CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Cheltenham Borough Council
# Council (Extraordinary Meeting)

**Meeting date:** **17 November 2025**

**Meeting time:** **2.30 pm**

**Meeting venue:** **Council Chamber - Municipal Offices**

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## Membership:

Councillors Dr David Willingham (Chair), Martin Horwood (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Dilys Barrell, Graham Beale, Angie Boyes, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Julia Chandler, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Ashleigh Davies, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Jan Foster, Juan Carlos Garcia Clamp, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Hannah Healy, Sandra Holliday, Peter Jeffries, Tabi Joy, Alisha Lewis, Dr Cathal Lynch, Tony Oliver, Ben Orme, Dr Helen Pemberton, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Stan Smith, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Izaac Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler and Suzanne Williams

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**Contact:** democraticservices@cheltenham.gov.uk
**Phone:** 01242 264 246

**1 Apologies**

**2 Declarations of interest**

**3 Minutes of the last meeting (Pages 3 - 22)**
Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2025

**4 Communications by the Mayor**

**5 Communications by the Leader of the Council**

**6 To receive petitions**

**7 Public Questions**

**8 Member Questions**

**9 Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill (Pages 23 - 56)**
Report of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

**10 2025 Independent Resident Survey Results (Pages 57 - 142)**
Report of the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

**11 Local Government Reorganisation - Business Case Submission (Pages 143 - 996)**
Report of the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

**12 Any other item the Mayor determines as urgent and which requires a decision**

Gareth Edmundson
Chief Executive

CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Cheltenham Borough Council
# Council
# Minutes

**Meeting date:** **13 October 2025**

**Meeting time:** **2.30 pm - 4.10 pm**

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**In attendance:**

**Councillors:**

Dr David Willingham (Chair), Martin Horwood (Vice-Chair), Frank Allen, Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Dilys Barrell, Angie Boyes, Jackie Chelin, Barbara Clark, Julia Chandler, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Ashleigh Davies, Chris Day, Iain Dobie, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Dr Cathal Lynch, Dr Helen Pemberton, Richard Pineger, Julie Sankey, Stan Smith, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Izaac Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler and Suzanne Williams

**Also in attendance:**

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Claire Hughes (Director of Governance, Housing and Communities) and Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive)

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## 1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Barnes, Beale, Chandler, Foster, Garcia Clamp, Healy, Holliday, Joy, Oliver and Orme.

## 2 Declarations of interest

Councillor Tooke and Councillor Williams, as Chair and Vice-Chair of Cabinet Housing Committee, both declared in interest in Agenda item 11: *Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel*; they will abstain from the vote for this item.

The Mayor, as county councillor for St Mark's and St Peter's, and Councillor Pineger, as borough councillor for St Mark's, both declared an interest in Agenda item 10:

*Interim review of polling districts, polling places, and polling stations for St Mark's Ward*

The Mayor also suggested that all parish councillors have an interest in Agenda item 9: *Community Governance Review - Stage 1 results and recommendations,* but this would not preclude them from taking part in the debate and voting on the recommendations.

**3 Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 21 July, were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

**4 Communications by the Mayor**

The Mayor began by expressing condolences to the families of Adrian Daulby and Melvin Cravitz, who were killed in the Yom Kippur terrorist attack on the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in Manchester. He said he understood how concerning this will be for the Jewish communities in Cheltenham, and had a simple message – there is no place for antisemitism, not here, not anywhere.

He said that on 02 October a number of councillors attended the funeral of former Mayor and Honorary Alderman Brian Chaplin. Not having served with him, he could do no more than offer condolences to his family and friends, but he invited any members who had worked with him to say a few words should they wish.

Councillor Horwood said he knew Brian during his time as MP and councillor, and although they agreed on nothing politically, always found him a funny and congenial character. He added that he was an outstanding harmonica player, and latterly a committed fundraiser for prostate cancer, making a huge contribution.

The Mayor invited everyone to stand for a minute's silence.

A list of events attended by the Mayor since the last meeting of Council can be found here on the CBC website.

**5 Communications by the Leader of the Council**

The Leader shared an update of just some of the activity and events since the last meeting of Full Council on 21 July:

- the council completed the first 10 of 70 new affordable homes at the Regents Village site in Swindon Village, making a significant step in addressing our local housing needs;

- Henry Boot Developments have appointed a contractor for the £1billion Golden Valley scheme near GCHQ, which is set to transform the area into a tech and innovation hub;
- Cheltenham joined the national *Rescue Me! Recycle* campaign from 22-28 September, promoting recycling awareness and community engagement;
- Horizon Aero Group, the preferred bidder for Gloucestershire Airport, unveiled a Social Value Charter outlining its commitment to sustainability and community benefit;
- nominations have opened for the 2025 No Child Left Behind awards, celebrating individuals and organisations who are making a difference for children and families in Cheltenham;
- the Community Pride 2025 programme has been launched, offering a total fund of £30k to support local community-led projects that boost neighbourhood pride and cohesion.

Looking forward to the December meeting, she hoped to be able to share the results of our 2025 Residents Survey for debate, together with an update to council on the sale of the Municipal Offices and Gloucestershire Airport.

She ended by encouraging all members to attend the member briefings on Local Government Review. It is a huge commitment, and there will be a special Full Council meeting in November to agree the submission to government. She put on record her thanks to all the officers working on this enormous piece of work.

## 6 To receive petitions

There were no petitions.

## 7 Public Questions

Seven public questions had been received, with written responses published on the website. Three of the questioners were present to ask supplementary questions.

### 1. Question from Richard Lawler to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

<u>Data Centres and Water Use</u>

National frameworks for water management, such as the *National Framework for Water Resources 2025* and the *Plan for Water*, focus largely on regulating water companies and supply infrastructure. They do not set sector-specific safeguards for high-demand industrial users such as data centres, whose cooling systems can place significant pressure on local water resources.

Given Cheltenham Borough Council's responsibilities as the Local Planning Authority, what steps will the council take to ensure that any future planning application for a data centre in our borough:

1. Includes clear and enforceable conditions on water use, abstraction, and discharge;
2. Demonstrates that local residents and businesses will not lose out to industrial users in the event of water shortages; and
3. Remains subject to local oversight and enforcement, even if data centres are later reclassified as nationally significant infrastructure projects?

**Cabinet Member response**

Thank you for your question.

It is not possible to pre-judge a future planning application as the issues that may or may not arise cannot be accurately predicted. Please be assured however that the issues that you have raised, where material, will be weighed into the planning balance as part of any planning decision and expert advice will be sought where necessary (from the Environment Agency for example). Conditions will be imposed where the legal tests are met. Responsibility for enforcement matters will remain with the borough council irrespective of whether a data centre is classified as a 'nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP)' in the future.

**2. Question from Mr Richard Lawler to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins**

<u>Fracking and Local Protections</u>

While the Government has paused support for hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), national energy policy continues to describe it as a possible future option. The National Planning Policy Framework allows certain major energy projects to be designated as *Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects*, which can override local planning controls and community objections.

Given Cheltenham Borough Council's responsibilities as the Local Planning Authority, what steps will the council take to ensure that if fracking proposals were brought forward affecting Cheltenham or its surrounds:

1. Local environmental protections, including groundwater safety and air quality, cannot be set aside;
2. Biodiversity net gain and nature recovery requirements are fully enforced; and
3. The health, safety, and concerns of local residents remain central to the council's decision-making, even if national policy seeks to override local control?

**Cabinet Member response**

Thank you for your question.

Hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') does not currently sit under the nationally significant infrastructure (NSIP) regime; a conventional planning application is therefore a requirement.

Dealing with and determining a planning application for fracking (and associated enforcement) is currently the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council in its capacity as Minerals Planning Authority (MPA). The borough council's role in this scenario is one of consultee only.

It is not the borough council's role to duplicate the planning process underway at the county council, but in the event that such an application is ever submitted, we will of course represent the views and opinions of Cheltenham residents through our role as a statutory consultee.

The particular considerations that you have raised in your question (environmental factors/biodiversity etc.) are legitimate planning considerations which the county council will need to take into account in the event that an application for fracking is submitted.

**3. Question from Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Wellbeing and Public Open Space, Councillor Izaac Tailford**

In recent weeks, a number of popular Restaurants and Cafes in Cheltenham have closed such as Ask in Montpellier, Ox in Cambray, and Cake Alchemist, Domain 16 and The Find in Regent Street.

What steps is the Council taking to support businesses of this type in these difficult Economic times and to attract new businesses to invest in our Town?

**Cabinet Member response**

Thank you for your question. As both a resident and cabinet member for the economy, I was disappointed to hear about the recent closures of these well-loved restaurants and cafés in Cheltenham. The retail and hospitality sectors are facing significant national challenges and, as an authority, we recognise the impact this has on our businesses, their staff, and the wider economy.

Many of the businesses you have mentioned have cited factors outside the council's control in their reasons for closing. This has included business rates, which are set nationally, increasing rent, which is set by landlords, and wider economic pressures such as rising costs of materials.

With this in mind, I want to reassure you that locally we are committed to doing everything we can to support local businesses and attract new investment into Cheltenham.

Some of our activities include:

<u>Place marketing and promotion:</u>

The council's Marketing Cheltenham team promotes the town to both residents and visitors as a vibrant place to visit, stay, and explore. Around 2 million people visit Cheltenham each year.

All visitor facing businesses are promoted on www.visitcheltenham.com for free and this website also hosts the biggest what's on guide in the town. It is a useful source of information and well used by visitors and residents with over 1 million visitors a year.

I took part in the regular Marketing Cheltenham meeting last week, where member businesses get together to promote and network – as well as having the opportunity to learn about the upgraded Visit Cheltenham website and how its changes will make it easier for them to promote themselves to visitors and residents.

Marketing Cheltenham are also the conduit for promoting the town to investors with our Moving to Cheltenham brand highlighting the many reasons to bring a business to the town.

Strong partnerships:

We work closely with Cheltenham Business Improvement District (BID) to support initiatives that enhance the town centre experience, including events, street dressing, and safety.

There are plenty of examples where we have worked together recently on things such as their town centre graffiti removal programme, public realm improvements, the Cambray Carnival for families and young people, and of course the Cheltenham and Gloucester Hospitals Charity Lions at Large trail, that brought many visitors and residents into our town centre during the summer.

This is a good opportunity to also say that I do hope that businesses in the BID area will back them in their latest ballot, so we can continue to work together going forward. They do a fantastic job and represent businesses very well.

We also work with other business groups including the Chamber of Commerce to support businesses across the town as a whole.

Support for start-ups and entrepreneurs:

Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the council funds business support via the Growth Hub. Based at the MX, the team offer free advice to businesses at all stages of their development and in all sectors.

I visited the Growth Hub last week, and I would highly recommend that businesses reach out to them for free support, advice and workshops.

Town centre vacant units action plan

Between 8 and 9% of the retail premises in Cheltenham town centre are currently vacant. This compares to a national average of around 14%. However, we are not complacent and our vacant units action plan sets out a list of actions and priorities to support town centre businesses.

Culture

It would be remiss of me to not mention all of our support, both financially and in-kind, for our cultural sector in Cheltenham – including, but not limited to, The Wilson, Town Hall, The Everyman, Cheltenham Festivals and Cheltenham Playhouse too.

All of these venues and organisations are a focal point and bring many visitors and residents into our town centre, boosting our hospitality industry and making our Festival Town a great place to live and work. This helps us punch far above our size as a town.

To summarise - we understand the pressures facing the hospitality sector and remain committed to promoting the town and working collaboratively with our partners to support businesses. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight a slice of what we are doing as a council – but to also help signpost businesses to available support where they need it.

**Supplementary Question**

Thank you for your full response – it is helpful to get this information out. Would you agree that it is worrying that so many well-established businesses are closing and that this might be a trend? You are right to say that we mustn't be complacent, especially with the important months ahead leading up to Christmas. The upcoming budget is a concern, with possible increase in taxation at national level that might affect these businesses, but I will do what I can to support him in the future to ensure that Cheltenham is well marketed as a great place to run a business.

**Cabinet Member response**

Thank you for the original question which provided a good opportunity to highlight just some of what we do as a council to support local businesses. One of the biggest challenges has been 14 years of hardship and austerity under the previous government, and while not agreeing with all the current government is doing, it is to be hoped that some of its changes, such as the new minimum wage, will make a difference to how affordable a business is to run.

Whilst it is a worrying trend nationally, I am not worried for Cheltenham because we do such a good job, and our vacancy levels are lower than elsewhere in the county and country. But we have to be vigilant, not complacent, to look after our town, working hard and putting pressure on nationally to hopefully push forward changes which will benefit our local businesses.

Although we have lost some businesses, we have gained some too, partly thanks to the hard work of Cheltenham BID under new director Fran Inman, working with the council. New businesses may also benefit from The Growth Hub which provides help, free explanations and support .

**4. Question from Rich Newman to Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins**

Does Cheltenham Borough council currently offer any particular protections for rare historic buildings and the businesses housed within them in our town? In short, does the council make any allowances for historic business/premises?

**Cabinet Member response**

Historic buildings which are deemed by Historic England to be of special architectural or historic significance are 'listed' on the National Heritage List for England. Listed buildings benefit from an enhanced level of protection; this means that any physical change which might affect its special interest requires the council's prior consent through the planning system. The protection provided by the 'listed building consent' regime does not however extend to the use of the building or changes from one business to another. Any physical works to a listed building which facilitate or encompass an associated change of use would however fall within the council's control.

Businesses accommodated within a listed building are subject to the same planning policies as those within an unlisted or non-historic building. The planning system does not provide protection for specific businesses; it does however provide a level of protection for certain commercial uses in a very limited and specific set of circumstances (for example protection for retail/commercial uses in a high street) where doing so is deemed to be in the wider public interest.

**Supplementary Question**

Thank you for the initial response. The Bell Inn dates back to 1809 and the previous planning application resulted in it being designated as an asset of community value, which was much appreciated. Does the council agree that the petition and public support gathered last time also applies to the current planning proposal, as the 'Save The Bell' campaign sees this as an ongoing issue rather than a new issue.

**Cabinet Member response**

[*The Mayor made the point that questions about specific planning applications yet to be determined are not allowed as any response could be viewed as pre-determination, resulting in costs to the public purse.*

*The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control apologised for not having thanked the questioner for his original question, but said he could only provide a limited response in view of the Mayor had said about pre-determination.]*

It is difficult to respond directly to the question without making any specific reference to The Bell Inn, but the main thing to remember is that historic buildings are protected by their listed building status, and this is taken into consideration when assessing planning applications. The council wants to make sure that the town's historical assets are protected, and I can assure the questioner that they will be, under the listed building system.

[*The Mayor added that members of the public concerned about any planning application can make formal representations through the planning process if they wish.*]

**5. Question from Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries**

Around four years ago CBC installed an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) as part of the upgrade to the Burrow's Pavilion. At that time, it was the first such installation in any of the parks in the Borough. It has transpired that the ASHP is not fit for purpose with running costs amounting to an unsustainable £6k-£7k per annum and has insufficient capacity to run the building. It seems that the contractor appointed under the CBC tender program had limited understanding of the technology. Furthermore, no form of guarantee as to its efficient performance is in place. Consequently, the ASHP now requires replacement at a cost to Leckhampton Rovers Football Club. The new ASHP will have running costs around £1.5k per annum.

Questions: Why was due diligence on suitability of contractor/supplier of original ASHP not carried out? Why is there no guarantee in place? How many other CBC parks have ASHP's in place and if so, have these been fitted by the same contractor?

**Cabinet Member response**

Thank you for the question. Firstly, I think we need to acknowledge the success of Burrow's Pavilion and how the investment overall has supported sport and physical activity to thrive on Burrow's Field which is to the significant benefit to the local community and to Cheltenham.

With regard to the ASHP itself, I think we need to establish the facts. It is not correct that due diligence was not carried out on the contractors. In fact, the works were awarded to an established, reputable and well-known local contractor and this was overseen again by an established and respected local firm as contract administrator on behalf of CBC.

However, it is often the case on any construction project that, following the completion of works, issues arise when a facility becomes operational.

In this case, CBC property team are currently in contact with the contractors to acquire warranty information for the installed equipment as this may enable a claim to be made for any credible defects. In addition, the council are also supporting the club to get a further mechanical and electrical assessment of the equipment. We hope through this support we can move towards reaching a positive resolution.

There are no other ASHPs in Council pavilions. There is one further ASHP in Montpellier Gardens Gallery but this was instigated, installed and is managed by the tenant.

**Supplementary Question**

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for a full response, and it is good to know that, contrary to what I had been led to believe, there does seem to be a warranty in place for the ASHP, which hasn't been working properly and has been costing £6-7k a year. How confident is the Cabinet Member that the warranty will be successful,

what extent of original cost four years ago will be forthcoming, and what was original cost?

**Cabinet Member response**

This is quite a lot of detail, and a written response will be provided as soon as possible. In the meantime, I would like to put on record my thanks to that community for all their hard work.

**6. Question from Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas**

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the current number of void council properties in Cheltenham, the average time these properties are standing empty, and how many of these are classified as long-term voids—empty for over 60 days?

**Cabinet Member response**

Thank you for your question. It is important to note that when providing information on the number and costs of void properties we are not dealing with static numbers, for example since April 2025 the council has received 118 terminations and has acquired new stock which also count as voids before being let.

As of 30 September, the council held a total of 127 void properties as follows:

0-3 weeks = 21

4-12 weeks =32

13+ weeks =74

In addition, we have 18 properties which are currently advertised and going through the lettings process.

We fully accept that there have been substantial delays in the turnaround times for our void properties.

However, these delays were due to serious governance and legal issues which had not been addressed by the previous executive team or board and were therefore only identified following the transfer from Cheltenham Borough Homes. As a result, it was necessary to put a stop on all void work for several months so that the right changes could be made so the council could achieve compliance.

Now that these issues have been resolved and new contractors procured, work is progressing to bring the number down quickly. Due to our new performance management approach, we have seen the number fall by 14% since July.

**7. Question from Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, Councillor Flo Clucas**

Given the loss of rental income from void properties, can the Council provide a detailed estimate of the total financial loss to the Housing Revenue Account from these voids since the management of council homes was brought back in-house? And what is the current monthly cost to the public purse of housing families in temporary accommodation, a cost that would be significantly reduced if these voids were brought back into use?

**Cabinet Member response**

The void rent loss for the 2024/25 financial year was £456,600 which represents a rent loss of 1.8% and for 2025/26 the void rent loss to date is £335,000 representing a rent loss of 2.64%.

As mentioned in the response to your previous question, as a result of serious governance and legal issues which had not been addressed by the previous executive team or CBH board prior to transfer it has been necessary to put a stop on all void work for several months so that the right changes could be made to ensure that the council achieves compliance.

Now that we are in a position where contractors have been lawfully procured and appropriate financial controls put in place the position on voids will be recovered. To that end I am pleased to report that due to the interventions made performance is already improving in bringing void numbers down, with a 14% reduction since July 2025.

It is also important to note that, despite this council having to take action to put right the legacy issues left by CBH, that we continue to move forward with delivering significant savings and efficiencies which can then be reinvested in the service to the benefit of our tenants, leaseholders and the houses they live in. None of this would have been possible without the Council taking the right decision to bring the service back in house.

**8 Member Questions**

There were no Member questions.

**9 Community Governance Review - Stage 1 results and recommendations**

Introducing the report, the Leader made the following points:

- local government reorganisation, with the abolition of all Gloucestershire's seven district and borough councils, will leave areas of Cheltenham outside the existing five parishes without any real local representation – hence the agreement to undertake a community governance review. Stage 1 ran from May to July, and

since then officers and members of the Community Governance Review working group have developed the recommendations outlined in the report;
- about 100 responses were received, largely through an online survey, with some more detailed proposals sent by email. It is important to understand the views of the public, community groups and various organisations within Cheltenham, and she put on record her thanks to everyone who has contributed so far, assuring them that any feedback on how to improve offline communications for Stage 2 of the consultation is being taken on board;
- Stage 1 has resulted in no clear consensus or specific proposal that can be presented as the finished article for Stage 2, so today's recommendations are essentially proposing a review of certain parishes and their surrounding areas, based on the survey responses and proposals provided, in addition to asking the public for their views on the development of any new parish or town council.

She said that since the publication of the report, a few questions have been asked, and she went on to highlight a few corrections and points of clarification in the report

- regarding how Stage 2 of the consultation will be conducted with no additional financial implications, she said it will be largely along the same lines as Stage 1 but that paper copies of the documents will be made available, and the offline element of the consultation will be improved where possible. It is not economic to email or send printed leaflets to every household, but is really important that we as local representatives and councillors do as much as possible through various channels to keep people informed;
- paragraph 2.7 of the covering reports notes that a community governance review can make changes to parishes not looking to change; it has been pointed out that this is confusing, and the report and public consultation website will be amended accordingly
- there are some minor formatting issues in the report which means the recommendations in the summary don't reflect those at the end of the report or in the covering report – theses will also be amended;
- following conflicting feedback from Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council, it has now been agreed that a complete review of that parish is needed and a recommendation to that effect has been added.

**Questions**

In response to Members' questions, the Leader confirmed that:

- the first round of consultation was always going to be tricky, as people would be faced with a blank piece of paper and have no real sense of what any changes would mean to them. She anticipated that Stage 2 would be more inclusive, providing more detailed information and recommendations, and therefore get a better response;
- the Monitoring Officer confirmed that there would be no minimum number of required responses for any recommendations to be enacted, but it would ultimately be for Members at Full Council to determine whether they were satisfied that the responses were enough to move forward with a reorganisation order;

- regarding what the general population may know or not know about local democracy, she was not intending to include anything about local government reorganisation in the community governance review, but could see that a lot of people were not engaged and, for example, didn't understand the differentiation between town and parish councils. She hadn't considered producing any short form videos or Facebook posts to improve understanding to date, but was happy to take this suggestion away for a conversation with the communications team;
- the Monitoring Officer said the only real legal difference between town and parish councils is that a town council can appoint a mayor should it wish, while a parish council cannot; otherwise their powers and responsibilities are effectively the same;
- it is not the government's intention to allow town and parish councils to take on the responsibilities of borough councils. She had not heard anything from the county council about its expectations around town councils, but could pick this up off-line with the Member.

**Debate**

Members welcomed the report, looked forward to the second stage of consultation, and made the following comments:

- the report is warmly welcomed and supported; we still have powers over community governance, and the council is paying proper attention to this tier of government, to ensure it is more immediate, accountable and cost effective. The comments regarding Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council are particularly welcome – that area provided the best response in the town, with strong support for a boundary review to include Pilley (which merged with Leckhampton in the early 20th century and feels itself to be part of the parish) and Bournside (with its strong connections with Warden Hill and already part of Warden Hill district at county level) making them both a logical fit with the parish. He strongly supports these two areas becoming part of Leckhampton with Warden Hill parish, though is aware that there may be increased staffing requirements for such a large area;
- the results of the Stage 1 consultation clearly highlight the requirement for a number of reviews of existing parishes, to either include previously-excluded parts or to move things round a bit – the opportunity to look at this is welcome, though any suggestion that a boundary line could be put along the railway line would not work, as this would cut through the heart of St Peter's ward;
- it is clear that, after potential boundary reviews and inclusions, and a potential new parish of Benhall and The Reddings, the majority of what is left will include Cheltenham's highest areas of multiple deprivation, as well as the town centre, with its many assets and green spaces enjoyed by all residents and visitors alike. Management oversight and responsibility and the associated precepts in this large town centre area would be disproportionately unfair, and raises the question of how town centre assets can be managed collectively;
- having tried and failed for three years to set up a neighbourhood forum in St Peter's, in an effort to secure more CIL funds for local projects, and noting a similar lack of success in West Cheltenham, Springbank and Hester's Way,

recruiting members for a parish council is likely to be just as difficult – how will these residents be represented?

- support for a town council will ensure that non-parished areas don't get left behind, but the town centre include areas of deprivation and it will be important work together and share issues across boundaries;
- another concern is how people will know what is going on in the next stage – it is important that local councillors help them to understand the difference between a town and a borough council, and explain what the changes will mean to them – just describing it as 'a different level of government' is not very meaningful for most people;
- with local government reorganisation coming and the possibility of one unitary council, it is particularly important to have town and parish councils representation for the whole of Cheltenham, as there will be fewer ward councillors to help people with small but important local matters. Tewkesbury and Cirencester already have town councils and Cheltenham should have similar local representation for its residents to make sure they're not left behind when big decisions are made at higher level;
- the only caveat here is that potential unitary divisional or ward boundary issues should be considered when looking at boundaries for parish and town councils to avoid any confusion for people as to where they actually live and who represents them – this must be aligned as much as possible;
- Swindon Village is a perfect example of this – a ward separated by two parish councils and an unparished area, which causes confusion and some irritation to residents. If the council is considering Wyman's Brook, Prestbury and Swindon Village as part of the review for the second stage, it would make more sense, and result in better representation and community cohesion if a single parish council covers the whole of Swindon Village ward. Without this, some important areas of Swindon Village ward will suffer from a lack of local representation as we move towards a unitary authority, including some of the most deprived parts which need significant funding and improvements to ensure they are not left behind. The council should be doing all it can to make sure those areas are represented and funded through a parish council, by extending it to the full extent of ward, and allocating funding for these areas;
- the local government review seems like a dilution of democracy and devaluation of communities – it feels like local democracy is being torn apart – and while some wards such as Springbank are strong communities, many residents are time-poor wary of the reviews, and not engaging. Some kind of town council is needed to represent these people;
- the important word here is 'community' – we all represent our communities, and we must continue to put them and their engagement first when considering the way forward. Swindon Village has a strong parish council which engages with people, brings them together, works hard for the village, and makes things happen. When signs were put up in Windyridge Road, announcing that it was part of Prestbury parish, residents were angry at the lack of consultation, as they felt themselves to be part of Swindon Village. These voices must be heard;
- when working on the Joint Core Strategy, it was important for residents of Swindon Village and Uckington to save areas of local green space, and representatives from both communities came together to help make this happen;

the idea that Uckington might form part of Swindon Village Parish Council is a good one. Also the impact of Elms Park will be enormous in this part of town, with many new properties on the Cheltenham side – those residents will need representation, and the parish council is already fighting for this;

- Members' comments so far have demonstrated how complicated this issue is and whether residents really understand what is happening. Fiddler's Green became part of Benhall and The Reddings ward last year, but no-one is quite sure when the boundaries are. There is an active residents association in Benhall, an embryonic one in The Reddings, and none at all in Fiddlers Green; Benhall could have its own parish, or combine with The Reddings, or even be part of Up Hatherley parish. Hopefully Stage 2 consultation will make things clearer;
- looking at the Stage 1 responses, there were a lot from Leckhampton, but only five from The Reddings, three from Benhall and none from Fiddler's Green. The council and Members need to reach out and do more, make sure people understand how any changes will affect how they are looked after. Hopefully there will be a better response in Stage 2, with more local meetings to explain this big change and how to get it right;
- councillors have a big responsibility to explain the process to residents. Parishes have a natural centre of gravity, which make it easier to reach residents and provide services, and we should be mindful of this and where residents are most likely to receive the best level of service when thinking about where any parish boundaries might go. Some streets may do better as part of a parish council, others as part of a town council – the onus is on us to decide where the dividing lines should be;
- the report is welcome, and particularly the suggestion that Benhall and The Reddings should form a parish, although there are other options. Members need to explain to their residents and communities what will be involved, and the positives of being part of a parish. There are likely to be some complications, as Benhall and The Reddings are different areas, but they want to work together going forward;
- on Appendix A, the boundary between proposed parishes F and C would be better redrawn co-terminus with the ward boundary between St Peter's and Lansdown, to avoid a very thin piece of St Peter's ward ending up in a different parish to the rest of the ward;
- we might want to encourage parishes to aspire to Quality Parish Status, which sets a good standard, ensuring the parish is well run and public money well spent.

