £91million to £111million, with most one-off investment costs being incurred in 2028/29. These one-off costs cover:

- IT disaggregation and consolidation: £46million to £66million (phased through to 2032/33)

- Programme management: £16.5million (through to 2028/29)

- Redundancy and severance: £12million (phased through to 2030/31)

- Legal work, estates reconfiguration, communication, and specialist support: £13million (through to 2028/29)

- Contract novation and renegotiation: £4.4million (through to 2028/29).

The implementation strategy deliberately phases these costs over three years or more, running through to 2032/33. This approach maximises savings while using controlled consolidation to avoid excessive disaggregation that would create multi-system duplication and long-term technical debt. The phased approach to redundancy protects institutional knowledge during the critical transition period.

RECURRING SAVINGS

Annual recurring savings build progressively over the implementation period, reaching between £30million and £38million by year five (2032/33):

- Staff rationalisation: £25million to £28million annually through phased implementation from 2030/31

- Democratic and governance reorganisation: £3.6million annually

- Improved procurement, contract management, and facilities: £18million to £21million annually.

These savings are partially offset by recurring costs including some diseconomies of scale, totalling £7million to £13million annually. The net result is £30million to £38million in annual recurring savings, as efficiencies occur.

STRATEGIC RATIONALE: WHY THREE AUTHORITIES

The three unitary configuration is not arbitrary. It represents the optimal balance across multiple dimensions: scale, complexity, efficiency, and local connection. This configuration delivers superior financial outcomes compared to both the current two-tier system and alternative unitary models.

OPTIMAL SCALE FOR DISAGGREGATION

Three authorities strike the optimal balance for managing disaggregation complexity. County-wide systems covering IT, HR, and Finance can be efficiently split three ways without creating excessive technical debt. More than three authorities would multiply implementation costs and create unsustainable duplication; fewer could introduce operational risks that might compromise service delivery.

Critical tasks including asset splits, pension allocations, grant distribution, and contract management all become tractable at this scale. The implementation can proceed at a controlled pace, allowing three organisations to be safely established without overwhelming programme management capacity.

MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY GAINS

Each authority achieves sufficient scale to sustain specialist capabilities without duplication yet remains small enough to avoid unwieldy bureaucracy. This critical mass enables investment in digital transformation, cyber resilience, and service modernisation that smaller authorities would struggle to afford.

Streamlined governance delivers further savings through reduced democratic overhead, clearer accountability, and faster decision-making. Service integration eliminates the handoffs and coordination costs inherent in the two-tier system, creating synergies across housing, planning, social care, public health, and economic development.

LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial sustainability extends beyond annual budgets. Each of the three authorities will maintain reserves sufficient to absorb unexpected shocks from demographic changes, policy shifts, or economic downturns. This financial headroom enables investment in transformation without forcing cuts to frontline services.

After transition costs are recovered, the authorities will generate growing annual surpluses that fund ongoing transformation in digital innovation, prevention programmes, and workforce development rather than being absorbed by operational pressures. This creates a sustainable dynamic where efficiency gains enable reinvestment in better outcomes.

The model is self-sustaining without dependency on external equalisation or emergency government funding. Each authority has sufficient tax base and economic diversity to weather local variations, creating genuine resilience.

EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY

As detailed elsewhere in this proposal, the three unitary model achieves a balanced distribution of deprivation and affluence across all three authorities. This balance is strategically significant from a financial perspective, as it enables each council to independently raise the funds necessary to support pockets of greater need within their respective footprints without creating dependency on redistribution mechanisms or cross-subsidisation between authorities.

The graphs in the technical papers illustrate the cumulative net budget position for each unitary authority after the first five years of reorganisation, combining all baseline modelling assumptions including inflation, assumed Council Tax increases, and the impacts of local government reorganisation. When compared across alternative configurations, the three unitary model demonstrates the most equitable budget position avoiding the financial imbalances that would characterise either more fragmented or more consolidated alternatives.

This equity of financial capacity provides each authority with genuine autonomy to respond to local priorities whilst ensuring that no single authority faces disproportionate fiscal pressures that would undermine service delivery or require external intervention.

STRATEGIC BENEFITS: INVESTING FOR TRANSFORMATION

The recurring savings generated by reorganisation will be strategically deployed to strengthen services and improve outcomes. This is not about implementing cuts or managing decline but about achieving transformation through building financially sustainable services that invest in prevention, respond to emerging needs, and continually improve outcomes.

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The three unitary model provides sufficient scale to maintain specialist capacity in children's safeguarding, SEND provision. Each authority will be large enough to sustain senior posts and specialised teams while avoiding the fragmentation that would increase costs and reduce quality. The phased transition protects expertise and institutional knowledge, ensuring continuity through reorganisation.

PREVENTION AND DEMAND REDUCTION

Larger authorities can pool resources to fund targeted prevention programmes, invest in upstream health interventions, and maintain sophisticated data systems and specialist preventive staff. The return on prevention investment accrues across multiple systems as residents maintain independence longer, require less acute intervention, and avoid crisis points that trigger expensive support.

In Children's Social Care, early help reduces statutory intervention and expensive placements. In Adult Social Care, reablement maintains independence and delays residential care. Better housing quality, employment support, and addressing social isolation prevent hospital admissions and reduce health service demand. Youth services and community safety programmes reduce policing and criminal justice costs.

While savings from prevention and demand reduction have not been included in financial modelling, the recurring benefits compound over years and decades, creating a level of financial sustainability that efficiency savings alone cannot deliver.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Each authority will have sufficient resources to implement modern, cloud-based platforms that replace aging legacy infrastructure, ensure cyber resilience, and meet data protection standards. Automation capabilities will free staff from repetitive tasks to focus on high-value work requiring human judgment. Predictive analytics will enable early identification of emerging needs, while resident-facing digital services will improve accessibility and satisfaction.

The costs of this modernisation programme have not been included in financial modelling, but each authority is expected to be large enough to sustain robust IT platforms and ongoing investment, avoiding the continued reliance on any outdated systems or expensive shared service arrangements that might limit flexibility.

TARGETED INVESTMENT IN HIGH-NEED AREAS

Smaller, strategically focused authorities enable locally agile decision-making that improves spend efficiency by ensuring investment aligns with actual need rather than uniform service models. Scale provides the resources to make meaningful investments in SEND, adult care, and prevention, while local knowledge ensures those investments are effectively targeted to achieve maximum impact per pound spent.

MANAGING DISAGGREGATION RISK

The successful disaggregation of county-wide systems represents the single largest risk in reorganisation. The three unitary model manages this risk through appropriate scale that makes technical and organisational challenges tractable, controlled consolidation that avoids excessive disaggregation and multi-system duplication and phased implementation that provides time to manage complex changes properly.

FINANCIAL HEADROOM AND RESERVE STRATEGY

Strong reserve balances across the three authorities provide essential capacity to absorb unexpected shocks from demographic changes, policy reforms or economic downturns without immediately cutting services or raising Council income beyond planned levels. This financial headroom enables investment in transformation initiatives that take time to generate returns and creates ability to respond to new demand pressures as they emerge.

This approach avoids the vulnerability of smaller or less balanced unitary models that lack reserves to weather significant challenges, forcing reactive rather than planned responses.

REINVESTMENT STRATEGY

The recurring savings generated by reorganisation will be strategically deployed across three priority areas:

Prevention infrastructure
Early help and family support services, mental health and wellbeing programmes, falls prevention and reablement for older adults, housing support and homelessness prevention, youth services and positive activities, and community development to build local capacity.

Digital and innovation investment
Modernised IT platforms replacing aging infrastructure, data analytics and AI capabilities for decision-making and predictive intervention, automation to free staff for complex work requiring human judgment, and cyber security to protect sensitive resident data.

Workforce development

Professional development and training, clear career pathways and progression opportunities, leadership development programmes, targeted recruitment and retention in hard-to-fill specialisms, and wellbeing and support for staff. A skilled, stable, and motivated workforce is essential for delivering transformation, and the recurring financial surpluses provide capacity to invest in people without squeezing frontline budgets.

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE SAVINGS

While the financial model demonstrates strong recurring savings and early payback, successful delivery depends on managing implementation risks and capturing additional transformation opportunities beyond those currently modelled. The three unitary configuration provides inherent advantages in managing these risks whilst creating capacity to pursue further efficiencies.

Managing key financial risks

The modelled savings assume successful delivery of pre-vesting MTFS savings through 2027/28, controlled inflation aligned with baseline assumptions, and full realisation of benefits from reorganisation being delivered on schedule. The surplus position shown in year five provides essential headroom to absorb potential variations in any of these areas. The three unitary authority model will enable councils to maintain sufficient reserves to manage unexpected shocks whilst continuing planned investments in prevention and transformation. The implementation approach outlined elsewhere reduces execution risk by avoiding simultaneous system disaggregation and allowing controlled consolidation of technology platforms.

Additional transformation opportunities

The modelling captures only those savings arising directly from reorganisation itself. Significant additional opportunities exist through ongoing transformation once authorities are established. The three unitary authority model provides the agility to redesign services swiftly, embed prevention at scale but also remain responsive to local need. Strategic asset rationalisation across the enlarged estate and accelerated digital adoption will generate further recurring benefits. Adult Social Care presents opportunity, with benchmarking indicating that authorities of this scale achieve better productivity across working age and older adult services through integrated commissioning and partnership delivery models.

Maximising financial resilience

Several additional levers can improve the financial position beyond baseline modelling. Business rates retention gains, currently not assumed in projections, could support transition costs or accelerate payback if retained through a transition period. Council tax base growth above the conservative 0.8% baseline assumption would generate material additional revenue as new authorities drive housing delivery. Asset disposals from estate rationalisation will provide capital receipts to offset implementation costs. Housing Revenue Accounts that join the unitaries can contribute proportionally to setup costs whilst creating opportunities for innovative accommodation solutions that reduce social care expenditure.

Government partnership

The model demonstrates financial independence without requiring external equalisation or emergency support. However, specific government support could accelerate benefits realisation: capitalisation directions to spread one-off costs over multiple years, digital transformation funding to support ICT modernisation, funding for ambitious prevention pilots, extended business rates retention to bridge the transition period, and clarity on Fair Funding Review impacts to enable long-term planning. These measures would enhance an already sound financial case rather than rescuing an unviable proposition.

The three unitary model creates the optimal platform to capture these additional opportunities whilst managing implementation risks effectively. The combination of sufficient scale for strategic investment, local agility for rapid transformation, and strong reserves for resilience ensures that financial sustainability extends well beyond the modelled projections.

ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The three unitary financial model directly supports government objectives across multiple policy areas:

Fiscal responsibility

Early payback within four to six years, recurring surpluses without additional government funding, self-sufficient operation independent of external support, and £181million to £258million in taxpayer value over ten years.

Public service reform

Resources to invest meaningfully in prevention and early intervention, digital transformation for modern and efficient service delivery, integration of services around residents' needs, and evidence-based investment in interventions proven to improve outcomes while reducing costs.

Recycling collection, St Albans (credit: Grainge photography)

CONCLUSION

Three Unitary Authorities represent the optimal financial configuration for Hertfordshire, balancing scale and local connection to deliver maximum value. The model provides:

• Strong recurring surpluses of £30million to £38million annually by year five

• Cumulative ten-year benefit of £181million to £258million

• Early payback within four to six years

• Financial resilience through strong reserves and headroom

• Capacity for prevention investment that reduces long-term demand

• Strategic capacity for innovation and partnership working

• Local accountability through authorities that understand their communities

• Self-sufficiency without dependency on external support.

This is not about implementing cuts or managing decline. It is about achieving transformation through building financially sustainable services that can invest in prevention, respond to emerging needs, and continually improve outcomes for residents through the 2030s and beyond.

The detailed technical modelling that accompanies this strategic summary provides the complete evidence base, including scenario analysis and year-by-year projections that demonstrate how this vision will be delivered in practice. Together, these documents provide a complete financial case that combines strategic vision with technical rigor, demonstrating why three unitary authorities represent the sustainable, strategic, and financially sound choice for Hertfordshire's future.

NEW UNITARY AUTHORITIES – MODELLED BUDGETS AND FUNDING POSITION FOR YEAR ONE (2028/29)

The graphs below show the anticipated year one budget for each proposed new unitary authority, excluding the initial costs and savings from LGR. On current assumptions and to different extents, new authorities will begin with opening surpluses or deficits based on modelled demand and service expenditure, the likely funding of each area and the capacity of each area to generate council tax.

As noted above, this modelling does not reflect the future impact of the Fair Funding Review, beyond that assumed within current authorities' Medium Term Financial Strategies, which is likely to change both the quantum and distribution of resource within Hertfordshire and may have an impact on the financial resilience of future unitary organisations.
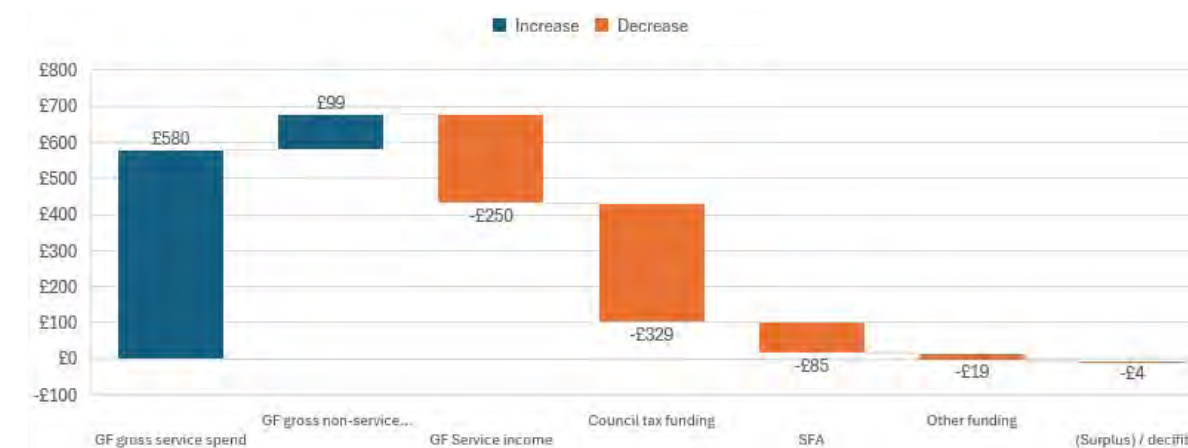
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – THREE WEST

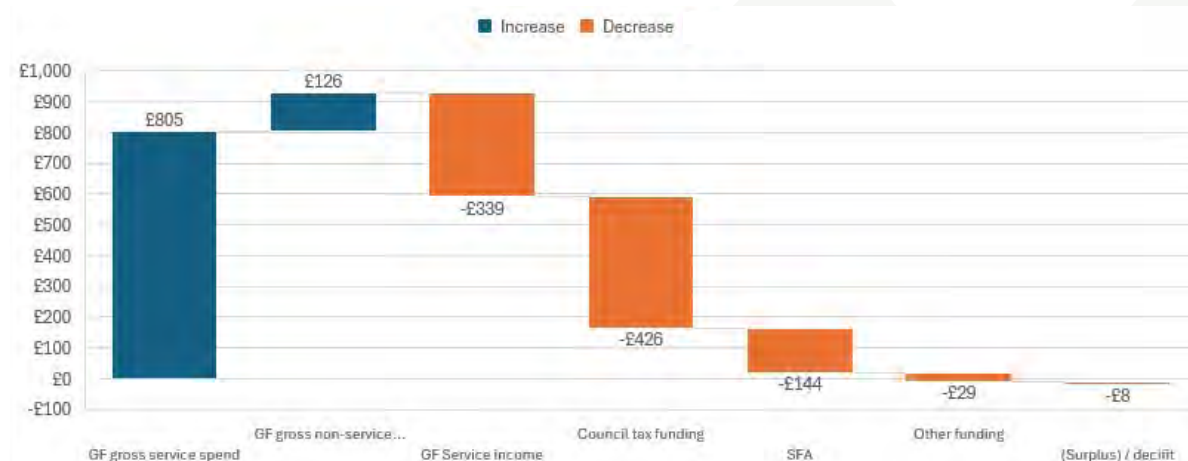### Full year 2028/29 budget and funding position (£millions)
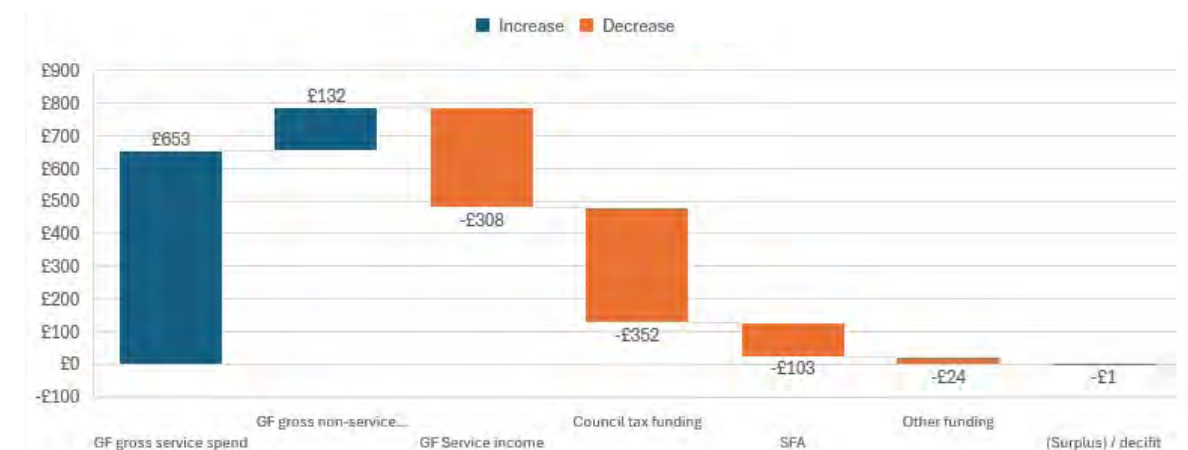
YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – THREE CENTRAL

Full year 2028/29 budget and funding position (£millions)

YEAR 1 BUDGET AND FUNDING – THREE EASTERN

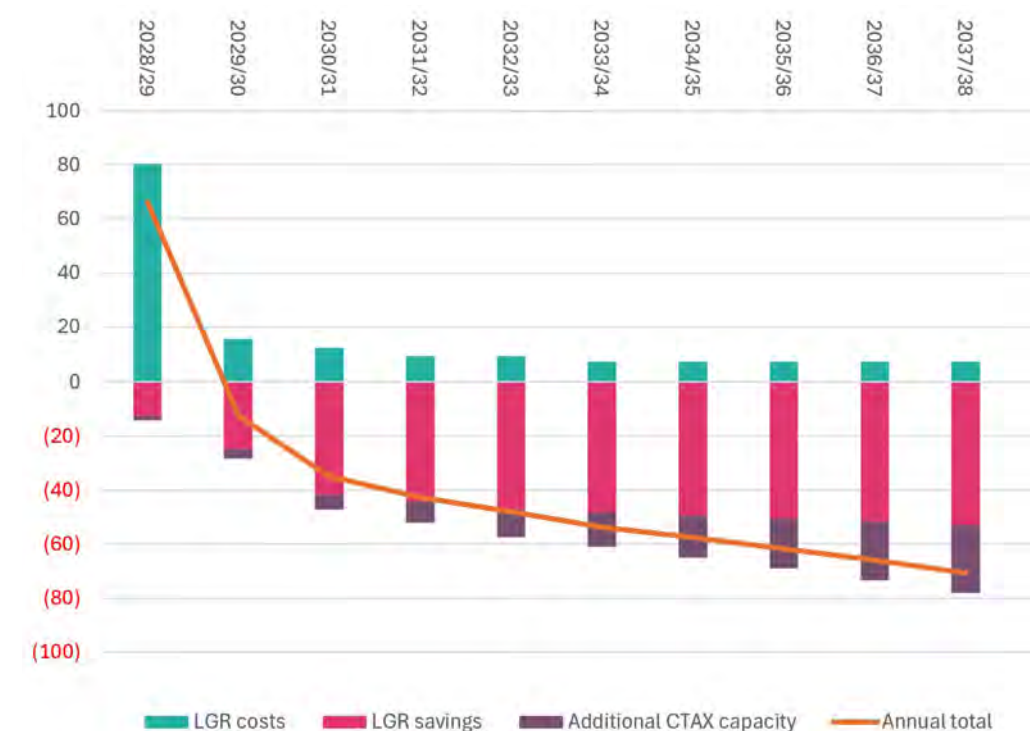### Full year 2028/29 budget and funding position (£millions)

Return to contents page

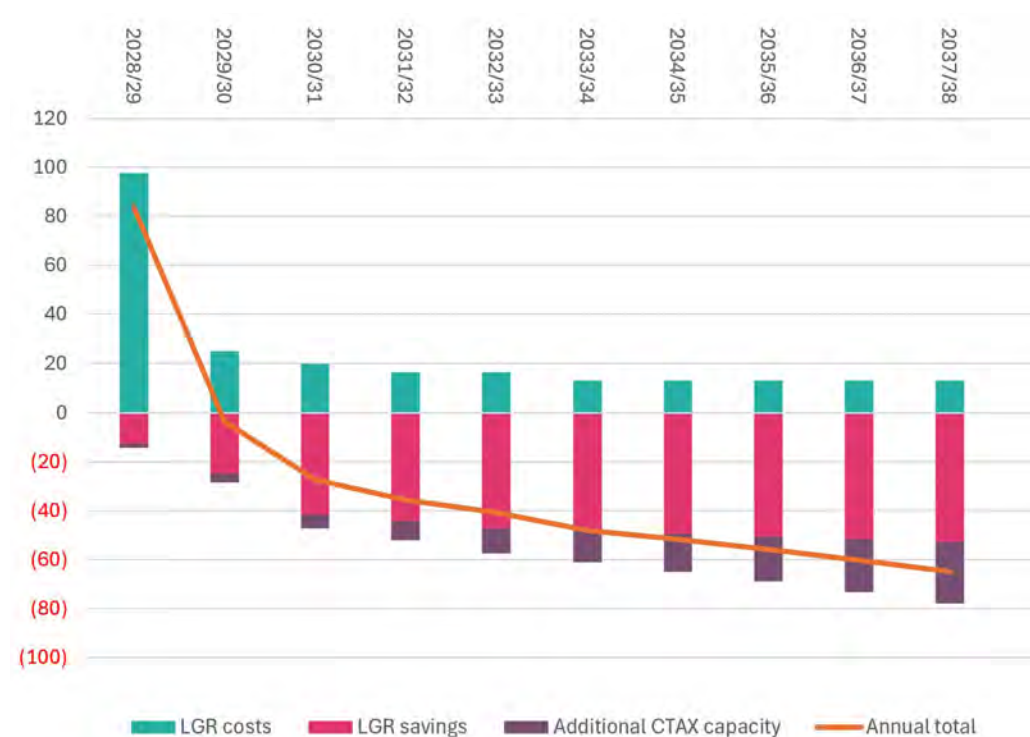## PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE TWO-TIER BASELINE OVER TIME

Lower Cost Scenario

Overall in-year difference from two-tier baseline (£millions)

Higher Cost Scenario

Overall in-year difference from two-tier baseline (£millions)

These two graphs show the in-year difference from the two-tier baseline that is delivered by LGR under this option. The modelled two-tier baseline is shown as zero, and the estimated impacts of LGR are shown as increases or (decreases) from that baseline. The key finding is that despite significant up-front costs, implementing this option would make Hertfordshire better off overall than the two-tier baseline in both the lower and higher-cost scenarios. Breaking down each line individually:

- **LGR costs** – this line adds together one-off costs (e.g. programme management) and recurring costs (e.g. duplicating management teams for social care). The majority of one-off investment costs will be incurred in the first year of LGR in 2028/29, and after five years only recurring elements of cost remain.

- **LGR savings** – this line shows the total recurring savings that are delivered by LGR (e.g. by removing duplication). These savings are higher than recurring costs so that a net annual saving is generated.

- **Additional council tax (CTAX) capacity** – this line shows the maximum extent to which future unitary authorities would be able to raise additional council tax over and above the two-tier baseline should they wish to do so, without breaching referendum limits. In practice, this will be a decision for future authorities themselves.

- **Annual total** – this line shows the aggregate movement from the two-tier baseline forecast under this option, adding up all of the above.

As set out in the summary table above, adding up positive and negative movement from the baseline over time means that, overall, Hertfordshire would be better off as a result of this option in 2031/32 in the lower-cost scenario and 2032/33 in the higher-cost scenario.

High Street, Watford

MEDIUM-TERM POSITION OF INDIVIDUAL UNITARY AUTHORITIES OVER TIME

Cumulative net budget deficit/(surplus) in 2032/33 (five years after vesting day) (£millions)
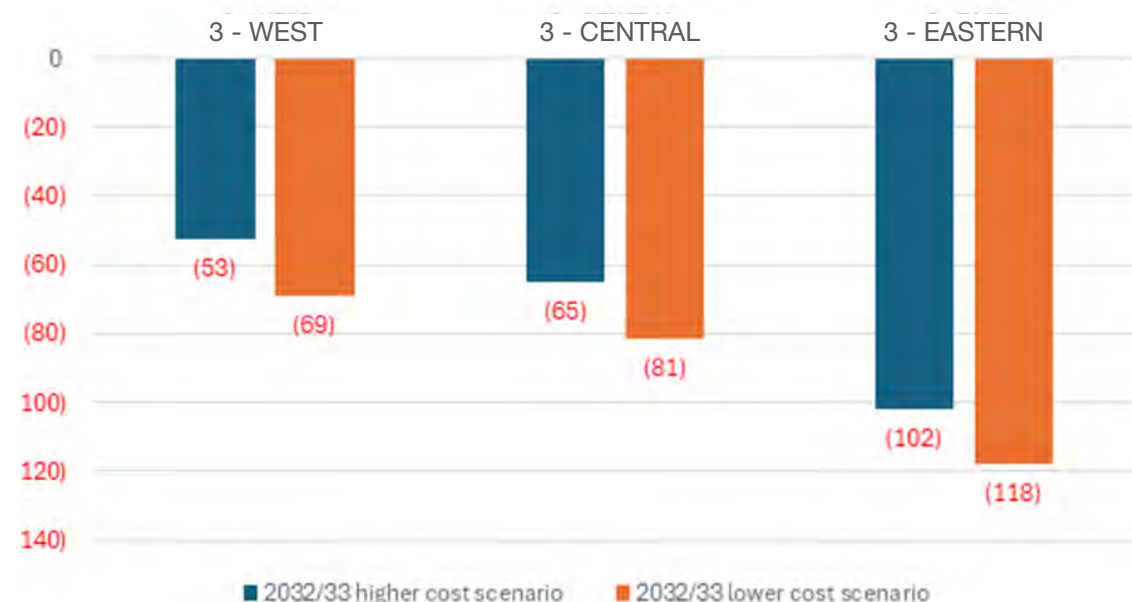
This graph combines all baseline modelling assumptions including inflation, assumed council tax increases and the impacts of LGR to show the cumulative net budget position for each unitary authority after the first five years of LGR. The set of baseline assumptions that we have used indicate that all models will be in a surplus position after this period, with increases in council tax assumed at 4.99 % (2.99% council tax + 2% Adult Social Care precept) in line with government funding assumptions. In our baseline assumptions this increase drives higher funding than the cost of services as driven by inflation, combined with the investment costs of delivering LGR and resulting savings. Further sensitivities have been modelled to test this position, and the surpluses will be quickly eroded if, for example:

Further sensitivities have been modelled to test this position, and the surpluses will be quickly eroded if, for example:

The significant savings planned in the 2025/26 to 2027/28 period (pre-vesting day) are not delivered in full, contributing to a more challenging opening position for new authorities.

- Inflation occurs at a higher rate than is assumed in our modelling.

- New authorities decide to increase council tax at a lower rate than the default assumed here, which is in line with government assumptions on future funding.

- There is any slippage in delivering the anticipated benefits from LGR.

- Further unexpected shocks occur.

The surplus shown above indicates that the three unitary model is likely to have some level of resilience in the event of any (or a combination) of the above occurring.
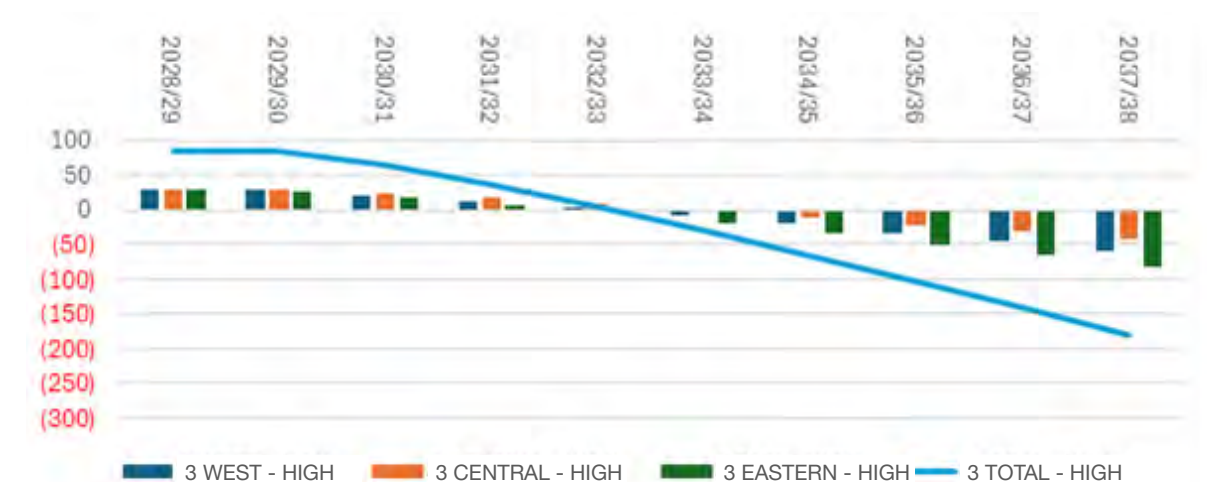
COSTS AND SAVINGS FROM LGR

Three unitary authorities - low scenario

Cumulative net costs/(savings) from LGR (£millions)
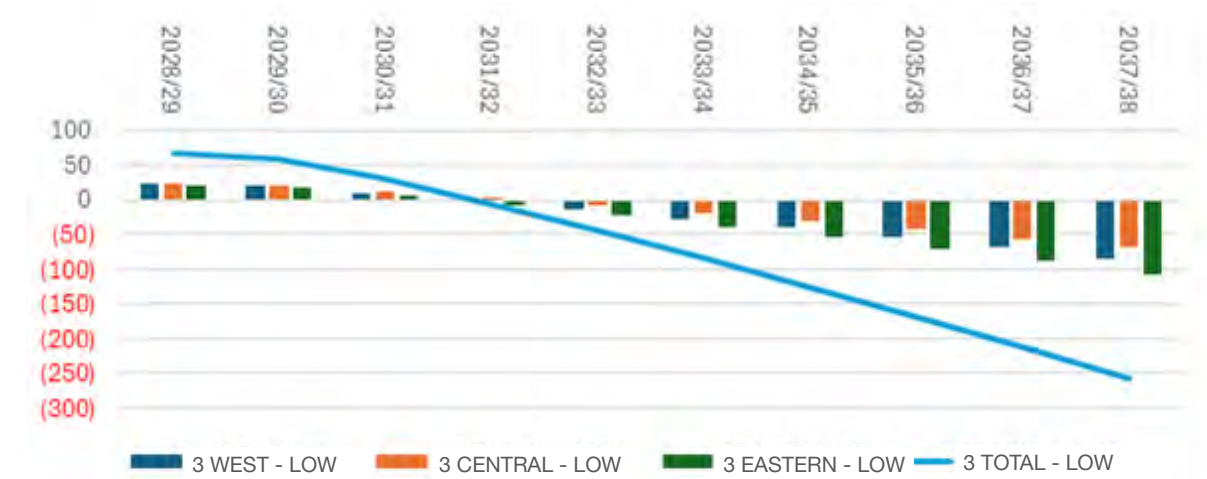
Three unitary authorities - high scenario

Cumulative net costs/(savings) from LGR (£millions)

CUMULATIVE NET COSTS / (SAVINGS) FROM LGR – LOWER COST SCENARIO (£MILLIONS)

£M	2028/ 2029	2029/ 2030	2030/ 2031	2031/ 2032	2032/ 2033	2033/ 2034	2034/ 2035	2035/ 2036	2036/ 2037	2037/ 2038
3 WEST - LOW	23	20	11	(1)	(13)	(26)	(40)	(54)	(69)	(83)
3 CENTRAL - LOW	23	21	13	3	(7)	(19)	(31)	(43)	(55)	(68)
3 EASTERN - LOW	22	18	7	(7)	(22)	(38)	(55)	(71)	(89)	(107)
4 TOTAL - LOW	**68**	**59**	**30**	**(5)**	**(43)**	**(83)**	**(125)**	**(168)**	**(213)**	**(258)**

CUMULATIVE NET COSTS / (SAVINGS) FROM LGR – HIGHER COST SCENARIO (£MILLIONS)

£M	2028/ 2029	2029/ 2030	2030/ 2031	2031/ 2032	2032/ 2033	2033/ 2034	2034/ 2035	2035/ 2036	2036/ 2037	2037/ 2038
3 WEST - HIGH	29	29	22	13	3	(8)	(20)	(32)	(45)	(58)
3 CENTRAL - HIGH	29	30	24	17	9	(1)	(11)	(21)	(32)	(42)
3 EASTERN - HIGH	28	27	18	7	(6)	(20)	(35)	(50)	(65)	(81)
4 TOTAL - HIGH	**85**	**86**	**64**	**37**	**6**	**(29)**	**(65)**	**(103)**	**(141)**	**(181)**

Croxley Business Park, Three Rivers

LGR COST AND SAVINGS DETAILED ASSUMPTIONS

The table below shows cost and savings assumptions in detail, identifying the areas in which a range has been accepted by partners. For further detail see Appendix A in the accompanying "spine" document.

LGR COSTS AND SAVINGS (£ M)										
ASSUMPTION	2028/ 2029	2029/ 2030	2030/ 2031	2031/ 2032	2032/ 2033	2033/ 2034	2034/ 2035	2035/ 2036	2036/ 2037	2037/ 2038
ONE OFF-COSTS										
IT disaggregation (HIGH)	28.0	8.2	4.6	3.5	3.5	-	-	-	-	-
IT disaggregation (LOW)	16.3	4.7	2.7	2.1	2.1	-	-	-	-	-
IT consolidation	18.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Programme management	16.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contract novation and renegotiation	4.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Estates and facilities - reconfiguration	1.4	1.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Communication and rebranding	1.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Staff relocation	1.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Specialist support and advice	5.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transition cost - redundancies	7.1	2.4	2.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total one-off costs (HIGH)	**84.8**	**11.9**	**7.0**	**3.5**	**3.5**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Total one-off costs (LOW)	**73.0**	**8.5**	**5.1**	**2.1**	**2.1**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**
RECURRING COSTS										
Additional costs of scale	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Diseconomies of scale (HIGH)	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7	12.7
Diseconomies of scale (LOW)	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0
Total recurring costs (HIGH))	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**13.1**
Total recurring costs (LOW)	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**	**7.4**
RECURRING SAVINGS										
Staff savings	(8.1)	(15.8)	(24.2)	(24.7)	(25.2)	(25.7)	(26.2)	(26.7)	(27.2)	(27.8)
Democratic and governance reorganisation	(1.1)	(2.1)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)	(3.6)
Direct cost savings	(3.2)	(6.7)	(13.8)	(16.0)	(18.4)	(19.0)	(19.6)	(20.2)	(20.8)	(21.5)
Total recurring savings	**(12.5)**	**(24.6)**	**(41.6)**	**(44.3)**	**(47.1)**	**(48.2)**	**(49.3)**	**(50.5)**	**(51.6)**	**(52.8)**

BALANCE SHEET - BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking of the consolidated balance sheets of new organisations against existing unitary authorities was undertaken by an independent organisation in March 2025. This comparison is based on our unmodified proposal (i.e. without changes to boundaries), but the results give a clear indication of the likely position of modified authorities.

	NET ASSETS	URR	URR+DSG	CFR	DEBT GEARING
3 West	TOP	TOP	TOP	3RD	TOP
3 Eastern	TOP	2ND	2ND	2ND	2ND
3 Central	TOP	2ND	2ND	3RD	TOP

Existing and future Hertfordshire authorities have relatively stable balance sheet financial health when compared with all existing unitaries. In this exercise they were compared to unitary authorities (excluding Metropolitan and London Boroughs). The table above shows the results by quartile.

Net assets – all three proposed unitaries would be in the top quartile.

Usable Revenue Reserves (URR) – all three unitaries will hold usable reserves at a level above the median, with 3 West in the top quartile.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit – currently low when compared with other areas, but forecasting much greater deficits in future which will impact the resilience of all three unitaries.

Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) – the one area with consistently low performance for all three unitaries. There are a handful of exceptions, driven by East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne.

Debt gearing - all three unitaries show above median levels in respect of debt gearing.

Boutique owner, Watford

OTHER KEY FINANCIAL RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Please refer to Appendix A of the spine document for a further list of specific risks and assumptions that are relevant to this option. In particular:

• Some existing costs and budgets will transfer to the Strategic Authority such as the Fire service. These have not been included in the financial model at this stage due to the complexities of splitting out budgets and resource. No additional running costs have been assumed for the Strategic Authority within the financial model.

• **Existing MTFS savings** – If the savings assumed to be achieved by vesting day are not delivered, this would reduce the projected baseline position and may require the new authorities to identify additional savings beyond those expected from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

• It should also be noted that, while annual savings are included in the MTFS up to 2027/28, non-LGR savings (to address underlying funding gaps) have already been incorporated into the financial model.

• **Savings** – while a prudent approach to savings has been adopted, it is not yet possible to fully determine which savings are cashable and which may be non-cashable - for example, where expenditure is funded by ring-fenced grants. Therefore, although expenditure may be reduced in some cases, there could be limitations on how those savings can be used.

• **MTFS forecasts** – as outlined earlier the financial models assume that cost increases – especially in social care and SEND, are lower in the years after LGR than in the years preceding it. Council tax increases are also assumed at 4.99% (2.99% council tax + 2% Adult Social Care precept) every year in line with government assumptions on funding.

• **Shared service arrangements** – Hertfordshire has a track record of successful shared services. It has been assumed for the purposes of the financial case that shared service arrangements will continue where long-term countywide contracts exist, such as for highways and waste disposal. Without these arrangements, the additional costs linked to disaggregation could rise.

• **DSG /High Needs Block (HNB) Deficit** – the HNB of the DSG funds education for children with SEND, including special schools, independent placements, and additional support in mainstream settings.

• Rising demand for SEND provision has led many councils to overspend, as grant funding has not kept pace with costs. The government's 'statutory override' allows councils to exclude these deficits from their accounts, but the financial shortfall remains. The override has been extended to March 2028 while longer-term reforms are developed.

• The County Council forecasts a cumulative DSG deficit of £255million by March 2028, with annual overspends expected to continue. The outcome of national reforms will be critical to the financial sustainability of all three structural options. Any remaining HNB deficit would need to be divided between the new authority or authorities, creating a risk that an unfunded deficit could be transferred.

- **Pay harmonisation** – no assumptions have been made in relation to pay harmonisation within the financial model although it is recognised that pay harmonisation will occur over several years. Whilst staff will initially move into the newly formed authorities taking their existing terms and conditions (including salary) under TUPE transfer, over time staff are likely to move on to the new organisations' terms and salary levels

- **Borrowing** – If alternative funding sources are insufficient to cover transition costs, borrowing may be required. Borrowing costs have not been included in the financial model at this stage and could reduce projected savings and the baseline funding available

- **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)** – the HRA sits outside of General Fund revenue expenditure. Although the four HRAs in Hertfordshire receive support services/Cost of democracy from the General Fund the impact on HRAs for one-off, on-going costs and savings has not been included within the financial business case

- **Assets disaggregation** – has not been accounted for within the financial model but this potentially poses risks at a later stage in terms of ensuring the transfer of assets and their corresponding revenue streams and or liabilities does not inadvertently worsen the financial position and sustainability of the new authorities. Disposal of surplus assets may help to defray the costs of reorganisation.

- **Shared services** – whilst some shared services already exist in Hertfordshire, for example Internal Audit, Anti-Fraud, Procurement and Building Control, these may no longer align geographically with the new authority boundaries. This may pose additional costs in relation to:

  o Disaggregating shared systems or contracts that are no longer aligned geographically.

  o Potential duplication of effort or investment if new, separate services are required.

  o Loss of economies of scale once shared arrangements end.

- However, in other cases existing shared services will not require disaggregation and there may be opportunities to expand these and create greater economies of scale.

- Companies and other entities – where they exist this may cause additional complexity in aggregating and disaggregating balance sheets and asset valuation or else amending governance and ownership arrangements. As a result, additional specialist support may be required. This is assumed to be covered by the existing allocation of specialist support within the one-off costs.

- Shadow authority costs – it has been assumed that the costs of the shadow authority can be covered by existing budgets and one-off costs and the contingency where required. These are unlikely to have a material impact on the financial assessment of alternative unitary options being considered, nor on their ongoing financial sustainability.
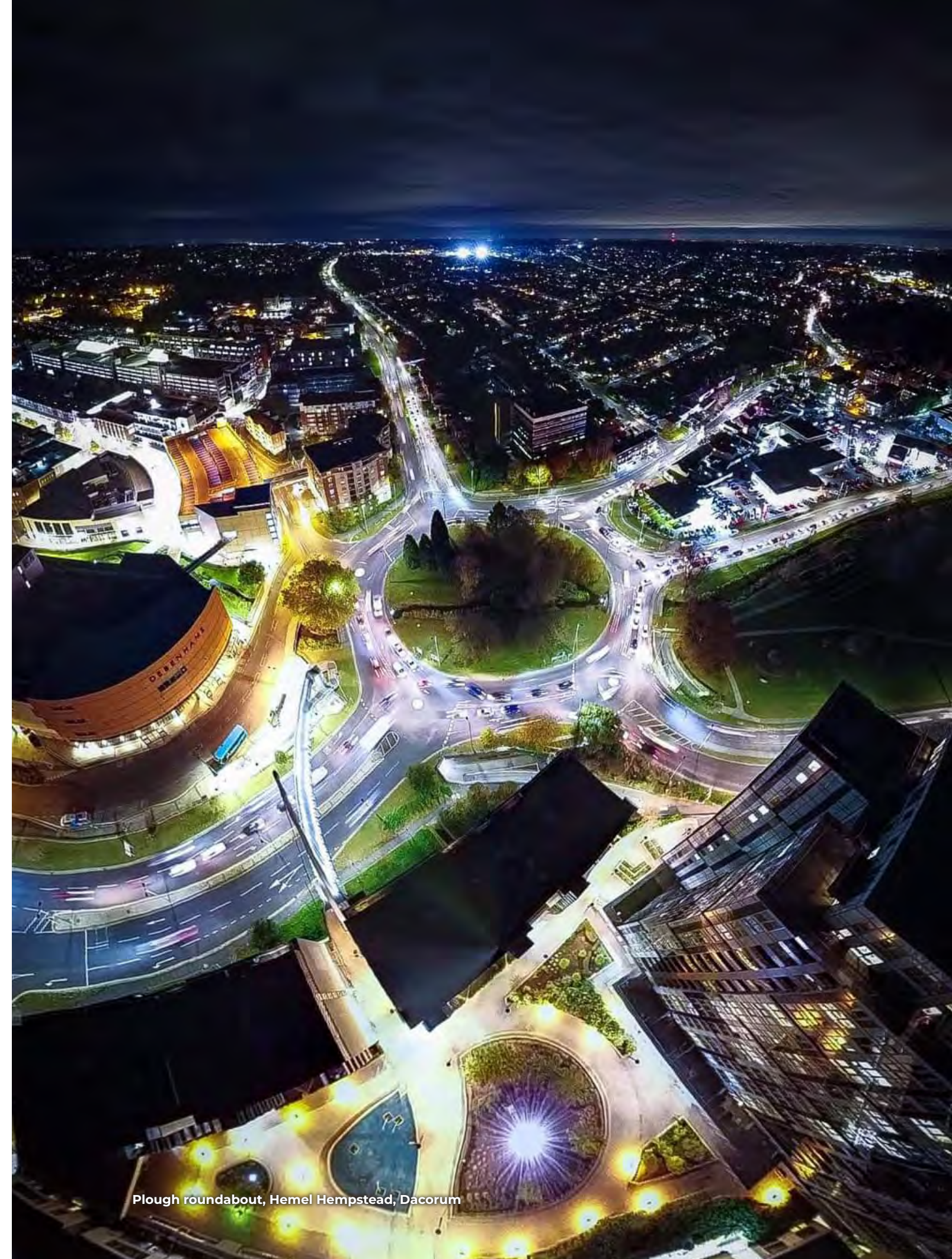
Plough roundabout, Hemel Hempstead, Dacorum

3. SUPPORTS DEVOLUTION ARRANGEMENTS (MHCLG CRITERION 5)

FROM PARTNERSHIP TO POWER: BUILDING HERTFORDSHIRE'S DEVOLUTION FRAMEWORK

The reorganisation of Hertfordshire into three new unitary authorities, creates the foundation for a transformational shift in local leadership and delivery. This model brings together the strategic scale of a county-wide vision with the local responsiveness of unitary governance, creating a framework designed to deliver.

As noted previously, Hertfordshire's strengths align directly with the government's Modern Industrial Strategy priorities. Well connected to both London and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the county stands as a major economic powerhouse, with a GDP per capita amongst the highest of any comparable authorities. The three unitary model provides the clarity, coherence and capacity needed to unlock the full potential of devolution, positioning Hertfordshire at the forefront of the government's devolution ambition.

This is not about redrawing boundaries. It is about turning shared ambition into measurable outcomes for every community across the county; reimagining what a modern, confident Hertfordshire can achieve: planning growth and transport as one integrated system, connecting people to skills and opportunity, driving innovation across a diverse economy and leading the transition to a sustainable, net-zero future.

DISTINCT ECONOMIC IDENTITIES, UNITED STRATEGIC PURPOSE

Hertfordshire's economic strengths are matched by persistent structural challenges. West Hertfordshire's creative and professional and business services growth is tempered by affordability pressures and social exclusion. Central Hertfordshire reflects a high-performing knowledge economy, yet faces severe housing stress and pockets

Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst, Lab Hotel, Stevenage

of deprivation. Eastern Hertfordshire leads in life sciences and digital infrastructure, but its relative affordability conceals deep educational inequalities and a vulnerable foundational workforce. These regional contrasts, outlined previously, highlight the need for targeted, place-based strategies that bridge opportunity and inclusion.

WHY THREE UNITARIES: THE OPTIMAL MODEL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

The three unitary configuration delivers at a level that fewer or multiple authorities would struggle to achieve. The model balances scale with proximity, creating authorities large enough to think and act strategically, yet close enough to communities to understand and respond to local needs.

The three unitary model is an optimal approach as it:

- Aligns with Hertfordshire's functional economic geography. The three areas correspond to real transport corridors and economic clusters. The road and rail networks that define and traverse each area are not arbitrary lines and reflect how people live, work and travel.

- Creates the right scale for strategic delivery without losing local connection. Each Unitary Authority will serve between approximately 350,000 and 479,000 residents rising significantly by 2045, large enough to employ specialist staff, manage complex projects and deliver at pace, but not so large that they become remote or disconnected from communities. A smaller unitary configuration would create areas too large to maintain distinct place identities, with the risk of tensions between different communities, whilst more Unitary Authorities would fragment capacity, duplicate strategic functions and retain many of the coordination problems we are seeking to resolve.