Summing up, the Leader made the following points:

- it was nice to bring a report to Council about community, as taking care of and being part of their communities is what most councillors want to do. Whatever we do next as we move into the next stage of whatever local government becomes, we need to make sure that all areas and communities have some level of local responsibility, accountability and representation;
- a lot has been said about fairness and deprivation, and we must be mindful of all areas when considering the way forward. As discovered by the Member who found setting up a neighbourhood forum impossible, there are areas where

people care but the majority of them are not retired, not high earners, and don't have the time or capacity to engage – this is one of the big reasons for doing a review;
- the subject of remuneration has been raised, and at the Gloucestershire Association of Town and Parish Councils AGM earlier this year, many people said that this would make a difference – some form of recognition, maybe an allowance of £2-4k, in recognition of the hard work and many hours parish councillors put in to doing an efficient job;
- it is true that a parish needs a centre of gravity, a community centre where events take place, but this must be relevant and welcoming to the whole parish, not just one element of it.

She thanked Members for their comments, hoped for a positive vote, and looked forward to working with the working group on the next stage of the consultation.

Before the vote, Councillor Horwood apologised for not having declared earlier that he is a Leckhampton with Warden Hill parish councillor. Councillors Smith and Bamford are also parish councillors.

Members approved unanimously the following recommendations:

**Council is recommended to review the full consultation response report (Appendix 3) and consider if the following recommendations should be taken forward for further consultation, including by way of a further survey and additional options such as focus groups:**

1. **To complete a full review of the boundaries of Swindon Village Parish and Prestbury Parish, including Wyman's Brook to establish which Parish it should sit in;**

2. **To complete a full review of the unparished area between Prestbury and Charlton Kings to understand if it should be incorporated into one of the already established councils;**

3. **To complete a full review of Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish, to understand whether the existing parish should be extended and/or separated into two parishes;**

4. **To consider setting up a new Parish for Benhall and The Reddings;**

5. **To directly ask the public, in stage 2 of the Community Governance Review, if they would like to see a Town Council in Cheltenham. This consultation question would provide an overview of what a Town Council could be responsible for and provide some options as to its boundaries.**

**10 Interim review of polling districts, polling places, and polling stations for St Mark's Ward**

The Returning Officer introduced the report, saying it was the council's statutory duty to ensure that all electors have reasonable and accessible facilities for voting. A full review of polling districts, places and stations was carried out in 2024, following which the function room at The Umbrella public house was designated as the polling place for polling district OA. However, following concerns from councillors about the polling station being situated outside St Mark's ward, and with further consultation, The Common Ground in Brooklyn Road (formerly St Marks and Hesters Way Community Association) has been identified as a more suitable alternative for electors in polling district OA.

He thanked borough and county councillors for aligning behind this recommendation.

A Member asked what contingency plan was in place if the polling station, which would now accommodate three polling districts, became unusable for any reason. The Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the Hesters Way polling station would be moved to the Oasis Sports Hall, and that an agreement is in place to have a portacabin supplier and generator on standby for the two St Mark's districts.

A Member thanked officers for the clear explanation, and welcomed the recommendations. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets also thanked officers and the elections team on behalf of all his colleagues, for their hard work all year round. The Mayor added his thanks.

**RESOLVED THAT:**

- **the change of polling place / station for electors in polling district OA to vote at The Common Ground, Cheltenham, Brooklyn Road (formerly St Marks & Hesters Way Community Association) is approved.**

**11 Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel**

The Monitoring Officer began by saying that she was introducing the report in the absence of the Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), Graham Russell, who has decided to stand down from the role. She put on record her thanks to him for all his hard work, time and effort over recent years, which she said was much appreciated.

Introducing the report, she said that when the new Cabinet Housing Committee was set up a year ago, it was agreed that the allowance for the Chair and Vice-Chair would be reviewed after one year. As set out in the report, the panel felt that the special responsibility allowance (SRA) for these roles should be increased to be in line with that of regulatory committees (Planning and Licensing) and recommended that change be made.

Members were also being asked to note the allowances paid to co-optees and independent persons on Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet Housing Committee.

There were no questions from Members.

A Member said she thoroughly supported the recommendations, knowing that the amount of technical information and paperwork dealt with by the Cabinet Housing Committee is very similar to that of Planning and Licensing. She was also pleased to note that the independent persons are being fairly remunerated.

The Leader added her thanks to the outgoing Chair of the IRP and was sorry to see him go after doing this difficult job for some years. She said his vast experience and knowledge of how councils and councillors work had made an important and consistent contribution to the work of the panel, and he will be much missed.

The Mayor also added his thanks on behalf of the whole Council, saying the task of Chair was challenging and often thankless.

**RESOLVED THAT:**

1. **the Chair of Cabinet Housing Committee be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance of £5,363, to be backdated to the 1 October 2025;**

2. **the Vice Chair of Cabinet Housing Committee be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,823, to be backdated to the 1 October 2025;**

3. **the allowances for co-optees/independent persons are noted.**

**12 2024-25 Audit, Compliance and Governance Annual Report**

The Chair of Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee introduced the report, which he felt provided a useful insight into the work of the committee, highlighting the excellent work of finance and audit colleagues, risk management, counter fraud and enforcement, cyber security and governance matters. He thanked them and officers for their input to the report, and councillor colleagues for their contributions and questions. He explained that the apparent late sign-off of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 accounts was not due to any tardiness of the accounts team, but to a massive national external audit backlog – it will be a couple of years until this is back on track.

No vote was required, but he hoped that Members found the report useful, and was happy to help with any points of clarification.

A Member thanked the Chair of Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee for an excellent job in chairing the committee over the last year, dealing with dense and technical material with focus and moving through the agendas efficiently. Another Member of the committee commented that he always particularly enjoys the reports of the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit, who do a huge amount of work to prevent public money from being syphoned off, and also the cyber security team for their really important work. He thanked the Chair and all the officers for their hard work.

As set out in the Recommendation, **no vote was required** but Council noted the Audit, Compliance and Governance Annual Report 2024-25

**13 2024-25 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report**

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny presented the report, thanking Councillor Foster who has occasionally stepped in to chair a meeting. She also drew Members' attention to an error in the report which stated that Councillor Barrell was a member of the committee in 2024-25; she was not, and this will be corrected before publication.

She said Overview and Scrutiny has had a busy year with an ambitious agenda set by Members, under the much-appreciated guidance of the Head of Governance, Risk and Assurance. She was also grateful to the Democratic Services team, who organise and liaise with all parties to ensure the items discussed meet the set objectives.

The chart shows how the committee interacts with the council and other committees, receiving reports from some and making recommendations to others. It has a wide-ranging and flexible remit to reflect current items of interest and concern, meets twice a year to set and prioritise agenda items, and appreciates dialogue with Members who report back from other scrutiny groups. She thanked officers for their expertise and time in preparing and presenting papers and answering challenging questions – Members don't underestimate the time and attention they give to the process, together with Cabinet Members.

Going forward she said Overview and Scrutiny Committee now includes two external members to offer further scrutiny of the items discussed, and looked forward to their future input.

A Member thanked the Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny on behalf of Chair, for taking on leadership of this committee, saying it is a massive undertaking and huge amount of work.

A Member thanked the Vice-Chair for the report, and said she was looking forward to reporting to Overview and Scrutiny on all the ongoing work undertaken during No Child Left Behind's Year of Youth Action. She also asked Members to note that as part of the council's work to tackle multi deprivation, and the problems faced locally and nationally with school attendance, she had met today with representatives from local junior and senior schools to consider how this can be challenged through NCLB effort.

The Leader thanked members of Overview and Scrutiny and for their work in keeping things on track, and, as a regular attendee at meetings, knew how much work Members put in to holding the council to account for its actions.

The Mayor thanked Members of opposition groups who sit on Overview and Scrutiny Committee, saying that with such a large majority on the Council, it is essential that the Cabinet is held to account for its decisions, and that best practice is followed by appointing a Chair from who is not a member of the main group. He thanked officers who support the committee and provide information.

The Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny thanked Members for their comments.

As set out in the Recommendation, **no vote was required** but Council noted the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25

**14 Notice of Motions**

There were none.

**15 Any other item the Mayor determines as urgent and which requires a decision**

There were none.

**16 Local Government Act 1972 -Exempt Information**

Before going into exempt session to approve the exempt minutes of the previous meeting, the Mayor asked if any Member were intending to make any amendments for the minutes. As there were none, it was confirmed by the Monitoring Officer that there was no need to move into exempt session.

**17 Exempt Minutes**

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 21 July were approved as a true record and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

# Cheltenham Borough Council

# Full Council – 17 November 2025

# Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill

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**Accountable member:**

Councillor Izaac Tailford, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm

**Accountable officer:**

Louis Krog, Head of Public Protection

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

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**Key Decision:** Yes

**Executive summary:**

The purpose of this report is to seek a resolution (set out in paragraphs 1 and 2 under the heading “Recommendations”) in accordance with section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 (the “1972 Act”) to promote a new private bill before Parliament, the Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill. The Bill will repeal section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852 (the “1852 Act”), empower the authority to adopt local market byelaws and give the authority new enforcement powers.

The 1852 Act provides the authority with the power to create markets. However, section 83 makes it a criminal offence for a "Fair, Market, Mop or Hiring" and any other related activities to be held upon the High Street or any other street within the Borough of Cheltenham. This therefore complicates the process for holding “markets” on the public highway in Cheltenham, requiring the authority to adopt a cumbersome alternative approach for the licensing of individual street trading consents.

**Recommendations:**

1. That in the judgment of the Cheltenham Borough Council it is expedient to promote a Bill for effecting all or some of the purposes mentioned below and that such a bill be promoted accordingly by the authority. The purposes are:

    a. Repealing section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852;
    b. Applying Part III of the Food Act 1984 to any market in the borough; and
    c. Introducing a power for an authorised person to issue a fixed penalty notice to any person who the authorised person has reason to believe has committed an offence contrary to byelaws made under section 60 of the Food Act 1984.
    d. Such other purposes as may be determined by the Council.

2. Delegate authority to the Head of Public Protection, in consultation with the S.151 Officer, Director of One Legal and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, to:

    a. address procedural matters which may arise in relation to the promotion of the Bill and to enter undertakings or commitments in relation to it;
    b. agree to the making of any necessary amendments to the Bill that may arise during the promotion of the Bill; and
    c. affix the Common Seal to the Petition for the Bill and to any other necessary documents.

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**Implications**

## 1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

Estimate for the work is between £40k (best) to £100k (worst) case. This broad range estimate is due to the many stages and scrutiny the bill must go through, which may require various resources to be paid for during the assessment process. Costs are to be charged to the licensing cost centre and funded through general balances. It is expected that the expenditure committed to this process will be recovered and paid back to the general fund over the 2-3 years, through income generated from revised licence fees, following the implementation of the amended bill. This resolution was agreed by Council in May 2023.

**Signed off by:** Ela Jankowska – Finance Business Partner **Date:** 04.11.2025

ela.jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk

## 1.2 Legal implications

As outlined in the body of the report.

**Signed off by:** One Legal – legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

### 1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

N/A

### 1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Reducing inequalities, supporting better outcomes
- Taking care of your money

### 1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

As outlined in Appendix 2.

### 1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

As outlined in the report.

## 2 Background

2.1 On 24 July 2023 Council passed a resolution to approve work to repeal section 83 of the 1852 Act. It further resolved to delegate authority to the Head of Public Protection to undertake the necessary work and steps to repeal section 83.

2.2 This report updates Council on this work and seeks approval from Council to formally deposit the necessary Bill before Parliament.

2.3 As outlined already, Cheltenham has a piece local of legislation in force, the 1852 Act. A review of the status of this legislation has led to the conclusion that section 83 of the local legislation is still in force. The existence of this legislation has a direct impact on the delivery of operation of markets.

2.4 The 1852 Act provides the authority with the power to create markets. However, section 83 of the 1852 Act makes it an offence for a "Fair, Market, Mop or Hiring" and any other related activities to be held upon the High Street or any other street within the Borough of Cheltenham.

2.5 Members will be aware that, notwithstanding the position with regards to the 1852 Act, “markets” continue to operate on streets in the Borough. This is only possible through an alternative means of granting individual street trading consents under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. The consequence of the alternative means of granting individual street trading consents, rather than single market consents, is that the number of market

trading consents have risen from less than 20 annually (2017/18) to, on average, over 330 annually.

2.6 It is important to point out therefore, that the alternative licensing approach is unwieldly and expensive for both the authority and traders and is not sustainable.

2.7 Markets are hugely important for the town, promoting economic and social wellbeing. It was therefore important that the authority takes the necessary steps to address the issues created by 1852 Act.

**Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill**

2.8 The proposed bill will:

2.8.1 Repeal section 83 of the 1852 Act;

2.8.2 Apply Part III of the Food Act 1984 to any market in the borough; and

2.8.3 Introduce a power for an authorised person to issue a fixed penalty notice to any person who the authorised person has reason to believe has committed an offence contrary to byelaws made under section 60 of the Food Act 1984.

2.9 Part III of the Food Act 1984 (Sections 50-61) grants local authorities powers to establish, acquire, and regulate markets, covering market places, days, hours, and the recovery of charges for market use, including weighing services. These powers extend to controlling existing market undertakings and allowing the creation of byelaws to regulate conduct, prevent nuisances, and manage the sale of goods to ensure orderly market operations. While that act itself provides the foundational powers, specific market regulations are enacted through byelaws made by the local authority under these powers.

**Procedure**

2.10 In order to promote the Bill, the authority must comply with the provisions of section 239 of the 1972 Act.

2.11 The first resolution recommended via this report is to consider whether it is expedient to promote the new Bill. Section 239(2)(a) of the 1972 Act requires the authority to pass a resolution to promote the new Bill. The resolution needs to be passed by a majority of the whole number of the members of the authority at a meeting of the authority held after the requisite notice of the meeting and of its purpose has been given by advertisement in one or more local newspapers circulating in the area of the authority. The notice of the meeting was published in the Gloucestershire Echo on 16 October 2025.

2.12 If a majority is secured, the new Bill will be deposited in Parliament by 27 November 2025 securing Parliamentary time during 2025/26 session. Failure to secure this timetable would put the Bill back 12 months because a private Bill can only be deposited in Parliament on one day each year (i.e. the 27 November).

2.13 There will be various stages of the Bill process through Parliament which will be facilitated by the authority's parliamentary agents.

2.14 By section 239(2)(b) of the 1972 Act, Council will need to pass a confirmatory resolution after the Bill has been deposited.

2.15 A draft copy of the Bill is appended to this report.

## 3 Reasons for recommendations

3.1 Securing the s.239 resolution is a pre-condition to depositing a private bill in Parliament, as outlined in this report.

## 4 Alternative options considered

4.1 Council can resolve not to promote a Bill as outlined in this report.

## 5 Consultation and feedback

5.1 In accordance with good practice, the authority undertook a public consultation exercise between the 8 of September 2025 and 17 October 2025. The authority conducted an online survey to capture feedback that was open to all stakeholders and members of the public.

5.2 The authority received 89 responses with a copy of the consultation report attached at appendix 3.

5.3 Members will note, in relation to the questions specifically seeking views on the proposed changes that the Bill will seek to introduce, that the majority of respondents were in support of the changes. (Questions 10 to 12).

## 6 Key risks

6.1 As outlined in Appendix 1.

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**Report author:**

Louis Krog, Head of Public Protection, louis.krog@cheltenham.gov.uk.

**Appendices:**

i. Risk Assessment
ii. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening
iii. Feedback from public consultation
iv. Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill

**Background information:**

- Exempt item - Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852, Meeting: 24/07/2023 - Council (Item 16)

## Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

| Risk ref | Risk description | Risk owner | Impact score (1-5) | Likelihood score (1-5) | Initial raw risk score (1 - 25) | Risk response | Controls / Mitigating actions | Control / Action owner | Deadline for controls/ actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | If Council does not resolve to repeal section 83 of the 1852 Act, the authority risks an operationally and financially unsustainable approach to licensing markets which is likely to jeopardise the economic and social value attached to markets. | Head of Public Protection | 3 | 5 | 15 | Reduce the risk | As outlined in the report and resolution. | Head of Public Protection | As outlined in the report. |
| | If Council does not resolve to repeal section 83 of the 1852 Act and continues to rely on the alternative licensing approach, it risks reputational damage for being overly bureaucratic in its approach. This, in turn, may impact on the desirability of the | Head of Public Protection | 2 | 3 | 6 | Reduce the risk | As outlined in the report and resolution. | Head of Public Protection | As outlined in the report. |

| Risk ref | Risk description | Risk owner | Impact score (1-5) | Likelihood score (1-5) | Initial raw risk score (1 - 25) | Risk response | Controls / Mitigating actions | Control / Action owner | Deadline for controls/ actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | borough to hold markets. | | | | | | | | |
| | If Council does not resolve to repeal section 83 of the 1852 Act, the authority risks future legal challenges and claims to its licensing approach with regards to markets. | Head of Public Protection | 4 | 2 | 8 | Reduce the risk | As outlined in the report and resolution. | Head of Public Protection | As outlined in the report. |
| | If Council does not resolve to repeal section 83 of the 1852 Act and continues to rely on the alternative licensing approach, the authority will need to subsidise market activity on an ongoing basis to make up for the income v cost variance. | Head of Public Protection | 4 | 3 | 12 | Reduce the risk | As outlined in the report and resolution. | Head of Public Protection | As outlined in the report |

## Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

### 1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

**a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment**

| | |
|---|---|
| Officer responsible: Louis Krog | Service Area: Public Protection |
| Title: Head of Public Protection | Date of assessment: xx October 2025 |
| Signature:  | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?** | Function |

**c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project**

If other, please specify: Resolution in accordance with section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 (the 1972 Act) to promote a new private bill before parliament.

| | |
|---|---|
| Is this new or existing? | **Already exists and is being reviewed** |

**Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project**

Resolution required by Council to promote a new private bill before parliament.

**d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Aims: | Promote a new private bill before parliament. |
| Objectives: | To: |

| | |
|---|---|
| | a. Repeal section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852 (which prohibits market and related activities on the High Street or any other street in the borough);<br>b. Apply Part III of the Food Act 1984 to any market in the borough; and<br>c. Introduce a power for an authorised person to issue a fixed penalty notice to any person who the authorised person has reason to believe has committed an offence contrary to byelaws made under section 60 of the Food Act 1984. |
| Outcomes: | As above. |
| Benefits: | Improved market licensing process, ability to regulate markets locally via local byelaws and additional enforcement powers. |

**e. What are the expected impacts?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers. | **Yes** |
| Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative? | **Positive** |

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

The promotion of the Bill is seen a tool to bringing wholesale improvements to the way street markets are licensed and regulated locally. This will empower the authority to regulate street markets in the interest of local people, communities and businesses and with local considerations. The restriction imposed by section 83 of the 1852 Act is considered an obstacle to achieving this.

**If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.**

| f. Identify next steps as appropriate | |
|---|---|
| Stage Two required | **No** |
| Owner of Stage Two assessment | |
| Completion date for Stage Two assessment | |

**Please move on to Stage 2 if required (intranet link).**

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## Responses Overview

Active

| Responses | Average Time | Duration |
|---|---|---|
| 91 | 259:46 | 0 Days |

1. Your Name

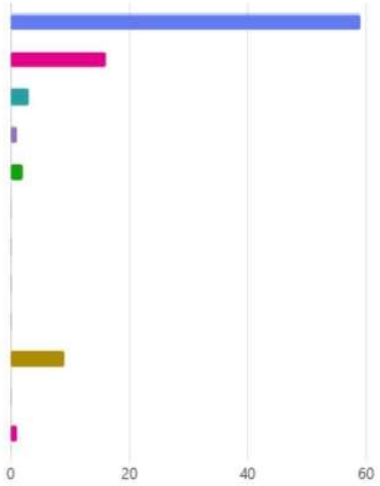
76
Responses

Latest Responses
"J Hodsdon"
...

[redacted]

2. Which best describes the capacity in which you are responding to this consultation:

| | |
|---|---|
| A Resident of Cheltenham | 59 |
| A Business in Cheltenham | 16 |
| A Resident but not of Cheltenham | 3 |
| Highways Authority/County Council | 1 |
| Market Operator | 2 |
| Business Improvement District | 0 |
| Chamber of Commerce | 0 |
| Marketing Cheltenham | 0 |
| Other business body/group | 0 |
| Cheltenham Borough or County Council Elected Member | 9 |
| A Member of Parliament | 0 |
| Other | 1 |



3. Your registered residential or business postcode:

91
Responses

Latest Responses
"GL50 2UQ"
"GL1 2TG"
"GL50 3PL"
...

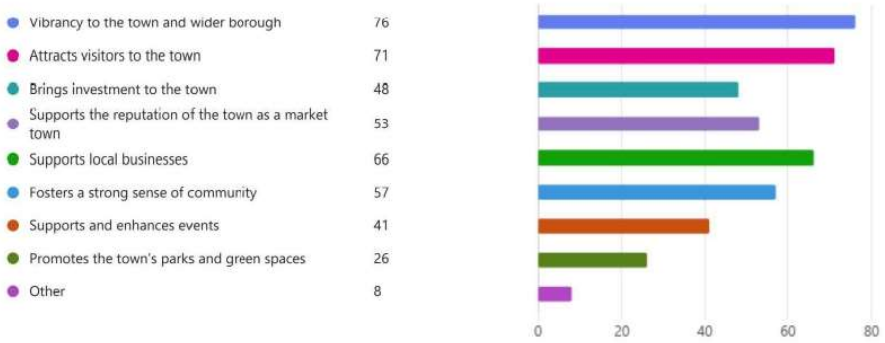
28 respondents (32%) answered GL50 for this question. Update

GL50 1NA
GL50 1LP
GL50 4BL
GL50 2AF
GL50 1PJ
GL52
GL50
GL50 1NB
GL50 2DG
GL50 2AN
GL51
GI50 2LN
gl50 2tj
GL50 1LE
GL50 2AE
GL50 4ET
GI50 6hz
GI50 3rn
GL50 2RA
GL50 4NF

4. Do you think markets are important to the town?




5. If yes – What value do you think they bring to the town? (choose all that apply)



6. If no – please explain why think so

5
Responses

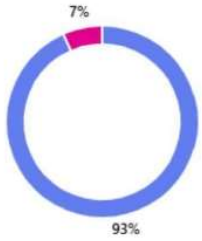
Latest Responses
...

2 respondents (40%) answered town for this question.




7. Do you visit markets held in Cheltenham?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 85 |
| No | 6 |

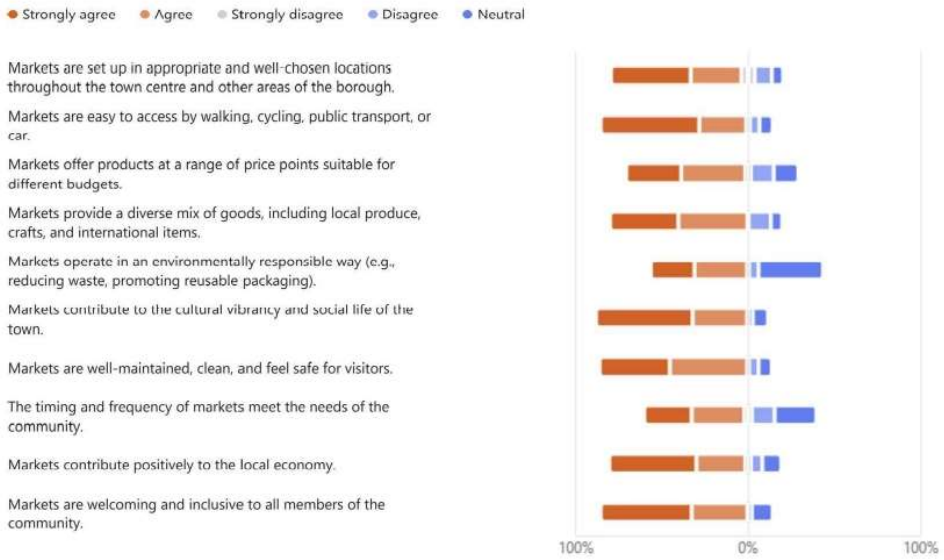



8. If yes, how often?

| | |
|---|---|
| Weekly | 12 |
| Monthly | 37 |
| Only for certain markets | 30 |
| Less often | 8 |



9. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:




10. Do you support the council's proposal to remove (by way of a repeal) the old restrictive legislation and adopt new local legislation?




11. Do you support the council's proposal to adopt new local rules (called byelaws) to make sure markets are safe, high quality, and run well?



12. Do you support the council's proposal to to give fines to people who trade illegally, so that everything is fair and properly managed?