- Provides balanced representation at the MSA. Three constituent authorities offer even representation around the MSA table, ensuring no single area dominates decision making. This structure allows diverse perspectives, rural in some areas, urban and suburban in others, different political traditions and varied economic strengths to inform strategic choices. Each authority becomes a strong anchor institution that can represent its communities effectively while collaborating on county-wide priorities.

- Provides effective partnerships. Three strong Unitary Authorities offer clear contacts and scalable, locally informed solutions for organisations like the NHS, emergency services, education providers and major businesses.

- Reflects how Hertfordshire works. The three Unitary Authority areas have coherent identities. People identify with these areas. They make sense to residents, businesses and partners.

The three unitary model is not a compromise; it is the optimal solution. It creates authorities of sufficient scale to deliver transformational change, balanced with sufficient proximity to understand and respond to community needs. When combined with a MSA, this structure unlocks the full potential of devolution.

POWERING OUR WORLD-CLASS ECONOMY AND INVESTING IN SKILLS

Hertfordshire's economic diversity creates a powerful platform for strategic, place-based investment. The three unitary model allows each council to lead regeneration aligned with local economic strengths, while the MSA provides coordination, funding streams and strategic alignment through a comprehensive Hertfordshire Local Growth Plan and Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

With powers to create Investment Zones and Mayoral Development Corporations, the MSA would hold the levers to deliver growth at scale. The three unitaries ensure sufficient local focus to support delivery and successful operation of major growth opportunities in each area.

This partnership approach ensures investment is focused where it matters most, leveraging Hertfordshire's economic diversity to attract national and international capital while retaining strong local leadership. By connecting sectoral clusters, linking Watford's creative corridor with Stevenage's life sciences strengths and Broxbourne's digital and AI capabilities, Hertfordshire can unlock the critical mass and scale essential to compete at an international level.

Harry Potter World, Warner Bros Studios Leavesden, Three Rivers

BUILDING A WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE

A thriving economy relies on a workforce equipped for the industries of tomorrow. The three unitary model enables skills provision to be tailored to local economic strengths and challenges, while the MSA ensures strategic alignment and access to devolved funding through the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and Adult Skills Fund.

With support from the MSA, each Unitary Authority will develop local skills hubs providing routes into training and employment aligned with key sectors:

- West Hertfordshire Skills Hub: professional and business services, creative industries (film / TV production, post-production, digital content), digital skills and AI literacy to address automation impacts, clean growth technologies.

- Central Hertfordshire Skills Hub: life and veterinary sciences, logistics and supply chain management (including decarbonisation), innovation and entrepreneurship (leveraging University of Hertfordshire Enterprise Zone), creative industries at Elstree and Sky Studios, addressing education deprivation in Borehamwood and Hatfield.

- Eastern Hertfordshire Skills Hub: cell and gene therapy, advanced manufacturing and defence sector capabilities, digital infrastructure and AI / cloud computing, agri-tech and rural enterprise, pathways from lower educational attainment areas into high-value sectors.

Hertfordshire's sectoral specialisms, including advanced manufacturing and digital technologies, are ideally positioned to create one of the government's proposed new Technical Excellence Colleges, further strengthening local growth and opportunities. Through the MSA, these local initiatives are unified by the LSIP, ensuring a consistent, inclusive approach to workforce growth that meets employer needs and creates opportunities for residents. Targeted programmes aligned with the government's 'Get Britain Working' will reduce economic inactivity through integrated employment and skills support, create pathways from foundational sectors into higher-value employment and address barriers faced by residents in deprived areas.

BUILDING THE RIGHT HOMES IN THE RIGHT PLACES

Hertfordshire faces acute housing affordability challenges, as enumerated above, that require both strategic and local responses. With plans for considerable housing growth, the three unitary model enables a joined-up approach to growth built around natural transport and economic corridors. Each Unitary Authority area is large enough to shape ambitious local growth, whilst delivering on strategic housing and infrastructure objectives set by the MSA through an ambitious Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

Through the SDS, and utilising powers to call in strategic sites or create Mayoral Development Corporations, Hertfordshire can optimise the opportunities in housing delivery and urban regeneration.

The three unitary model ensures delivery builds on Hertfordshire's excellent track record of collaborative working on strategic housing growth opportunities, like Hemel Garden Communities and Harlow-Gilston Garden Town, to maintain community engagement and sustain momentum. Critically, the model also provides the right balance of capacity and local knowledge to directly deliver affordable housing within communities. Each of the three areas can develop clear programmes for affordable housing delivery on non-strategic sites, identifying opportunities that would otherwise be missed without the local expert knowledge this model provides.

Taking inspiration from the government's Small Sites Aggregator pilots, the three unitary areas within Hertfordshire can take a proactive role in the delivery of housing. Being of a similar scale to the current pilot areas of Lewisham, Bristol and Sheffield, this model provides a unique opportunity to work with SME builders and local tradespeople across Hertfordshire to support local housing delivery. The three unitaries provide organisations of the right scale to deliver new homes through a portfolio approach that benefits the local economy, while having the resources to work alongside a MSA to leverage the powers and funding required to deliver at scale. Together these initiatives form a county-wide ecosystem for sustainable growth, where housing, infrastructure and jobs are planned and delivered in balance.

CREATING A MODERN, CONNECTED TRANSPORT NETWORK

Hertfordshire's transport network is the economic backbone of the county. Positioned strategically, the county's connectivity is vital but suffers from congestion, fragmentation and underinvestment. The three unitary model reflects key transport corridors and creates local delivery capacity to invest in and maintain the network, while the MSA provides strategic oversight to create a truly integrated transport system.

As the single Local Transport Authority, the MSA would take on responsibilities for bus franchising, rail integration and planning for strategic active travel networks, developing a unified Hertfordshire Transport Strategy that connects major roads and rail lines into a coherent system. Delivering east-west connectivity across the county will be a strategic priority for the MSA. Funding from Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), similar to that charged in London, can help deliver the strategic transport infrastructure needed to address this long-standing barrier to growth.

Hertfordshire bus services

Delivering net-zero requires both local innovation and regional development. Decarbonising the transport system, improving air quality and meeting climate goals requires strategic and local interventions. The three unitary model embeds sustainability at the core of delivery, bringing the ability to focus on place-specific issues, whilst the MSA provides the strategic reach and investment levers to accelerate decarbonisation and climate resilience across the county.

This joined-up vision, with the MSA and three new authorities, will deliver an approach that strengthens north-south and east-west connectivity, reduces carbon emissions, unlocks growth, improves accessibility and removes barriers that have limited inclusive economic opportunities in Hertfordshire for decades.

London Underground station in Hertfordshire

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM BUILT FROM NEIGHBOURHOODS OUTWARD

As outlined elsewhere in detail, the three unitary model embeds integrated neighbourhood teams that link housing, social care, health, policing, wellbeing and community safety at a local level. The MSA can support the three Unitary Authorities to deliver their ambition for system-wide reform, uniting place, prevention and prosperity for Hertfordshire.

MOVING FROM POSSIBILITY TO POWER

This approach gives Hertfordshire the scale to think bigger and the structure to deliver smarter. It is a model designed not only to meet today's challenges, but to unlock the full potential of devolution tomorrow, providing the essential connection between local vision and regional power.

It sets out a clear route to a MSA built on strong foundations: three authorities leading delivery at place level, working together under a single strategic umbrella that amplifies their collective impact. This is how Hertfordshire moves from possibility to power, to a shared platform for growth, innovation and leadership.

The three unitary model will unleash ambition for growth across Hertfordshire, empowering people and places. It is about aligning ambition with delivery, combining local energy with strategic intent, ensuring that every community benefits from the opportunities devolution brings. A structure that can invest in the right things, in the right places, at the right time and do so with clarity, confidence and purpose.

Each of the three unitary areas brings its own character to the table. Together these areas represent Hertfordshire's full economic and cultural spectrum. Each brings unique strengths. Each faces distinct challenges. And each deserves local leadership that understands its communities and local needs while being empowered to deliver transformational change at scale. The three unitary model provides exactly that.

When combined with a MSA, this structure unlocks powers that can reshape Hertfordshire's future: powers over housing, transport, skills, economic development and climate action that will enable us to move at pace and respond to our communities' ambitions.

4. HIGH QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE SERVICES (MHCLG CRITERION 3)

DESIGNING TOMORROW, TODAY

The accompanying spine document establishes how Hertfordshire's new councils will be safe, legal and operational from day one, providing the secure foundation on which transformation can begin. Set out below is what the three unitary model will achieve from that point: a shift from stabilising the present to shaping the future.

The creation of three confident, connected and capable authorities provides the platform to deliver services that are not only efficient but transformative, structures that enable prevention, technology that empowers people, and cultures that turn ambition into action. We recognise that services such as social care, housing and public health operate within statutory frameworks that set clear expectations and parameters, frameworks that rightly prioritise safeguarding, quality and equity. While these duties limit the scope for radical transformation of core functions, they do not constrain our ambition to deliver them better: with greater prevention, stronger integration and deeper community connection. It is where vision becomes delivery; where reorganisation translates into better lives, stronger communities and a more confident Hertfordshire, built by people who believe that public services can and should create lasting change.

By uniting ambition with community connection across West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire, the authorities will transform local government into a dynamic catalyst that, through leadership, innovation, prevention and growth, empowers all three areas to thrive and shape their own prosperous futures.

Whilst organisational structures provide the framework, it is people who bring that framework to life. Their engagement, innovation and commitment are what make transformation real and lasting. Yet structure matters, not for its own sake, but for what it enables. A people-first culture, essential to prevention, sustainable growth and innovation, does not happen by accident, it must be intentionally designed and enabled. The three unitary model provides that configuration: large enough to invest in the sophisticated capabilities that define modern public service but also connected enough to remain grounded in community understanding.

This transformation rests on a fundamental principle that will shape everything that follows; prevention works, but only when structure enables it. The three unitary model creates that structure.

WORKING TOGETHER: THE ONE HERTFORDSHIRE ALLIANCE

The three unitary model delivers prevention through autonomous authorities, each large enough to lead, yet connected enough to collaborate. Autonomy does not mean isolation. The One Hertfordshire Alliance, comprised of leaders of critical services, adult and children social care, public health, education and SEND, will provide a framework to coordinate seamlessly around shared priorities, markets and resources to deliver equity and opportunity for every resident. It will evolve from ensuring day one safe and legal critical service delivery to a strategic partnership that supports continuous improvement and a platform for key countywide partnerships.

This framework provides the gateway to transformation at scale and as a coherent voice for Hertfordshire to work with Central East Integrated Care Board, the MSA, the wider East of England region and central government on key issues such as SEND demand. This will take forward current foundations and successful practice in social care in Hertfordshire to support new models of service delivery including exploration of shared service delivery, where appropriate to do so.

Joint frameworks will enable market shaping and specialist provision that ensures equity in critical areas such as foster care, SEND provision, children's homes and public health commissioning. Shared digital platforms will create interoperability without uniformity, allowing each authority to develop its own intelligent digital core whilst connecting to countywide infrastructure. Integrated workforce planning will build resilience, share expertise, and create career pathways that span all three councils.

Cross-boundary service models will ensure residents experience seamless support regardless of administrative boundaries. Shared investment and funding for innovation, transformation and resilience will pool resources for change that benefits everyone.

The One Hertfordshire Alliance exemplifies the approach of the three unitary model: autonomy with alignment, partnership by design, built on trust, mutual benefit and a shared commitment to prevention and prosperity across every part of Hertfordshire.

PREVENTION AS THE FOUNDATION – WHY IT MATTERS

The three unitary model creates the optimal structure for prevention to succeed: large enough for strategic public sector integration, systems relationships and data capability, small enough to connect with neighbourhoods and community assets. It is the catalyst for transforming public services to proactive, community-centred support that builds resilience and improves lives.

There is a strong economic case for prevention. Research by the Local Government Association, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, and IMPOWER demonstrates that for every £1 invested in prevention, councils save more than £3 in future social care costs[8] . Nearly half of high-cost interventions, including statutory child protection, hospital admissions and residential care placements could have been avoided through earlier, integrated support.

[8] Earlier action and support: The case for prevention in Adult Social Care and beyond, LGA, November 2024

National analysis indicates a £4billion - £5billion potential productivity gain from improving the Local Government–NHS interface[9], with even greater benefits when focusing on prevention. Local studies show that 40% to 60% of demand in complex health and care systems can be influenced. Case studies highlight opportunities to prevent, reduce, or delay long-term care in 78% of adult cases and to provide earlier support in 81% of children's cases[10]. Early Integrated Neighbourhood Team pilots, such as those in East Birmingham, have already demonstrated positive results, including fewer GP visits, reduced hospital stays, and less need for long-term care packages[11]. The three unitary authority model aims to match or surpass these outcomes.

Prevention works when investment targets evidence-backed interventions that address root causes: early years support, falls prevention and reablement, tackling loneliness and social isolation, housing retrofit and healthy homes and employment and skills pathways. These interventions reduce demand, maintain independence, enhance wellbeing and generate prosperity. The three unitary model structure enables operational delivery.

Active Herts, Broxbourne

[9] IMPOWER analysis using 2025 INDEX tool
[10] Based on recent IMPOWER case reviews with a London Borough
[11] Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS FT, July 2025

WHY PREVENTION REQUIRES THIS SCALE

The three unitary model creates the foundation for effective neighbourhood-based service delivery. In the NHS 10-Year Plan, neighbourhoods are the cornerstone of integrated care, based on natural geographies, population distribution and need.

The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) will merge into the new Central East ICB in April 2026 (covering Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, and Hertfordshire), fundamentally reshaping strategic commissioning across a broader geography.

Existing Primary Care Networks (PCNs) provide the springboard for new "single neighbourhood provider" contracts delivering enhanced multidisciplinary services that coordinate GPs, community health, social care and voluntary sector teams serving populations of 30,000 to 50,000.

These neighbourhoods then cluster at a Place Board level which then coalesce at Unitary Authority level. At this level, clusters of PCN's link to care providers such as, health and care partnerships, acute hospitals, care homes, mental health, local government and voluntary organisations to make shared assessments of local need, plan how to use collective resources and join up what they offer beyond traditional health and social care services.

Directors of Adult Social Care, public health and Children's Services hold significant legal duties to protect people and are the gateway to a range of local government functions and resources that can be deployed to neighbourhoods to build a prevention first approach, and scale and embed preventative work already underway.

Policing Vision 2030[12] emphasises prevention-focused policing integrated with multi-agency partnerships, aiming to address factors such as mental health, homelessness, domestic abuse, adult and youth vulnerability. The three unitary model enables Police neighbourhood teams to align with PCN footprints, building genuine relationships with partner agencies and communities whilst reducing inefficient demand through coordinated, multi-agency support rather than emergency response. The model already aligns with updated Police neighbourhood structures. Regardless of the end destination of the LGR work, the Chief Constable has confirmed that he will ensure that policing can work effectively in the community partnership.

The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise organisations (VCFSE) sector champions prevention because it aligns with their core mission to strengthen communities. Yet crisis-driven commissioning marginalises them through short-term grants rather than strategic partnership. By embedding prevention as the operating principle, the three unitary model offers long-term investment in community capacity and positions VCFSE as equal partners in design and delivery.

This configuration responds to demographic pressures, particularly the growing elderly population in Hertfordshire, forecasting a 40% increase in over 65s, a 47% increase in over 85s and a 78% increase in dementia prevalence by 2040. SEND demand is growing at 12-15% per annum in line with national averages meaning a new model of delivery is required to enable financial sustainability and better outcomes.

[12] *Policing vision 2030, Strategic Policing Partnership Board, March 2023*

Prevention requires coordinated multi-agency support, integrated governance structures that enable seamless collaboration across all levels of the system from neighbourhood delivery to working with government.

Neighbourhoods and Integrated Care Systems are critical constants for long-term reform to enable prevention and the long-term financial sustainability of public services.

Through neighbourhood working, prevention becomes tangible, where risk is identified early, support is wrapped around families from all disciplines; health, care and local government genuinely connecting at the frontline. This model of neighbourhood working delivers reduced costs, fewer hospital admissions and improved health outcomes, as demonstrated by case studies across England[13]. This approach also aligns to DCN Guidance; Building the Best Places for Families and Children[14] and the government's Family First Partnership approach[15].

The three unitary structure provides alignment to the NHS 10-Year plan, creating the stable platform for joint commissioning, shared data systems and coordinated workforce planning. This will deliver care within community settings, transitioning from analogue to digital systems while fostering innovation, and emphasise prevention.

As the following table demonstrates, this is the scale where strategic public sector integration meets neighbourhood delivery, creating authorities which are large enough for data capability, specialist commissioning and system partnerships, but also small enough for community connection, local knowledge and democratic accountability. By aligning with neighbourhood infrastructure and positioning strategically for the emerging Central East ICB footprint, the three unitary model supports delivery of the NHS 10-Year Plan.

	POPULATION			
GUIDANCE	SYSTEMS	PLACE	LOCAL GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS	NEIGHBOURHOODS
MHCLG (Devolution Guidance)	1.5m (Strategic Authority)	500,000 (Unitary Authority)	Criterion 6 – Provide detail on Neighbourhood based governance	N/A
NHS (Designing Integrated Care System guidance)	1-3m (Integrated Care System)	250,000-500,000	N/A	30-50k
3UA Proposal	3.3m (Central East ICB) 1.5M (Strategic Authority)	413,000-600,000 (unitary authority)	30-120k (Place Boards)	30,000-50,000 served by community hubs

[13] *Neighbourhood health – case studies of good practice, NHS England, March 2025*
[14] *Building the Best Places for Children and Families, DCN, July 2025*
[15] *Families First Partnership programme, DfE, March 2025*

2035 Resident Journey: Margaret and George

Margaret (82) and **George (85)** live in a semi-detached home in East Hertfordshire. Margaret has early-stage dementia and George has mobility issues and a history of falls. They are proud, independent, and have lived in their community for over 50 years.

1. Early identification and outreach

Shared data systems from health, social care, housing and benefits using predictive AI technology identify Margaret and George as high-risk for hospital admission and care home placement. This trusted, transparent use of data reflects the system's prevention-first design: learning from people, not just about them.

A member of their local neighbourhood team, aligned to the Primary Care Network footprint, receives this alert and visits them to conduct a home safety assessment and cognitive screening. The officer is part of a multidisciplinary team that includes NHS staff, social workers, housing officers, and voluntary sector partners, a One Workforce, operating seamlessly across organisational boundaries.

2. Coordinated support plan

A single key worker is assigned to Margaret and George, eliminating the need for multiple referrals, embodying Hertfordshire's integrated front door approach, one assessment, one plan, one relationship.

The key worker develops a joined-up care plan that includes falls prevention interventions (grab rails, stair lift, non-slip flooring), memory café sessions and dementia-friendly activities at the local community hub, weekly check-ins from a volunteer befriender, and remote monitoring via wearable devices linked to NHS systems. Data flows securely between agencies, allowing early intervention rather than crisis response.

3. Neighbourhood team integration

Margaret and George's care is coordinated by a co-located team operating within their neighbourhood footprint. This team includes a dementia nurse specialist, a housing adaptations officer, a community safety officer, and a voluntary sector coordinator.

Together, they ensure Margaret's cognitive needs and George's physical risks are addressed holistically. This is Hertfordshire's neighbourhood delivery model in action, bringing together previously separate functions through the aggregation and disaggregation of services to deliver joined-up, human-centred support. The team meets monthly to review progress and adapt the care plan, using shared data and professional insight to continually learn and improve.

4. Community hub engagement

Margaret and George begin attending their local community hub, which offers in-person support and peer groups, drop-in sessions for benefits advice, and digital access to health and wellbeing advisors.

The hub becomes a lifeline, reducing isolation and providing trusted, local support. As a flagship of the place-based delivery model, it brings together public, voluntary and digital services under one roof, turning service points into social spaces. Margaret joins a reminiscence group, while George participates in a falls prevention exercise class. Both feel more connected, supported, and part of their community again.

5. Voluntary sector as equal partner

Local charities and faith groups are embedded in the neighbourhood model, not just as providers but as co-designers. Margaret and George benefit from a dementia-friendly walking group run by a local charity, a volunteer driver service for hospital appointments, and a community-led "safe homes" initiative that checks on vulnerable residents during winter.

6. Ongoing prevention and evaluation

Margaret and George's outcomes are tracked not by service usage, but by avoided crises. Their admissions to hospital reduce, their wellbeing improves, and their independence is maintained.

Through the Place Board, representing health, housing, and community partners, anonymised data and resident feedback are used to shape future services. This closes the loop between insight, learning and action, demonstrating how Hertfordshire's new model is designed not only to deliver services but to evolve and lead.

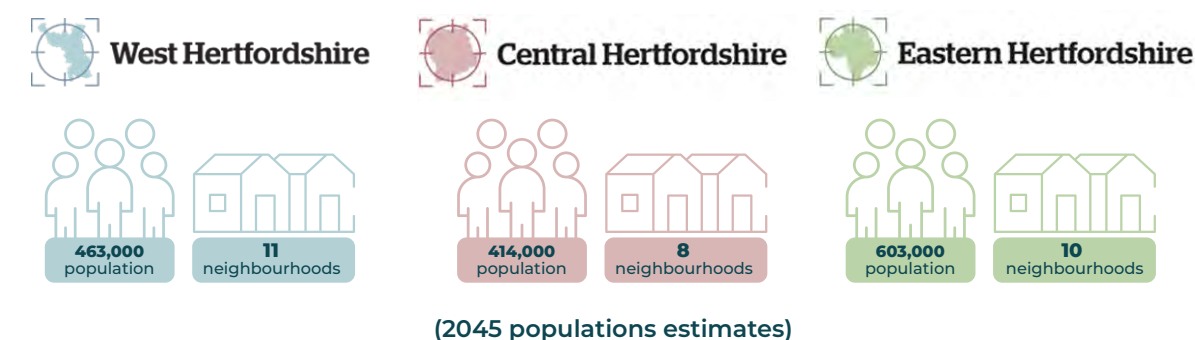## HOW THE MODEL WORKS: CONNECTED PLACES, STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Prevention at this scale requires structural configuration that operates with strategic sophistication whilst maintaining intimate community knowledge. Transformation only succeeds when staff know their communities deeply enough to see the person behind the data, the family behind the statistic and the opportunity behind the challenge.

The three unitary model achieves this balance. Each authority is large enough to invest in AI-driven digital capability, employ specialist expertise and operate at sufficient scale to command credible partnerships, but is also small enough for staff to retain the local knowledge that makes those capabilities meaningful. Skills pathways can reflect local employment landscapes. Prevention strategies can be tailored to how specific communities experience need.

This is not a compromise between competing priorities. It is the optimal design: sophisticated enough to compete at scale, connected enough to understand lived experience and financially resilient enough to invest in prevention.

THE OPTIMAL CONFIGURATION

Each Unitary Authority coordinates 8 to 11 PCN neighbourhoods, benchmarked to similar comparable authorities in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire [16].

West Hertfordshire — 463,000 population — 11 neighbourhoods

Central Hertfordshire — 414,000 population — 8 neighbourhoods

Eastern Hertfordshire — 603,000 population — 10 neighbourhoods

(2045 populations estimates)

At 8 to 11 neighbourhoods per authority, Hertfordshire achieves the critical balance and scale to work across and with the wider integrated care system.

This optimal range enables each authority to maintain direct relationships with strategic public sector partners, lead Health and Wellbeing Boards, coordinate multidisciplinary teams across a manageable footprint, operate population health management systems that stratify risk and target interventions, align community assets and voluntary sector infrastructure with neighbourhood geographies, command a credible voice within the new Central East ICB and Strategic Authority. Critically, Section 75 partnership agreements as created by the NHS Act 2006 will enable budgets to be pooled between local health and social care organisations and authorities to deliver greater impact.

[16] *North Northamptonshire (407,000 population; 9 neighbourhoods), West Northamptonshire (406,000; 8 neighbourhoods), and Buckinghamshire (553,000; 14 neighbourhoods)*

PREVENTION IN PRACTICE: WHAT CHANGES

The three unitary structure enables a fundamental shift to proactive prevention:

- **Shared data** integrates across health, social care, education, housing and policing to identify residents at risk 6 to 12 months before crisis occurs, enabling intervention when support costs less and works better.

- **Key workers** coordinate one plan across multiple services, eliminating fragmented referrals. One professional holds accountability for ensuring the right support wraps around the family.

- **Multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams** co-located across PCN footprints bring together health, social care, policing, housing, education and VCFSE, working collaboratively with shared accountability for community outcomes and maximising a family first approach. Services are co-designed at local level, shaped by the unique culture and specific needs of each neighbourhood, with team members possessing deep understanding of their communities to tailor support effectively.

- **Community hubs** provide physical and virtual spaces for accessible support, such as drop-in sessions and virtual peer support tailored to each community, overcoming geographical barriers to ensure everyone can access help.

- **VCFSE organisations** are embedded as equal partners, leading community-led solutions with community assets, befriending schemes, peer support networks, faith groups, sports clubs and residents' associations mobilised as the first line of support, with statutory services as enablers.

- **Needs-led, strengths-based support** replaces risk-based thresholds, building on community assets. Support continues for as long as needed, not just until immediate crisis is resolved.

- **Shared accountability** measures success by how many avoid needing services, not how many access them and a need to move from traditional hospital performance indicators [17]. Joint commissioning across health, social care, housing, education, VCFSE and policing creates accountability for population outcomes, with evaluation built into every programme and Place Boards connecting neighbourhood delivery to strategic governance.

By intervening earlier and providing coordinated support across a range of services e.g. via Healthy Hubs, demand for statutory services decreases because people receive the right help at the right moment. Communities experience greater resilience. Individuals and families are less likely to reach crisis point.

[17] *Making care closer to home a reality, The King's Fund, Feb 2024*

2035 Resident Journey: Aisha

This journey demonstrates the system's commitment to co-design, empowerment and value through prevention, putting trust, voice and lived experience at the heart of transformation.

Aisha, who has cerebral palsy and learning disabilities, faced major challenges when she turned 18 and transitioned from children's to adult services. The loss of school support left her uncertain, and finding housing added further stress. These changes increased her anxiety, made her behaviour harder to manage, and led to feelings of isolation. The journey below reflects how this would be different in the future.

1. Early identification and transition planning

As Aisha approaches 18, her children's social worker flags her upcoming transition using Hertfordshire's integrated life-course pathway. This begins at age 14, ensuring no cliff edge. The Neighbourhood case worker proactively reviews her case through a multi-agency transition panel including adult social care, housing, health, and SEND services to map future care options. Her Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) automatically triggers an adult social care assessment using shared data, no duplication, no retelling her story. A personalised transition plan is initiated 12 months before her 18th birthday, ensuring continuity across services.

2. Neighbourhood-based support coordination

Aisha is assigned a lead professional from her local neighbourhood team, aligned to the Primary Care Network footprint, who becomes her single point of contact. This team, part of Hertfordshire's One Workforce model, brings together professionals across traditional boundaries to undertake legally required assessments and design support around the person, not the process. This team includes a social worker, housing officer, a learning disability nurse, a community occupational therapist, a benefits officer and a voluntary sector advocate. Together, they co-produce a support plan with Aisha and her family, ensuring her voice is central. The team works collaboratively across children's and adult services, health, housing, benefits and education to deliver seamless support.

3. Housing and independence pathway

Recognising Aisha's need for accessible housing, the team identifies and adapts a supported living placement one year in advance. The housing officer ensures the property meets her physical needs, while the voluntary sector advocate helps Aisha understand her tenancy rights and responsibilities. This anticipatory approach, using shared intelligence and pooled budgets, avoids crisis-driven placements and demonstrates how the three-unitary model enables scale for planning, but flexibility for personalisation. Aisha's independence is supported from day one, with wrap-around assistance designed to grow as her confidence does. This proactive approach avoids crisis-driven placements and ensures Aisha's independence is supported from day one.

4. Skills, employment and community connection

Aisha is enrolled in a local skills programme tailored for young adults with disabilities. Her day opportunities are co-funded through pooled budgets from education, social care, and health, a practical example of integrated commissioning and shared accountability. She attends sessions at the community hub, which offers peer mentoring, social activities and digital literacy support. She also begins working one day a week in a local café enabled by the VCS and attends a specialist college two days a week. The hub is inclusive and empowering, helping Aisha build confidence and friendships. After completing her college course, she goes on to get a permanent role working in the local café continuing to build community connections.

5. Seamless service continuity

Thanks to the Neighbourhood Team, Aisha's children's service records are seamlessly transferred to adult services. There is no duplication, no re-assessment, and no need to retell her story. Her health and care plan is digitally accessible to all relevant professionals, ensuring joined-up working and consistent support.

6. Empowerment and co-design

Aisha joins a youth advisory panel that helps shape services for young adults with disabilities. Her lived experience informs future service design, and she participates in participatory budgeting sessions to allocate funding for inclusive community projects. Her family describes the transition as "a smooth bridge, not a terrifying jump." The integrated approach reduces family stress, improves Aisha's outcomes, and costs 35% less than traditional, fragmented transitions.

BUILDING INTELLIGENCE, SHAPING FUTURES

These changes in practice, multidisciplinary teams, key worker coordination, VCFSE partnership, shared accountability, all depend on three critical enablers: effective, ethical and innovative use of data, people and infrastructure. The three unitary model provides the scale to invest in shared expertise, interoperable systems, and a unified approach to analytics that provides a bridge between prevention, growth and innovation, delivering change that is intelligent, trusted and human.

Shared integrated enterprise architecture and infrastructure, not isolated systems are critical. Each unitary will operate a local digital core, anchored in community needs. This model promotes innovation, ensures alignment with Government Digital Service standards, and allows scalable use of new technologies across the county.

Data-driven decisions will connect prevention, growth and inclusion. Through secure, open data platforms, residents can understand performance, participate in shaping services, and see the real impact of public investment. Predictive insights will link housing, health, employment, and education and will turn information into action. This will enable early intervention and resource optimisation, through identifying homelessness risk, matching residents with jobs, or optimising housing locations, transforming how decisions are made and how outcomes are delivered.

BUILDING THE DIGITAL CORE

The three unitary model is designed to establish a robust enterprise-level infrastructure core that seamlessly connects people, systems and insights, but is sufficiently flexible for each authority to tailor its use to the needs of its communities and neighbourhoods. Hertfordshire's technology framework will follow the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) Technology Code of Practice, though it is anticipated that some initiatives will evolve over time. Certified public cloud environments would be adopted to provide the flexibility, resilience and cost efficiency required, in line with the G-Cloud framework. This cloud-first, hybrid-ready approach is intended to ensure that systems remain adaptable and robust.

Security measures are being aligned with the NCSC Zero Trust Architecture principles and the Government Cyber Security Strategy 2022-30. This means that, once implemented, every connection will be verified and monitored, ensuring a zero-trust security model is in place. There is also an ambition to interconnect shared services through Application Programming Interfaces, enabling reuse and collaboration between the different unitaries and promoting open standards and interoperability.

A strong commitment to data governance and ethics will ensure compliance with UK GDPR and the National Data Strategy, guaranteeing data reliability, privacy and trust. These foundational elements will support hybrid working, intelligent automation and real-time analytics across all service areas. Ultimately the success of this transformation will be measured by the outcomes it delivers in terms of improved decisions, faster delivery and a more empowered workforce, rather than by the technology itself.

This local intelligence makes prevention deliverable, identifying risk earlier, coordinating support seamlessly and targeting interventions where they have greatest impact. It also fuels inclusive growth, providing the insight to align housing, skills, transport and investment around the real needs of people and places. This is technology in service of people, enabling smarter services, thriving neighbourhoods and prosperous, connected communities across Hertfordshire. The three unitary model creates the scale to build that foundation once and use it well: unified where it adds value, local where it makes the difference.

OUR PEOPLE

Technology and data build capability, people turn it into progress when they are empowered, skilled and supported by cultures that champion innovation. The three unitary model creates the conditions for this, with councils large enough to invest in digital capability and professional development, but local enough for people to feel connected to their communities and see the difference they make. Public service reform re-engineers local government around three enablers: digital intelligence, human connection and shared purpose. The three unitary model will be digital first but human always, using technology and real-time data to streamline processes and create seamless resident experiences, while maintaining empathy, inclusion and trust.

Public service reform will challenge the status quo, replacing outdated practice with joined-up design that reflects how people live their lives. Staff will be trusted to identify what no longer works, co-design new solutions and innovate around shared outcomes. Structures will be agile by design, with flexible governance that adapts quickly to changing demand, demographics and technology. Decisions will be evidence-led, guided by data and resident feedback, with AI-powered analytics enhancing, not replacing, professional judgement.

Partnerships will empower multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams to make decisions where knowledge is deepest and relationships strongest. Equity in access will ensure every community benefits, supported by culturally competent practice and a workforce that reflects Hertfordshire's diversity.

Prosperity shared by all defines growth that benefits everyone. The three unitary model enables this by aligning economic development, housing, skills and transport around the specific opportunities of each place, recognising that prevention and growth are two sides of the same coin. Economic development becomes a prevention strategy, linking affordable housing, skills pathways and regeneration to long-term wellbeing, ensuring prosperity uplifts both towns and rural areas.

Services will be designed around residents' lived experience, with frontline staff empowered to advocate for them. Financial sustainability will come through transparency, honest dialogue and investment in prevention and transformation rather than short-term efficiencies. Above all, the three unitary model will build one workforce, a culture of collaboration, empowerment and pride, where staff experience change happening with them, not to them, supported by leadership that enables rather than controls. This is people-first transformation: councils large enough to create opportunity and progression, but which remain local enough for every colleague to see their impact and every community to feel it.

THE ENGINE OF DELIVERY – INTEGRATED BACK OFFICE

The back office is not a support function. It is the operational engine of local government. In the future, services such as finance, HR, ICT, procurement and governance must operate collaboratively. Transformation will be enabled by building integrated enterprise architecture that consolidates systems, streamlines and automates processes, and embeds analytics into everyday management.

This model replaces duplication with standardisation and data silos with intelligence. Platforms will integrate process automation, case management, and insight tools that provide transparent performance dashboards and operational forecasting.

A people-first culture, prevention-focused practice and intelligent use of technology all depend on one further foundation: a modern, integrated back office which turns ambition into action. Whilst frontline services shape outcomes for residents, it is the systems, processes and people behind them that determine how quickly, efficiently and effectively those outcomes are achieved.

The creation of three new authorities provides the opportunity to design this foundation coherently, aligning people, process and technology from the outset. The three unitary model gives the critical mass to invest in shared digital architecture, common data standards and intelligent automation, while retaining the local flexibility to adapt systems to the needs of communities and neighbourhoods. Fragmentation gives way to connection, duplication to collaboration. This joined-up foundation releases capacity, accelerates decision-making and enables staff to focus where they add most value, on prevention, growth and human connection.

Evidence reinforces this direction. Over half of councils (58%) report a digital skills gap, showing that capability, not technology, remains the biggest barrier to transformation[18]. Effective use of data and AI enhances productivity, reduces duplication and improves outcomes for both staff and residents, particularly when digital literacy is shared across the workforce rather than confined to technical teams. Investment in digital capability becomes a retention strategy, giving staff the confidence, autonomy and purpose to shape how services evolve.

In the three unitary model, the back office becomes the adaptive core of the organisation. Services operate as one connected system, powered by automation, analytics and shared intelligence. Routine processes are streamlined and self-managed; predictive tools surface insights that guide investment, workforce planning and early intervention. Real-time data flows between back office and frontline, ensuring decisions at every level are informed, transparent and responsive.

Opening night, Watford Colosseum (credit Trade Photography)

THREE LEARNING, ADAPTIVE ORGANISATIONS

The three unitary model will operate as a connected, learning organisation, one that captures insight, anticipates risk and reshapes processes dynamically. Shared intelligence across the system will create feedback loops that improve service quality, financial control, and community experience.

By aligning technology with purpose and embedding good governance, Hertfordshire's councils can become models of digital maturity in line with A Blueprint for Modern Digital Government[19], organisations that are intelligent, trusted, and above all, person-centred.

Three unitaries make this possible at scale. It provides the resilience and shared investment to modernise systems once while keeping accountability and service insight close to place. Transforming the back office first creates the stability, scale and capability needed for every other part of the system to thrive. It is the invisible infrastructure that connects prevention with growth, links digital ambition to human insight and turns strategic intent into everyday practice across Hertfordshire.

[18] Local Government Workforce Survey: Research Report, Local Government Association, 2023

[19] A Blueprint for Modern Digital Government, Cabinet Office, January 2025

WHAT IT DELIVERS FOR RESIDENTS

Prevention works when structure and its supporting infrastructure enable it. Safe landing through implementation of detailed transition plans on day one is non-negotiable and forms the essential foundation upon which we will build transformation. Critical services will transfer seamlessly, preserving all statutory functions and frontline relationships to ensure uninterrupted statutory compliance and continuity of casework. This stability creates the solid platform from which we can innovate and improve. Building on this secure base, we will embed an integrated front door within each unitary as a single point of access to safeguard our most vulnerable residents; transforming how we deliver services from the ground up. What matters most is what this delivers to our residents:

Adult Social Care will transform from a service of support into a system of independence and opportunity, where prevention is embedded at every level and through collaboration residents' rights are protected. Residents will receive person-centred care and support rooted in their neighbourhood where prevention, independence and choice are at the core, aligned to the government's vision to put 'People at the Heart of Care'.[20] Every resident will receive the right support at the right time, in the right place, enabling individuals to live independently, safely and well within their communities. The robustness and focus on day one transition plans will be maintained to ensure ongoing support and care for our residents as services evolve. This preventative approach is not about avoiding or reducing care and support when it is needed, it is about delaying when provision is needed and by reducing those who need high levels of support the quality of service can be maintained.

Neighbourhood teams will provide single points of contact, coordination and connection. Community hubs will expand face-to-face support such as falls prevention and blood pressure checks, alongside cutting-edge technological advances providing digital platforms for medical information to be shared with NHS staff.

Building on Hertfordshire's 'Good' Care Quality Commission rating, its 'Connected Lives' approach, and the pioneering 'Connect and Prevent' transformation programme, the use of predictive analytics and AI will mature into a unified data platform. This will enable seamless data integration to proactively identify risks, intervene earlier, and personalise support. As a result, hospital admissions will decline, integrated and co-produced services will become standard practice, and community-led models will be the norm. Maintaining the robustness and focus on day one transition plans is critical, and it is crucial to ensure quality ongoing support and care for our residents as our services evolve. The three-council model will position the new authorities for readiness to transform, a preventative approach that is not about avoiding or reducing care and support when it is needed. Instead, it aims to delay the provision of such care. By reducing the number of individuals who require high levels of support, we can ultimately enhance the quality of service provided for those most in need.

[20] *People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care reform white paper, Department of Health and Social Care, December 2021*

Children's Social Care builds on the strength of high-performing services with a future model of prevention and early intervention to advance the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Completion of the current programme to develop new care homes and increase bed capacity will help to meet demand and manage costs. Future provision will be supported through integration with housing initiatives. Foster care services will be coordinated across Hertfordshire to promote fairness and consistency in both delivery and incentives.

Multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams will improve outcomes and experiences, providing a holistic care model for families. Children's voices will be louder and greater by embedding them at the heart of continuous improvement to co-design services.

The authorities will act as ambitious corporate parents, ensuring children and families receive coordinated, accessible support through a single agency and place-based care integrated by neighbourhood teams, making it easier to navigate support and benefit from the principles of Family Safeguarding.

This is not about doing the same at a different scale, it is about maintaining and retaining a skilled and settled workforce by giving them the opportunity to reshape how Children's Services are delivered.

Through digital transformation, predictive analytics and real-time insight, practitioners will have the autonomy and tools to work smarter and closer to families, using technology to strengthen, not replace, professional judgement. The model provides stability, consistency and a sense of place and belonging in the foundational years of a child's life, supporting every child to thrive.

Education and SEND faces significant pressure locally and nationally to build an inclusive education system. Within this context, the three unitary model will deliver an inclusive and equitable system that places children and families at the heart of service design, with early intervention, prevention and neighbourhood provision at its core. This will build on the work of the SEND Local Area Partnership and SEND Academy, which are delivering a programme of improvements and skills development.

Informed by the voices of children, carers and families, health, education, housing and social care will come together as a single agency to co-design and produce SEND and education provision. SEND officers placed in neighbourhood teams will be visible and approachable, working in close collaboration with therapists, health visitors, neighbourhood teams and parent forums.

Early identification and multi-agency coordination will drive timely, effective support. The three unitary model will deliver equitable and balanced school provision, with an appropriate number of schools, pupil referral units and special schools distributed across each authority area as the platform for wider improvement.

Families will spend less time navigating bureaucracy and more time benefiting from tangible support and positive outcomes where they live.

Hertfordshire's education system is one of its greatest strengths, with over 90% of schools rated good or outstanding and pupil attainment consistently above national averages

from Key Stage 2 through to GCSE. This success is built on strategic coordination, strong school improvement support through HFL Education (a school-owned company), and a collaborative 'family of schools' culture that spans maintained schools and academies across all phases.

Under a three unitary model, each new authority would become the local education authority for schools within its boundaries. The challenge is maintaining the strategic coherence and collaborative culture that has driven Hertfordshire's success, whilst avoiding fragmentation that could undermine school standards or create inequity for children and families.

Maintaining strategic coherence. Several education functions operate most effectively at scale and require coordination across the three authorities. School improvement services would continue through HFL Education, with all three authorities commissioning from this proven model to maintain consistency and quality. Place planning requires a county-wide view of demographic trends and capacity to avoid inefficient provision and ensure children can access good local schools. Admissions need coordinated fair access protocols, particularly for vulnerable children and those requiring specialist placements. The 'family of schools' culture depends on networks and partnerships that often span multiple authority boundaries.

Housing and homelessness services will consolidate into three Strategic Housing Authorities capable of acting on prevention. By aligning operational services in neighbourhood teams and embedding wider services within and informed by communities, early intervention and Family Safeguarding becomes achievable. Integration enables prevention that addresses root causes rather than managing consequences.

Demands on temporary accommodation will reduce and critically families will not experience further trauma, parents are supported to create safe environments for their children; to maximise income and seek employment, children remain in their family home without school disruption; at least one authority with retained housing stock and an active development programme, providing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capacity and strong partnerships with registered providers. Merging assets and expertise removes fragmentation and creates the scale to deliver more affordable homes, accelerate supply and reduce homelessness. Additionally, community-led housing models will benefit from this scale to move from pilot to practice, enabling locally driven solutions that have the potential to strengthen place and prevent crisis.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Public health will be embedded within each Unitary Authority to ensure consistent leadership while maintaining local responsiveness. In addition to delivering statutory functions, it will provide strategic intelligence and leadership to embed a preventative model that improves population health, reduces inequalities, and proactively manages public health risks.

Working at both neighbourhood and system levels, Public Health will play a central role in neighbourhood teams and Place Boards, using evidence to identify local needs,

shape targeted interventions, and inform commissioning across Hertfordshire. It will lead coordination with health partners, convene statutory partnerships, and collaborate closely with the VCFSE sector to co-design and deliver services that reflect community and cultural intelligence.

Crucially, Public Health will act as the link to the wider Integrated Care System (ICS) and MSA and population health management, ensuring that local insights inform strategic decisions and that outcomes are improved through joined-up, place-based approaches.

Transport and infrastructure will create a connected system that links people, places and opportunity: safe, sustainable, inclusive and resilient. The move to three unitaries will transform how services are delivered, replacing fragmented, duplicated arrangements with a cohesive model built around real travel patterns, growth corridors and community priorities.

Residents will engage with a single, accountable authority for repairs, maintenance and enforcement, supported by transparent, data-driven systems that improve responsiveness and trust. Empowered neighbourhood teams and Place Boards will shape local design, from safe routes to schools and community hubs to active travel, air quality, biodiversity and climate resilience, ensuring infrastructure reflects the way people live.

Innovation and technology will underpin every stage of delivery, driving smarter asset management, reducing waste and creating a transport system that enables prevention, supports growth and builds confidence across Hertfordshire's communities.

All other county, district, and borough functions will be unified around the principles of prevention, place and prosperity. Where scale offers improved outcomes, shared services will be explored; where local decision-making is essential, sovereign authority will be respected.

This flexible approach, balancing aggregation and disaggregation, creates opportunities to shape services in line with these principles. Libraries, museums, theatres, community centres and educational facilities will evolve into community hubs, providing access to learning, health services, and digital inclusion. These hubs will also act as gateways to skills development and employment pathways, tailored to each authority's unique economic strengths and ensure resident / user quality of life is maintained.

Parks, open spaces, and leisure services will become focal points for community cohesion, public health, and civic pride. Economic development functions will align with locally relevant growth strategies, working in partnership with a MSA. Planning services will be responsive to distinct market conditions. Existing partnerships, such as Better Business for All, will offer a unified platform for accessing regulatory services. The Hertfordshire Waste Partnership has the potential to serve as a strong foundation for integrated delivery, achieving efficiencies and resilience while maintaining local focus.

Harmonised service standards, developed with current and future partnerships, will ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability across all three authorities. At the same time, each authority will retain the flexibility to shape local services, economic development, skills programmes, and growth strategies around their specific sectors and opportunities.

Residents will have clarity about who delivers which services and confidence in a system that is consistent, efficient, and people-centred – connecting prevention with prosperity and ensuring that both social wellbeing and economic opportunity are rooted in the needs and potential of local communities.

FROM VISION TO DELIVERY

This is Hertfordshire's moment to move from managing systems to shaping futures. The creation of three confident, connected and capable authorities provides the platform to deliver services that are not only efficient but transformative; structures that are rooted in place, designed for prevention and built to deliver prosperity. Technology will empower people and cultures that turn ambition into action. It is where vision becomes delivery; where reorganisation translates into better lives, stronger communities and a more confident Hertfordshire, built by people who believe that public service can and should create lasting change.

To bring this vision to life, we are seeking government support and funding to enable us to maximise the collective impact of local government, health services and our voluntary and community sector. Our goal is to unlock prevention and prosperity, prepare for devolution and play a key role in improving population health and prosperity. We have identified two or three pilot neighbourhoods focused on highest-need cohorts, including frail elderly, those with complex conditions and families. By implementing an integrated neighbourhood prevention approach, we aim to build and pilot this model of working for a fuller roll out as set out in the programme below, with a full plan in Appendix 4.