13. Do yo have any further comments to make?

50
Responses

Latest Responses

[redacted]

...

30 respondents (64%) answered markets for this question. Update



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**Max Wilkinson MP**
Member of Parliament for Cheltenham
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Louis Krog
Head of Public Protection & DEPLO
Public Protection
Cheltenham Borough Council
Municipal Offices, Promenade, Cheltenham
Sent via email: louis.krog@cheltenham.gov.uk

11 September 2025

Dear Louis

I welcome the Borough Council's consultation on the location of markets. The Christmas and other regular markets are an asset to the town. However, because bricks and mortar businesses now pay high business rates and high rents alongside increased employers' National Insurance payments, it is important for the council to note the existential threat to the future of prosperity town centre businesses. And therefore, it is important that the council is proactive in doing all it can to support bricks-and-mortar town centre businesses. In this case, that means adjusting licensing policy accordingly.

I hope that you and your team will work to reduce conflict between bricks and mortar businesses and markets. While I do not subscribe to the economics of zero-sum, I understand that there is only limited consumer spending to be spread among our town centre businesses. If I put myself in the shoes of a bricks-and-mortar business owner, I feel a great deal of sympathy for those who feel their trade is impacted by occasional markets. In some extreme cases, market stalls have been placed directly outside permanent businesses selling exactly the same products. I believe in competition, but I also believe in fair treatment of hospitality businesses and retailers. I would urge you to apply specific sensitivity to the hospitality sector, which is suffering profound challenges. Cheltenham's growing reputation as a place to eat and drink has come after a lot of hard work, much of it supported ably by the Borough Council. That brand position must be protected for the sake of our local economy. While street food options are interesting, we must not place at risk our permanent cafes and restaurants. I trust you will take these points into account when deciding on the appropriate location for markets. In the longer run, developments at the front and rear of the Municipal Offices, stretching into a rejuvenated Royal Well, may provide space for markets. In the shorter term, I am certain your hardworking team will be able to think creatively to find a solution.

This consultation also provides an opportunity to give greater protection to the flagstones on the Promenade. This important part of our town centre aesthetic clearly suffers from regular motor vehicle use associated with markets in what is notionally a pedestrianised area. This has led in the past to the county council using a method known by many local people as 'tarmac cowpatting' to

**Max Wilkinson MP**
Member of Parliament for Cheltenham
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

repair flagstones. I trust you will be in touch with colleagues at the County Council to understand how this consultation might align with any emerging town centre plan. With reference to the Promenade, it is also important to note the potential for emerging proposals for the development of Cavendish House.

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

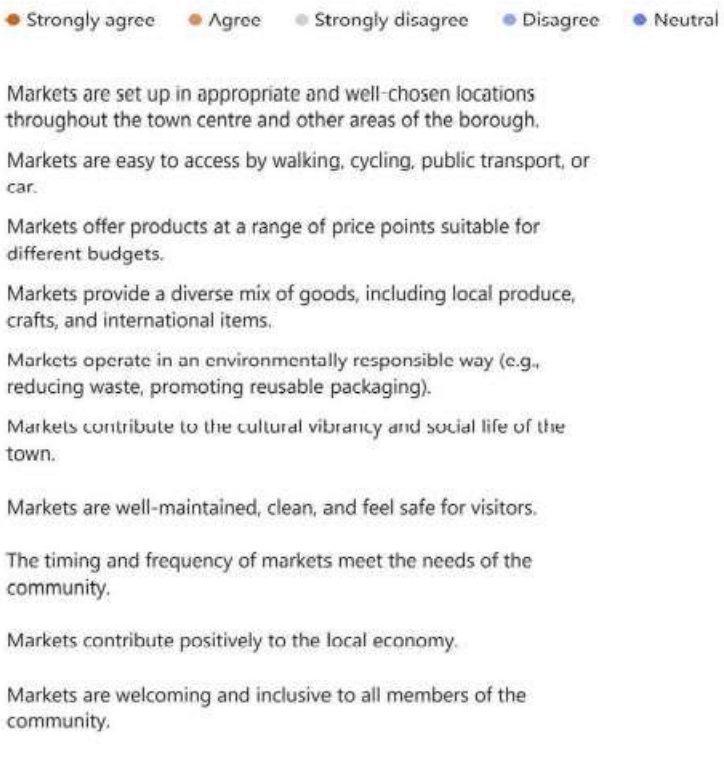
[redacted]

Max Wilkinson MP

max.wilkinson.mp@parliament.uk

# Individual responses to markets consultation

1. Name: Helen Mole, head of economic development, comms & marketing, Cheltenham Borough Council
2. Capacity: Marketing Cheltenham
3. GL50 9SA
4. Do you think markets are important to the town: Yes
5. If yes - what value do they bring to the town? Tick all boxes
6. N/A
7. Do you visit markets held in Cheltenham? Yes
8. If yes, how often? Monthly
9. To what extent do you agree with the following statements




Disagree

Strongly agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Neutral

Strongly agree

Agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Strongly agree

10. 10. Do you support the council's proposal to remove (by way of a repeal) the old restrictive legislation and adopt new local legislation?
    Yes
11. Do you support the council's proposal to adopt new local rules (called byelaws) to make sure markets are safe, high quality, and run well?
    Yes
12. 12. Do you support the council's proposal to to give fines to people who trade illegally, so that everything is fair and properly managed?
    Yes
13. Do you have any further comments to make?

Evidence shows that well-curated and promoted events and markets have an important role to play in support of the local economy, communities, and the overall prosperity of the town centre. Events contribute to the place brand of "The Festival Town" and the vitality and viability of the place, bringing visitors, as well as generating regional and national publicity.

Markets not only drive increased footfall and retail spend but also serve as incubators for new businesses, foster social interaction, and promote sustainable local supply chains. While Cheltenham currently lacks detailed impact data on its own offering, and this would ideally be improved, the national insights strongly suggest that a well-integrated, strategically managed market offering plays a central role in supporting the town centre.

Selecting a street layout which supports the continuation of the markets and maintains access for local businesses, whilst still protecting the infrastructure will be essential to maximising this potential and ensuring that Cheltenham's markets contribute meaningfully to the town's future prosperity.

On a practical level, it will also be essential to ensure ongoing management and enforcement of markets. This may include ensuring feedback is received and monitored from local businesses and visitors, or that photographs are sent by event organisers to demonstrate that they have complied with the conditions imposed on them regarding layout.

**Some evidence:**

Increased footfall

In general, markets in the UK have been demonstrated to generate footfall increases of around 25% for town centres. In addition, the variable nature of market stalls, broadens the retail offer available in town centres which increases the uniqueness of the place and provides further reason for repeat visits. This is particularly relevant to places with regular (e.g. weekly or monthly) markets. Markets are a key part of the experiential identity of the place (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006) and enhance the city image (Morales, 2009).

Economic impact

Markets are proven to increase retail sales for surrounding businesses, with significant numbers (55%-71%) of market visitors spending money in other shops (New Economics Foundation, 2005). Regeneris Consulting Ltd. (2010) estimated that customers at street markets in London spent £752 million per year at other shops in town centres. This gives a multiplier effect of 2.75 with market customers spending on average £1.75 in other shops in the town centre for every £1 they spend in the market.

**NB –** In order for the positive multiplier effect to be felt, it is essential that market layouts consider local amenities and access to neighbouring businesses, e.g. not blocking doorways or obscuring shop signage.

**Name:** Francesca Inman, Chief Executive, Cheltenham BID

**Address:** Cheltenham BID, First Floor, Isbourne House, 3 Wolseley Terrace, Oriel Road, Cheltenham GL50 1TH

**Are markets important in the town:** Yes

**If yes, what do they bring to the town:**
-Economic benefits
-Social and community benefits
-Attracts visitors to the town
-Supports reputation as a market town

**Do you visit the markets in Cheltenham?**
-Yes

**If yes, how often?**
-Monthly

**Do you support the Councils proposal to remove (by the way of repeal) the old restrictive legislation and adopt new local legislation?**
-Yes

**Do you support the Councils proposal to adopt new local rules (called byelaws) to make sure markets are safe, high quality and run well?**
-Yes

**Do you support the Councils proposal to give fines to people who trade illegally, so that everything is fair and properly managed?**
-Yes

**Positives**
- Markets can be anchors for a town centre the enhance footfall and support surrounding retail.
-When there is a variety of options, they outperform the ‘generic’ stalls.
- There are lots of case studies that show if they are community run, and council supported increase inclusion and local benefit.
- They help animate public spaces, making the town feel more lively and attractive and can act as a place for people to come together
-They can help build civic pride by showing the town has something unique which could help with place branding

**Challenges**
-Market space needs to be convenient, visible and well-integrated with the town.
-Accessibility needs consideration
-Vendor costs vs accessibility – if fees to high small traders may be excluded.
-Alignment with sustainability and town centre strategy e.g waste, travel, local sourcing.
-Local businesses need to be taken into consideration e.g not putting a pizza stall outside a pizza business.
-Ongoing management is key – the markets need often, active coordination.

**Considerations**
1. What are we trying to achieve by having the markets and how do we measure whether they are working?

2. How do we ensure they are benefiting the town centre as a whole rather than becoming a nuisance to businesses?
3. Has the economic impact been measured throughout and if so do we have data on what markets have been successful and why?
4.How do we ensure they are offered locally first rather than out of town organisations coming in? Markets should help local businesses and entrepreneurs start or test operations in lower-cost, flexible ways (stall / pop-up rather than full shop). They should keep more money circulating locally (instead of large chains or external companies) so the local economy becomes stronger.
5. Appearance - The likes of Cotswolds Markets are highly valued and visually appealing and have built a strong reputation.
6. Location? Is it suitable or could we extent it. What is the most appropriate location?

Potential KPIS

1. Market footfall (people count during market hours)
2. % of market visitors who also visit high-street shops (surveys)
3. Trader occupancy rate and trader churn (sustainability)
4. Average spend per visitor (surveys or stall takings sample)
5. Number of local producers vs. non-local traders (local benefit)
6. Social metrics: % visitors from Cheltenham vs. visitors; inclusion indicators (e.g - affordable offers, community stalls)
7. Environmental: % waste diverted/recycled, single-use reduction initiatives

Research on the topic : The New Economics Foundation and academic projects recommend combining footfall, spend, trader turnover, social inclusion metrics and qualitative measures of community value when making the case for investment:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/193068/1/220408-HB1-final-version_RW_ONLINE.pdf

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/Social%20Value%20written%20evidence%20-%20April%202025.pdf

Overall, the Cheltenham BID are supportive of the markets as long as they have a strong economic benefit for the town centre and the surrounding businesses. They currently add value but are under-scaled. They could be significantly improved by their frequency and curation. With a stronger brand and activation, they could become a stronger driver of footfall and spend for local business growth and place identity.

Name (optional): _____

Which best describes the capacity in which you are responding to this consultation (**required**):

☐ A Resident of Cheltenham

☐ A Business in Cheltenham

☐ A Resident but not of Cheltenham

x Highways Authority/County Council

☐ Market Operator

☐ Business Improvement District

☐ Chamber of Commerce

☐ Marketing Cheltenham

☐ Other business body/group

☐ Cheltenham Borough or County Council Elected Member

☐ A Member of Parliament

☐ Other not specified (please specify): _____

Your registered residential or business postcode (**required**):

GL1 2TH

1. **Do you think markets are important to the town?**
   *Yes*

   a. *If yes – What value do you think they bring to the town? (choose all that apply)*

      i. Vibrancy to the town and wider borough x
      ii. Attracts visitors to the town x
      iii. Brings investment to the town x
      iv. Supports the reputation of the town as a market town x
      v. Supports local businesses x
      vi. Fosters a strong sense of community x
      vii. Supports and enhances events x
      viii. Promotes the town's parks and green spaces x
      ix. Other, please state:

   b. *If no – please explain why think so.*

2. **Do you visit markets held in Cheltenham?**
   *GCC officers from different teams across the county authority may attend in either official or personal capacity.*

   a. *If yes, how often?*

      i. Weekly
      ii. Monthly
      iii. Only for certain markets
      iv. Less often

3. **To what extent do you agree with the following statements:**
   *10 – Completely Agree to 1 – Completely Disagree*

   *Please see any other comments below.*

**Location**
"Markets are set up in appropriate and well-chosen locations throughout the town centre and other areas of the borough."

**Accessibility**
*“Markets are easy to access by walking, cycling, public transport, or car.”*

**Affordability**
*“Markets offer products at a range of price points suitable for different budgets.”*

**Variety of Offerings**
*“Markets provide a diverse mix of goods, including local produce, crafts, and international items.”*

**Support for Local Businesses**
*“Markets help promote and sustain local traders and producers.”*

**Environmental Sustainability**
*“Markets operate in an environmentally responsible way (e.g., reducing waste, promoting reusable packaging).”*

**Cultural and Social Value**
*“Markets contribute to the cultural vibrancy and social life of the town.”*

**Safety and Cleanliness**
*“Markets are well-maintained, clean, and feel safe for visitors.”*

**Frequency and Timing**
*“The timing and frequency of markets meet the needs of the community.”*

**Economic Impact**
*“Markets contribute positively to the local economy.”*

**Inclusivity**
*“Markets are welcoming and inclusive to all members of the community.”*

# Changes we Propose to Make

The council aims to adopt new local legislation to:

a. Repeal the current, historic restrictive legislation.
b. Adopt new market licensing legislation that will allow the council greater freedom to license, promote and regulate markets in the town centre and wider borough.
c. Ability to adopt local byelaws to ensure markets operate to the highest possible standards, safety and quality.
d. Adopt new powers to issue fixed penalty notices for unlawful trading activity to ensure the regime is regulated fairly.

1. **Do you support the council’s proposal to repeal the historic restrictive legislation and adopt new local legislation?**
   *Yes*

   *Do you have any other comments to make?*

*Gloucestershire County Council officers support the general principle of the most appropriate legislation adoption for modern market good practice. Without further details we are unable to comment on specific aspects of Cheltenham Borough Council's repeal process, however GCC officer teams will continue to support practical and supportive dialogue with the Borough Council to help achieve the success of the town's markets.*

2. **Do you have a view on the council's proposed ability to adopt local byelaws to ensure markets operate to the highest possible standards, safety and quality.**
*Please refer to response to Q1.*

3. **Do you have a view on the council's proposed ability to issue fixed penalty notices for unlawful trading activity?**
*GCC officers support Cheltenham Borough Council's ability to provide a flexible, proportionate and appropriate response to tackling unlawful trading activity in order to ensure a continuing safe operating and trading environment for the benefit of residents, visitors, market traders and businesses. GCC notes that there may be occasional circumstances where vulnerable or safeguarding concerns for individuals engaging in some unlawful trading practices may benefit from a more flexible approach with the appropriate Community Safety Partnership advisers.*

# Any other comments

1. **Do you have any other comments to make?**

**Highways**
*GCC officers will continue to work closely with CBC officers to ensure that any individual Highways matters relating to potential relocation from existing market locations are fully considered and reviewed in accordance with current legislation and safety best practice. For specific matters either during or following the process of this legislative review, please contact the Assistant Director of Highways and Infrastructure.*

**Economic Development**
*GCC officers regularly liaise with CBC Economic Development officers and are fully supportive of the contribution that the variety of markets on offer provide to the vibrancy and footfall of Cheltenham town centre; to communities accessing local market socioeconomic benefits , and in specialist retail locations such as The Suffolks and for important calendar events including key seasonal occasions.*

*GCC officers also noted the links to the aims of the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy 2024-2034 and the draft Local Growth Plan which encourages start-up support, MSMEs and the health of the visitor economy and the importance of the food, drink and agricultural sector to Gloucestershire's economy. Access to locally sourced food and healthy produce is important to our aspirations for both public health and wellbeing as well as an important source of diversified support for our rural and farming communities across the county. The Made in Gloucestershire membership directory may be of interest to local growers and artisan food and drink producers. For further information, visit Made in Gloucestershire | The Best Local Food and Drink*

*The Gloucestershire Growth Hub and the Cheltenham Growth Hub advisers are available for businesses of all sizes, including locally based market traders, to help provide advice and support to small traders and MSMEs who may be interested in expanding their business with financial, digital marketing and business planning support*

*all available to encourage growth. For further information, visit Home - The Growth Hub Gloucestershire*

*The GCC Retail and Hospitality Business Group, is also attended by CBC officers and other district partners. Further discussions to support markets and development/promotional opportunities are also welcomed both through the engagement of this group and through the Cotswold LVEP partnership. The vitality of the visitor sector, including through regular markets and seasonal events, is regarded as highly important to the cultural experience of the town. The culture of the town is often cited as an important draw for employment retention and talent attraction in other key local sectors, including the broader technology and digital economy through the Golden Valley development, and in other key growth sectors. For any further discussion of these strategic and business growth initiatives, please contact the Planning, Economy and Growth Manager - economy@gloucestershire.gov.uk*

# [DRAFT[1]] Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

This Bill is promoted by Cheltenham Borough Council ("the Council").

This Bill provides for the repeal of section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852 (which prohibits market and related activities on the High Street or any other street in the borough of Cheltenham) and for connected purposes.

*Clause 1* gives the short title of the Bill and provides for the date on which the Act comes into force.

*Clause 2* defines certain expressions used in the Bill.

*Clause 3* repeals section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852.

*Clause 4* provides that Part III of the Food Act 1984 (which provides for the general operation of markets) applies in the borough. This clause is precedented in section 6 of the Norwich Livestock Market Act 2025.

*Clause 5* provides a power to issue fixed penalty notices for breach of any byelaws made under the Food Act 1984, with certain notice requirements detailed in *subsections (3)-(5)*. *Subsection (6)* provides that no proceedings may be taken against a person to whom a fixed penalty notice is issued within 14 days of the notice being issued and that such a person cannot be convicted if a fixed penalty is paid before the end of that period. *Subsection (7)* provides that the amount of the fixed penalty is to be prescribed by the Council and *subsection (8)* prescribes the form of evidence applicable to the proceedings. This clause is precedented in section 8 of the Norwich Livestock Market Act 2025.

*Clause 6* enables an authorised person (including a constable or a person authorised by the Council) to require a person suspected of acting in breach of byelaws made under the Food Act 1984, to give their name and address so that enforcement action may be taken against the person. *Subsection (2)* provides that it is an offence to fail, without reasonable excuse, to provide such information. This clause is precedented in section 9 of the Norwich Livestock Market Act 2025.

EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

In the view of Cheltenham Borough Council the provisions of the Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill are compatible with the Convention rights.

[1] This is a draft version of the Bill. It is possible that drafting changes will be made between now and the date on which the Bill must be deposited in Parliament: 27 November 2025.

# Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Bill

CONTENTS

1. Citation and commencement
2. Interpretation
3. Repeal of section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852
4. Application of Part III of the Food Act 1984
5. Fixed Penalty Notices
6. Power to require name and address

A

# BILL

TO

Make provision for the repeal of section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act; and for connected purposes.

WHEREAS —

(1) It is expedient that the powers of Cheltenham Borough Council should be extended and amended as provided in this Act:

(2) It is expedient that section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852 (which prohibits market and related activities on the High Street or any other street in the borough of Cheltenham) is repealed:

(3) It is expedient that the other provisions in this Act be enacted:

(4) In relation to the promotion of the Bill for this Act the requirements of section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 (powers of joint and local authorities to promote Bills) have been observed:

(5) The objects of this Act cannot be attained without the authority of Parliament:

May it therefore please your Majesty that it may be enacted, and be it enacted, by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

**1. Citation and commencement**

This Act may be cited as the Cheltenham Borough Council (Markets) Act 202[ ] and comes into force at the end of 28 days beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

**2. Interpretation**

In this Act—

"authorised person" means—

(a) a person acting in the course of that person's duties who is authorised by the Council to exercise one or more of the functions under **sections 5** and **6** of this Act; or

(b) a constable, a Police Community Support Officer, an officer of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, an officer of the Health and Safety Executive, a person authorised for the purposes of section 44 (powers of fire-fighters etc in an emergency etc) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, a person accredited under section 41 (accreditation under community safety accreditation schemes) of the Police Reform Act 2002 , a traffic officer or an animal welfare officer, each acting in the course of that person's duties;

"the borough" means the borough of Cheltenham which is administered by the Council for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972 from time to time; and

"the Council" means Cheltenham Borough Council.

**3. Repeal of section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852**

Section 83 of the Cheltenham Improvement Act 1852 (which prohibits market and related activities on the High Street or any other street in the borough) is repealed.

**4. Application of Part III of the Food Act 1984**

On and from the repeal mentioned in section 1, Part III of the Food Act 1984 applies in the borough.

**5. Fixed Penalty Notices**

(1) An authorised person may issue a fixed penalty notice to any person who the authorised person has reason to believe has committed an offence contrary to byelaws made under section 60 of the Food Act 1984.

(2) A fixed penalty notice is a notice offering the person to whom it is issued the opportunity of discharging any liability to be convicted of the offence to which the notice relates by payment of a fixed penalty to the Council.

(3) A fixed penalty notice must be in writing and state—

(a) the particulars of the circumstances alleged to constitute the offence to which the notice relates;

(b) the amount of the fixed penalty;

(c) the effect of subsection (6);

(d) the name and address of the person to whom payment of the fixed penalty may be sent; and

(e) the permissible methods of payment.

(4) A fixed penalty notice may be issued in person or by post and must identify by name the person to whom it is issued, unless the authorised person cannot reasonably ascertain the person's name.

(5) Where a fixed penalty notice is issued by post, it is deemed to have been issued to the person to whom it relates on the second business day after it was posted.

(6) Where a person is issued with a fixed penalty notice—
(a) no proceedings may be taken in respect of the alleged offence in relation to which the notice was issued before the end of the period of 14 days, beginning with the date on which the notice was issued; and
(b) the person may not be convicted of that offence if the fixed penalty is paid before the end of that period.

(7) The amount specified under subsection (3)(b) is to be an amount prescribed by the Council, which—
(a) may prescribe different amounts in relation to different classes of cases, but
(b) may not prescribe an amount exceeding level 1 on the standard scale.

(8) In any proceedings, a certificate that—
(a) purports to be signed by or on behalf of the officer responsible for the Council's financial affairs; and
(b) states that payment of a fixed penalty was or was not received by the date specified in the certificate;
is evidence of the facts stated.

**6. Power to require name and address**

(1) An authorised person who has reason to believe that a person ("P") has committed an offence contrary to byelaws made under of the Food Act 1984, may require P to give P's name and address with a view to—
(a) the service of a summons on P, or
(b) the issuing of a fixed penalty notice to P under **section 5**.

(2) A person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to provide information required under subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

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# Cheltenham Borough Council

# Council – 17 November 2025

# 2025 Independent Resident Survey Results

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**Accountable member:**

Cllr Rowena Hay, Leader of the Council

**Accountable officer:**

Gareth Edmundson, Chief Executive

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

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**Key Decision:** No

**Executive summary:**

Residents' surveys are frequently carried out by local councils to collect statistically robust views from a representative sample of residents. The last resident survey was undertaken in 2022. In line with the 2022 recommendation to repeat the survey in three years' time, the Leader of the Council requested an independent resident survey be carried out in summer 2025 with the aim of understanding residents' views on several topics related to the council and the local area to inform future service delivery and to benchmark against previous surveys.

Overall, council performance is consistent with or above the national average when benchmarked against the LGA Polling Survey. Some resident perceptions have declined since the previous survey in 2022 but align with or exceed the 2019 survey.

With local government reorganisation taking place, the resident survey is timely in giving members an up-to-date local understanding about resident views on Cheltenham Borough, the importance of identity and what they think about services.

**Recommendations:**

1. Council acknowledges the 2025 Resident Survey results and the insights they provide for future service delivery.
2. The results are used to inform future delivery of council services.
3. The results from the survey are communicated to the council's partners with lead responsibilities for areas where further improvement has been identified.
4. The survey is repeated in three years' time.

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## 1. Implications

### 1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

**Signed off by:** Jon Whitlock, Head of Finance, jon.whitlock@cheltenham.gov.uk

### 1.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

**Signed off by:** One Legal, legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

## 2. Environmental and climate change implications

The survey results identified that the majority of respondents have made changes in the last three years to tackle climate change, however four in ten respondents (40%) said that they had not made any. This provides insight on the gap which needs to be addressed within the borough to mitigate climate change and influence future work.

**Signed off by:** Maizy McCann, Climate Officer, Maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk

### 1.3 Corporate Plan Priorities

The resident survey results will be used to inform service delivery and will contribute to all the Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Securing our future
- Quality homes, safe and strong communities
- Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity
- Reducing inequalities, supporting better outcomes
- Taking care of your money

### 1.4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

The resident survey was a representative sample of the population as set out in research methodology in the report at Appendix 3.

### 1.5 Performance management – monitoring and review

The survey will be repeated in three years' time to measure the impact of service delivery on resident satisfaction levels.

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## 2 Background

2.1 Residents' surveys are frequently carried out by local councils to collect statistically robust views from a representative sample of residents. The last resident survey was undertaken in 2022.

2.2 In line with the 2022 recommendation to repeat the survey in three years' time, the Leader of the Council requested an independent resident survey be carried out in summer 2025 with the aim of understanding residents' views on several topics related to the council and the local area to help inform future service delivery and to benchmark against previous surveys.

2.3 Enventure Research Ltd were commissioned to undertake the survey on behalf of the Council.

## 3 Survey methodology and response rate

3.1 A questionnaire was co-designed by the Council and Enventure Research. To allow comparisons to be made against previous survey findings, some questions from the 2022 and 2019 surveys were included, as well as questions from the LGA 'Are You Being Served?' national polling survey to allow for benchmarking on a national scale.

3.2 A representative telephone survey was conducted with residents of Cheltenham aged 16 and above. Quotas for the survey were set on age, gender and ward, to provide a sample that was broadly representative of Cheltenham residents. In addition, some interviews were undertaken face-to-face at various locations to ensure hard to reach residents were included. The representative sample size provided an accuracy of +/-2.9% at the 95% confidence interval.

3.3 An open access online version of the same questionnaire was also made available, to provide all residents with the opportunity to take part.

3.4 A total of 1,100 telephone and face-to-face interviews were completed, and the online survey received 426 responses.

3.5 The report at Appendix 3 provides a detailed explanation of the methodology.

## 4 Key Findings

4.1 High-level results from the representative sample of residents surveyed are briefly summarised below. The full detailed report, results and analysis is set out in Appendix 3.

4.2 Benchmarking against LGA Polling Survey

- The council's performance is consistent with or above the national average.
- Overall resident satisfaction with their local area as a place to live is at 82%.
- Satisfaction with the way the council runs things and agreement that the council provides value for money has remained consistent with the 2022 survey and is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of those who think the council keeps residents well-informed about the services and benefits it provides has decreased but is consistent with the national average.

4.3 Local area

- Perceptions of living in Cheltenham remain positive, but some decreases have been recorded since 2022. The perception that living in Cheltenham provides the opportunity to grow a career has increased from 29% in 2019 to 49% in 2025, but there is room for further improvement in this area and around improving opportunities for young people.
- The majority of residents believe their local area has not changed much in the past year, but a quarter think it has got worse.
- When asked what one change they would want local councils to make to improve their experience as a Cheltenham resident, the most common response was improvements to road and pavement maintenance. A cleaner, better maintained local area with less litter was also mentioned by residents.
- Satisfaction with town centre amenities is high and 85% of respondents are satisfied with events, but perceptions of Cheltenham in the evening are less positive than the daytime. Respondents were also dissatisfied with the range of shops, driven largely by the closing of shops and a desire to see a greater variety of shops.

4.4 Environment

- The majority of residents have made changes in the last three years to

tackle climate change, however four in ten have not.

- Opinion was split on how easy or difficult it is to book a slot to visit a Household Recycling Centre run by Gloucestershire County Council. Reopening Swindon Road household recycling centre (HRC) and better HRC access was also mentioned by some respondents when they were asked about the one change they would like local councils to make to improve their experience as a Cheltenham resident.

4.5 Developing Cheltenham

- Around 70% of respondents agree that there is a need for more affordable homes to buy and rent in Cheltenham, but only 36% of residents are willing to accept some new homes being built on green space.

- Awareness of the Golden Valley development has increased by 10% since 2022, but residents are more likely to disagree than agree that it is for people like them.

4.6 The Council

- Many residents are unaware of how much of their council tax is allocated to the Council and over half believe any increase should be in line with inflation.

- Whilst residents feel it is most important for the council to have a digital presence, the majority also feel it is important for the council to maintain a physical presence in the town centre.

4.7 Local representation

- Most residents feel a strong sense of belonging to their local area and would say they live in Cheltenham if speaking to someone from elsewhere in the UK. Most residents also feel it is important that they are represented by a local council and local councillors.

## 5 Conclusions

5.1 The representative survey results show that council performance is consistent with or above the national average when benchmarked against the LGA Polling Survey, but some resident perceptions have decreased since the 2022 survey.

5.2 The online survey results, although not the focus of this covering report, largely mirror the views of representative respondents to a greater or lesser degree. Online survey respondents did, however, tend to hold more negative views than representative survey respondents with regard to the local area and the council.

5.3 The survey results need to be considered in the wider context of both the financial climate the council has been operating in over the last few years and residents' experience of the cost-of-living crisis. The council has faced financial pressures in almost all areas. As well as having ambitious savings targets, the cost of delivering services has been rising and the council's government funding has been cut year-on-year. The cost-of-living crisis also continues to grow and supporting a growing number of residents affected by this crisis remains a challenge.

5.4 Against this challenging backdrop, overall, the council continues to perform well but there are also clear areas for improvement.

## 6 Responding to the survey

6.1 Cheltenham residents feel a strong sense of belonging to their local area and having a local council and local councillors is important to them. As local government reorganisation progresses, it will be important to recognise and take account of this.

6.2 Awareness of the Golden Valley Development has increased since the last survey, but more can be done to engage with different local audiences to demonstrate the relevance of the development to them and how it could benefit them.

6.3 The Growth Plan for Gloucestershire, which is in the final stages, will bring together public sector partners, businesses, education providers, the voluntary sector and local communities to create opportunities for Cheltenham residents.

6.4 The council continues to work with partners on issues relating to the town centre. This includes Gloucestershire County Council on matters relating to the public realm and Cheltenham BID and others on activities such as the vacant unit action plan, reducing anti-social behaviour and generally improving the Cheltenham experience.

6.5 The possibility of reopening the Swindon Road Household Recycling Centre (HRC) came up in the survey. Gloucestershire County Council is currently undertaking a review of all household recycling centres, and this means a decision won't be taken until this review has been completed.

6.6 Most residents feel it is important the council maintains a physical presence in the town centre, and this will be incorporated into planning the council's move to an alternative location upon completion of the sale of the Municipal Offices.

6.7 Residents again raised the maintenance of roads and pavements as an area of concern, and these survey findings will be shared with Gloucestershire County Council as the body responsible for improvements in this area.

6.8 The full report provides valuable insight and the survey results will be shared with all the council's service areas to inform future service delivery.

## 7 Reasons for recommendations

7.1 It is important the council acknowledges the views of Cheltenham residents and ensures these views are used to inform delivery of council services so that those services meet the needs and expectations of residents.

7.2 Some of the views expressed in the survey are not within the remit of the council to address and so the results will be shared with those partners that hold lead responsibilities for some of the areas where further improvement has been identified.

7.3 Repeating the survey in three years' time will enable the council to measure the impact of service delivery on resident satisfaction levels.

## 8 Consultation and feedback

8.1 This report presents the results of a consultation with residents that gathered views on a number of topics and which will be used to inform service delivery.

## 9 Key risks

9.1 If the council does not take account of the views expressed in the independent resident survey, then future service delivery may not meet the needs or expectations of residents.

---

**Report author:**

Gill May, Organisational Performance Lead, gill.may@cheltenham.gov.uk

**Appendices:**

1. Risk Assessment
2. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening
3. Resident Survey 2025 Report by Enventure Research Ltd

**Background information:**

Independent resident surveys 2022 and 2019.

## Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

| Risk ref | Risk description | Risk owner | Impact score (1-5) | Likelihood score (1-5) | Initial raw risk score (1 - 25) | Risk response | Controls / Mitigating actions | Control / Action owner | Deadline for controls/ actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | If the council does not take account of the views expressed in the independent resident survey then future service delivery may not meet the needs or expectations of residents | Leadership team | 1 | 2 | 2 | Reduce | Share survey results with all service areas. | Gill May | 18/11/25 |

# Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

## 1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

| a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment | |
|---|---|
| Officer responsible: Gill May | Service Area: Corporate Services |
| Title: Organisational Performance Lead | Date of assessment: 27/10/25 |
| Signature: G S May | |

| b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project? | Other |
|---|---|
| If other, please specify: Results of an independent resident survey | |

| c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project | |
|---|---|
| N/A | |
| Is this new or existing? | **Other** |
| **Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project** | |
| | |

| d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it? | |
|---|---|
| Aims: | To conduct an independent resident survey. |
| Objectives: | To understand residents' views on several topics related to the council and the local area to help inform future service delivery. |
| Outcomes: | Resident survey was undertaken in summer 2025. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Benefits: | To inform future service delivery. |

| **e. What are the expected impacts?** | |
|---|---|
| Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers. | **No** |
| Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative? | **No impact expected** |
| Please provide an explanation for your answer: | |
| The Resident Survey 2025 Report presents the findings of an independent resident survey undertaken during the summer. The report has no impact in itself, but the results will be used to inform future service delivery. | |

**If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.**

| **f. Identify next steps as appropriate** | |
|---|---|
| Stage Two required | **No** |
| Owner of Stage Two assessment | |
| Completion date for Stage Two assessment | |

enventure research

CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Resident Survey 2025

Final Report

October 2025

www.enventure.co.uk

**Report prepared by:**

Katie Osborne
katie@enventure.co.uk

Kayleigh Pickles
kayleigh@enventure.co.uk

**Report reviewed by:**

Mark Robinson

Thornhill Brigg Mill
Thornhill Beck Lane
Brighouse
West Yorkshire
HD6 4AH

01484 404797

www.enventure.co.uk

info@enventure.co.uk

Reg no: 4693096
VAT no: 816927894

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# Executive summary

## Background

This report presents the findings of the Cheltenham Resident Survey 2025 conducted by Enventure Research on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council. The survey aimed to understand residents' views on several topics related to the Council and the local area to help inform future service delivery. A representative telephone survey of 1,100 Cheltenham residents aged 16 and above was conducted in summer 2025 and repeated questions from the two previous Resident Surveys (2019 and 2022) and the LGA 'Are You Being Served?' polling survey to allow for tracking and benchmarking. An online version of the survey was also made available for all Cheltenham residents aged 16+ to complete and was promoted via the Council's website and social media.

## Key findings

Please note the key findings are based on the results to the representative survey only. The main body of the report details the results to the online survey alongside the representative survey.

**Results from the 2025 survey are either consistent with or more positive than the most recent LGA Polling Survey, but some decreases in satisfaction have been recorded since 2022**

- Overall resident satisfaction with their local area as a place to live is at 82%, which represents a decrease since 2022 (-8%) but is in line with the level of satisfaction recorded in the 2019 Resident Survey (84%) and is higher than the national LGA Polling Survey (74%)
- Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things (57%) has remained consistent with the surveys undertaken in 2019 and 2022 and is in line with the national average (56%)
- Agreement that the Council provides value for money (40%) has remained consistent with the 2022 survey and is higher than the national average (36%)
- The proportion of those who think the Council keeps residents well informed about the services and benefits it provides has decreased to 50% (-6%), which is consistent with the national average (50%)

**Respondents would most like to see improvements to road and pavement maintenance, but some are happy with things the way they are**

- When asked what one change they would want local councils to make to improve their experience as a Cheltenham resident, a quarter (25%) said *improve roads/pavements/fix potholes*
- Positively, the second most common response was *don't know* or that *nothing is needed* (15%)
- Other common responses included *cleaner/better maintained local area/less litter* (10%), *improved/more frequent waste and recycling collections* (6%) and *better/cheaper parking/more enforcement* (6%)

**The majority of respondents believe their local area has not changed much in the past year, but a quarter think it has got worse**

- The majority of respondents (65%) said their local area has *not changed much* over the past year
- One in ten (9%) felt it had *got better* and 26% thought it had *got worse*, an increase of 6% since 2022

**Respondents tend to have positive perceptions of Cheltenham as a place to live, however some decreases have been recorded since 2022 and there is room for improvement around young people and growing careers**

- Overall agreement has decreased for all statements about Cheltenham as a place to live since the previous survey, with the exception of *by living in Cheltenham, I have the opportunity to grow my career* (+5%); however, levels of agreement are similar to or higher than those recorded in the 2019 Resident Survey
- Agreement was highest for *I would recommend Cheltenham as a place to live* (83%)
- Three quarters (74%) agreed that *Cheltenham has a vibrant culture and is an exciting place to live* and a similar proportion (70%) agreed that *Cheltenham has a positive future*
- In contrast, less than half agreed that *by living in Cheltenham, I have the opportunity to grow my career* (49%) and that *Cheltenham is a place that offers opportunity for young people* (46%), with larger proportions disagreeing or saying they did not know when compared with the other statements

**High levels of satisfaction were recorded for most town centre amenities, but respondents continue to be less satisfied with the range of shops and Cheltenham in the evening compared with during the day**

- In line with the findings from the previous Resident Survey, respondents were most likely to be satisfied with *events* (85%), *safety during the day* (82%), and *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the daytime* (77%), but satisfaction levels were lower than those recorded in 2022 (-3%, -5% and -5% respectively)
- The only increase in satisfaction was recorded for *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the evening* (+7%), however it should be noted that this has previously been asked as *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit after dark*
- Respondents were more than twice as likely to indicate that they were satisfied with *safety during the day* (82%) than with *safety after dark* (39%)
- Similarly, respondents were significantly more likely to feel satisfied with *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the daytime* (77%) than *as a place to visit in the evening* (55%)
- Less than half were satisfied with *the range of shops available* (47%) and over a third (36%) were dissatisfied with this
- Of those dissatisfied with the range of shops, the most common explanations were that there were *too many closed shops* (63%), *not enough variety of shops* (52%) and that they *would like more independent shops* (25%)

**The majority of respondents have made changes in the last three years to tackle climate change, however four in ten have not**

- Four in ten respondents (40%) said that they had not made any changes in the last three years specifically to tackle climate change
- The most common changes made were *reusing and recycling more/producing less waste* (36%) and *walking, cycling or using public transport more/using car less* (22%)

**Opinion is split on how easy or difficult it is to book a slot to visit a Household Recycling Centre run by Gloucestershire County Council**

- A greater proportion of respondents find it *easy* (35%) to book a slot to visit a County Council-run Household Recycling Centre than *difficult* (27%)
- A quarter (25%) of respondents said they *have not tried to book a slot*

**Respondents tend to agree that there is a need for more affordable homes to buy and rent in Cheltenham, but opinion is split regarding new homes being built on green spaces**

- Around seven in ten respondents agreed that *there is a need for more affordable homes to rent* (70%) and *to buy* (68%) in Cheltenham
- Agreement that there is a need for more affordable homes in Cheltenham has fallen since the previous survey (-6% *to rent* and -8% *to buy*)
- Respondents were more like to disagree (44%) than agree (36%) that they are *willing to accept some new homes being built on green spaces*, and 17% said they did not know

**Awareness of the Golden Valley Development has increased since 2022, but respondents are more likely to disagree that it is for people like them than agree**

- Almost two thirds of respondents (64%) were aware of the Golden Valley Development, an increase of 10% since 2022
- A greater proportion disagreed (36%) than agreed that *the Golden Valley Development is for people like me*, and a quarter (25%) neither agreed nor disagreed
- Of those who disagreed, the most common reasons were that they are *not interested in more housing* (26%) and that they *don't work in technology or cyber security* (22%)
- Similar proportions said they *don't want to work in technology or cyber security* (19%) and that they are *not interested in the Golden Valley Development* (18%)

**The majority are unaware how much of their council tax is allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council and over half believe any increase should be in line with inflation**

- Just 12% of respondents correctly identified that *10-19%* of their council tax is allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council
- Almost half (47%) believe that *20% or more* of their council tax goes to the Council and 35% answered that they *don't know*
- 56% of respondents said that council tax should be increased to *match inflation*, an increase of 26% since the previous survey
- Around a third (32%) said that it should be increased *below inflation*, a significant since the previous survey (-35%), perhaps because the rate of inflation at the time of the 2022 survey was much higher when compared with this year's survey
- A further 12% said council tax should be increased *above inflation* (+9%)

**Whilst respondents felt it was most important for the Council to have a digital presence, the majority also feel it is important for the Council to maintain a physical presence in the town centre**

- Respondents thought it was most important that *the public can access the Council's services digitally* (92%), in line with the 2022 findings
- Large proportions also felt it was important that *there is a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services* (85%) and that *the Council's main office/staff are located in the town centre* (79%), however there has been a decrease since 2022 (-5% and -6% respectively)

**Respondents are most likely to say they live in Cheltenham when explaining where they live, and the majority feel a strong sense of belonging to their local area**

- Respondents were most likely to indicate they would say they were from *Cheltenham* (83%) if talking to someone from elsewhere in the UK
- Much smaller proportions would say *Gloucestershire* (7%), *the Cotswolds* (5%) and the *South West* (2%)
- Three quarters (76%) agree that they *feel a sense of belonging to their local area*, and just 9% disagreed
- Over eight in ten (83%) respondents said it was *important* that they are represented by a local council and local councillors, whilst 11% said it was *not important*

# The Research Programme

## Introduction

Cheltenham Borough Council wished to conduct a survey with a representative sample of its residents to understand views on several topics related to the Council and the local area to help inform service delivery. Benchmarking was also required against the findings from the 2019 and 2022 Resident Surveys and the LGA 'Are You Being Served?' national tracker survey.

Enventure Research was commissioned to conduct the survey, analyse and evaluate the feedback and provide a comprehensive report on the findings.

## Methodology

### Questionnaire design

A questionnaire was co-designed by Cheltenham Borough Council and Enventure Research and included questions designed to understand:

- Satisfaction with the local area
- Views on how the Council runs things
- Opinions on whether the Council provides value for money
- How well informed the Council keeps its residents
- What changes local councils could make to improve Cheltenham residents' experience
- Whether residents' local areas have changed in the past year
- Perceptions of living in Cheltenham
- Satisfaction with the town centre amenities
- Behaviour changes related to climate change
- Ease of booking a slot at a Household Recycling Centre run by Gloucestershire County Council
- Perceptions of housing in Cheltenham
- Awareness and perceptions of the Golden Valley Development
- Whether residents understand the proportion of their council tax that goes to Cheltenham Borough Council
- The rate at which residents feel council tax should be raised
- Residents' sense of place and how important it is to be represented locally

To allow comparisons to be made against previous survey findings, some questions from the 2019 and 2022 Resident Surveys were included, as well as questions from the LGA 'Are You Being Served?' national tracker survey to allow for benchmarking on a national scale.

For reference, a copy of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendices.

### Representative survey

A representative telephone survey was conducted with residents of Cheltenham aged 16 and above by a team of telephone interviewers using a CATI methodology (Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing), whereby respondents' answers to questions are directly input into survey software. In addition, some interviews were undertaken face-to-face at various locations across Cheltenham town centre to ensure hard to reach residents were included, such as those from ethnic minority backgrounds and younger residents.

Interviews took approximately 12 minutes for an interviewer to complete with a respondent. Interviewer shifts took place at different times, on both weekdays and weekends (including at peak times).

Before launching the survey, the questionnaire was tested with a small number of residents who were asked to take part and provide feedback on their experience. This helped ensure that the questionnaire was easy to understand, would elicit useful responses, was of a suitable length and that the questions were asked in a non-biased manner to collect valid and reliable data.

In total, **1,100 interviews** were completed, with research taking place from 7 July to 11 August 2025.

Quotas for the survey were set on age, gender and area of Cheltenham based on mid-year population estimates in 2022, to provide a sample that was broadly representative of Cheltenham residents.

### Online survey

To provide all residents with the opportunity to take part in the survey, an online version of the same questionnaire used in the representative telephone and face-to-face survey was made available for residents to complete. Due to the self-selecting nature of the online survey, this means that the final sample who completed the online survey is not representative of the overall Cheltenham population.

The online survey was hosted and managed online by Enventure Research between 16 July and 13 August 2025. The survey was open to people aged 16 and above who lived in the borough.

The online survey was promoted via the Council's website and social media channels.

The online survey received **426** responses.

## Survey response

In total, **1,526 responses** were received to the survey. The breakdown of responses is shown in the table overleaf.

Figure 1 – Survey responses by methodology

| Methodology | Number | % |
|---|---|---|
| Representative telephone and face-to-face survey | 1,100 | 72% |
| Online survey | 426 | 28% |
| **TOTAL** | **1,526** | **100%** |

# How to read the report

## Percentages in figures

This report contains various tables and charts. In some instances, the responses may not add up to 100%. There are several reasons why this might happen:

- Only the most common responses may be shown in the table or chart
- Individual percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number so the total may come to 99% or 101%
- A response of less than 0.5% will be shown as 0%.

## Sampling tolerances

As the survey was undertaken by a sample of people who live in Cheltenham, all results are subject to sampling tolerances. Based on ONS mid-2022 estimates, the Cheltenham population of those aged 16 and above is 98,740, meaning that the 1,100 representative sample size will provide an accuracy of +/-2.9% at the 95% confidence interval. This means with a result of 50%, we can be 95% sure that if we interviewed all residents then the result would be between 47.1% and 52.9%.

## Subgroup analysis

Subgroup analysis has been undertaken to explore the results of the representative survey by demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability, area of Cheltenham, and whether they have any children or young people aged 0-18 in their household. This analysis has only been carried out where the sample size is seen to be sufficient for comment. Where sample sizes were not large enough, subgroups have been combined to create larger groups if possible. It should be noted that the percentages shown in the subgroup analysis reflect the proportion of the subgroup who answered the question and gave a particular response.

This analysis is only shown in the report where statistically significant differences between subgroups have been found at the 95% level of confidence. This means that we can be confident that if we repeated the same survey, 95 times out of 100, we would get similar findings.

## Response options

To analyse some questions, response options have been grouped together to show an overall level. For example, in some instances 'very satisfied' and 'quite satisfied' have been grouped and shown as 'total satisfied'. Where combined percentages do not equal the overall level reported (being 1% higher or lower), this is due to percentages being rounded to the nearest whole number.

## Other responses

For some questions, respondents were able to select 'other' and provide a free-text response. Where 15 or more 'other' responses have been received, a summary has been provided within the commentary to highlight the most common response themes.

## Benchmarking and comparisons

Some of the questions asked in the Cheltenham Resident Survey are also asked by the Local Government Association (LGA) in a national tracker survey, which is administered to a representative sample of 1,000 British adults using a telephone survey methodology. Results from the Cheltenham Resident Survey have been compared where the same question has been asked in the national survey. The most recent survey that the results have been compared with was undertaken in October 2024.

Where questions have been repeated from the previous Cheltenham Resident Survey conducted in 2019 and/or 2022, the results have been included for comparison. It should be noted that the methodology of the survey conducted in 2019 utilised a postal methodology, so results are not necessarily directly comparable, but will give a good indication of trends in attitudes and perceptions.

## Terminology

Throughout this report, those who took part in the representative survey are referred to as 'representative respondents', whilst those who completed the online version of the survey are referred to as 'online respondents'.

# Research findings

## The local area

### Satisfaction with the local area as a place to live

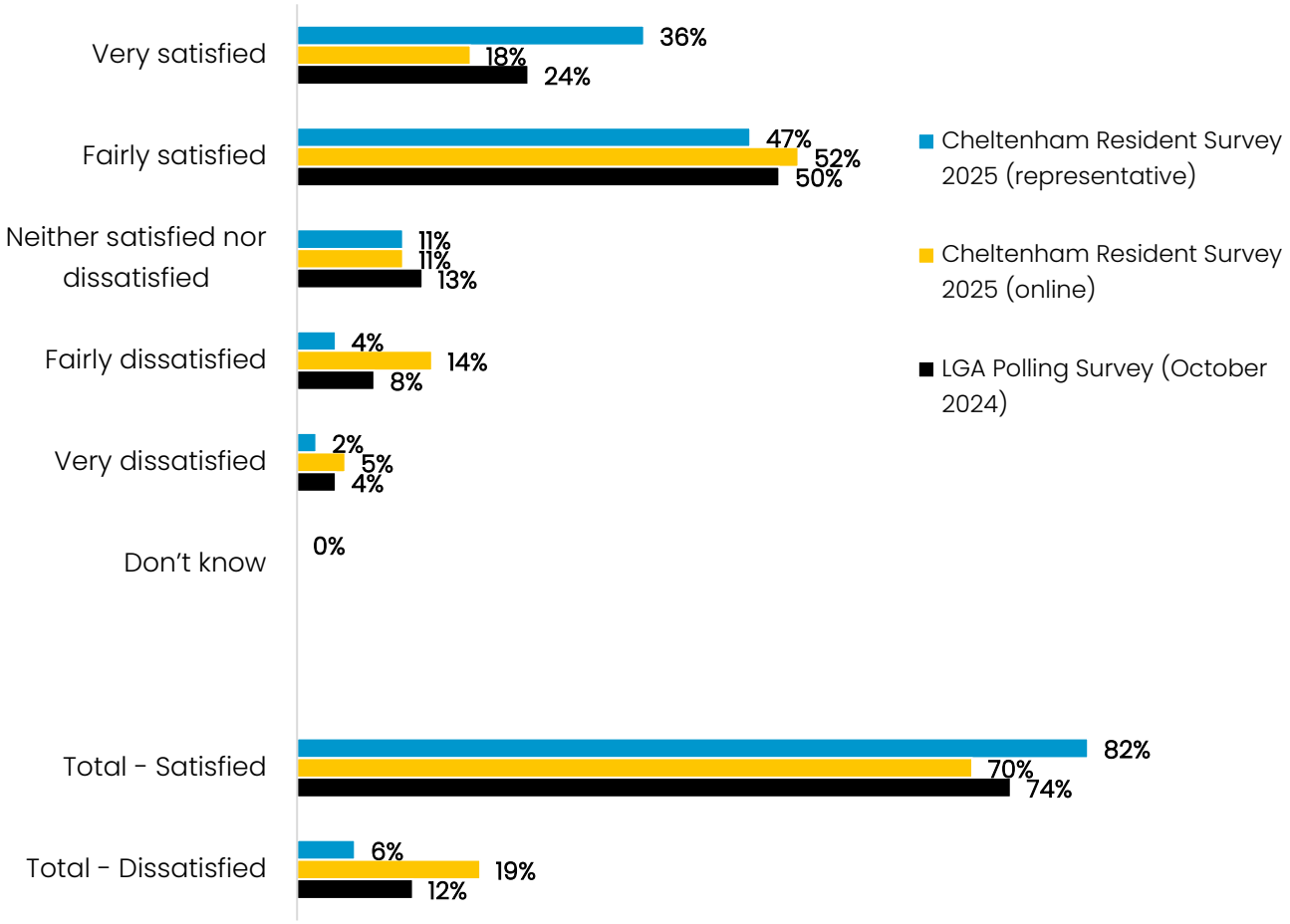
Eight in ten representative respondents (82%) reported that they were either *very satisfied* (36%) or *fairly satisfied* (47%). Just 6% were either *fairly dissatisfied* (4%) or *very dissatisfied* (2%).

Satisfaction was lower amongst online respondents, albeit still high at 70% overall. By contrast, online respondents were more likely to say they were dissatisfied (19% overall) when compared with representative respondents (6% overall).

Equal proportions of representative and online respondents said they were *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* with their local area as a place to live (both at 11%).

As shown in the chart below, the representative survey recorded a higher level of satisfaction than the national figure from the most recent LGA survey (+8%).