**High Level - LGR Implementation Plan
Implementation Timeline**
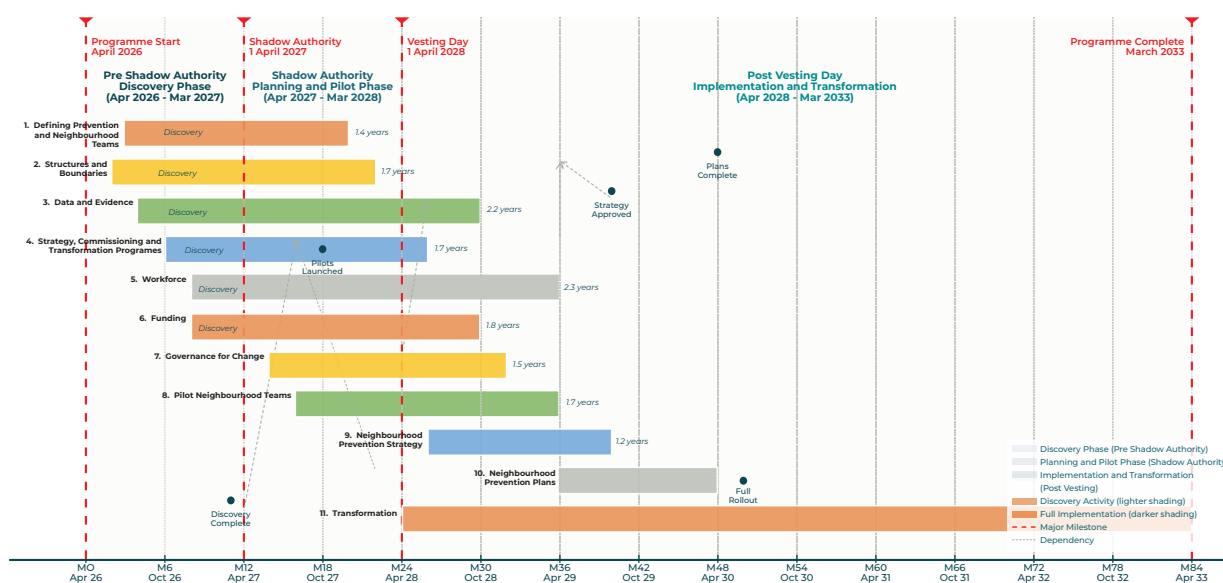
Programme Duration: April 2026 – March 2033 (84 months/7 years) | Discovery phase focusses on research and planning; Full implementation from Shadow Authority onwards
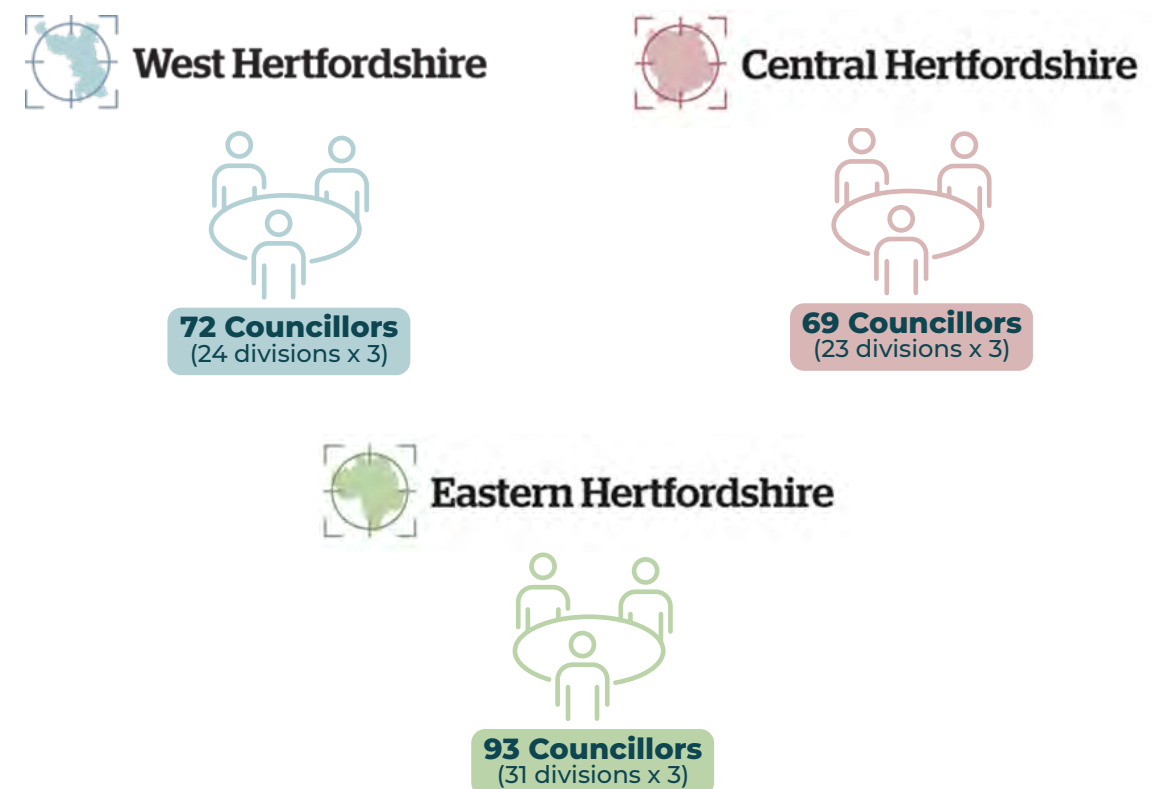
Timeline (from April 2026)

The delivery of this approach is dependent on securing appropriate funding, without this, the programme will require significant revision with implications for readiness and transformation capability particularly during the pre-shadow and shadow authority periods:

Pre-shadow and Shadow periods (April 2026 - March 2028): Programme is reliant on funding from either central government or LGR Joint Committee which will be established when the Structural Changes Order comes into effect. This funding is essential for discovery, planning, and pilot activities.

Post-vesting period (April 2028 onwards): Funding flows through the new unitary authority budgets, providing greater certainty for transformation activities.

CHAMPIONS OF THE COMMUNITY

The three unitary model comprises 234 Councillors (three per division of the current Hertfordshire County Council, aligned with Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance) distributed across:

West Hertfordshire

72 Councillors
(24 divisions x 3)

Central Hertfordshire

69 Councillors
(23 divisions x 3)

Eastern Hertfordshire

93 Councillors
(31 divisions x 3)

These numbers reflect careful consideration of LGBCE guidance on strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership, and are made more equitable by the Bushey boundary modification request (see also Appendix 2). The proposal balances executive scrutiny, electoral equality and councillors' broader responsibilities to constituents and outside bodies.

EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION AND CIVIC IDENTITY

Three Councillors per division enables shared workload and improved constituent representation, whilst aligning with LGBCE guidance that councils exceeding 100 members risk becoming unwieldy, and with diluted accountability. This model avoids disruptive post-vesting-day boundary changes that would confuse residents navigating the reorganisation. Proposed numbers align with 90% of single-tier authorities that operate with 40-95 Councillors.

Three new authorities will strengthen democratic representation whilst amplifying resident and community voices. The average ratio of 3,800 residents per Councillor is comparable to recent Unitary Authorities (4,016) and substantially lower than the current County Council, creates stronger connections between residents and local government, enhancing community empowerment at every level.

Built predominantly on existing district boundaries, with the exception of the Bushey boundary change, the approach respects strong civic identities and reflects established community shapes, and the three unitaries create clear, recognisable electoral arrangements. This familiarity of approach optimises potential turnout for the 2027 Shadow Authority elections and brings clarity and more confidence to voters, to help retain and build sustained engagement and enfranchisement.

Balanced population representation ensures fairness and equity for everyone. By using not just administrative boundaries but place-based boundaries residents already know, the proposal delivers democratic institutions that are familiar, responsive and designed to safeguard local identity whilst enabling a smooth transition. This approach directly supports the government's commitment and the three unitary authority commitment to neighbourhood empowerment, ensuring communities have genuine influence over decisions that affect them.

The reduction of 283 Councillors across Hertfordshire delivers efficiency and savings aligned with government priorities, without compromising democratic engagement or local representation. With approximately 167 committee seats, each Councillor will hold two to three committee roles (ratio of 1.8 – 2.4), allowing them to discharge their duties, including committee attendance, constituent casework and local representation, without the role becoming the preserve of full-time politicians. The smaller geographic coverage eliminates the need for multiple committees (such as Development Management) in each authority.

REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR COMMUNITY

Investment in councillor training, technology and data access will equip elected members to lead effectively. A highly skilled, visible team of representatives will amplify resident voices on the issues that matter most to them, whilst strengthening community empowerment through better-informed decision making.

Better support and accessibility will encourage wider participation, including younger people and those who might not otherwise consider public office as an option available to them. This will attract diverse candidates who truly reflect Hertfordshire's communities, ensuring representation remains inclusive and rooted in lived experience.

ASSURANCE

The tiered operating model of the three unitary authority proposal establishes sophisticated risk management, balancing distributed decision making with transparent oversight, fully embedded within governance arrangements. Each level takes responsibility for appropriate risks:

- **Neighbourhood teams**: operational and service delivery risks.
- **Unitary authorities**: strategic risks across services and geographies.
- **Hertfordshire-wide structures**: shared risks spanning local boundaries, where necessary.
- **MSA**: enterprise-level risks from devolved powers, major investments and county-wide priorities.

This framework ensures no authority is overburdened, whilst creating coherent risk ownership across tiers. Multiple reinforcing accountability streams, designed to avoid duplication whilst strengthening oversight, will deliver resilience and agility for prevention-first, community-connected services that build long-term public confidence.

Assurance operates through three complementary channels:

- **Democratic assurance**, via Place Boards, and neighbourhood working linked with transparent performance dashboards, keeps communities at the heart of oversight and enables genuine community empowerment in service design and delivery.
- **Professional assurance** through peer review, shared learning networks, open risk conversations and joint quality frameworks that safeguard standards whilst encouraging innovation.
- **Regulatory assurance** by adapting statutory frameworks to collaborative delivery, ensuring coordinated inspection, proportionate regulation and independent external audit, overseen by a designated Governance and Audit Committee.

These interlocking safeguards form a tested and credible model that will secure high-quality services for Hertfordshire's residents and provide the stability, discipline and confidence necessary to manage complex transition successfully. The new authorities will start on a strong footing, capable of sustaining excellence whilst genuinely empowering communities to shape their own futures.

Whippendale Woods (credit Rob Jefferis)

5. MEETS LOCAL NEEDS AND INFORMED BY LOCAL VIEWS (MHCLG CRITERION 4)

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT: LISTENING, LEARNING AND SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Residents, partners and businesses want simpler, more accountable local government that stays connected to communities whilst having the scale to lead on prevention, prosperity for all and innovation.

The proposed three unitary model provides the platform for smarter, earlier intervention, stronger local leadership and long-term sustainability, a system built not just to manage today, but to shape Hertfordshire's future. Stakeholder and resident feedback on the modified proposals were clear:

KEEP SERVICES LOCAL, RESPONSIVE AND JOINED-UP

Residents and partners were united in valuing local knowledge and relationships. Health, care and voluntary sector representatives expressed the view that strong neighbourhood intelligence is essential to prevention and early intervention, with one partner emphasising that "strong place-based partnerships with good engagement from district and borough councils are essential to delivering integrated health and care outcomes." As another partner said, "It only works when the people designing services understand the people who use them."

Community groups also pointed to duplication and confusion created by the current system, "buck-passing between tiers," as one resident described it. Voluntary sector representatives stressed that "any reorganisation must protect and build upon these relationships." Across all voices, the message was the same: reorganisation must make life simpler for residents, not more distant.

PROTECT COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND LOCAL VOICE

Hertfordshire's diversity is one of its key assets. Residents want reorganisation that reflects the way people live, work and identify with their local areas – that is why the Bushey boundary modification is proposed. Cultural organisations argued that "civic identity and local pride are vital to public trust, people need to see themselves in their council." Similarly, voluntary sector representatives spoke of the need to retain "distinct community voices that reflect local heritage, diversity and networks."

Residents strongly agreed, with typical comments including: "It's important that every town keeps its sense of identity – people are proud of where they live." Many recognised the three unitary approach as a natural fit with these daily patterns, with West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire each reflecting functional geographies, transport links and shared communities. As residents put it: "three unitaries recognise Hertfordshire's three natural regions and keep local decisions local," and "We need something resilient but still local – three councils feels about right."

Focus group participants reinforced this view, agreeing that: "three unitaries are preferred for balancing accessibility and relational services e.g., Social Care, maintaining community identity." This perspective was reinforced by the feedback from one Youth Panel, which brought together young people aged 14 to 18 to discuss how future local services could better reflect their needs and aspirations. Nearly 40 students participated in an active and thoughtful dialogue, emphasising that while they recognise the importance of financial resilience in local government, it is equally

vital for them to have a meaningful voice in shaping how their communities are run. When asked to vote on the preferred model for future governance, an overwhelming majority of students expressed clear support for the three unitary authority approach.

Stakeholders also supported this rationale, noting that boundaries should align with how people live their daily lives. As one explained, "The 3UA option most closely matches how people live their lives day to day." Another described the approach as "reflecting community reality rather than administrative convenience."

Respondents also highlighted the regional significance of getting this structure right. Stakeholders pointed out that a unified approach across three strong authorities will help Hertfordshire remain competitive within the London-Cambridge-Oxford corridor and wider southeast economy. A coordinated structure supports consistent planning for infrastructure, skills and growth, strengthening the county's ability to attract investment and deliver sustainable development.

DELIVER VALUE FOR MONEY AND LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

Businesses and partners emphasised that overlapping roles between tiers waste resources, particularly in planning, licensing, estates and back-office functions. They called for streamlined, accountable structures that free investment for frontline delivery. As one stakeholder noted: "Three unitaries offer the scale to achieve efficiencies through shared procurement, aligned strategies and better technology."

Residents linked reorganisation to fairness and efficiency: "We want our money spent on services," with another adding that, "three unitaries would make it clearer who is responsible for what."

Stakeholders also connected efficiency with environmental sustainability, arguing that larger, coordinated councils could deliver countywide climate strategies, unified waste management and integrated sustainable transport planning. They viewed reorganisation as an opportunity to make every pound and every decision work harder for local outcomes, whilst accelerating progress toward shared environmental goals.

The three unitary model responds by combining sufficient scale for efficiency with mechanisms to reinvest savings into frontline services and strategic priorities like climate action. It delivers resilience through shared functions whilst ensuring accountability remains local and transparent.

MODERNISE, INNOVATE AND GROW

Reorganisation was widely seen as a chance to reset local government for the future. Respondents wanted digital access that is consistent across services, faster decision-making and councils that use data intelligently to anticipate need.

Young residents in particular called for visible results from reorganisation: "Larger authorities could deliver coordinated growth, such as new towns," and "Cleaner streets, better parks, and stronger youth provision." Focus groups added that reorganisation could lead to "simplified access via a one-stop shop model, reducing resident confusion (valued by young people especially)."

Business and community partners saw the same potential: joined-up governance that makes Hertfordshire easier to invest in and better positioned for sustainable growth. As one business representative stated, "Three unitaries will create consistency and clarity for investors and developers, helping Hertfordshire remain competitive."

Stakeholders agreed that the new authorities could unlock innovation through shared systems, digital transformation and integrated planning. The three unitary framework enables this by aligning strategic policy across wider areas whilst maintaining flexibility for local adaptation.

BUSHEY WITHIN WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

Engagement also addressed specific boundary questions, notably the inclusion of Bushey within West Hertfordshire authority. Responses clearly demonstrated support for this alignment, with residents citing shared identity and practical connections with neighbouring communities.

One said, "I support three Unitary Authorities, it correctly recognises that Bushey belongs within the west authority alongside Watford, Three Rivers and Dacorum. Bushey's identity and daily life links are with Watford and the A41 provides a clear natural boundary from Borehamwood/Elstree."

Another resident observed, "From my postcode, it is only around 2.1 miles to Watford town centre compared to almost 3.8 miles to Borehamwood town centre. This reflects everyday reality: Bushey is physically and socially closer to Watford, with stronger daily links in shopping, transport, and community life."

This evidence reflects the value residents place on boundaries that match lived experience and functional geography. The three unitary authority proposal provides flexibility for such refinements, ensuring new authorities align with how people identify their communities.

Bushey Rose Garden, Hertsmere

HOW THE PROPOSAL RESPONDS

The feedback from residents and stakeholders shaped every part of the proposal. It confirmed that reorganisation must not only simplify structures, but also change the way services are delivered, making prevention, growth and innovation the foundations of how Hertfordshire works.

Place and prevention mean keeping the local relationships and intelligence that partners value most. The three new authorities will embed neighbourhood-based working through Place Boards and community partnerships, ensuring that services are designed and owned locally. This approach turns prevention into a shared mission, identifying needs early, tackling root causes and connecting people to support before crisis hits. Cross-agency collaboration with education, policing and health will be strengthened by operating across coherent local footprints, enabling partners to 'join up prevention and early intervention across systems.'

Prosperity answers the call for resilience and long-term value for money. By consolidating where scale matters, in planning, housing, transport and the economy, the three authorities will unlock investment, strengthen local economies and reinvest efficiencies back into communities. A unified strategic approach ensures that growth benefits every area, not just the fastest growing ones.

Innovation delivers on residents' demand for modern, accessible and transparent services. Reorganisation provides the opportunity to build shared digital infrastructure, data platforms and customer access systems that make it easier for residents and businesses to engage with their council. Innovation also extends to new ways of partnering, across health, education, policing and the voluntary sector, creating smarter collaboration around people and places.

Wheat Quarter, Welwyn Hatfield

MAINTAINING TRUST, ACCESS AND CONNECTION

Stakeholders were clear that reorganisation must strengthen, not weaken, existing partnerships. Hertfordshire's collaborative culture, across councils, the NHS, police, education and the voluntary sector, is a great strength. Health sector representatives emphasised: "Local relationships are going to become even more pertinent as neighbourhoods become more prominent within the health and care system." Cultural partners stated, "Watford Cultural Leaders Group has made a big difference, this needs to be preserved and enhanced to ensure valuable momentum is not lost."

The proposal safeguards these strengths by anchoring neighbourhood-level engagement into the new structures, ensuring partners remain visible and trusted in every community. Each authority will maintain community hubs, place boards, community engagement channels to preserve direct access and democratic accountability. As residents emphasised, "If councils listen locally and involve communities, people will support change." Councillors will remain rooted in their areas, empowered with the tools and data to represent residents effectively.

Stakeholders also raised valid concerns about potential remoteness and service continuity. Residents emphasised: "We need clear local contacts and visible Councillors," and "People need reassurance that bins will still be collected and care visits won't be disrupted." The three unitary authority model addresses these concerns directly. Each authority will ensure every community retains strong representation and accessible points of contact, avoiding the remoteness of larger unitaries whilst achieving better coordination than the current two-tier system. As one respondent summarised, "Three is a practical and deliverable solution, less disruptive than four or more and more responsive than one."

A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The message from engagement is unequivocal: Hertfordshire is ready for change but not change that loses sight of people and place. Residents want local government that works smarter, acts earlier and plans ahead. Partners want coherence and shared purpose. Businesses want clarity and speed.

The three unitary authority model meets all these expectations. It creates authorities that can lead and innovate, whilst also remaining close enough to people and places to listen and respond. It replaces duplication with collaboration, silos with shared intelligence and short-term fixes with prevention and growth. As participants summed it up: "Three unitaries strike the right balance, big enough to be efficient, but not so big that they lose local accountability," and "Three is the best compromise – it recognises Hertfordshire's natural regions and keeps local decisions local."

Through place, prevention and prosperity for all of Hertfordshire, this proposal delivers exactly what residents and stakeholders have asked for: a simpler, stronger, more locally connected Hertfordshire that is ready to shape the future together.

6. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (MHCLG CRITERION 6)

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: A TRANSFORMATIVE VISION FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Community empowerment drives Hertfordshire's future. The three unitary authority model embeds empowerment in democratic structures that share real power, build community capacity, and elevate resident leadership. Hertfordshire will create a radically different governance model. Communities won't just influence decisions, they'll make them. Resources will flow to their priorities.

The three unitary approach builds community capacity and sparks democratic innovation at every level. Reorganisation becomes democratic renewal through genuine partnership with residents, delivering tangible outcomes. The evidence is clear: communities with strong social connections, active voluntary sectors, and genuine decision-making power achieve better wellbeing, stronger economies, lower crime, better health, and greater resilience[21].

The three unitary authority approach creates the conditions for transformative community empowerment. It works through democratic principle and practical outcomes, rebuilding trust while harnessing community knowledge, capacity, and leadership. This transformation delivers efficiencies: research shows a £3.50 return per £1 invested in community capacity[22].

A MULTI-TIERED ARCHITECTURE FOR COMMUNITY POWER

The Hertfordshire Five-point Strategic Plan gives communities greater influence and control over local decisions. The three unitary authority model delivers this strategy through design principles that shift power to communities, not just consult them. These principles guide every decision.

Four interconnected pillars deliver this vision: Local Democratic Forums, town and parish councils, the VCFSE, and Councillors. The three unitary model design principles underpin these pillars, turning strategy into action and making community empowerment real across Hertfordshire.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S FIVE-POINT STRATEGIC PLAN

As set out in the core document, the strategic plan builds on existing networks, leveraging current successes to achieve greater impact. It encourages inclusive democratic participation, integrates prevention-focused services and promotes asset-based community development. By addressing the social determinants of health, it enhances equality and wellbeing, while driving local prosperity through economic empowerment.

[21] *Rapid evidence review of community initiatives, DCMS, updated June 2022*
[22] *The Impacts of Scaling Social Infrastructure Investment, Frontier Economics, May 2025*

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Community empowerment will evolve in the three new Unitaries by creating ways of working that embed genuine power sharing and local decision making. Design principles will guide every decision about structures, processes and resource allocation to test commitment and avoid tokenism:

- Subsidiarity – Taking decisions as locally as possible, with communities controlling issues directly affecting them. Strategic frameworks at unitary level, with power over local priorities flowing downwards.

- Genuine power-sharing – Communities decide, rather than advise. Forums control meaningful resources through participatory processes with decision-making power over service design and delivery.

- Multiple entry points – Value all participation, formal structures, community organisations, informal neighbourhood activities, creating multiple pathways for voice and leadership.

- Progressive community leadership – Move from council-led to community-led approaches, so communities increasingly drive agendas and shape futures.

THE FOUR PILLARS

PILLAR ONE: Local democratic forums - Place Boards

Approximately 15 Place Boards will operate as Local Democratic Forums across the three Unitary Authorities, providing place leadership aligned with community identities. These Boards operate at the scale where people experience their daily lives – where they shop, where their children attend school, where they use services and know their neighbours.

Under the three unitary model, this number and scale strikes the right balance: large enough to retain strategic oversight of the neighbourhoods they serve, yet maintaining the place identity and community connection essential for genuine empowerment. They are explicitly designed for place and people, not artificial boundaries, adapting flexibly to reflect what residents identify with as their neighbourhood.

Place Boards are designed to work in partnership with, not replace or duplicate, existing town and parish councils. In rural areas where parish councils already provide effective hyper-local governance, Place Boards will operate at a neighbourhood cluster level, providing strategic coordination and access to resources that complement parish-level activity. In urban areas with no parish structure, Place Boards convene and connect community anchor organisations and partners operating in those areas, building on the success of the One Watford Place Board (included as a case study elsewhere in this document) and the Stevenage Development Board.

Place Boards align with the government's English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill, positioning Hertfordshire at the forefront of democratic innovation. They will build genuine connections and facilitate community confidence in the new Unitary Authorities from day one.

A fundamental evolution in local democracy

Place Boards represent a fundamental evolution from traditional area committees, embedding genuine power-sharing:

DIMENSION	TRADITIONAL AREA COMMITTEE	PLACE BOARD
Decision-making	Advisory or limited delegation	Real delegated powers over budgets and services
Membership	Councillors with some co-optees	Multi-agency partnership with equal standing
Community engagement	Consultation-focused	Co-design, co-creation, ongoing participation
Empowerment	Variable, often limited	Opportunities in relation to community ownership of assets and commissioning
Agility	Moderate, fixed processes	Adaptive to the local area
Integration	Limited cross-agency work	Full integration with health, police, housing partners
Accountability	To parent council	To community and council, with direct representation
Scope	Defined area, fixed themes	Flexible, responsive to local context, prevention focus
Innovation	Traditional, sometimes slow to change	Designed for innovation and continuous improvement

This structural shift demonstrates the three unitary model's commitment to transforming not just structures, but the fundamental relationship between councils and communities.

Governance and membership

Place Boards will operate with a strong link to the Cabinet of each authority, ensuring democratic accountability at leadership level. Membership includes Councillors alongside representatives from the NHS, police, housing associations, the VCFSE sector, town and parish councils, and anchor institutions. This will create multi-agency forums where diverse voices hold equal weight in decision-making.

Representation from key public sector organisations also presents opportunities for efficiency and alignment, with Place Boards potentially serving multiple functions such as the Community Safety Partnership Responsible Authority Group or the Local Health Partnership Board, reducing duplication whilst strengthening coordination.