**Figure 2 – Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426); LGA (1,000)



**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to be **satisfied** with their local area as a place to live (82% overall) include:

- Those aged 25-34 (88%) vs those aged 45-54 (78%)
- Those living in South East Cheltenham (92%) vs those living elsewhere, particularly those living in West Cheltenham (73%)
- Those who do not have a disability (84%) vs those who do (75%)

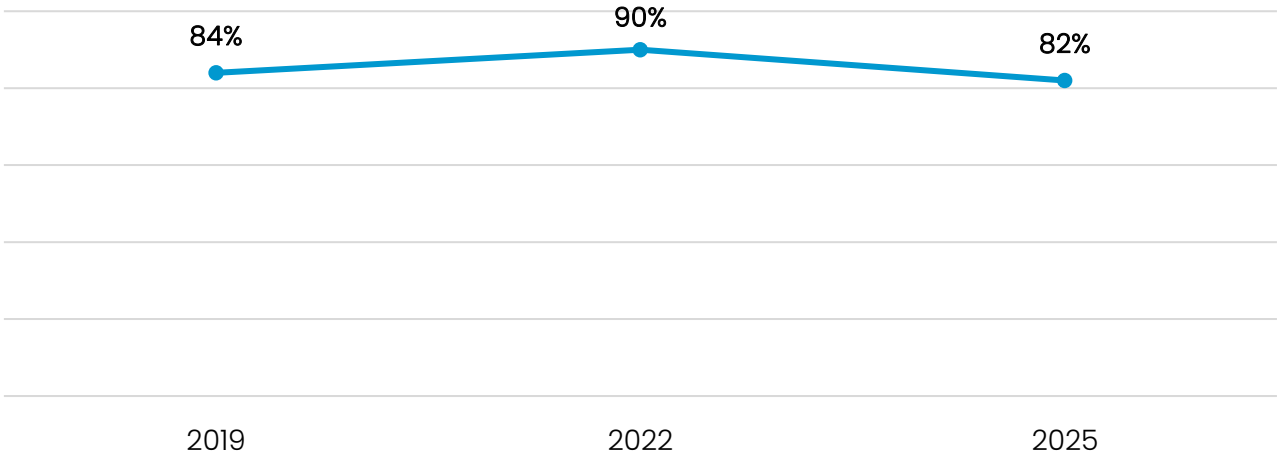
Those living in West Cheltenham were more likely to be **dissatisfied** with their local area as a place to live (9%) when compared with those living in South West Cheltenham (4%).

The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total satisfaction only) alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

Overall satisfaction has decreased by 8% since the previous survey, but is at a similar level to that recorded in 2019.

**Figure 3 – Satisfaction with local area as a place to live compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**

Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (1,572)



## Changes to improve residents' experiences

To understand their priorities, respondents were asked what one change they would want local councils to make to improve their experience as a Cheltenham resident. Two of the three most common themes provided by representative respondents related to the appearance of Cheltenham, including a quarter (25%) who suggested to *improve roads/pavements/fix potholes* and 10% who suggested *cleaner/better maintained local area/less litter.*

One in seven representative respondents (15%) said they *don't know* what would improve their experience as a Cheltenham resident, or that *nothing was needed.*

Similar proportions of representative respondents made suggestions related to waste and recycling in Cheltenham, including *improved/more frequent waste and recycling collections* (6%) and *reopen Swindon Road HRC/better HRC access* (5%).

The table below shows the most common themes from the representative survey, followed by example verbatim quotes for some of the most common themes.

**Figure 4 – What one change would you want local councils to make to improve your experience as a Cheltenham resident? (Most common themes – representative survey)**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100)

| Top themes in free-text responses | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Improve roads/pavements/fix potholes | 276 | 25% |
| Don't know/nothing needed | 161 | 15% |
| Cleaner/better maintained local area/less litter | 105 | 10% |
| Improved/more frequent waste and recycling collections | 68 | 6% |
| Better/cheaper parking/more enforcement | 62 | 6% |
| Reopen Swindon Road HRC/better HRC access | 56 | 5% |
| Better communication/access to information | 50 | 5% |
| More services/facilities for children and young people | 29 | 3% |
| Improved safety/more visible policing | 28 | 3% |

> *I think there needs to be an improvement on our pavements in Cheltenham as they are uneven and dangerous.*
> **Improve roads/pavements/fix potholes**

> *I don't know, we never really have any problems.*
> **Don't know/nothing needed**

> *Get our cul-de-sac cleaned, we never get any street cleaning done here.*
> **Cleaner/better maintained local area/less litter**

> *Allow us to have a single blue bin for recycling rather than having multiple crates.*
> **Improved/more frequent waste and recycling collections**

Many of the same themes from the representative survey also appear in the most common themes from the online survey (shown in **Figure 5**), suggesting that these are important issues to Cheltenham residents. This includes the three most common themes from the online survey such as *cleaner/better maintained local area/less litter* (21% online and 10% representative), *improve roads/pavements/fix potholes* (17% online and 25% representative) and *reopen Swindon Road HRC/better HRC access* (11% online and 5% representative).

**Figure 5 – What one change would you want local councils to make to improve your experience as a Cheltenham resident? (Most common themes – online survey)**
Base: All online respondents (426)

| Top themes in free-text responses | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Cleaner/better maintained local area/less litter | 89 | 21% |
| Improve roads/pavements/fix potholes | 71 | 17% |
| Reopen Swindon Road HRC/better HRC access | 45 | 11% |
| Improved/more frequent waste and recycling collections | 33 | 8% |
| Better/cheaper parking/more enforcement | 28 | 7% |
| More investment/modernise/improve appearance | 24 | 6% |
| Traffic management/fewer roadworks/reduce congestion | 22 | 5% |
| Safer roads/more speed limits/traffic calming | 19 | 4% |
| Better planning/more infrastructure | 18 | 4% |
| Better communication/access to information | 17 | 4% |
| Spend wisely/stop wasting money | 17 | 4% |

> *Clean the streets regularly, not never unless re-actively due to resident/s complaints. If it happens in Montpelier, why isn't it elsewhere?*
> **Cleaner/better maintained local area/less litter**

> *The quality of some of the roads are shocking, potholes not being maintained correctly. The volume of traffic means that sufficient maintenance is required and this is not happening.*
> **Improve roads/pavements/ fix potholes**

> *Open up the Swindon Rd recycling centre to make it easier to dispose of unwanted items.*
> **Reopen Swindon Road HRC/better HRC access**

> *Return bins where they are taken from and not leave in middle of road.*
> **Improved/more frequent waste and recycling collections**

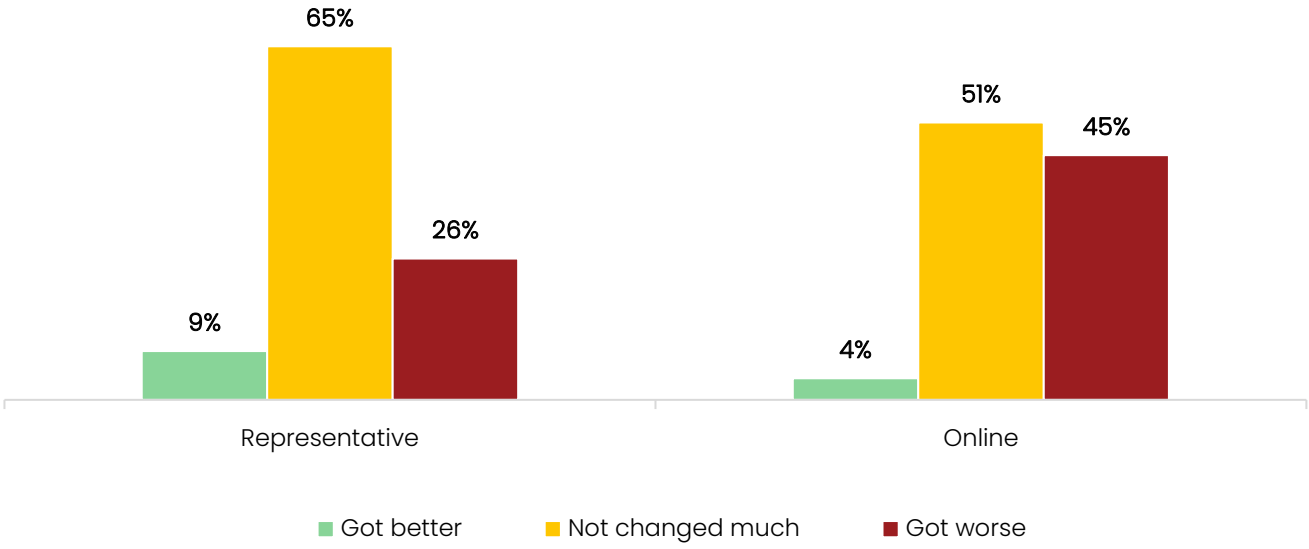
## Changes to the local area in the past year

When asked whether they thought their local area had got better, worse, or had not changed much over the past year, the majority of representative respondents (65%) felt their local area had *not changed much*. A quarter (26%) felt their local area had *got worse* and 9% felt it had *got better*.

Online respondents' opinions appeared to be split, between those who felt their local area had *not changed much* (51%) and those who felt it had *got worse* (45%). A further 4% of online respondents believed their local area had *got better.*

**Figure 6 – On the whole, do you think that over the past year your local area has got better or worse, or not changed much?**

Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those aged 16-34 were more likely to think their local area has **got better** over the past year (13%) when compared with those aged 55+ (7%).

Subgroups more likely to think their local area has **got worse** over the past year (26% overall) include:

- Those aged 35+ (27%) vs those aged 16-34 (20%)
- Those living in Central Cheltenham (31%) vs those living in West (22%) and North Cheltenham (22%)
- Those who do not have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (27%) vs those who do (21%)

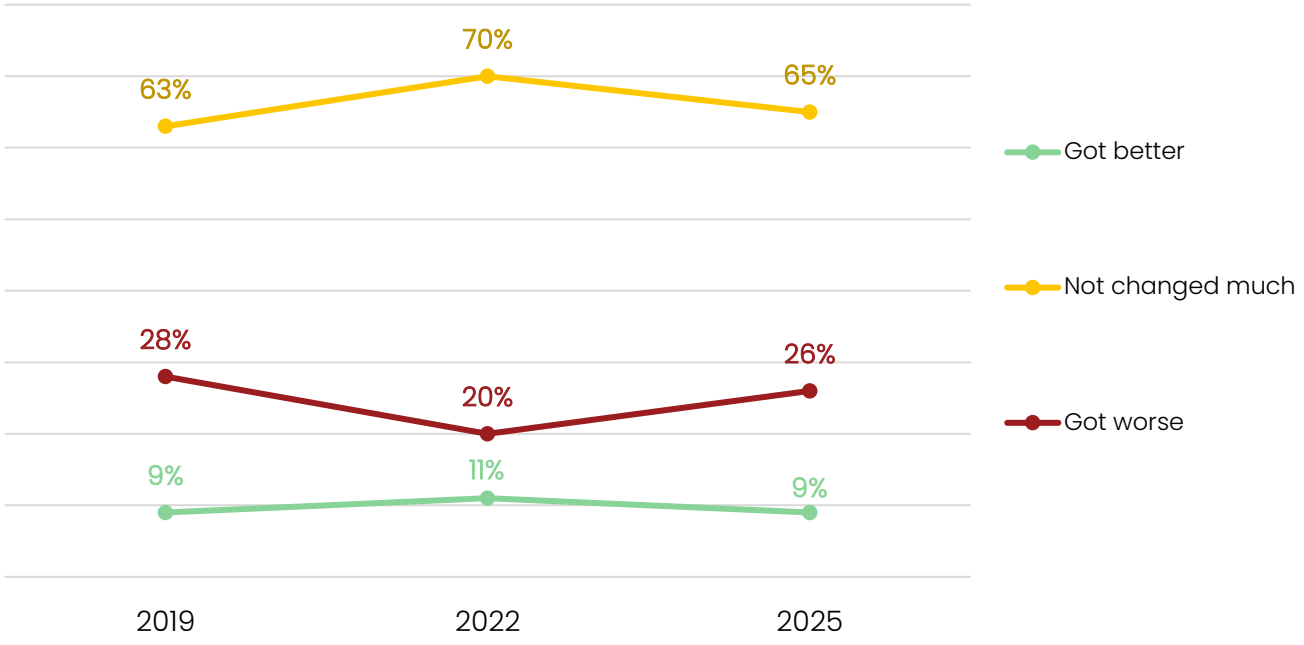
The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

Since 2019, the most common response has remained that respondents' local area has *not changed much*, but there has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents who said this (-5%) when compared with the previous survey. By contrast, the proportion of respondents who said their local area has *got worse* has increased since the previous survey (+6%) and is now consistent with the 2019 survey.

The proportion of respondents who said their local area has *got better* has remained consistent since 2019.

**Figure 7 – Feelings about changes to local area compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**

Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (1,534)



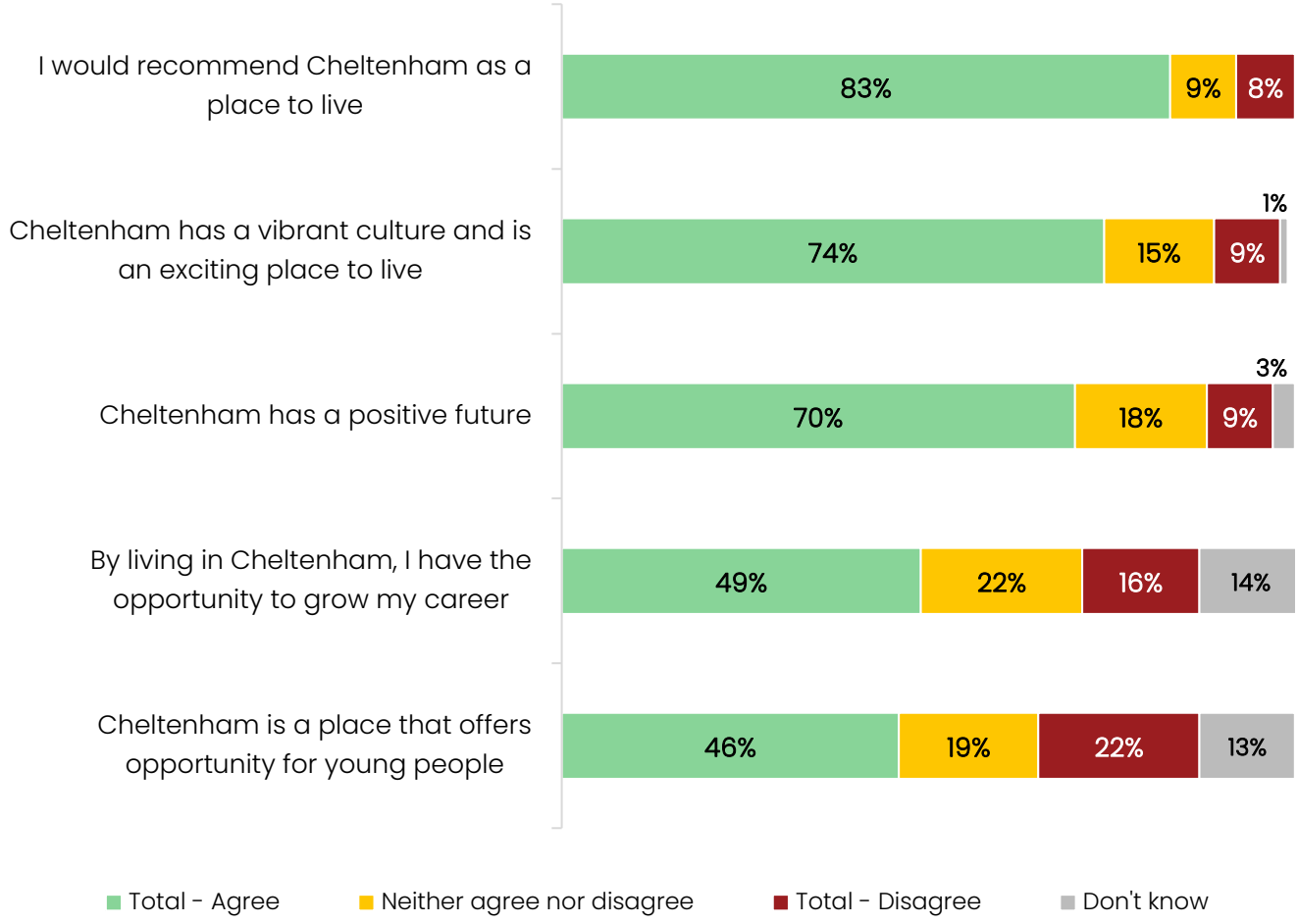
## Agreement with statements about Cheltenham

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about Cheltenham as a place to live. The chart below shows a breakdown of the responses provided by representative respondents.

Agreement was highest for the statement *I would recommend Cheltenham as a place to live,* with over eight in ten representative respondents (83%) saying they agreed with this. Three quarters of representative respondents (74%) agreed that *Cheltenham has a vibrant culture and is an exciting place to live*, and a further seven in ten (70%) agreed that *Cheltenham has a positive future.*

By comparison, much smaller proportions of representative respondents agreed with the statements *by living in Cheltenham, I have the opportunity to grow my career* (49%) and *Cheltenham is a place that offers opportunity for young people* (46%). Instead, these statements recorded larger proportions of respondents answering that they disagreed (16% and 22% respectively) or that they did not know (14% and 13% respectively) when compared with other statements.

**Figure 8 – To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100)



**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to **agree** with the statement **I would recommend Cheltenham as a place to live** (83% overall) include:

- Those aged 65+ (88%) vs those aged 16-24 (77%)
- Those living in South East Cheltenham (88%) vs those living in Central (79%) and West Cheltenham (80%)

Those who have a disability were more likely to **disagree** with the statement **I would recommend Cheltenham as a place to live** (12%) when compared with those who do not (7%).

Those aged 25-34 were more likely to **agree** with the statement **Cheltenham has a vibrant culture and is an exciting place to live** (81%) when compared with those aged 55+ (71%).

Those aged 16-24 and 45+ were more likely to **disagree** with the statement **Cheltenham has a positive future** (13% and 10% respectively) when compared with those aged 25-34 (3%).

Subgroups more likely to **agree** with the statement **by living in Cheltenham, I have the opportunity to grow my career** (49% overall) include:

- Those aged 16-54 (56%) vs those aged 55+ (38%)
- Those who have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (58%) vs those who do not (44%)

Subgroups more likely to **agree** with the statement **Cheltenham is a place that offers opportunity for young people** (46% overall) include:

- Those aged 16-34 (63%) vs those aged 35+ (40%)
- Those who have children and young people aged 0-18 living in their household (53%) vs those who do not (44%)

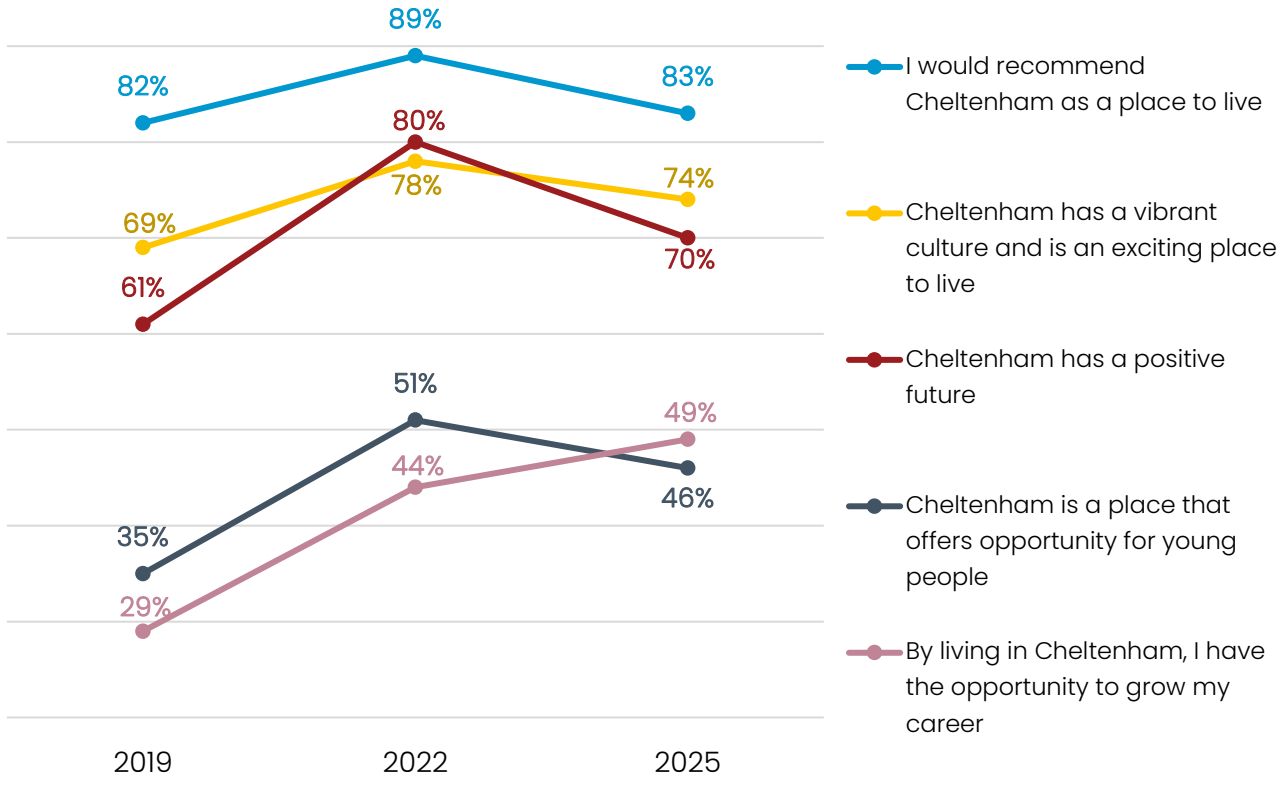
The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total agree only) alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

Although the majority of statements have recorded a decrease in agreement since the previous survey, it is important to note that the levels of agreement are similar to or higher than those recorded in 2019.

Agreement with the statement *by living in Cheltenham, I have the opportunity to grow my career* was the only increase recorded since the previous survey (+5%).

**Figure 9 – Agreement with statements about Cheltenham compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**

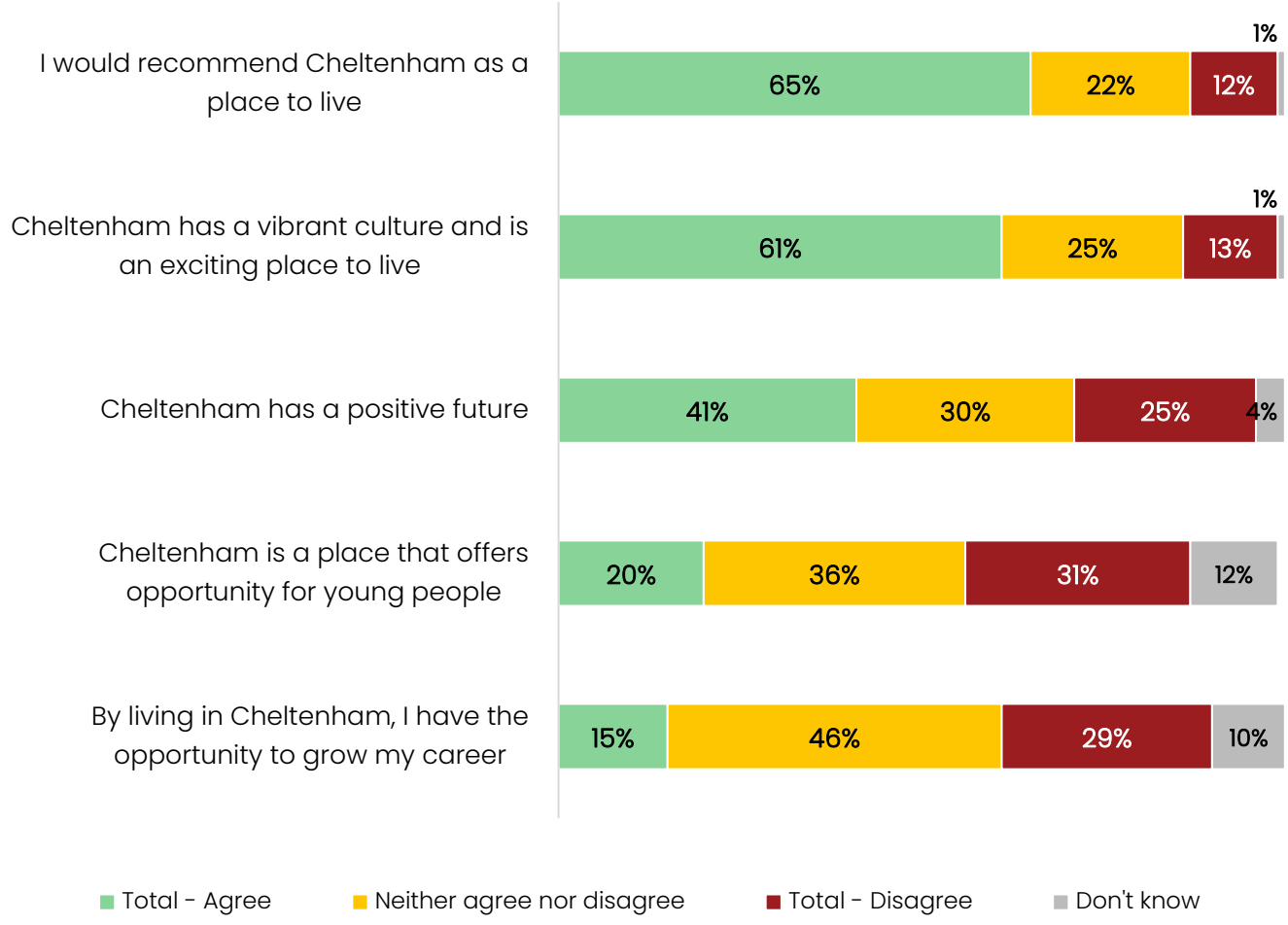
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (various – unknown)



Online respondents were also most likely to agree with the statement *I would recommend Cheltenham as a place to live* (65%), followed by 61% who agreed that *Cheltenham has a vibrant culture and is an exciting place to live.*

Online respondents were more likely to disagree than agree with the statements *Cheltenham is a place that offers opportunity for young people* (31% vs 20%) and *by living in Cheltenham, I have the opportunity to grow my career* (29% vs 15%). For these statements, online respondents were most likely to answer that they neither agree nor disagree (36% and 46% respectively).