Place Boards will be delegated real power, moving beyond traditional advisory functions to genuine decision-making authority. They will:

- Commission local services within agreed frameworks and thresholds, determining which services operate in their area and how they are delivered

- Determine community asset transfers below defined thresholds, giving direct control over which community organisations receive support and access to community facilities

- Allocate revenue and capital budgets to reflect local priorities, setting local standards within strategic frameworks established at unitary level

- Co-design service delivery working with council teams, partners and communities to shape how local services operate most effectively, rather than accepting one-size-fits-all approaches imposed centrally

This shift of power increases responsiveness, improves coordination between health, policing, housing and voluntary sectors, and makes accountability clearer for residents. Participatory budgeting will be a central but not exclusive focus. Each Place Board will provide capacity for local problem-solving, bringing together residents, Councillors, service providers and community organisations to collaborate on neighbourhood issues.

Place Boards will utilise shared data from health, housing, education, policing and social care partners to identify emerging needs and support early intervention. This prevention-focused approach targets support before issues escalate, reducing demand on acute services whilst improving outcomes for residents.

Underpinning each Place Board will be existing and evolving engagement arrangements – neighbourhood forums, resident networks, sector partnerships and community panels. Each area will select and adapt the most effective tools for their unique community contexts, ensuring engagement is both inclusive and responsive to local voices. This approach allows each Place Board to draw upon proven methods best suited to their communities whilst remaining open to innovation.

Community co-design has been central to developing the Place Board model. VCFSE partners have emphasised that "the LDF must be adaptable so structures can operate in ways that best suit local communities and needs", a principle embedded in the design approach. Rather than imposing a rigid template, each Place Board will have flexibility to customise governance arrangements, meeting frequencies, engagement methods, and priority-setting processes to match local context.

Geographic equity and tailored approaches

The three unitary geography enables Place Boards to be configured with geographic coherence, clustering areas with similar settlement patterns and needs. This allows powers and resources devolved to Boards to be tailored appropriately, recognising that urban Place Boards will face different challenges and opportunities to more rural boards where town and parish councils already provide strong hyper-local governance.

This differentiation ensures equity of impact rather than uniformity of approach, with each Place Board empowered to operate in ways that complement existing local democratic structures rather than competing with or duplicating them.

Community Policing, St Albans (credit: Stephanie Belton)

Accountability and transparency

Local governance will enable neighbourhoods to manage services within agreed standards, influence strategic decisions through consultation and co-design, and operate transparently through:

- Clear financial frameworks and delegation thresholds

- Robust oversight mechanisms connecting to unitary governance

- Regular community review and feedback loops

- Public reporting on decisions, spending, and outcomes

- Accountability both upward to the unitary council and outward to the communities they serve.

Implementation through pilots

The model will be tested and refined through an initial pilot phase in three areas representing diverse community contexts. These pilots will:

- Test the delegation frameworks and decision-making processes in real-world conditions

- Identify and resolve operational challenges before wider rollout

- Generate evidence of what works in different community contexts

- Build confidence and demonstrate impact to support expansion across all three unitary authorities.

Pilot Place Boards will co-design critical elements of their operation:

- Local priorities linked to council corporate policies but grounded in hyper-local data and community voice

- Governance footprint with opportunity to simplify local structures by bringing existing forums, networks and working groups under the Place Board umbrella to enhance rather than duplicate local voice

- Engagement mechanisms exploring deliberative sessions, community assemblies, targeted outreach to under-represented groups, and youth participation

- Modular functions tailored to local needs within the overall framework.

This co-design approach ensures Place Boards are shaped by communities, not imposed upon them.

A second phase during the shadow authority period will test Place Board models in different contexts, ensuring the approach works effectively across Hertfordshire's diverse geography. This phased approach enables comparison, ensures equity, and drives transformation across all communities – urban and rural – before full rollout at Vesting Day.

Learning from these pilots will inform the bespoke framework for full implementation, ensuring Place Boards are resilient, responsive, and genuinely transformative from Vesting Day.

Measuring success

Place Boards will be evaluated against clear outcomes that demonstrate genuine community empowerment:

- Neighbourhood decision-making: Number of residents engaged in priority-setting; percentage of local budget co-designed with communities; community satisfaction with influence over local decisions

- Trust and legitimacy: Trust in local governance; attendance at Place Board meetings and engagement activities; geographic spread of participation

- Prevention and early intervention: Increase in preventative activity; reduction in demand on acute services; multi-agency collaboration on early-help approaches; time-to-resolution on local issues.

This evidence-based approach ensures accountability whilst supporting continuous improvement across all Place Boards.

PILLAR TWO: town and parish councils and community anchors

Existing town and parish councils, alongside recognised community anchor organisations, such as community centres, family hubs and sports clubs, form the foundation of hyper-local governance and service delivery. These organisations often command strong trust and local knowledge and can be highly responsive to changing circumstances.

Building capacity within councils and community anchors empowers localities to take on greater responsibility. Focusing on governance, financial management, and effective service delivery enhances both asset and service management. Strong governance ensures transparency and accountability, while robust financial management underpins long-term sustainability. Improved service delivery makes communities more agile and resilient. Under the three unitary authority model, there is a clear commitment to supporting these community organisations to broaden their roles and contribute more effectively.

PILLAR THREE: Voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise partnership

The VCFSE sector represents community empowerment's lifeblood. These organisations sit closest to needs, command the highest trust and deliver impressive impact per pound. The government recognises this contribution, seeking to reset the relationships through the Civil Society Covenant to harness the sector's "dynamism, innovation and trusted reach" for growth and better community outcomes.

Success requires reimagining the relationship between the VCFSE and the three authorities. To optimise these relationships, we will develop VCFSE Accords in recognition of their vital role as partners in leadership, delivery design and community-facing activity.

Resident engagement, North Herts

Draft three unitary authority Hertfordshire VCFSE Accord

COMMITMENT	FROM UAS	FROM VCFSE SECTOR	TIMELINE
Funding security	• 3-year agreements (not annual) • Annual grants • Payment advance / monthly not arrears • 12-month notice if changes	• Collaborate, avoid duplication • Shared learning • Transparent impact reporting • Sustainability planning • Quality self-regulation	Post Vesting Day
Strategic voice	• VCFSE on all Place Boards (full members) • Representatives on strategic partnerships • 12-week consultation minimum • Co-production policies / services • Voice in budget priorities	• Report to wider sector • Constructive challenge • Frontline evidence shared • Active participation • Honest feedback	Vesting Day representation Quarterly forums Annual assembly
Infrastructure	• Funding / Unitary for infrastructure orgs • Building access nil / nominal cost • Shared back-office systems • Professional development • Digital support	• Support small groups • Peer mentoring • Knowledge exchange • Volunteer support • Evaluation capacity	Funding post Vesting Day Systems April 2029 Ongoing development
Commissioning	• Pipeline 18 months ahead • Lots tailored to value • 20% social value weighting • Light processes under £100,000 • Payment 30 days (target 14)	• Proportionate responses • Honest capacity assessment • Collaboration not competition • Quality standards • Innovation willingness	Pipeline post Vesting Day Reforms 2028–29 Quarterly updates
Place-based	• Neighbourhood Officer partnership • Asset transfers with revenue support • Co-location opportunities • Joint external funding bids	• Support underserved areas • Anchor institutions • Community settings delivery • Reach excluded groups • Support resident leadership	Asset framework Oct 2028 Co-location ongoing

PILLAR FOUR: Councillors as community leaders

With the three unitary authority model, the scale of operations allows for a deeper understanding of local areas. This enables councillors to embrace their roles as community leaders (in partnership with executive), championing the voices and actions of their communities, and strengthening relationships.

Through active participation in Place Boards and unitary decision-making processes, councillors ensure that residents' voices and community priorities are incorporated into strategic decisions, connecting communities with resources and assisting grassroots organisations in navigating complex systems. To underpin this approach, it is essential to upskill both the workforce and councillors so they can effectively function as enablers rather than directors.

Implementation

We recognise that transforming community empowerment from an aspiration into a tangible reality requires concrete structures, clear expectations and dedicated resources. During the transition period from 2026-28, we are committed to developing the operational frameworks that will enable our four pillars to deliver meaningful change from Vesting Day. Our approach is built on codesign with communities, learning from pilot initiatives, and ensuring operational readiness before launch.

Our transition programme focuses on five interconnected critical work areas that will lay the foundations for effective community empowerment:

Watford by drone

WORK AREA	ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Structures and boundaries	Collaborate with communities and VCSFE to map boundaries respecting identity; explore constitutional models granting decision-making power; pilot approaches with volunteer communities; finalise transparent, inclusive, scalable framework	• Community-informed boundary maps • Constitutional models with genuine powers • Pilot evaluations • Final governance framework	Pre-Vesting Day: Pilot approaches Pre-Vesting Day: Mapping / models Post Vesting Day: Finalisation
Service portfolios	Service mapping councils / communities; create tiered framework (manage directly / scrutiny-influence / set priorities); pilot frameworks selected areas; refine for county-wide rollout	• Comprehensive service mapping • Tiered framework document • Pilot area evaluations • Refined rollout plan	Pre-Vesting Day: Mapping / framework Pre-Vesting day: Pilots Post Vesting Day: Refinement
Funding mechanisms	Develop Community Investment Fund business cases; explore external vehicles (investment trusts); design participatory budgeting processes; create delegation frameworks balancing autonomy / accountability	• Investment Fund business cases • External funding options analysis • Participatory budgeting design • Delegation frameworks	Pre-Vesting Day: Business cases/ design Post Vesting day: Mechanisms established
Capacity and support	Councillor training / Officer support / dashboards / tools / communities of practice; VCFSE Accord / protocols / funding mechanisms; Neighbourhood Officer training / protocols / frameworks community development / codesign	• Comprehensive training programmes • VCFSE Accord signed • Officer development resources • Support infrastructure operational	Pre-Vesting Day: Development Vesting day: Delivery begins Post Vesting Day: Full operation
Data and accountability	Develop integrated intelligence systems multi-agency data; establish privacy / ethics frameworks; build community data literacy; define success metrics / baseline; design accessible reporting formats	• Integrated data systems • Privacy / ethics frameworks • Data literacy programmes • Metrics / baseline established • Reporting templates	Pre-Vesting Day: Systems / frameworks Post Vesting Day: Implementation / training

The approach incorporates codesign with communities, draws on lessons from pilot projects, and focuses on ensuring operational readiness prior to April 2028.

Seizing the moment

Hertfordshire has a rare opportunity to place real community power at the heart of local government. The challenges are clear: public trust is low, and traditional structures no longer meet resident expectations for genuine influence and responsive partnership. Bold action is essential.

A multi-layered approach; Place Boards, Town and Parish councils, and the voluntary sector, give communities real decision-making power, not just voice. From day one, investing in community capacity and embedding empowerment into council culture will unlock local leadership, innovation, and shared ownership of outcomes.

This vision requires letting go of outdated models, trusting communities to lead, and supporting participation when resources are stretched. The rewards are substantial: stronger relationships, more resilient communities, better outcomes, and renewed democratic purpose.

Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

7. TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION, DESIGNING VISIONARY SERVICES FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

At the heart of the government's ambition for Local Government Reorganisation is the need to deliver high quality and sustainable services and community empowerment, all underpinned by meaningful public service reform. The three unitary model for Hertfordshire responds directly to this ambition, and the approach to transition is purposefully designed to ensure that the imperative to achieve "safe and legal" outcomes does not crowd out transformational thinking.

THE CHALLENGE: BALANCING COMPLIANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

Experience from previous reorganisations demonstrates a consistent pattern; without deliberate protective measures, operational pressures inevitably consume all available capacity, reducing ambition to mere structural consolidation. The urgent demands of legal compliance, system migration, and operational continuity create a gravitational pull that draws resources, attention, and leadership focus away from transformational work. The result is reorganisation that changes structures but not outcomes; a missed opportunity that communities experience as disruption without improvement.

OUR APPROACH: DESIGNED FOR TRANSFORMATION

The three unitary model addresses this risk head-on through an implementation approach that treats transformation not as an aspiration for "later," but as a core requirement from day one. This is achieved through four interconnected mechanisms that protect and advance transformational thinking throughout the transition period.
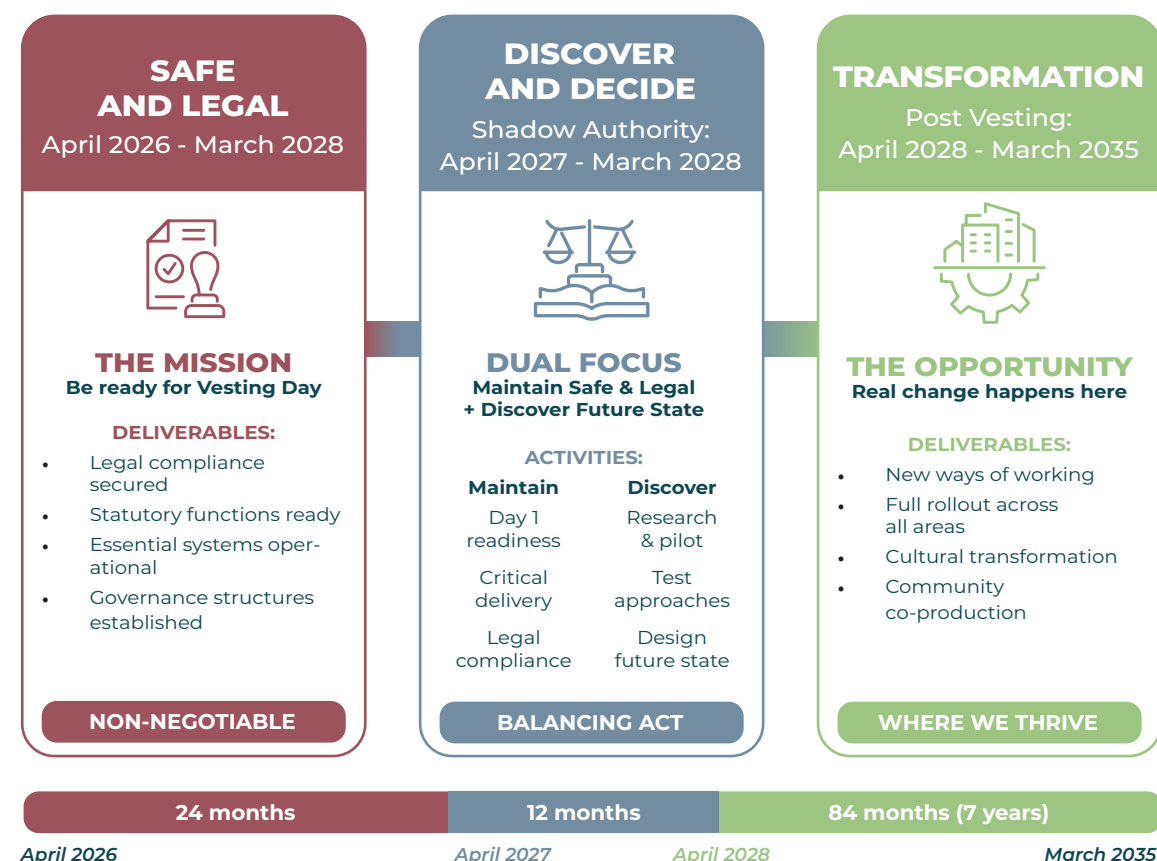

Street Cleansing, East Hertfordshire

THE IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY

The visual below illustrates our phased approach, showing how we balance the essential requirements of compliance with the equally important work of transformation:

High Level - LGR Implementation Plan

The journey from Safe & Legal to Transformation

First we must be **SAFE & LEGAL** for day one
While doing this, we **DISCOVER and DECIDE**
Then we truly **TRANSFORM**

SAFE AND LEGAL
April 2026 - March 2028

THE MISSION
Be ready for Vesting Day

DELIVERABLES:
- Legal compliance secured
- Statutory functions ready
- Essential systems operational
- Governance structures established

NON-NEGOTIABLE

DISCOVER AND DECIDE
Shadow Authority:
April 2027 - March 2028

DUAL FOCUS
Maintain Safe & Legal + Discover Future State

ACTIVITIES:

Maintain	Discover
Day 1 readiness	Research & pilot
Critical delivery	Test approaches
Legal compliance	Design future state

BALANCING ACT

TRANSFORMATION
Post Vesting:
April 2028 - March 2035

THE OPPORTUNITY
Real change happens here

DELIVERABLES:
- New ways of working
- Full rollout across all areas
- Cultural transformation
- Community co-production

WHERE WE THRIVE

24 months	12 months	84 months (7 years)
April 2026	April 2027	April 2028 — March 2035

This phased approach ensures we meet legal obligations while creating space for meaningful transformation

This phased journey ensures that compliance work and transformational thinking proceed in parallel, with each phase building the foundation for the next. Safe and legal delivery is achieved not at the expense of transformation, but as the platform upon which transformation can thrive.

FOUR MECHANISMS TO SAFEGUARD TRANSFORMATION

Four intentional mechanisms work together to ensure transformation remains central throughout the transition period:

1. DUAL GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

The programme structure deliberately separates transactional delivery from transformational design, ensuring neither crowds out the other. This dual architecture operates as follows:

Transactional workstreams: Dedicated capacity focuses exclusively on operational continuity, legal compliance, and system migration. These workstreams ensure the critical foundations are secured, the "safe and legal" baseline that enables the new authorities to operate from day one.

Transformational workstreams: Operating in parallel with protected capacity and resources, these workstreams develop new service models, digital capabilities, partnership arrangements, and ways of working that will define how the new authorities deliver public services.

Structured integration: Regular touchpoints ensure the two streams inform each other: transformation designs must be implementable within the timeframes and constraints of transition, while transactional decisions must not inadvertently lock in old ways of working.

2. PROTECTED CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

Planning explicitly ringfences resources for transformation activity throughout the transition period. This recognition that building new capabilities requires sustained capacity that cannot be sacrificed to immediate operational pressures is fundamental to the programme's success.

Protected capacity includes:

- Dedicated programme capacity for service redesign and new model development across all service areas
- Resources for community and partner engagement to co-design new approaches
- Investment in staff development and cultural change programmes that equip teams for new ways of working
- Early adoption funding for digital platforms, data systems, and enabling infrastructure
- Protected time for pilot programmes and testing of new approaches while transition proceeds.

Without this explicit protection, transformation capacity would be gradually eroded as operational pressures mount. By building protection into the programme structure from the outset, we ensure that transformation is resourced as fully as compliance.

3. EXPANDED VESTING DAY READINESS STANDARDS

The definition of 'safe and legal' has been deliberately expanded beyond basic operational continuity to include transformational readiness. This crucial redefinition changes what it means to be ready for Vesting Day.

The three new authorities will not simply maintain existing services in new structures; they will be poised to operate differently from day one.

Vesting day readiness criteria therefore include:

Baseline requirements:

- Operational continuity for all statutory services
- Legal compliance with all regulatory and statutory duties
- Financial systems and controls in place
- Staff employment transferred and payroll operational
- Essential ICT systems functioning

Transformational readiness:

- New service delivery models designed, piloted, and ready for implementation
- Partnership arrangements and integrated working protocols established with key partners
- Community engagement frameworks in place with clear mechanisms for resident voice and influence
- Digital platforms and data systems enabling modern, efficient service delivery
- Workforce equipped with skills, tools, and support for new operating models
- Performance frameworks aligned to outcomes, not just outputs.

By embedding transformation into the definition of readiness, we ensure it is not treated as optional or deferred. Being ready for Vesting Day means being ready to operate differently, not just ready to operate.

4. PHASED IMPLEMENTATION WITH LEARNING

Rather than attempting immediate wholesale transformation that would overwhelm transition capacity, the programme adopts phased implementation that protects space for experimentation, learning, and adaptation.

This approach works through three stages:

- **Discovery phase (pre-Shadow Authority):** Light-touch research, stakeholder engagement, and mapping establish the foundation for transformation without overwhelming pre-shadow period capacity. This phase is about understanding current state, identifying opportunities, and building the evidence base, not delivering wholesale change.

- **Pilot phase (Shadow Authority)**: Selected pilot programmes test new service models and ways of working while transactional work proceeds. These pilots generate evidence, build capability, and create momentum. Critically, they allow for learning and course correction before wider rollout, reducing risk and improving quality.

- **Scaled implementation (post-vesting)**: Armed with evidence from pilots and freed from the immediate pressures of vesting preparation, transformation scales systematically across services and geographies over a 7-year period, with continuous learning and adaptation built into the process.

This approach ensures transformation begins during transition rather than waiting for some distant "business as usual" state. It creates momentum, builds confidence, and generates tangible examples of what transformation looks like in practice, critical for maintaining commitment as transition pressures mount.

Grand Union Canal, Cassiobury Park, Watford

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE: TRANSFORMATION AS BASELINE, NOT ASPIRATION

These four mechanisms reflect a fundamental principle that distinguishes this implementation approach from traditional reorganisation: safe and legal delivery is the baseline, not the ceiling of ambition.

The three unitary model is designed to achieve both operational security and transformational change, recognising that without deliberate structural protection, the former will inevitably consume the latter. This is not naive optimism; it is deliberate design informed by learning from previous reorganisations where transformation was consistently lost to operational pressures.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

In practical terms, this approach manifests in several concrete ways:

- Programme governance structures with equal standing for transformation and transactional workstreams, ensuring transformation has a voice at every decision point

- Budget allocations that protect transformation funding even when operational pressures create competing demands

- Performance frameworks that track both operational readiness and transformation progress, making both equally visible to programme leadership and stakeholders

- Communication strategies that tell the transformation story alongside the transition story, maintaining focus on the "why" as well as the "how"

- Decision-making criteria that explicitly consider transformational impact, not just operational efficiency

- Workforce engagement that emphasises new possibilities and opportunities, not just structural changes.

These are not aspirations; they are commitments built into the programme design from the outset.

REIMAGINING FROM DAY ONE

Implementation of the three unitary model is not simply about moving from eleven councils to three. It is about using that structural change as the foundation for fundamentally reimagining how local government serves communities across Hertfordshire.

Crucially, that reimagining begins on day one of the transition period, not after it. Through dual governance architecture, protected capacity, expanded readiness standards, and phased implementation, the programme ensures that transformation is not sacrificed to the pressures of transition, but proceeds alongside it.

The result will be three new unitary authorities that are not only operationally sound and legally compliant, but fundamentally different in how they work, with communities, with partners, and internally. They will be modern, efficient, responsive, and outcome-focused from the moment they come into being.

Skate Park, Oxhey, Watford

CONCLUSION

Hertfordshire is a place of economic dynamism, rural beauty and strong connections to the capital, where ambition, enterprise and community spirit run deep. It now stands at a defining point: a rare opportunity not just to reorganise services, but to redefine what local government can achieve. Yet without the right structure, that potential cannot be fully realised.

The three unitary authority model is the answer. Whilst the base three unitary proposal could stand alone, the modified model creates authorities large enough to invest, innovate and influence, yet close enough to understand every neighbourhood and ensure opportunity reaches every community. This is not an arbitrary choice. It reflects extensive engagement with residents and builds on how people already live, work and connect across Hertfordshire, following natural geographies. It keeps communities central whilst providing the dynamic system, clarity and capacity the county needs to shape tomorrow's opportunities.

This proposal is built on a powerful truth: prevention and prosperity are inseparable from place, but both need an enabling structure to succeed. The three unitary model delivers exactly that - clarity of purpose, coherence of leadership and capacity for impact. It creates organisations capable of attracting investment, growing local economies and putting people before process.

Success depends on collaboration. The three authorities - West, Central and Eastern Hertfordshire - will operate with shared intent. Together they create the scale, maturity and credible voice needed to unlock devolution. This positions Hertfordshire to secure the transport, skills and economic powers that will drive transformative change and long-term prosperity.

At the heart of this model are Hertfordshire's communities. Each authority will remain locally connected, building the relationships that make services work and the understanding that drives continual improvement. Every resident will see the difference: one council to contact, one place to go, clearer accountability. Rather than distancing people from their councils, this model preserves cherished local identity whilst creating the scale needed for responsive, effective and efficient services.

This is what the three unitary authority model achieves: a system designed for prevention and prosperity, powered by partnership, built on place and driven by ambition. It gives Hertfordshire the structure, scale and shared purpose to deliver growth, resilience and opportunity for every community. Not as an aspiration, but as a commitment to results. This means faster housing delivery, more effective prevention services, stronger negotiating power with developers, and the financial sustainability to protect frontline services for generations to come.