**Figure 10 – To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**
Base: All online respondents 2025 (426)



## Satisfaction with town centre amenities

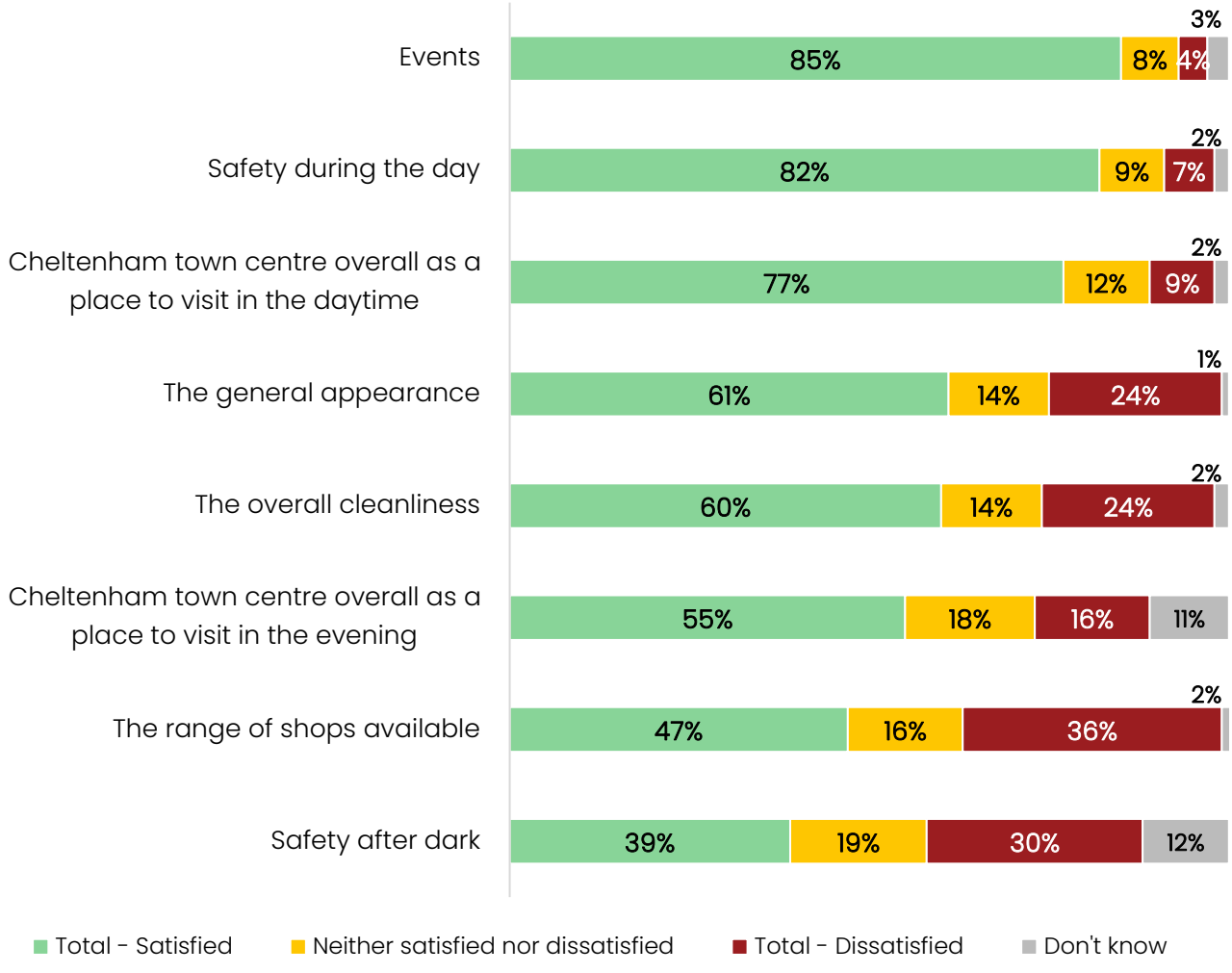
When asked to rate their satisfaction with a number of amenities in Cheltenham town centre, representative respondents were most likely to be satisfied with *events* (85%).

Representative respondents were more than twice as likely to indicate that they were satisfied with their *safety during the day* (82%) than report feeling satisfied with their *safety after dark* (39%). Similarly, representative respondents were significantly more likely to feel satisfied with *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the daytime* (77%) than *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the evening* (55%).

Six in ten representative respondents said they were satisfied with *the general appearance* (61%) and *the overall cleanliness* (60%) of the town centre.

Less than half of representative respondents (47%) were satisfied with *the range of shops available* and over a third (36%) were dissatisfied, highlighting this as a key area for improvement.

**Figure 11 – Thinking about the town centre, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100)



**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to be **dissatisfied** with their **safety during the day** (7% overall) include:

- Those aged 35-54 (9%) vs those aged 16-34 (4%)
- Those who have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (10%) vs those who do not (6%)

Those aged 35+ were more likely to be **dissatisfied** with **Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the daytime** (11%) when compared with those aged 16-34 (5%).

Subgroups more likely to be **satisfied** with **Cheltenham town centre as a place to visit in the evening** (55% overall) include:

- Those aged 16-54 (65%) vs those aged 55+ (41%)
- Those who have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (62%) vs those who do not (53%)

Subgroups more likely to be **satisfied** with their **safety after dark** (39% overall) include:

- Male respondents (42%) vs female respondents (36%)
- Those aged 16-54 (45%) vs those aged 55+ (29%)
- Those from ethnic minority backgrounds (52%) vs those of White ethnicity (38%)
- Those who do not have a disability (41%) vs those who do (29%)

Female respondents were more likely to be **dissatisfied** with **the range of shops available** (40%) when compared with male respondents (31%). Conversely, male respondents were more likely to be **dissatisfied** with **the overall cleanliness** (27%) when compared with female respondents (21%).

Those aged 55+ were more likely to be **dissatisfied** with the following when compared with those aged 16-54:

- The overall cleanliness (29% vs 20%)
- The general appearance (33% vs 18%)
- The range of shops available (44% vs 30%)

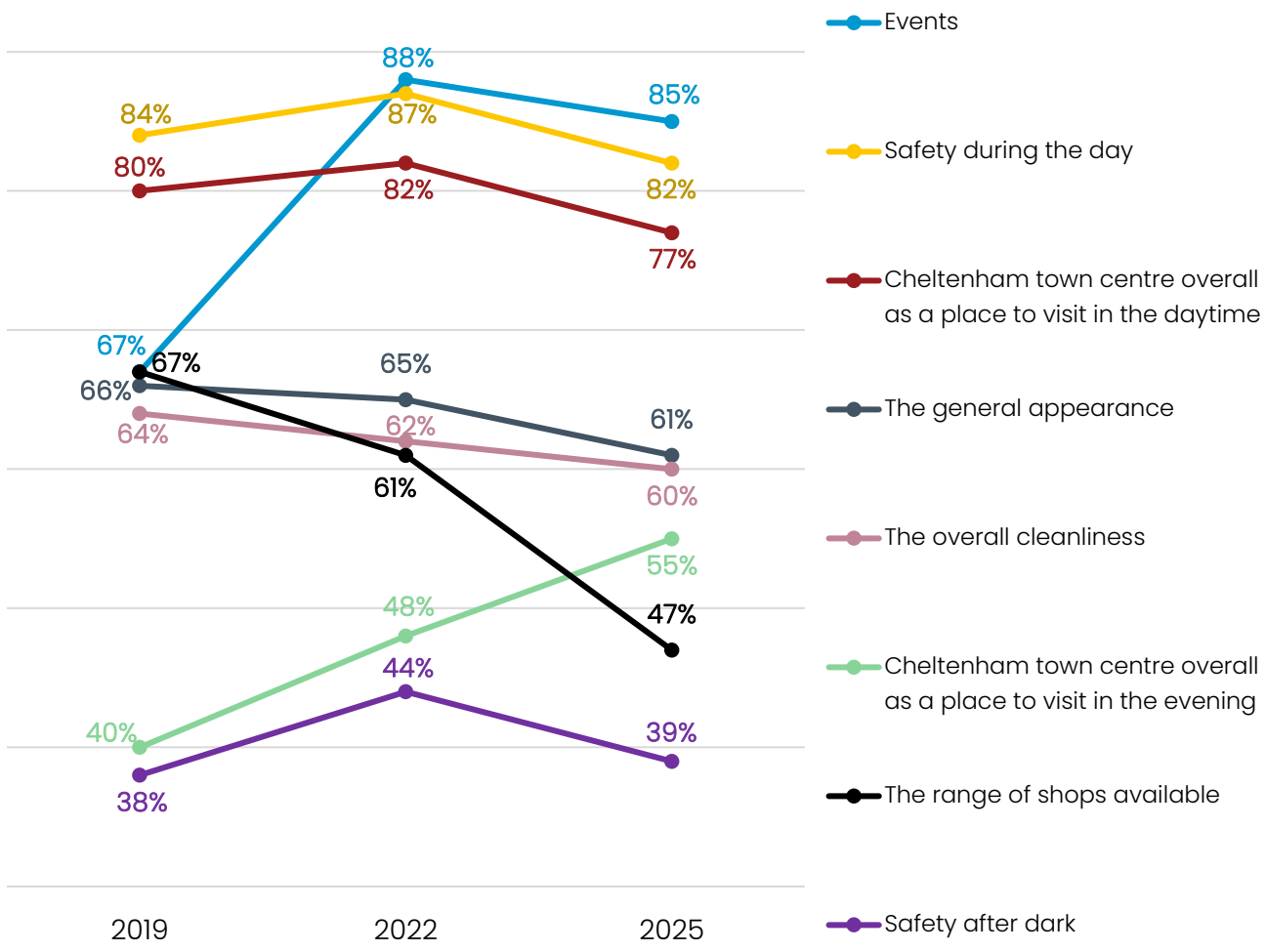
The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total agree only) alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

After several town centre amenities recorded an increase in satisfaction in the previous survey, satisfaction has decreased for the majority in this year's survey. In most cases, satisfaction has fallen in line with the figures recorded in 2019.

Satisfaction with *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the evening* has continued to increase since 2019, from 40% to 55%, representing a 15% increase. This shows a positive trend, although it should be noted that this has previously been asked as *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit after dark*.

The results show that satisfaction has continued to decrease since 2019 for *the general appearance* (-5% since 2019), *the overall cleanliness* (-4% since 2019), and *the range of shops available* (-20% since 2019).

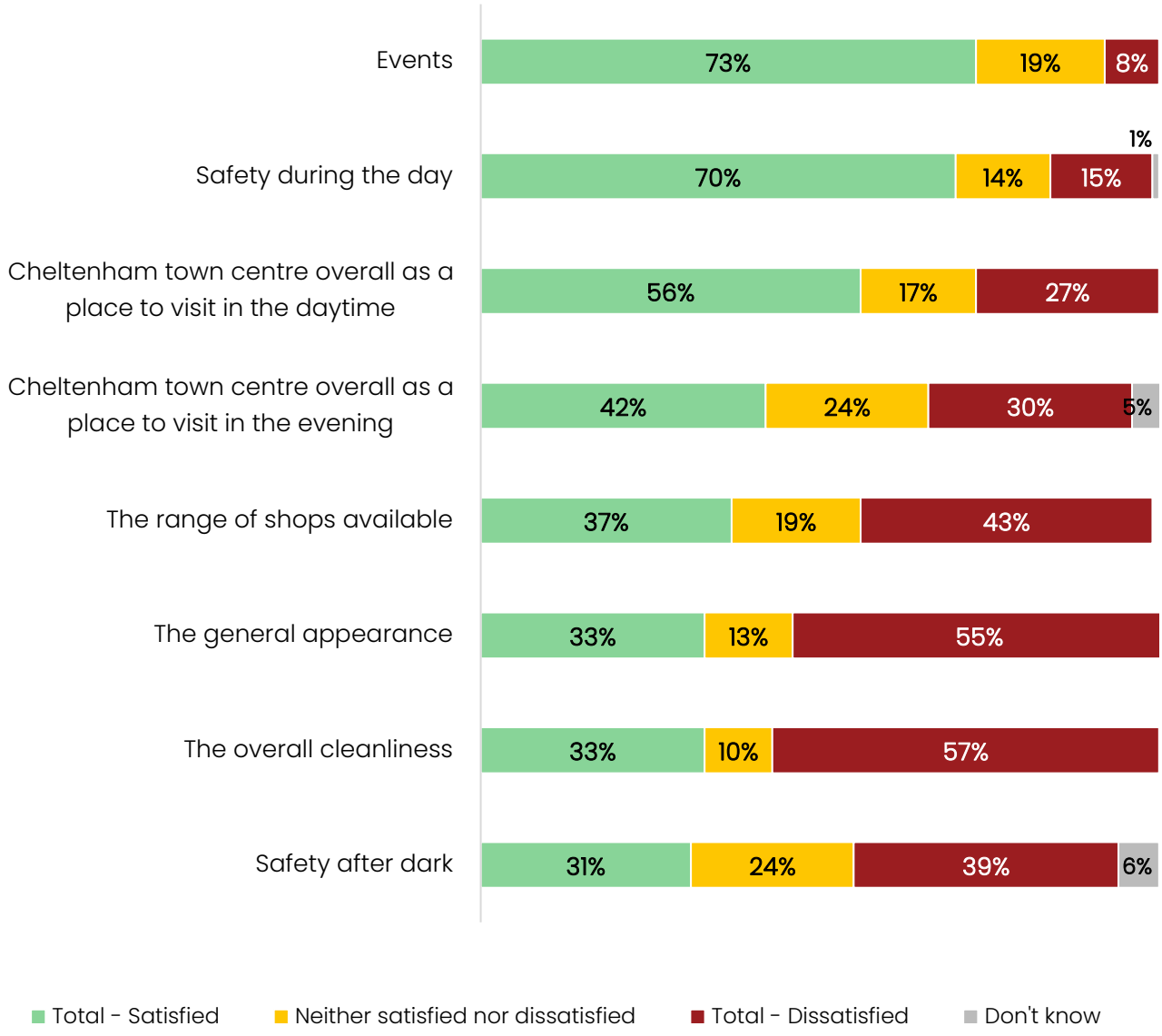
**Figure 12 – Satisfaction with Cheltenham town centre compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (various – unknown)



Online respondents were also most likely to be satisfied with *events* (73%), and a similar proportion (70%) indicated that they were satisfied with their *safety during the day.* A further 56% of online respondents said they were satisfied with *Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the daytime.*

Less than half of online respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the remaining town centre amenities, and several amenities recorded larger levels of dissatisfaction than satisfaction. This includes *the range of shops available* (43% dissatisfied vs 37% satisfied), *the general appearance* (55% dissatisfied vs 33% satisfied), *the overall cleanliness* (57% dissatisfied vs 33% satisfied) and their *safety after dark* (39% dissatisfied vs 31% satisfied).

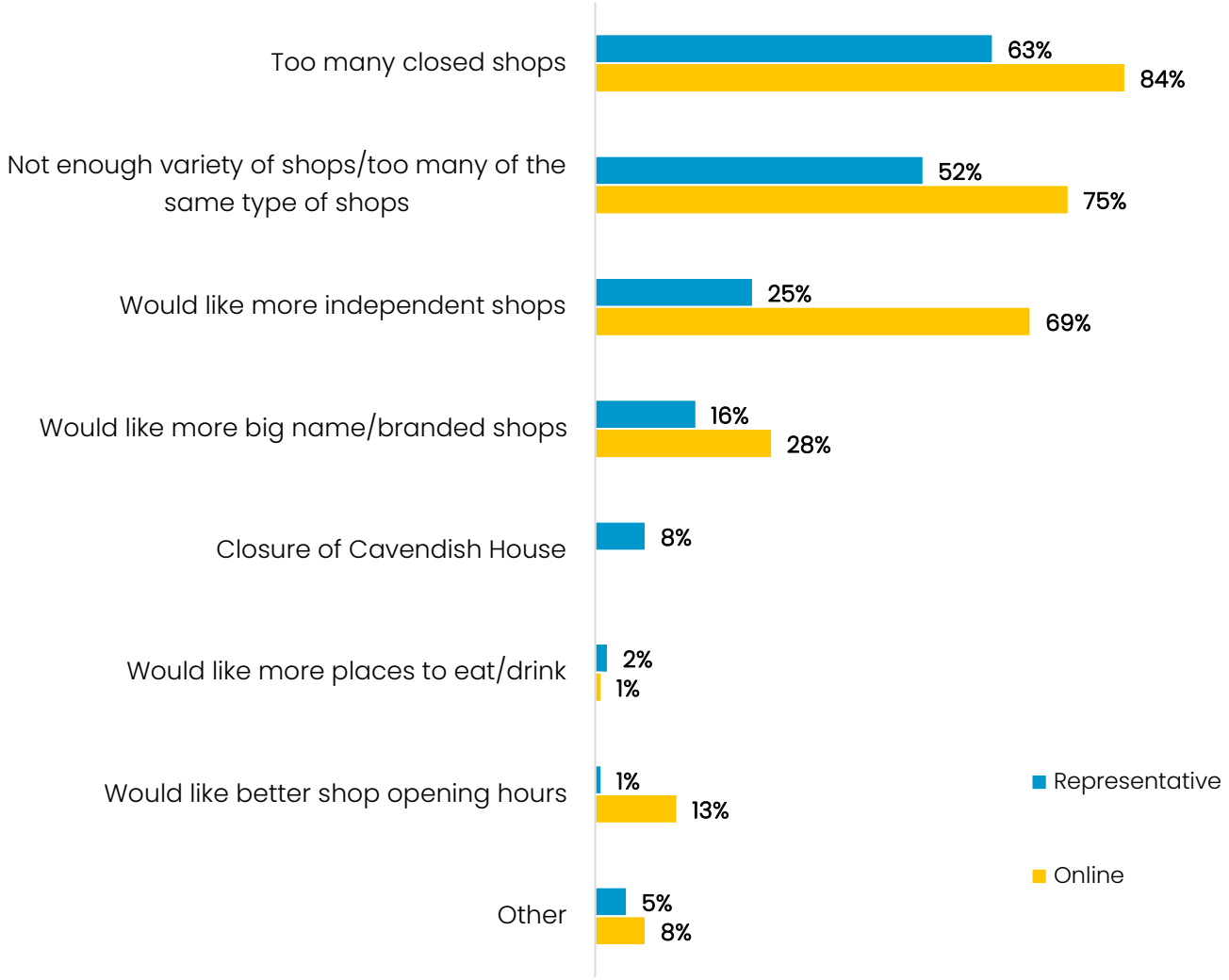
**Figure 13 – Thinking about the town centre, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?**
Base: All online respondents 2025 (426)



Across both surveys, the most common reason for being dissatisfied with the range of shops available in Cheltenham town centre was that there are *too many closed shops* (63% representative and 84% online). This was followed by the opinion that there is *not enough variety of shops/too many of the same type of shops* (52% representative and 75% online), and that respondents *would like more independent shops* (25% representative and 69% online). The full range of responses are shown in the chart below.

**Figure 14 – Why have you said that you are dissatisfied with the range of shops available?**

Base: Those who said they were dissatisfied with the range of shops available – representative (394); online (184)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those aged **16-34** were more likely to provide the following reasons when compared with older respondents:

- Would like more big name/branded shops (24%) vs those aged 55+ (13%)
- Closure of Cavendish House (19%) vs those aged 35+ (6%)

# Environment

## Behaviours to tackle climate change

When asked whether they have made any changes in the last three years specifically to tackle climate change, the most common change made by respondents across both surveys was *I reuse and recycle more/produce less waste* (36% representative and 65% online).

Just over a fifth of representative respondents (22%) said they *walk, cycle or use public transport more/use car less.* Further to this, around one in ten representative respondents said they *minimise energy usage at home* (11%), *have improved the energy efficiency of their home* (11%), *avoid single use plastics and plastic packaging* (10%) and are *mindful of food consumption* (9%), such as growing food at home, minimising food waste and eating local or seasonal produce.

A significantly larger proportion of representative respondents said they have not made any changes (40%) when compared with online respondents (12%). This may be because this question was asked without prompting in the representative survey, but online respondents would have seen the list of possible changes to choose from when completing the survey.

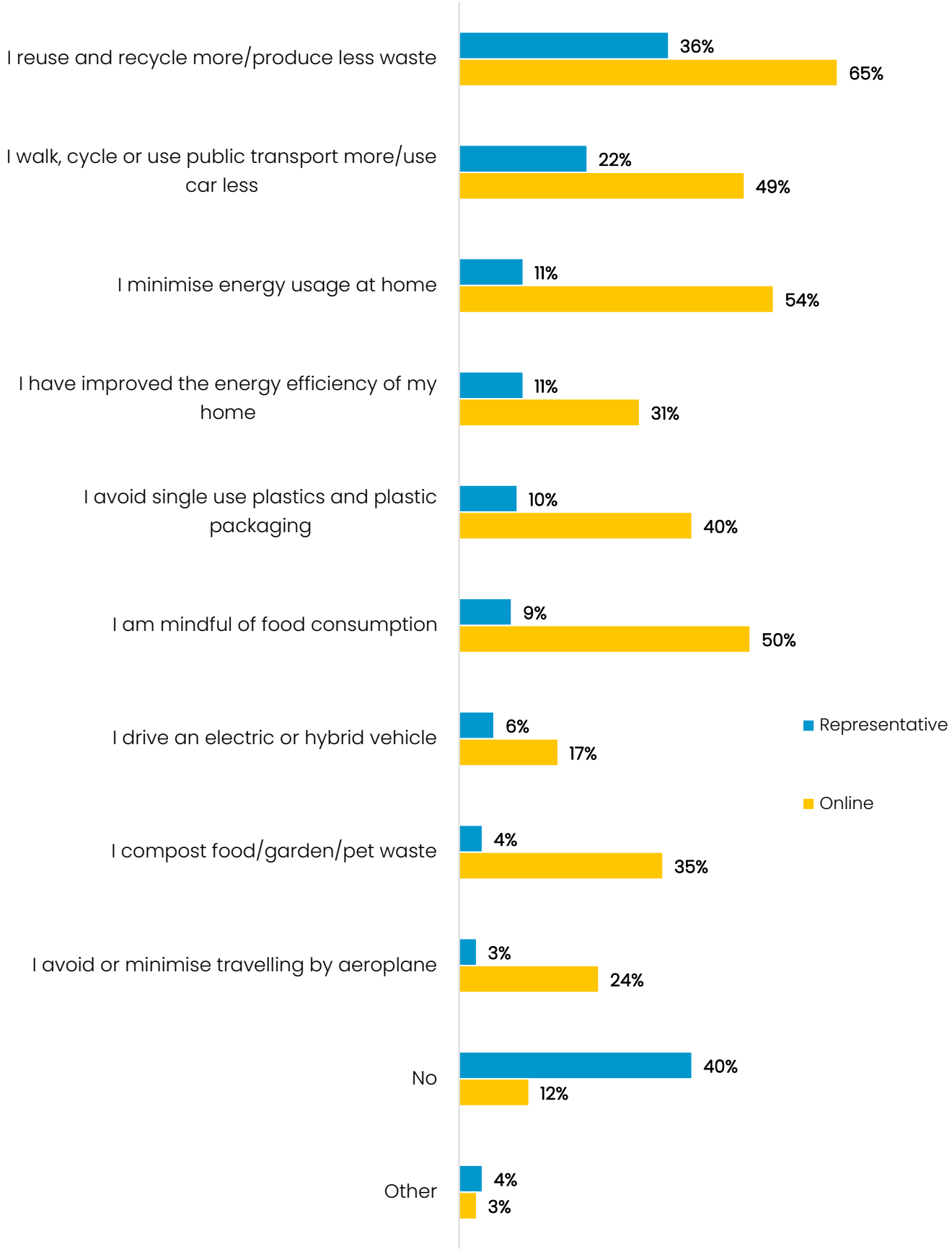
The most common *other* responses provided by representative respondents (4%) include:

- Minimise water use/save water/recycle used water
- Reduced energy use/smart meter/generate electricity
- Wild garden/planted wildflowers/sustainable garden

The full range of responses is shown in the chart overleaf.

**Figure 15 – Have you made any changes in the last three years (since 2022) specifically to tackle climate change?**

Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)



**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to say they **have not made any changes in the last three years** (40% overall) include:

- Male respondents (45%) vs female respondents (36%)
- Those aged 45-54 (48%) vs those aged 35-44 (35%) and 55-64 (36%)
- Those living in Central (43%), West (45%) and North Cheltenham (42%) vs those living in South East Cheltenham (33%)

When compared with those aged 35+, those aged **16-34** were more likely to say they have made the following changes:

- I walk, cycle or use public transport more/use car less (35% vs 17%)
- I minimise energy usage at home (16% vs 10%)
- I avoid single use plastics and plastic packaging (19% vs 6%)
- I am mindful of food consumption (17% vs 6%)
- I compost food/garden/pet waste (8% vs 3%)

Those who have **children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household** were more likely to say they have made the following changes when compared with those who do not:

- I avoid single use plastics and plastic packaging (14% vs 8%)
- I am mindful of food consumption (13% vs 7%)
- I drive an electric or hybrid vehicle (9% vs 5%)

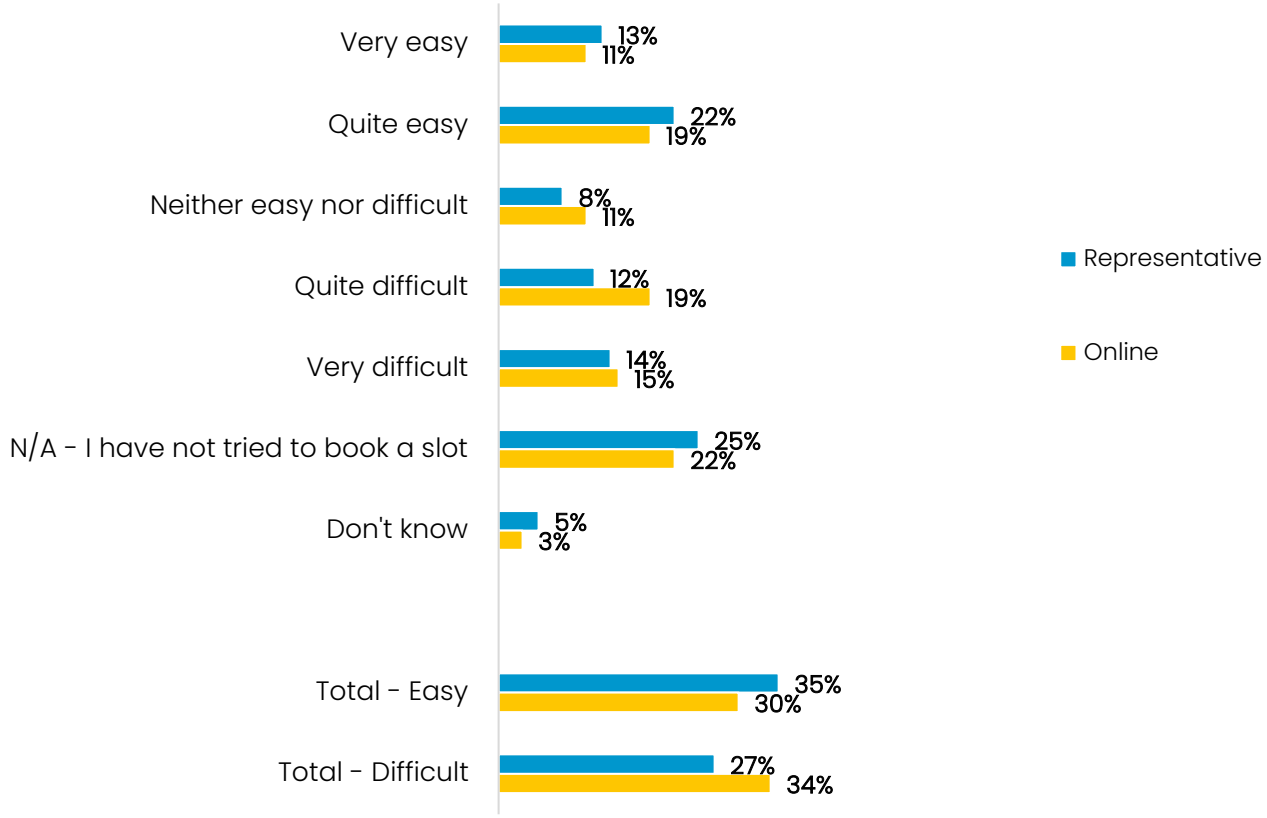
Those living in South West Cheltenham were more likely to say they have **improved the energy efficiency of their home** (16%) when compared with those living in West (8%) and North Cheltenham (8%).

## Ease of booking a Household Recycling Centre slot

Opinion was split across both surveys in relation to how easy or difficult respondents find it to book a slot to visit a Household Recycling Centre run by Gloucestershire County Council. Over a third of representative respondents (35%) said they find it *easy* to book a slot, which is a larger proportion than those who said they find it *difficult* (27%). A quarter of representative respondents (25%) said they *have not tried to book a slot.*

Online respondents were slightly more likely to find it *difficult* to book a slot (34%) than *easy* (30%), and a further 22% of online respondents said they *have not tried to book a slot.*

**Figure 16 – How easy or difficult do you find it to book a slot to visit a Household Recycling Centre run by Gloucestershire County Council?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to say they **have not tried to book a slot** (25% overall) include:

- Those aged 55+ (33%) vs those aged 16-54 (20%)
- Those who do not have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (29%) vs those who do (15%)
- Those who have a disability (36%) vs those who do not (22%)

Those aged **35-54** were more likely to say they find it **difficult** to book a slot (36%) when compared with those aged 16-34 (19%) and 55+ (24%).

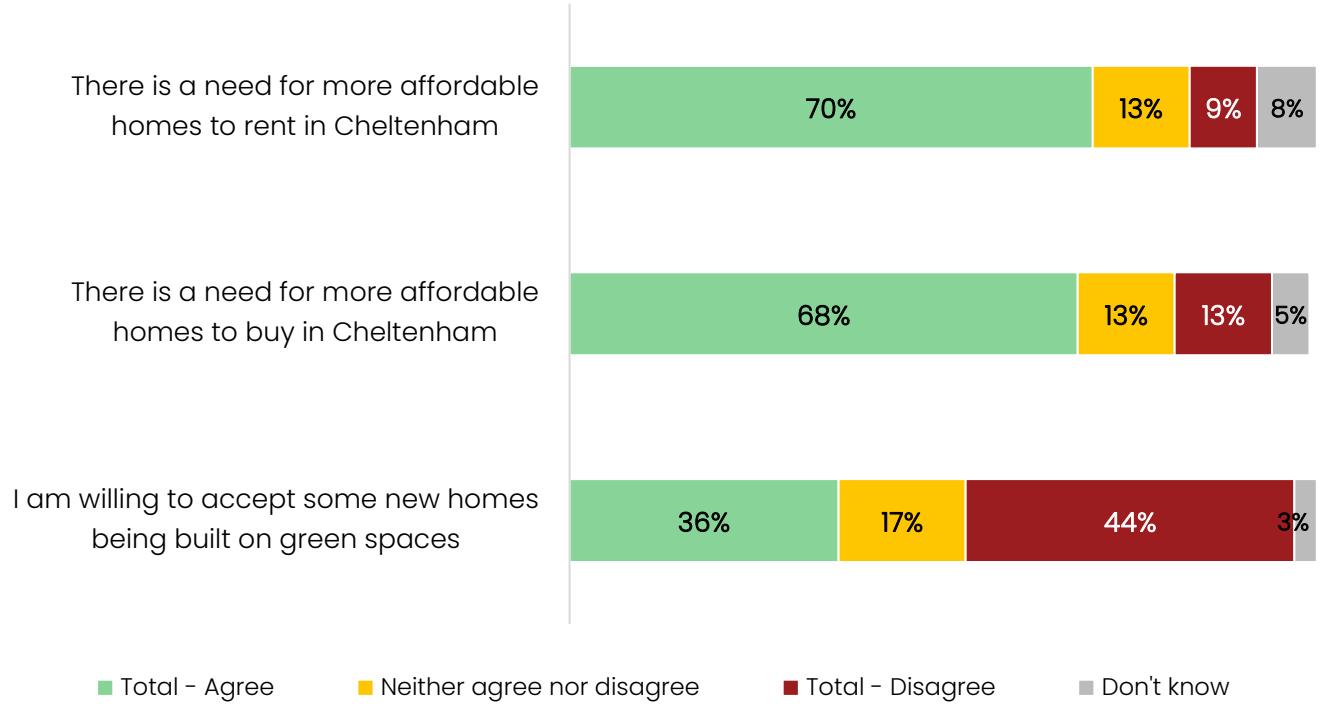
# Developing Cheltenham

## Housing in Cheltenham

Around seven in ten representative respondents agreed with the statements *there is a need for more affordable homes to rent in Cheltenham* (70%) and *there is a need for more affordable homes to buy in Cheltenham* (68%).

However, representative respondents were more likely to disagree with the statement *I am willing to accept some new homes being built on green spaces* (44%) than agree (36%).

**Figure 17 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about housing in Cheltenham?**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100)



**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to **agree** that **there is a need for more affordable homes to buy in Cheltenham** (68% overall) include:

- Those aged 16-34 (73%) vs those aged 55+ (63%)
- Those living in South East Cheltenham (73%) vs those living in South West Cheltenham (63%)

Subgroups more likely to **disagree** that **there is a need for more affordable homes to buy in Cheltenham** (13% overall) include:

- Those aged 35+ (16%) vs those aged 16-34 (8%)
- Those living in South West Cheltenham (18%) vs those living in South East Cheltenham (9%)

Subgroups more likely to **agree** that **there is a need for more affordable homes to rent in Cheltenham** (70% overall) include:

- Female respondents (73%) vs male respondents (67%)
- Those aged 16-34 (74%) vs those aged 55+ (67%)

Subgroups more likely to **disagree** that **there is a need for more affordable homes to rent in Cheltenham** (9% overall) include:

- Those aged 35+ (11%) vs those aged 16-34 (5%)
- Those living in South West Cheltenham (12%) vs those living in South East Cheltenham (6%)

Subgroups more likely to **agree** that they are **willing to accept some new homes being built on green spaces** (36% overall) include:

- Male respondents (41%) vs female respondents (31%)
- Those aged 16-54 (41%) vs those aged 55+ (29%)
- Those from ethnic minority backgrounds (57%) vs those of White ethnicity (34%)

Subgroups more likely to **disagree** that they are **willing to accept some new homes being built on green spaces** (44% overall) include:

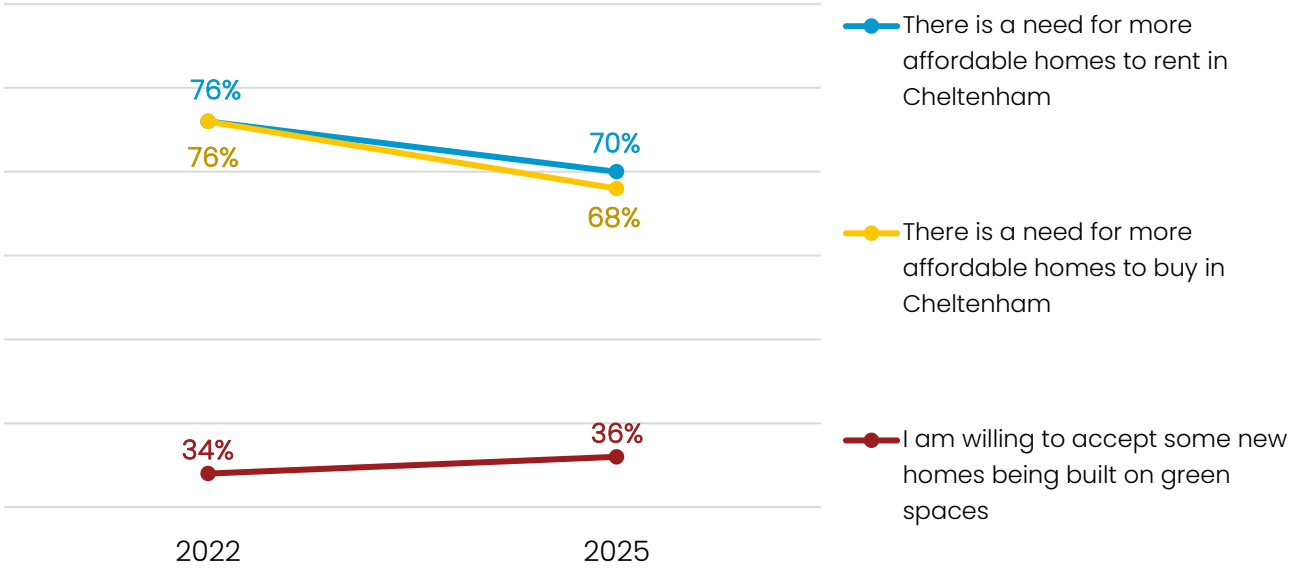
- Those aged 55+ (54%) vs those aged 16-54 (36%)
- Those of White ethnicity (45%) vs those from ethnic minority backgrounds (26%)
- Those living in South West Cheltenham (52%) vs those living in West Cheltenham (38%)

The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total agree only) alongside the results from the previous survey for comparison.

Agreement that there is a need for more affordable homes in Cheltenham has fallen since the previous survey; *there is a need for more affordable homes to rent in Cheltenham* (-6%) and *there is a need for more affordable homes to buy in Cheltenham* (-8%).

Agreement with the statement *I am willing to accept some new homes being built on green spaces* is consistent with the previous survey.

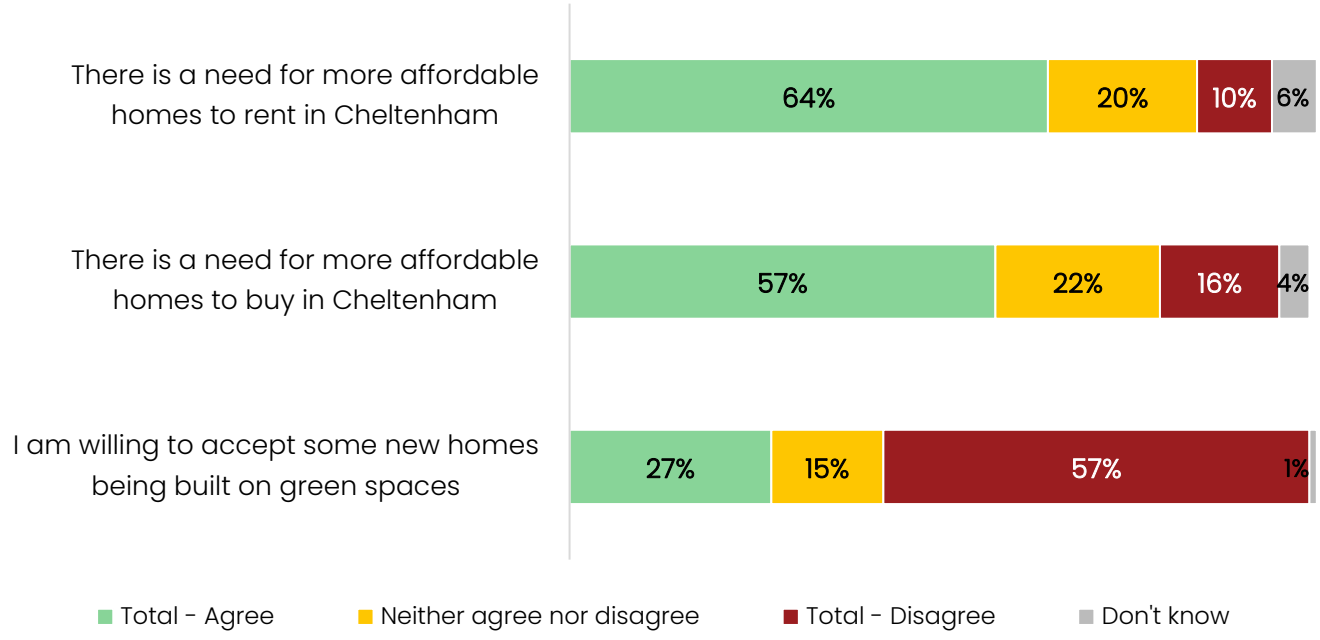
**Figure 18 – Agreement with statements about housing in Cheltenham compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100)



As seen with the representative survey, large proportions of online respondents agreed that *there is a need for more affordable homes to rent* (64%) and *buy in Cheltenham* (57%).

The majority of online respondents (57%) disagreed that they are *willing to accept some new homes being built on green spaces*.

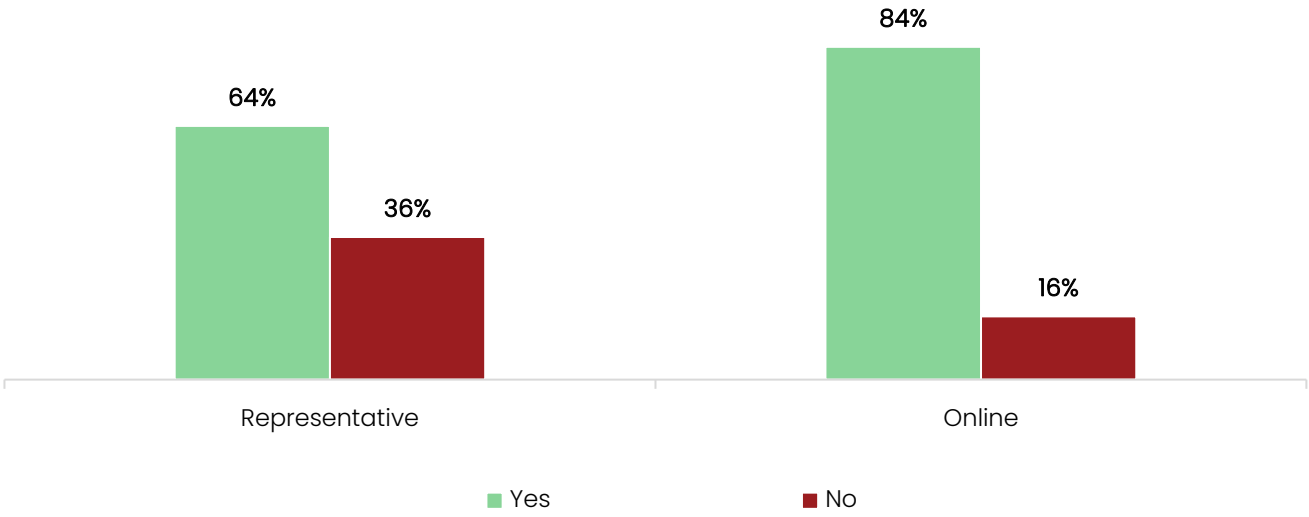
**Figure 19 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about housing in Cheltenham?**
Base: All representative online 2025 (426)



## The Golden Valley Development

Almost two thirds of representative respondents (64%) said they were aware of the Golden Valley Development. By comparison, a larger proportion of online respondents (84%) said they were aware of this.

**Figure 20 – Are you aware of the Golden Valley Development?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to say they are **aware** of the Golden Valley Development (64% overall) include:

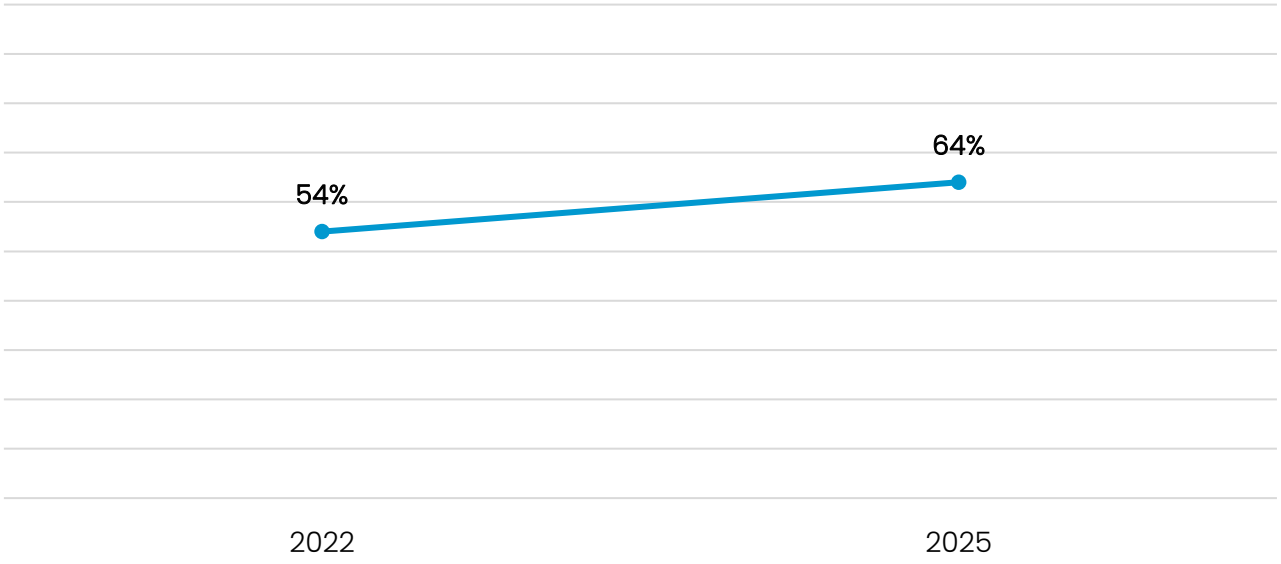
- Male respondents (69%) vs female respondents (59%)
- Those aged 55+ (72%) vs those aged 16-54 (58%)
- Those of White ethnicity (65%) vs those from ethnic minority backgrounds (48%)
- Those living in South West Cheltenham (73%) vs those living in Central (60%), West (63%) and North Cheltenham (59%)
- Those who do not have children and young people aged 0-18 living in their household (66%) vs those who do (59%)

The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total agree only) alongside the results from the previous survey for comparison.

It is positive to note that awareness of the Golden Valley Development has increased since the previous survey by 10%.

**Figure 21 – Awareness of the Golden Valley Development compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**

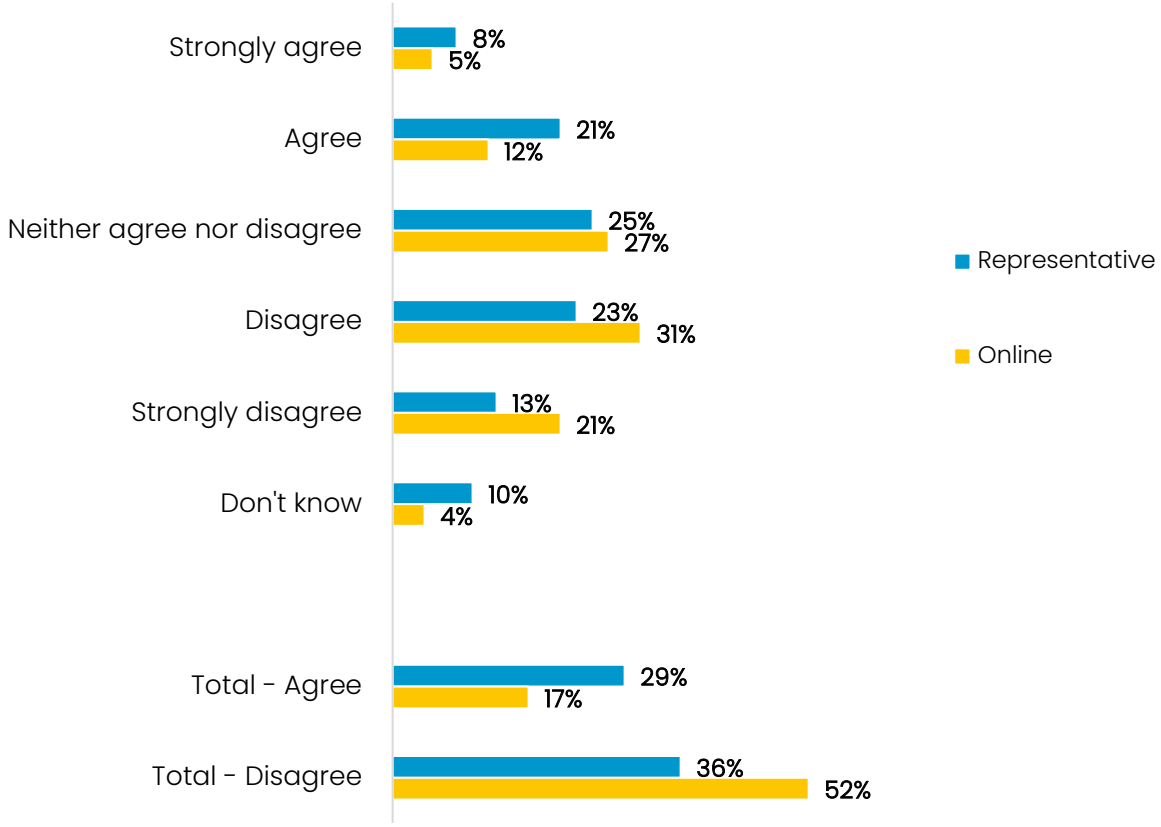
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100)



Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement *The Golden Valley Development is for people like me*. Across both surveys, respondents were more likely to *disagree* (36% representative and 52% online) than *agree* (29% representative and 17% online). Around a quarter of respondents from each survey said they *neither agree nor disagree* (25% representative and 27% online). Representative respondents were more likely to answer that they *don't know* (10%) when compared with online respondents (4%).

**Figure 22 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "The Golden Valley Development is for people like me"?**

Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to **agree** that the Golden Valley Development is for people like them (29% overall) include:

- Those aged 16-54 (33%) vs those aged 55+ (24%)
- Those from ethnic minority backgrounds (42%) vs those of White ethnicity (28%)

Subgroups more likely to **disagree** that the Golden Valley Development is for people like them (36% overall) include:

- Those aged 55+ (44%) vs those aged 16-54 (29%)
- Those of White ethnicity (37%) vs those from ethnic minority backgrounds (17%)
- Those who do not have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (39%) vs those who do (28%)

Those who disagreed that the Golden Valley Development is for people like them were asked why this was. The most common reasons provided amongst representative respondents was that they are *not interested in more housing* (26%) and that they *don't work in technology or cyber security* (22%).

For those who took part in the online survey, the most common reasons given were that they *don't work in technology or cyber security* (67%) and *don't want to work in technology or cyber security* (40%).

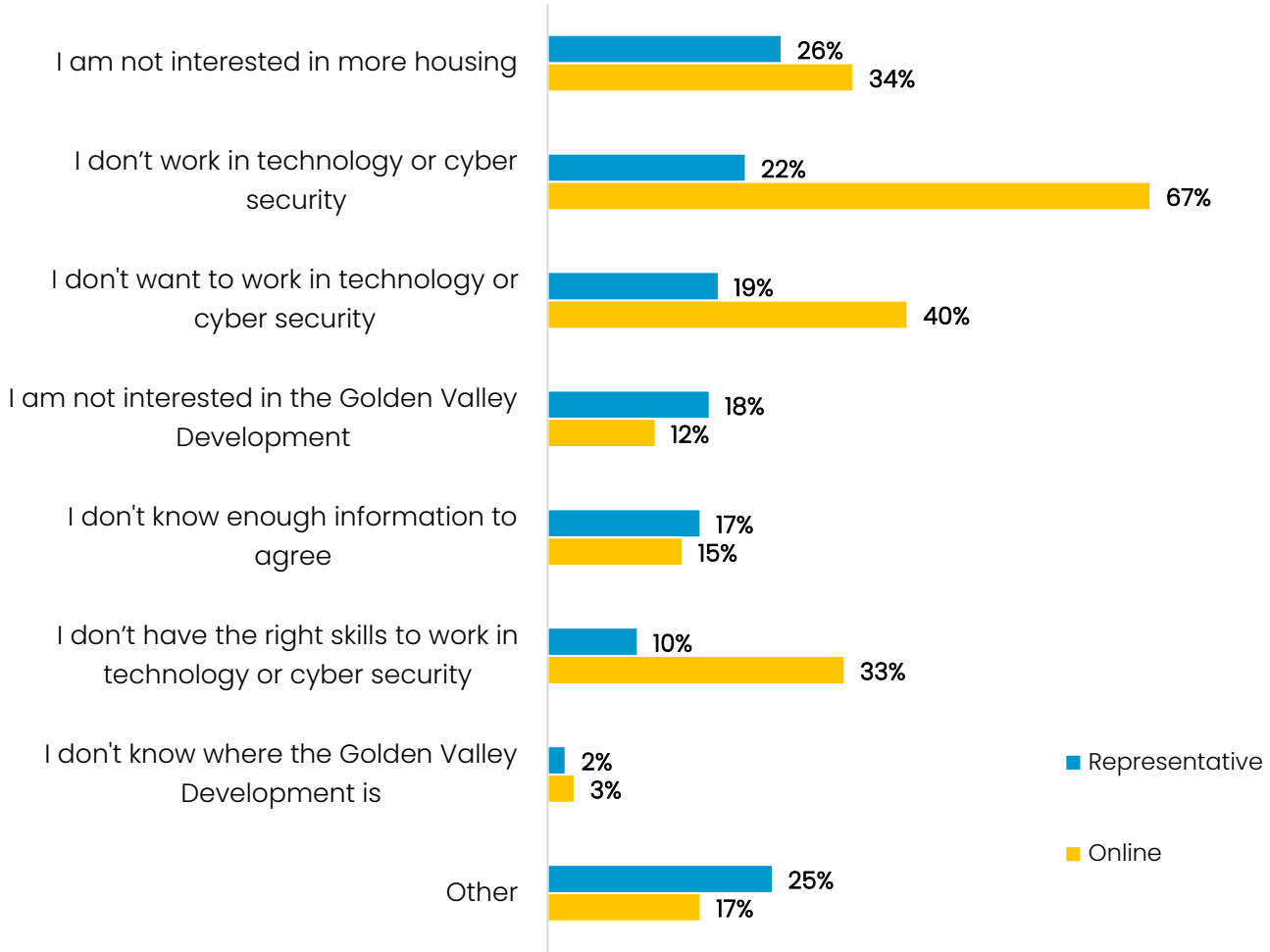
Representative respondents were more likely to say that they are *not interested in the Golden Valley Development* (18%) when compared with online respondents (12%).

The most common *other* responses provided by representative respondents (25%) include:

- Age/for younger people
- Retired/approaching retirement
- Doesn't affect me/won't go there

**Figure 23 – Why have you said that you disagree that the Golden Valley Development is for people like you?**

Base: Those who disagreed that the Golden Valley Development is for people like them – representative (393); online (222)



**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those living in West Cheltenham were more likely to say they are **not interested in more housing** (32%) when compared with those living in Central Cheltenham (17%).

Subgroups more likely to say they **don't work in technology or cyber security** (22% overall) include:

- Those aged 16-34 (37%) vs those aged 55+ (15%)
- Those living in Central Cheltenham (29%) vs those living in North Cheltenham (12%)

Those aged 35-54 were more likely to say they **don't want to work in technology or cyber security** (25%) when compared with those aged 55+ (15%).

Subgroups more likely to say they are **not interested in the Golden Valley Development** (18% overall) include:

- Female respondents (22%) vs male respondents (13%)
- Those aged 35-54 (29%) vs those aged 16-34 (9%) and 55+ (15%)

Subgroups more likely to say they **don't have the right skills to work in technology or cyber security** (10% overall) include:

- Those aged 16-54 (16%) vs those aged 55+ (5%)
- Those who have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (17%) vs those who do not (9%)
- Those who have a disability (18%) vs those who do not (9%)

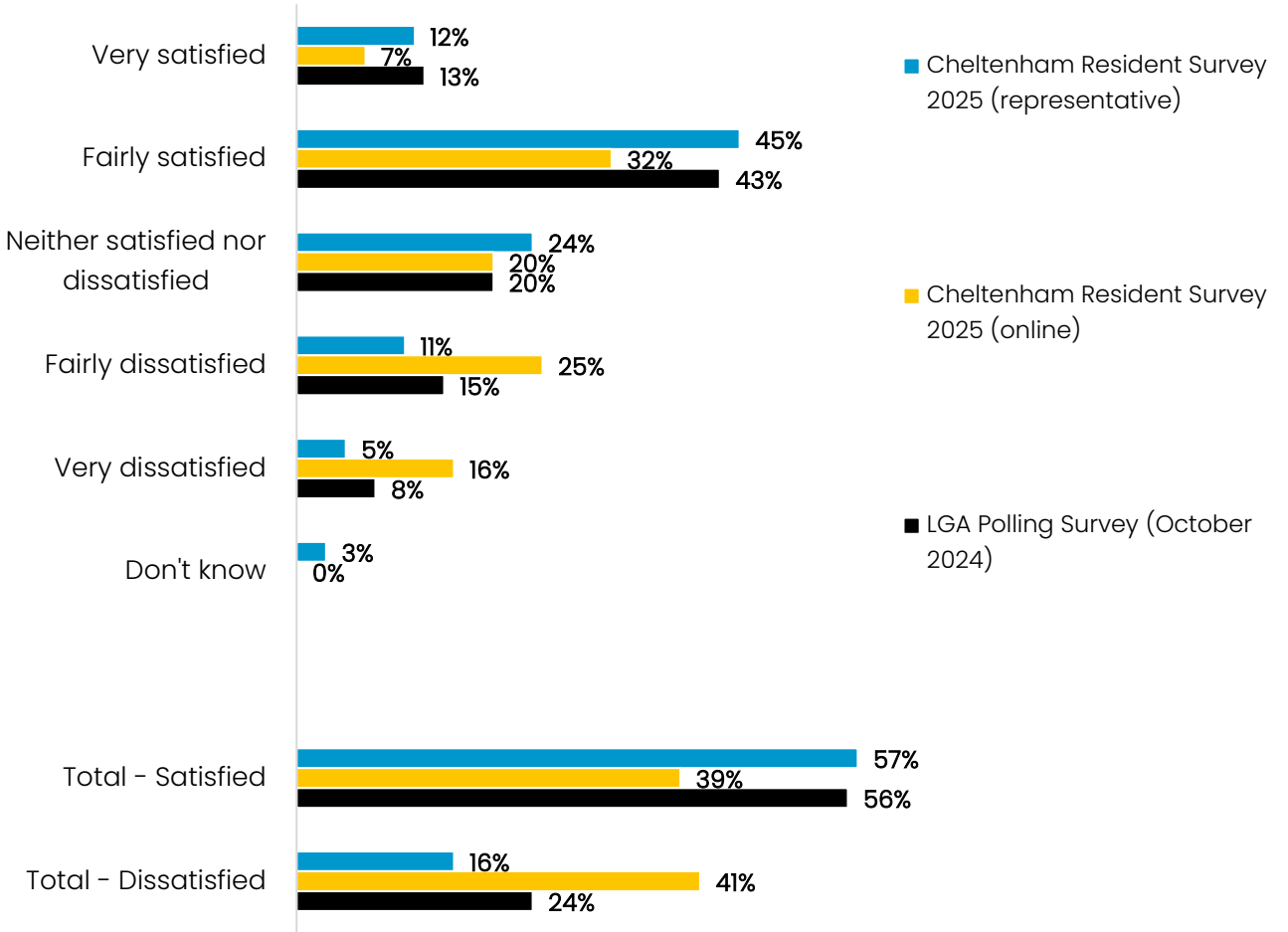
# Views on Cheltenham Borough Council

## How the Council runs things

Almost six in ten representative respondents (57%) are *satisfied* with the way the Council runs things, which is in line with the national figure (56%). A quarter of representative respondents (24%) said they are *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* and a smaller proportion (16%) are *dissatisfied.*

The responses of online respondents were split, with similar proportions indicating that they were *satisfied* (39%) or *dissatisfied* (41%) with the way the Council runs things. A further 20% of online respondents said they were *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.*

**Figure 24 – Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Cheltenham Borough Council runs things?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426); LGA (1,000)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

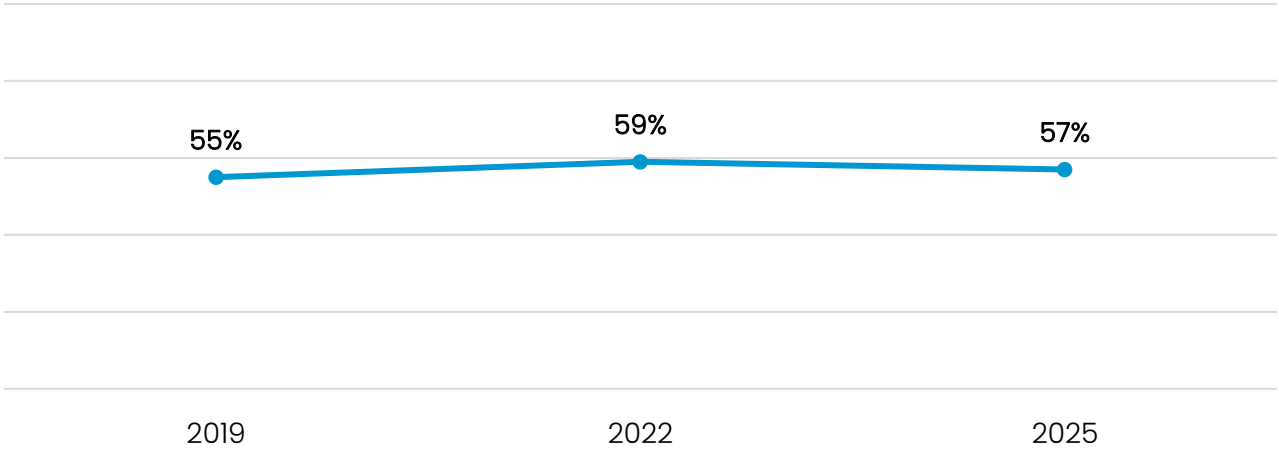
Those aged 35+ were more likely to say they are **dissatisfied** with the way the Council runs things (19%) when compared with those aged 16-34 (9%).

The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total satisfaction only) alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things has remained consistent with the previous surveys.

**Figure 25 – Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**

Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (1,555)



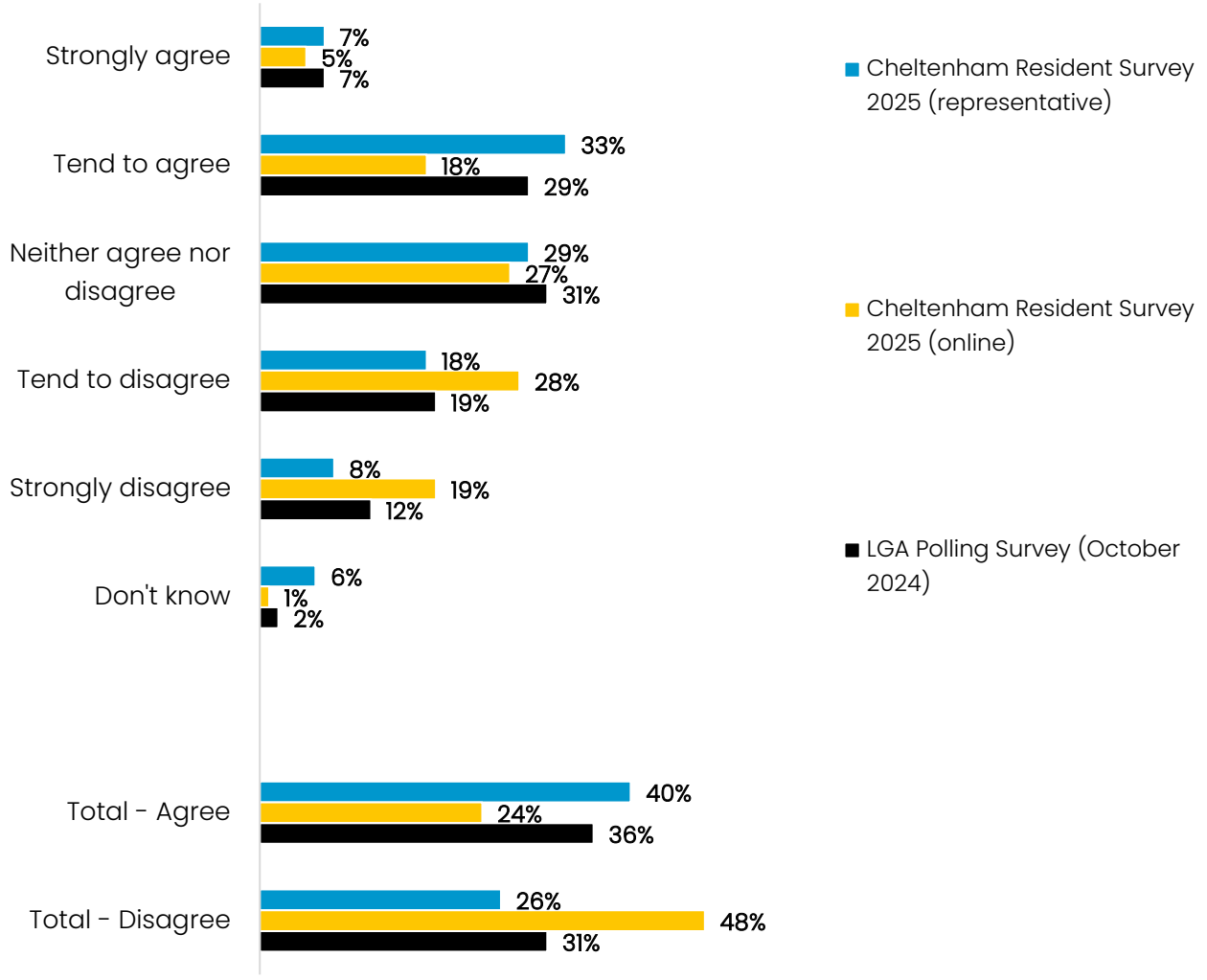
## Value for money

Four in ten representative respondents (40%) *agreed* that the Council provides value for money, which is above the national figure (36%). A quarter of representative respondents (26%) *disagreed* that the Council provides value for money, and a further 29% said they *neither agree nor disagree*.

Online respondents were twice as likely to *disagree* (48%) than *agree* (24%) that the Council provides value for money. Just over a quarter of online respondents (27%) said they *neither agree nor disagree*.

**Figure 26 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that Cheltenham Borough Council provides value for money?**

Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426); LGA (1,000)



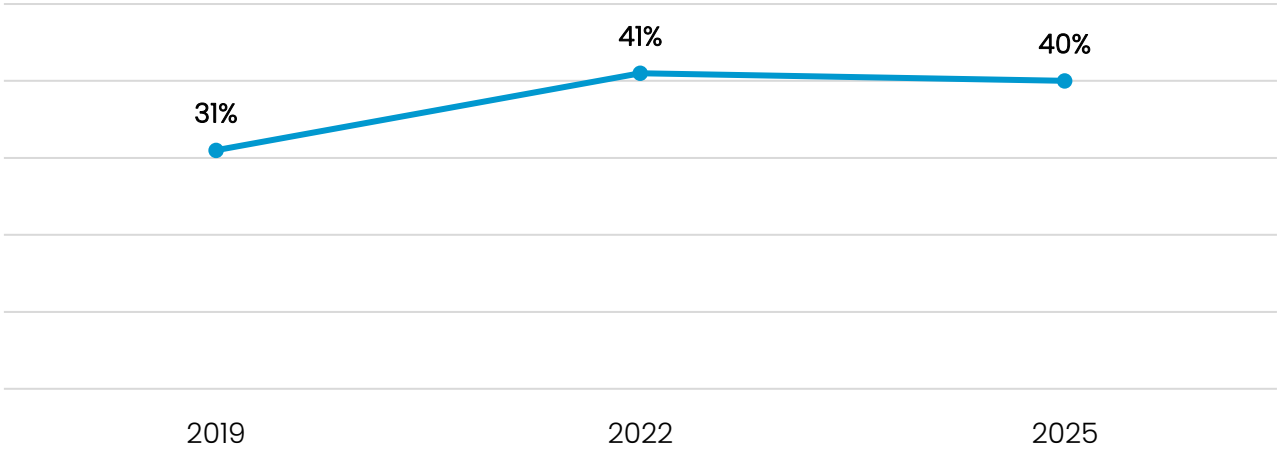

**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those aged 35+ were more likely to **disagree** that the Council provides value for money (28%) when compared with those aged 16-34 (19%).

The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total agree only) alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

Following an increase recorded between 2019 and 2022, overall agreement that the Council provides value for money has remained consistent with the previous survey.

**Figure 27 – Agreement that the Council provides value for money compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (1,546)

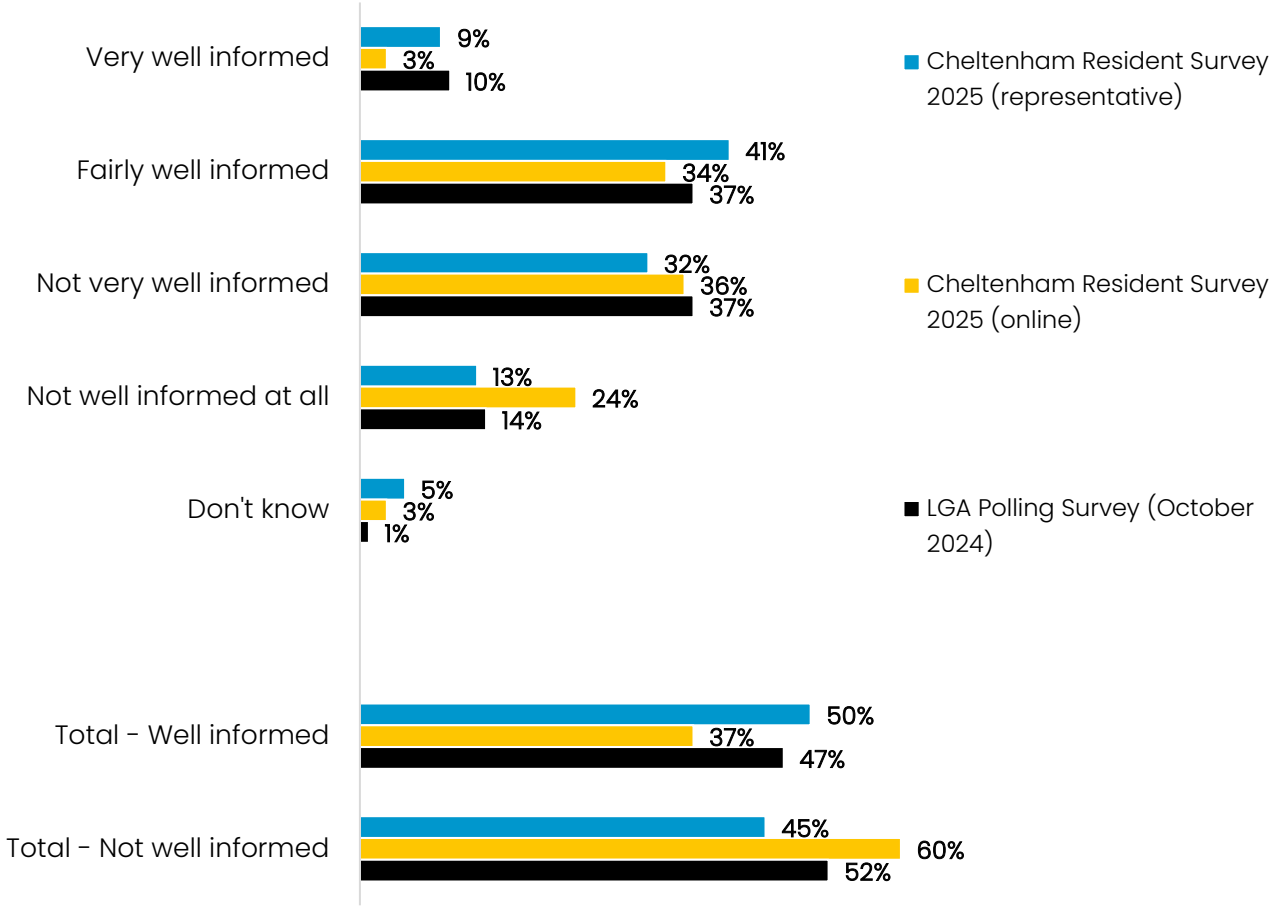


## Keeping residents informed

Half of representative respondents (50%) thought that the Council keeps residents *well informed* about the services and benefits it provides, which is slightly above the national figure (47%). However, just under half of representative respondents (45%) felt that residents were *not well informed*, which suggests that opinion on this matter is split amongst residents.

As seen previously, the results from the online survey were more negative than the representative survey. Almost four in ten online respondents (37%) thought that the Council keeps residents *well informed,* whilst a larger proportion (60%) thought that residents were *not well informed.*

**Figure 28 – Overall, how well informed do you think Cheltenham Borough Council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426); LGA (1,000)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

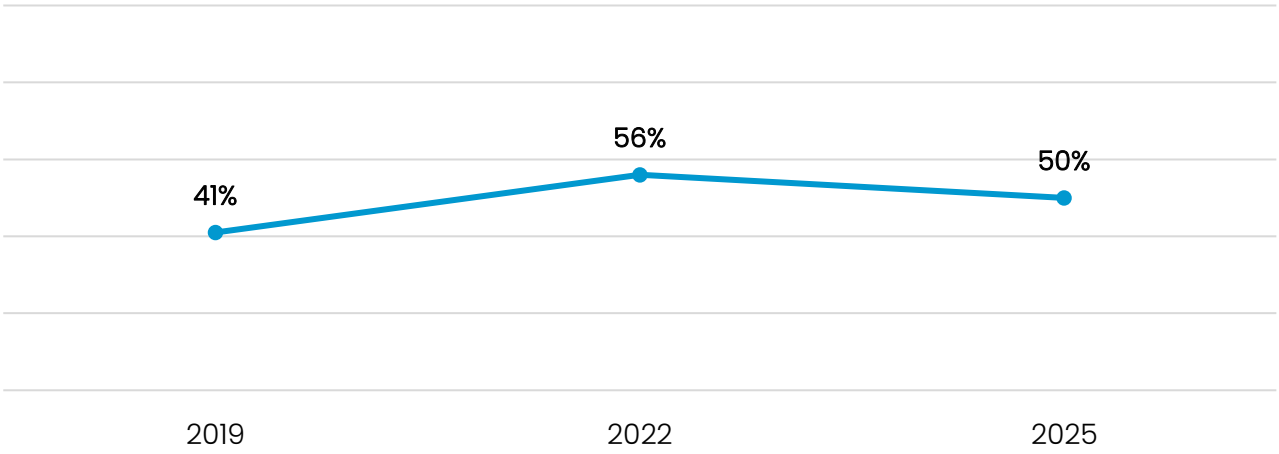
Subgroups more likely to say the Council keeps residents **well informed** (50% overall) include:

- Those aged 35+ (52%) vs those aged 16-34 (45%)
- Those who do not have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (52%) vs those who do (43%)

The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total satisfaction only) alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

Whilst the proportion of those who think that the Council keeps residents well informed has decreased since the previous survey (-6%), this figure is still higher than 2019.

**Figure 29 – Opinion that the Council keeps residents well informed compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (1,563)



## Council tax

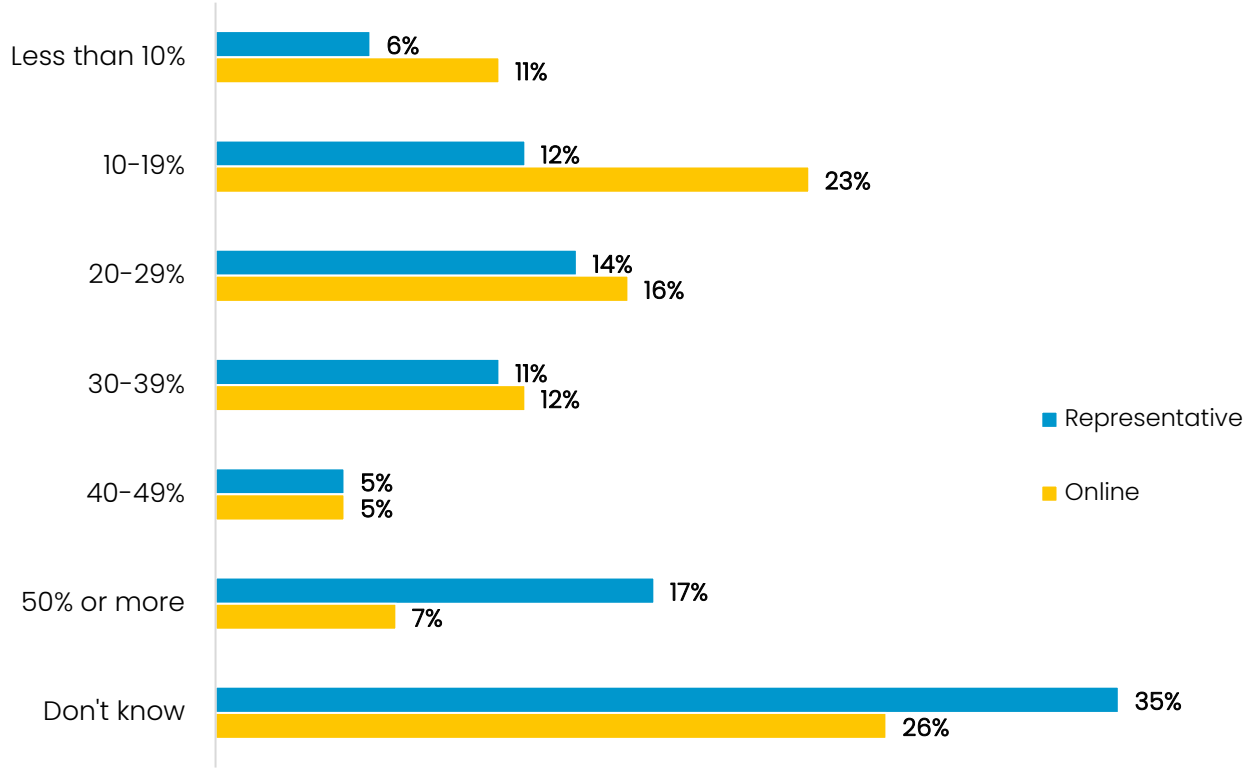
Approximately 11% of Cheltenham residents' council tax is allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council. To gauge awareness of this, respondents were asked what percentage of their council tax they believed goes to the Council.

Online respondents were more likely to correctly identify that *10-19%* of their council tax goes to the Council (23%) when compared with representative respondents (12%).

Almost half of representative respondents (47%) and four in ten online respondents (40%) believed that 20% or more of their council tax goes to the Council.

Representative respondents were more likely to say they *don't know* (35%) when compared with online respondents (