This opportunity will not come again. The choices made now will shape Hertfordshire for decades, either limiting what is possible or unlocking the county's full potential. At this historic moment, we have the chance to create something exceptional. The three unitary authority model, rooted in our people, designed for prevention, and built to deliver prosperity, gives Hertfordshire the means to move forward with confidence. It builds on existing realities and is unequivocally the right choice for Hertfordshire's future.

Hatfield House, Welwyn Hatfield

APPENDIX 1

TABULAR SUMMARY OF LGR PROPOSAL FOR 3 UNITARY AUTHORITIES MAPPED AGAINST MHCLG CRITERIA

APPENDICES

CRITERION	1. Foreword	2. The Proposition	3. Scale, Efficiency & Capacity Incl Finance	4. Supports Devolution Arrangements	5. High-Quality & Sustainable Services	6. Meets Local Needs & Informed By Local Views	7. Community Empowerment	8. Transition & Implementation	9. Conclusion	Appendices
Criterion 1 - A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government										
a) Sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area		✓	✓	✓					✓	
b) Sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs		✓	✓	✓						
c) 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		✓	✓						✓	
d) 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.			✓	✓		✓				
Criterion 2 - Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.										
a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more		✓	✓							
b) 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		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve Councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money		✓	✓			✓				
d) How an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from - existing budgets; flexible use of capital receipts to support transformation; invest-to-save projects			✓							

CRITERION	1. Foreword	2. The Proposition	3. Scale, Efficiency & Capacity Incl Finance	4. Supports Devolution Arrangements	5. High-Quality & Sustainable Services	6. Meets Local Needs & Informed By Local Views	7. Community Empowerment	8. Transition & Implementation	9. Conclusion	Appendices
Criterion 3 - prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens										
a) New structures will improve local government and service delivery and avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services				✓	✓	✓			✓	
b) Deliver public service reform leading to better value for money				✓	✓	✓				
c) Impacts for crucial services such as social care, Children's Services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety				✓	✓				✓	
Criterion 4 - work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views										
a) Evidence meaningful and constructive local engagement						✓				
b) consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance						✓			✓	
c) Evidence of local engagement, explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed						✓				
Criterion 5 - New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements										
a) 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	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution				✓					✓	
c) Ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.				✓						
Criterion 6 - enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment										
a) make sure that communities are engaged							✓	✓		
b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement							✓			

APPENDIX 2 – BUSHEY

THE CASE FOR CHANGE – BUSHEY'S INTEGRATION INTO WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The three unitary authority model for Hertfordshire (3UA) is based on the building blocks of district areas. However, the Secretary of State is asked to consider implementing the proposal with a modification request as part of the statutory change process to alter the existing boundary between Watford Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council, enabling the wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath (herein referred to as 'Bushey') to be integrated into the future West Hertfordshire administrative boundary, noting that the existing ward boundaries are coterminous with the Aldenham parish boundary but not existing County division boundaries. The map appended at Appendix 2A illustrates the proposed boundary change, which allows the existing Aldenham parish to remain within the proposed Central Unitary Authority.

This document presents a detailed justification for the proposed boundary change that will better align administrative boundaries with community identity, service delivery and economic integration.

INTRODUCTION

The proposal to transfer Bushey from the Borough of Hertsmere to West Hertfordshire is rooted in the recognition that true community identity is shaped by the lived and shared experiences and daily interactions of residents, rather than by arbitrary administrative boundaries.

Local government reorganisation creates the opportunity to correct misalignment in the part of West Hertfordshire known as Bushey, by ensuring that governance structures mirror the social, economic and cultural relationships that characterise Bushey's community life.

The opportunity for the Secretary of State to facilitate this modification request as part of the Statutory Change Order presents a significant opportunity to bring local government arrangements into harmony with community reality. The realignment will help secure better outcomes for current and future generations by placing community identity at the heart of local governance.

With a population of 28,411 (Bushey North: 8,004; Bushey St James: 7,700; Bushey Park: 7,280; Bushey Heath: 5,427), Bushey currently sits as an isolated enclave in south-west Hertsmere (see Appendix 2A), physically separated from the rest of the district by the M1 / A41 corridor and substantial greenbelt (over two miles to Borehamwood). In contrast, Bushey shares deep-rooted historic, social, economic and infrastructure ties with Watford (less than 0.5 miles of greenbelt separation) that make its integration into West Hertfordshire both logical and beneficial (see Appendix 2B).

The proposed boundary change strengthens public services and financial sustainability, reflects genuine community identities and interests, enables effective and convenient

local government and delivers value for money. Most importantly, it aligns administrative boundaries with the lived reality of residents and the functional geography of the area. For that reason, it has political support from existing Leaders in the areas that will make up the future Central and West Hertfordshire Unitary Authorities. In short, this modification request is made because it strengthens alignment to the LGR criteria whilst righting a historical inconsistency, utilising a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to enact the will of local residents and re-connect a community divided by administrative boundaries.

COMMUNITY IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Bushey's community identity has been shaped by its relationship with Watford since the 19th century. By the Victorian era, Bushey was firmly embedded within the Watford district through shared postal services and railway infrastructure. The London and North-Western Railway connected Bushey directly to Watford and London, establishing an economic interdependence and commuter flows that persist today.

Between 1860 and 1960, Bushey underwent significant transformation, with its population rising from 856 in 1801 to over 24,000 by the mid-20th century. This growth was directly shaped by Watford's industrial expansion, with many Bushey residents working in Watford's brewing, printing and manufacturing sectors. The development of council housing in Bushey during the interwar period was explicitly tied to Watford's population pressures and planning strategies.

Governance structures have long reflected this historical integration. Under the Local Government Act of 1894, parts of Bushey were included in the Watford Urban District, later forming Oxhey Ward. This administrative overlap enabled joint planning and service delivery, establishing patterns that continue to define community interaction.

St James' Church, Bushey, Hertsmere

CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Today's community patterns overwhelmingly demonstrate Bushey's orientation towards Watford rather than Hertsmere. A 2018 Retail and Leisure study surveying Bushey residents revealed:

Centres visited by Bushey residents:

Watford **97.6%**

Bushey Heath **71.8%**

Bushey **74.4%**

Radlett **31.9%**

Borehamwood **65.3%**

Most visited centres:

Watford **55%**

Bushey Heath **12.7%**

Bushey **15.5%**

Borehamwood **11.3%**

North Watford / St Albans Road **2.2%**
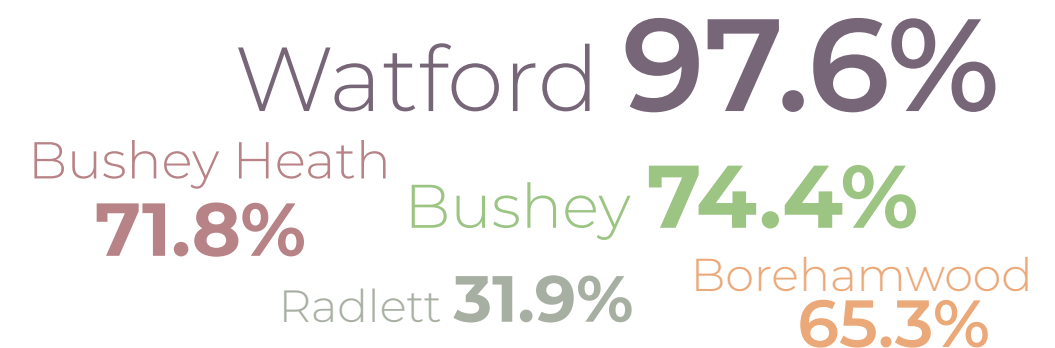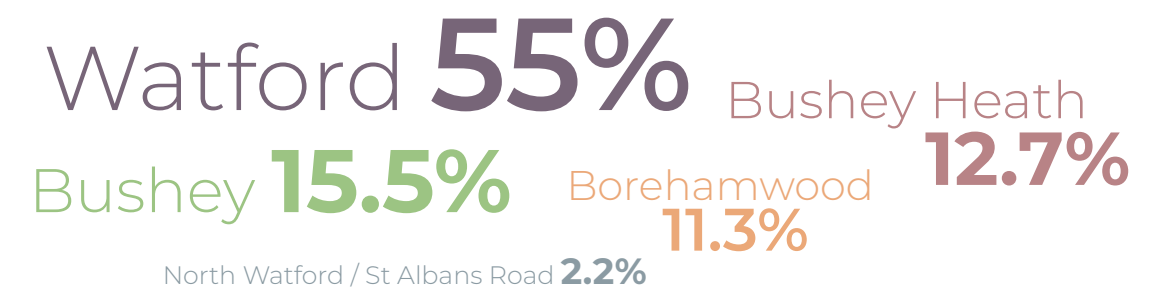
These figures demonstrate that virtually every Bushey resident visits Watford town centre, and it is by far the most frequented destination, significantly exceeding even local centres within Bushey itself.

Socially and culturally, Bushey residents have long participated in Watford's civic and cultural life. From early 20th-century civic celebrations, such as the 1935 Silver Jubilee, to shared access to cultural amenities including cinema, arts and public events, the communities are closely intertwined. The influence of Watford's artistic heritage extended into Bushey through institutions like the Herkomer Art School, which attracted artists and students from across the region.

Today residents routinely cross boundaries for transport, schooling, healthcare, leisure and cultural activities. Bushey benefits directly from Watford's vibrant retail, hospitality and entertainment offer whilst also giving back: contributing to Watford's character as a diverse and inclusive urban area. In line with the LGR criteria, there is therefore a compelling community and economic argument for this modification request to be considered and approved.

EDUCATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Educational patterns further reinforce these close community ties. As of Spring 2025:

- 1,829 pupils attending schools in Bushey have home addresses in Watford, nearly 29% of Bushey's 6,351 total pupils.
- Only 18% of Bushey's pupils come in from across the rest of Hertfordshire in comparison (excluding Bushey and Watford).
- 9.5% of pupils living in Bushey attend schools in Watford.
- 11% of pupils living in Watford attend schools in Bushey.

Furthermore, the schools across Watford, Three Rivers and Bushey already form part of the South West Herts Schools Consortium for secondary school transfer and this, along with the cross-boundary education patterns above, demonstrates deeply embedded, cohesive community relationships that transcend administrative boundaries.

RESIDENT PERSPECTIVES

Public consultation on local government reorganisation in September 2025 revealed strong support among Bushey residents for integration with West Hertfordshire. Residents consistently described Bushey as physically and socially closer to Watford than to Borehamwood or to the rest of Hertsmere, citing shorter distances, stronger daily links and a shared sense of community identity. Representative comments include:

"I support three unitary authorities, it correctly recognises that Bushey belongs within the West authority alongside Watford, Three Rivers and Dacorum. Bushey's identity and daily life links are with Watford, and the A41 provides a clear natural boundary from Borehamwood/Elstree. This adjustment reflects community reality while keeping disruption minimal."

"I have always felt a much closer connection to Watford than to Borehamwood or the rest of Hertsmere."

"From my postcode in Bushey it is only around 2.1 miles to Watford town centre, compared to almost 3.8 miles to Borehamwood town centre. This reflects everyday reality: Bushey is physically and socially closer to Watford, with stronger daily links in shopping, transport and community life."

These perspectives underscore that the proposed boundary change reflects lived experience, convenience and genuine community identity, rather than imposing artificial administrative divisions and presents the Secretary of State with a unique opportunity to right a historical inconsistency.

EFFECTIVE AND CONVENIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CLEAR AND IDENTIFIABLE BOUNDARIES

The current boundary creates an anomaly: Bushey sits as an isolated island within south-west Hertsmere, physically separated from the rest of the district by significant barriers. The opening of the M1 motorway in the 1950s created a substantial physical severance between Bushey and Borehamwood, reinforced by over two miles of greenbelt to the east. This compares with less than 0.5 miles of greenbelt between Bushey and Watford, where urban areas flow together more naturally with minimal physical separation.

The proposed boundary change would create a clear, logical and easily identifiable boundary along the M1 / A41 corridor, a major transport infrastructure feature that already functions as a natural dividing line. This alignment would eliminate the current administrative anomaly and establish boundaries that reflect actual physical geography and settlement patterns.

SERVICE DELIVERY ALIGNMENT

The amended boundary would significantly improve service delivery patterns by aligning administrative responsibility with functional geography. Currently Bushey's physical orientation towards Watford creates practical challenges for service integration with Hertsmere, whilst its separation from the rest of the district complicates coordinated delivery.

Walking or cycling between Bushey and Borehamwood involves longer travel times along rural national speed limit roads with limited pedestrian infrastructure (footpaths often only on one side). In contrast, travel between Bushey and Watford occurs along residential streets with urban character and complete pedestrian infrastructure. Bushey flows seamlessly into Watford's residential areas of Watford Heath and Oxhey with little to no physical severance.

This connectivity is reinforced by:

- **Rail**: the London Overground Lioness Line, with Bushey Station serving as a key node, terminating at Watford Junction.
- **Bus**: eight routes operating between Bushey and Watford (routes 142, 258, 306/306A, 347, 885, 336, 346, 602).
- **Road**: strong connections enabling easy access for residents and service vehicles.

Integrating Bushey into West Hertfordshire would align service delivery with these existing travel patterns, enabling:

- More efficient waste collection and street maintenance aligned with natural access routes.
- Coordinated transport planning reflecting actual usage patterns.
- Integrated emergency service deployment from natural response locations.
- Joint infrastructure investment aligned with functional geography.
- Coherent planning for growth and regeneration across a unified area.

This alignment eliminates the need for complex inter-authority agreements and enables more responsive, convenient service delivery for residents.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Economically Bushey functions as part of Watford's functional economic area. The 2021 Census revealed that over 900 Bushey residents commute to Watford for work, probably an underestimate due to the impacts of COVID-19 on working patterns. In total, over 1,400 Bushey residents commute to work within the proposed West Hertfordshire area. By comparison, just over 900 commute to the central area, with fewer than 600 working in Hertsmere specifically.

Many Bushey residents are employed in Watford's major sectors such as health, education, the creative industries and in professional services. This economic link is further reinforced by Bushey's local businesses, which depend on Watford's larger market and infrastructure to thrive. The close relationship between the two areas extends beyond employment and commerce; they share key strategic priorities, including growth, regeneration and sustainability.

Integrating Bushey into West Hertfordshire via approval of this modification request would enable a more coherent and impactful approach to joint planning and investment. By aligning administrative boundaries with the functional economic geography, planning, infrastructure investment and business support can be coordinated more effectively. This would ensure that resources are targeted where they are most needed and allow both areas to benefit from shared opportunities for growth and development.

DEMOCRATIC ALIGNMENT

The proposal is to amend the boundary, as per Appendix 2A, to realign the existing Hertsmere wards of Bushey North, Bushey St James, Bushey Park and Bushey Heath so that they fall within the West Hertfordshire Unitary Authority. It is proposed that the existing Aldenham West borough ward of Hertsmere remains in the future Central Hertfordshire Unitary Authority. This is because the current County division boundaries are not coterminous with existing borough ward boundaries and the existing Parish Council Ward of Aldenham is aligned with the borough ward boundaries rather than County division boundaries. Aligning the boundary change to borough ward boundaries subsequently means that the entirety of the existing Aldenham Parish Council ward area can remain intact under the Central Hertfordshire Unitary. This proposal avoids fragmenting a well-established parish structure, with consequences for governance, financial arrangements and community cohesion.

STRONG PUBLIC SERVICES AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC COHERENCE

Bringing Bushey and Watford together within West Hertfordshire offers a strategic opportunity to enhance prosperity across the sub-region. Watford will play a pivotal role as a key economic and service centre in West Hertfordshire, with strong transport links, a thriving business community and a successful regeneration track record. Integrating Bushey will enable a more coherent and joined-up approach to public service delivery, allowing both areas to benefit from:

- **Shared infrastructure**: coordinated investment in transport, digital connectivity and community facilities aligned with actual usage patterns.
- **Integrated service delivery**: health, education, social care and environmental services planned and delivered across a unified functional area.
- **Strategic investment**: stronger case for regional and national funding through a unified vision for growth and resilience.
- **Coordinated planning**: coherent approach to housing, employment and regeneration, reflecting functional relationships.

ENHANCED SERVICE QUALITY

For Bushey residents, integration into West Hertfordshire would provide:

- Greater access to Watford's employment opportunities, cultural amenities and high-quality services.
- More responsive local governance aligned with actual community connections.
- Investment and planning decisions reflecting genuine travel-to-work, education and retail patterns.
- Preservation of Bushey's distinct identity within a broader administrative framework.

For West Hertfordshire as a whole, the integration would:

- Create a more balanced and sustainable Unitary Authority.
- Enable more efficient resource deployment across the functional economic area.
- Strengthen democratic representation and county-wide equity through better alignment of boundaries with community identity.
- Support inclusive growth and reduce inequalities through coordinated strategy.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The boundary change enhances financial sustainability through:

- **Operational efficiency**: aligning service delivery with natural geography reduces costs associated with complex cross-boundary arrangements, duplicate infrastructure and inefficient service patterns. Services such as waste collection, street maintenance and public transport can be planned and delivered more efficiently when boundaries reflect actual settlement patterns.

- **Strategic investment**: a unified approach to planning and regeneration across Bushey and Watford creates better opportunities to secure strategic funding from regional and national sources. The stronger economic case for investment in a coherent functional area enhances the return on public spending. Transport improvements, digital infrastructure and community facilities can be planned holistically, rather than requiring complex, cross-boundary coordination.

- **Resource optimisation**: integration enables more effective sharing of specialist resources, facilities and expertise across the functional economic area.

- **Economic development**: joint economic strategy across a unified functional economic area creates better conditions for business growth and job creation. This strengthens the tax base and reduces demand for public services through improved prosperity.

- **Administrative simplification**: eliminating artificial boundaries reduces the need for formal inter-authority agreements, joint committees and complex governance arrangements for service delivery. This reduces administrative overhead and enables faster, more responsive decision making.

- **Democratic engagement**: boundaries that reflect genuine community identity and functional relationships enhance democratic legitimacy and engagement. Residents participate more effectively in governance when boundaries align with their lived experience and community connections.

- **Long-term sustainability**: the boundary change creates more resilient and sustainable unitary authorities by ensuring administrative areas reflect actual settlement patterns, economic geography and community relationships. This enhances capacity to respond to future challenges and opportunities.

- **Section 151 Officers**: whilst the case for value exceeds financial assessment, the Section 151 Officers of Watford Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council have nevertheless confirmed that the proposed boundary change delivers value for money. In their analysis, they have established that the adjustment will not have a negative impact on the financial modelling underpinning the overall Hertfordshire Local Government Reorganisation proposal.

EQUITABLE AUTHORITY CONFIGURATION

The boundary change also improves the overall configuration of unitary authorities. The existing Bushey North and Bushey St James wards become the new Bushey North division, whilst the existing Bushey Park and Bushey Heath wards become the new Bushey South division, both within the West Hertfordshire Unitary area. The remaining area of the current Bushey divisions, which currently fall within the Aldenham West ward of Hertsmere will form part of the new Watling division, within the Central Hertfordshire Unitary area. See Appendix 2C. With Bushey subsequently integrated into West Hertfordshire, the councillor and division distribution becomes more equitable:

West Hertfordshire

Central Hertfordshire

Eastern Hertfordshire

72 Councillors
(24 divisions x 3)

69 Councillors
(23 divisions x 3)

93 Councillors
(31 divisions x 3)

This represents a balanced distribution, yet avoids creating an authority that approaches the LGBCE's threshold of concern regarding council size, whilst ensuring all three authorities have the capacity for effective strategic leadership.

LEGAL POSITION

In a letter to the Leaders of Hertfordshire Councils on 5 February 2025, Jim McMahon, the then Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, invited Leaders and Chief Executives to work together to develop a proposal for a single tier of local government for the county, and proceeded to set out the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and timeline for this process.

In particular, the following matters relating to boundary change were required to be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

1. Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.

2. There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

It was made clear, therefore, that whilst maintaining existing boundaries may be the default starting position, provision is made for departing from those boundaries where justification can be made on the grounds of public service and financial sustainability.

It remains the view of the councils that approval of this modification request will significantly strengthen the opportunities relating to the three unitary model, and this has been clearly evidenced, as required, within the request. Noting advice from MHCLG that the local government reorganisation is operating within the framework of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, we understand that the Act does not allow for boundary changes to form part of any base proposal. As such, MHCLG has confirmed that any modification request to the Secretary of State to amend existing boundaries should accompany a 'base proposal' developed using existing boundaries. In doing so, it was advised by MHCLG that any modification request should cover the boundary alteration request as well as strong justification for it, covering the benefit to public services and financial sustainability against any costs or complexities of implementation. This modification request meets these requirements.

Furthermore, the 3UA proposal sets out our assessment against the LGR criteria and so this modification request, as required, notes how that assessment against the criteria differs from the proposal so that the benefit of the proposed boundary change can be sufficiently assessed by the Secretary of State.

CONCLUSION

The case for integrating Bushey into West Hertfordshire is compelling across key criteria:

- **Community identity**: historical development, contemporary interaction patterns, educational connections and resident perspectives consistently demonstrate that Bushey's community identity is oriented toward Watford, rather than Hertsmere. The proposed boundary change reflects the lived reality of communities, rather than administrative convenience.

- **Effective local government**: the boundary change creates clear, identifiable boundaries along natural features (the M1 / A41 corridor) and aligns service delivery with functional geography. This enables more efficient, responsive and convenient public services for residents.

- **Public services and financial sustainability**: integration enables strategic coherence, enhanced service quality, operational efficiency and better investment returns. It creates conditions for inclusive growth and long-term sustainability across the functional economic area.

- **Value for money**: the boundary change delivers value through service efficiency, infrastructure investment, economic development, administrative simplification and democratic engagement, while creating more resilient and sustainable unitary authorities. Indeed, we do not believe it practical to achieve the same change via a future Principal Area Boundary Review because this would significantly increase transition costs and limit the scope for public sector transformation in the initial years of a new unitary council.

Most fundamentally, this boundary change recognises that communities are defined not by administrative lines on maps, but by the daily interactions, relationships and connections that shape residents' lives. Bushey's integration into West Hertfordshire ensures that the new unitary structure reflects and serves these genuine community bonds, creating governance that is locally responsive and strategically capable.

This once-in-a-generation opportunity to align administrative boundaries with community reality will enhance prosperity, improve services and strengthen democracy across the sub-region for decades to come and it is respectfully requested that the Secretary of State, in full consideration of the compelling narrative, approves this modification request.

KEY DATA SUMMARY

Population (2022 mid-year estimates, ONS)

- Total Bushey population: 29,330
- Bushey North: 14,629
- Bushey South: 14,701
- Projected growth to 2040 (detailed projections available)

Travel to work (2021 Census)

- Over 900 Bushey residents commute to Watford
- Over 1,400 Bushey residents commute to proposed West unitary authority area
- Just over 900 commute to Central unitary authority area
- Fewer than 600 commute to Hertsmere specifically

Education (Spring 2025)

- 1,829 pupils attending school in Bushey have home addresses in Watford (29% of 6,351 total pupils)
- 18% from rest of Hertfordshire (excluding Bushey and Watford)
- 9.5% of pupils living in Bushey attend school in Watford
- 11% of pupils living in Watford attend school in Bushey

Retail and leisure (2018 Survey – most recent survey)

Centres visited by Bushey residents:

1. Watford: 97.6%
2. Bushey: 74.4%
3. Bushey Heath: 71.8%
4. Borehamwood: 65.3%
5. Radlett: 31.9%

Most visited centres:

1. Watford: 55%
2. Bushey: 15.5%
3. Bushey Heath: 12.7%
4. Borehamwood: 11.3%
5. North Watford / St Albans Road: 2.2%

Transport infrastructure

- Rail: London Overground Lioness Line (Bushey Station to Watford Junction)
- Bus routes connecting Bushey and Watford: 142, 258, 306/306A, 347, 885, 336, 346, 602
- Green belt separation: Over 2 miles to Borehamwood vs less than 0.5 miles to Watford
- Distance: Approximately 2.1 miles from Bushey postcodes to Watford town centre vs 3.8 miles to Borehamwood town centre

APPENDIX 2A MAP OF EXISTING WATFORD AND HERTSMERE BOUNDARIES

Please note: The red line represents the new unitary boundary, running along existing Bushey ward boundaries, coterminous with parish boundaries. The green line shows the existing county boundary which will be realigned through the approval of this modification request.
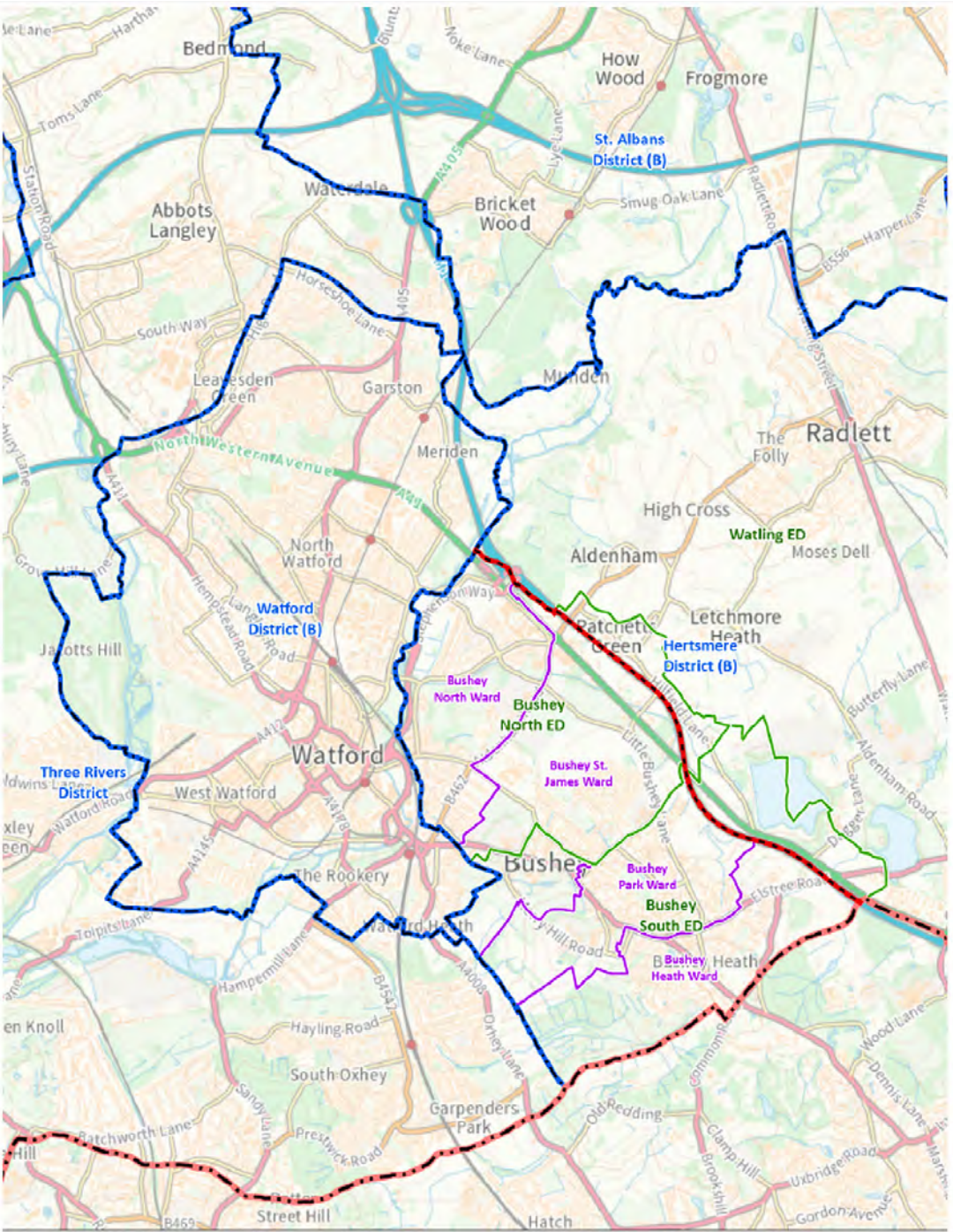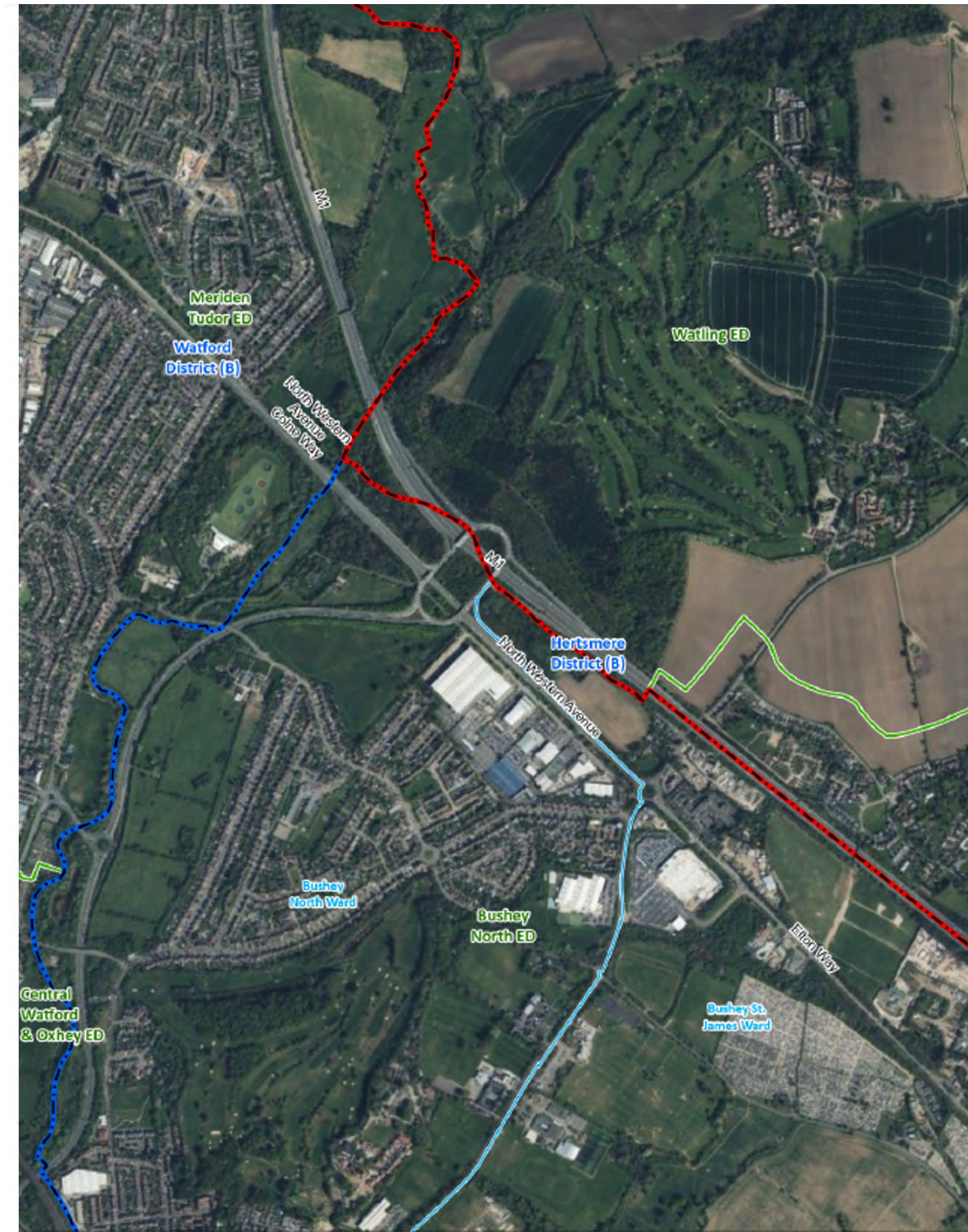

APPENDIX 2B AERIAL VIEW OF EXISTING WATFORD AND HERTSMERE BOUNDARIES

Return to contents page

APPENDIX 2C - REMAINING AREA

A and B represent the remaining area of current Bushey divisions, which will be in the new Watling division, within the Central Hertfordshire Unitary Authority

3UA boundary proposal

— Proposed 3UA boundary

▭ Herts Electoral Boundaries

▭ Bushey Watling 3UA Proposed Areas

1:1,500
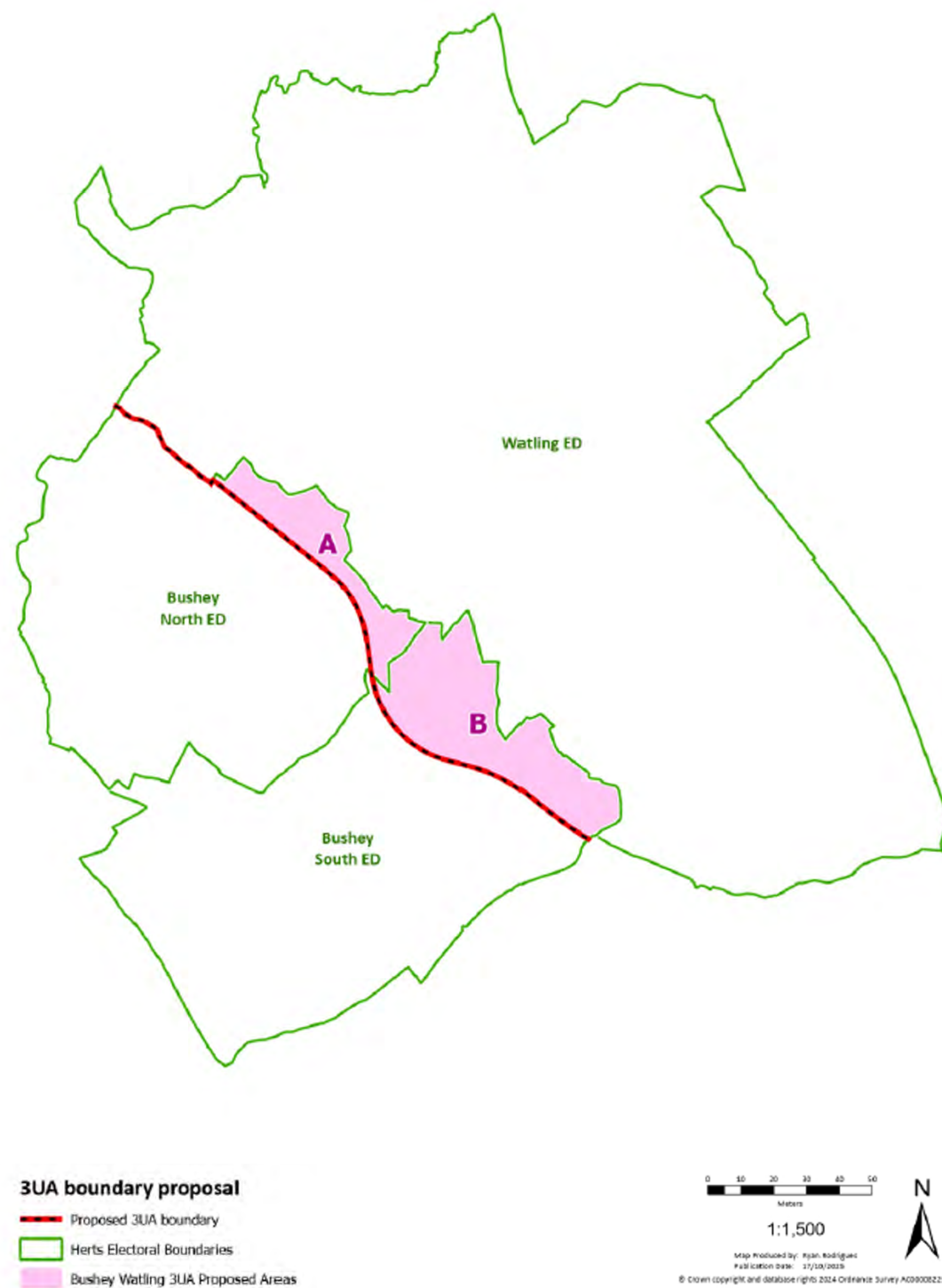
APPENDIX 3 – HEMEL GARDEN COMMUNITIES

The Hemel Garden Communities programme plans for housing and employment growth, including urban regeneration within Hemel Hempstead and an expansion of 11,000 homes to the north and east of the current town. This development goes beyond the existing Dacorum Borough Council boundary into the St Albans City and District Council area. The development involves 455 hectares in Dacorum and 519 hectares in St Albans, together with 53 hectares of new employment space. The plan is connected with the regeneration of Hemel Hempstead, and upon completion, it will be necessary to ensure the integration of new and existing communities with Hemel Hempstead, in terms of identity and local government administration.

Although delivery is at an early stage, both Dacorum and St Albans have worked in close collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council and other stakeholders to develop a joint Delivery Board and Delivery Strategy – the programme is an exemplar of cross-boundary working between local government partners. The emerging local plans for each of these areas support this opportunity to deliver the co-ordinated expansion of the existing town of Hemel Hempstead, with housing delivered on a relatively even distribution across each area on completion of the programme in 2050. Under a three unitary solution these established joint working arrangements will continue to flourish between West and Central Hertfordshire, with delivery turbo-charged through the support of the new Strategic Authority.

Towards the completion of the programme there will be a need to ensure the new expansion is unified with existing communities under the shared identity of Hemel Hempstead and fully aligned and integrated with the existing town. This alignment will optimise local service delivery and strengthen community cohesion.

Under the proposed three unitary solution, collaborative efforts between West and Central Hertfordshire will ensure that this expansion is delivered seamlessly, establishing long-term place-based governance. To achieve this a thorough boundary review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is anticipated towards the end of the development programme, and this will be required to ensure that ward structures appropriately reflect evolving community needs and strengthen growth opportunities in West Hertfordshire.

Figure 1 - Hemel Garden Community Delivery Statement March 2025

APPENDIX 4 – NEIGHBOURHOOD PREVENTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE	KEY DEPENDENCIES AND RISKS STATUS
1. Defining Prevention and Neighbourhood Teams			
• DISCOVERY PHASE: Conduct comprehensive stakeholder engagement across health, social care, police, voluntary sector and councils • DISCOVERY PHASE: Undertake benchmarking exercise with comparable local authorities • SHADOW ONWARDS: Facilitate multi-agency workshops to co-design Hertfordshire prevention approach • SHADOW ONWARDS: Develop clear definitions of prevention tiers and neighbourhood team operations • SHADOW ONWARDS: Establish guiding principles for team composition and integrated delivery	• Discovery report on current state and best practice • Vision and Target Operating Model document • Strategic vision for prevention • Operating principles and values • Team composition and roles • Performance framework and success metrics	Discovery: April 2026 - March 2027 Full Work: April 2027 - August 2028	• Securing commitment from all partner organisations • Alignment with ICS neighbourhood strategy • Managing expectations around pace of change • Discovery phase must inform shadow authority planning
2. Structures and Boundaries			
• Map existing administrative boundaries across all partner organisations • Analyse population data, deprivation indices, and community identity • Facilitate workshops to develop boundary options (30,000-50,000 population) • Undertake impact assessment of boundary options • Engage communities and members on proposed boundaries • Develop transition plan for moving to proposed structures	• Proposed Neighbourhood Model Boundaries Report • Comparative analysis of boundary options • Maps showing proposed neighbourhoods with demographics • Coterminosity analysis with partners • Whole System Approach Framework • Impact assessment and transition plan	Discovery: April 2026 - March 2027 Full Work: From April 2027	• Political sensitivity around boundary changes • Tension between ideal coterminosity and pragmatism • Impact on existing staff and services • Partner agreement on boundaries
3. Data and Evidence			
• Collate existing needs assessments, JSNA, Public Health reports • Analyse demographics, health inequalities, social care demand at neighbourhood level • Map current service utilisation, costs, and outcomes • Identify data gaps and commission additional analysis • Develop neighbourhood profiling methodology • Create evidence summaries for each proposed neighbourhood	• Neighbourhood Evidence Packs for each area • Population demographics and projections • Health and wellbeing profiles • Social care demand and spend analysis • Community safety profiles • Community assets mapping • Service utilisation data and identified priorities	Discovery: April 2026 - March 2027 Full Work: From April 2027	• Data sharing agreements between partners • Quality and consistency of data • Capacity within analytical teams • Making evidence accessible and actionable • GDPR compliance

ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE	KEY DEPENDENCIES AND RISKS STATUS
4. Strategy, Commissioning and Transformation Programmes			
• Comprehensive stocktake of current strategies across all partners • Map all commissioned services, contracts, and delivery programmes • Identify transformation programmes impacting neighbourhood teams • Facilitate analysis workshops: stop, start, scale decisions • Develop high-level strategic plan for neighbourhood alignment • Undertake risk assessment of contractual and financial implications • Engage service providers and communities on proposed changes	• Gap and Opportunity Analysis • Matrix of current commissioned services • Duplication and gap analysis • Stop/start/scale recommendations • Strategic Alignment and Commitments Map • High-Level Risk Assessment • Mitigation strategies	Discovery: April 2026 - March 2027 Full Work: From April 2027	• Complexity of mapping multiple organisations • Contractual constraints limiting flexibility • Financial pressures driving short-term decisions • Provider market concerns • Legal review requirements
5. Workforce			
• Map existing workforce across all partners for neighbourhood teams • Analyse current staff locations, roles, skills, terms and conditions • Model workforce requirements for proposed teams • Undertake gap analysis between current and required workforce • Engage with staff, trade unions and HR leads • Develop workforce transition principles (TUPE considerations) • Identify training and development needs for new ways of working	• Workforce Mapping Report • Current workforce analysis by neighbourhood • Skills, capacity, and gap analysis • Workforce modelling for target teams • Workforce Transition Plan • TUPE and employment implications • Training and development requirements • Recruitment and retention strategy	Discovery: April 2026 - March 2027 Full Work: From April 2027	• Staff anxiety and resistance to change • Employment law and TUPE complexity • Recruitment challenges in key roles • Different terms and conditions • Trade union consultation requirements • Retention of key staff during transition
6. Funding			
• Map all current funding streams supporting prevention activity • Analyse funding allocation geographically and by service type • Model funding requirements for proposed neighbourhood teams • Identify opportunities for pooled budgets and aligned funding • Engage partners on funding principles and governance (S75) • Develop business case for pilot neighbourhood teams • Explore national pilot funding opportunities • Design funding governance model enabling local flexibility	• Funding Mapping and Analysis • Comprehensive map of funding by source and value • Funding requirements modelling • Partner Funding Engagement Report • Pooled budget proposals • Section 75 development roadmap • Pilot Funding Business Case • Expected outcomes and ROI	Discovery: April 2026 - March 2027 Full Work: From April 2027	• Partner willingness to pool/align budgets • Financial pressures limiting investment • Complex funding conditions • Accountability and governance concerns • Success of national funding bids • Time for Section 75 agreements

ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE	KEY DEPENDENCIES AND RISKS STATUS
7. Governance for Change			
• Review existing governance arrangements across partners • Design governance model for neighbourhood, locality, and strategic levels • Develop draft Section 75 agreements for integrated commissioning • Establish programme governance for development phase • Develop criteria and process for selecting pilot neighbourhoods • Create business case and approval papers for pilots • Secure approval from decision-making bodies for pilot funding	• Draft Governance Model • Governance structure and terms of reference • Decision-making framework • Draft Section 75 Agreements • Pilot Neighbourhood Proposal • Selection criteria for -3 pilot areas • Implementation timeline and evaluation framework • Pilot Funding Approval secured	Shadow Authority (April 2027 - March 2028)	• Legal arrangements for new Unitary Authority • Partner commitment to formal governance • Complexity of Section 75 development • Political and organisational approvals • Resource for governance infrastructure • Timing of decisions
8. Pilot Neighbourhood Teams			
• Establish project management for pilot neighbourhoods • Co-design detailed operating model with local stakeholders • Recruit and deploy staff with appropriate induction • Establish local neighbourhood partnerships • Implement integrated IT systems and data sharing • Deliver training: strengths-based practice, integrated working • Launch pilots with clear communication • Establish monitoring and evaluation framework • Capture learning, challenges and adaptations • Undertake formal evaluation at key milestones	• Pilot Neighbourhood Team Implementation • Fully operational teams in ~3 neighbourhoods • Monitoring and Evaluation Reports • Progress against objectives • Quantitative data on activity and outcomes • Staff, partner and resident feedback • Impact case studies • Recommendations for wider rollout • Cost-benefit analysis	Shadow Authority (April 2027 - March 2028) 6-12 month pilot	• Recruitment and retention of staff • IT systems and information governance readiness • Partner engagement in pilot areas • Managing expectations during pilot • Sufficient time for meaningful evaluation • Changes required based on learning

ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE	KEY DEPENDENCIES AND RISKS STATUS
9. Neighbourhood Prevention Strategy			
• Establish co-production process with diverse stakeholders • Review evidence base, best practice, and pilot learning • Facilitate co-production workshops for vision and priorities • Draft Neighbourhood Prevention Strategy • Undertake formal consultation with stakeholders • Revise strategy based on consultation feedback • Develop implementation plan including rollout phasing • Secure formal approval through governance • Confirm funding commitments from partners • Develop communication and engagement plan for launch	• Neighbourhood Prevention Strategy • Vision for prevention in Hertfordshire • Strategic priorities and outcomes framework • Neighbourhood team model • Partnership commitments and governance • Implementation roadmap • Performance and evaluation framework • Strategy Implementation Plan • Confirmed Funding and Resources	Post Vesting Day (April 2028 – March 2035)	• Meaningful co-production takes time • Balancing ambition with financial constraints • Securing funding commitments • Alignment with ICS and partner strategies • Political approval and support • Managing implementation expectations
10. Neighbourhood Prevention Plans			
• Establish neighbourhood planning process with methodology • Form neighbourhood planning groups with diverse representation • Share evidence packs and facilitate local analysis • Undertake community engagement and asset mapping • Co-produce neighbourhood prevention plans • Ensure plans are specific, measurable, and achievable • Identify local priorities and actions • Incorporate learning from pilots • Link plans to strategic priorities and commissioning • Secure sign-off through neighbourhood partnerships	• Neighbourhood Prevention Plans for each area • Neighbourhood profile and evidence summary • Community-identified priorities • Agreed outcomes and success measures • Detailed action plan with responsibilities • Resource allocation • Governance and accountability arrangements • Community engagement approach • Annual review and refresh process	Post Vesting Day (From April 2028) Annual refresh	• Capacity of teams and partners to lead planning • Quality of community engagement • Ensuring plans are meaningful not bureaucratic • Aligning local and strategic priorities • Maintaining momentum across multiple areas • Plans as living documents not one-off

ACTIVITIES	DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE	KEY DEPENDENCIES AND RISKS STATUS
11. Transformation			
• Implement governance across all neighbourhood partnerships • Roll out neighbourhood teams across all areas based on pilots • Complete TUPE transfers and organisational changes • Implement comprehensive workforce development programme • Develop neighbourhood team leaders for multi-agency management • Establish communities of practice for shared learning • Implement cultural change programme: collaboration, learning, innovation • Implement integrated IT systems and shared care records • Build data analytics capability for evidence-based decisions • Develop performance dashboards and digital inclusion initiatives	• Fully Operational Governance Structures • Complete Neighbourhood Team Rollout • Digital Infrastructure for integrated working • Embedded Culture Change • Performance Management Framework operational • Continuous Improvement Processes • Section 75 agreements implemented • Staff wellbeing and support mechanisms • Career pathways within neighbourhood teams	Post Vesting Day (April 2028 – March 2035) 7-year transformation	• Sustained leadership commitment • Investment in workforce and digital • Managing change fatigue • IT system integration challenges • Information governance complexity • Maintaining momentum over time • Financial pressures impacting investment • Demonstrating impact to sustain commitment

HERTFORDSHIRE:
DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY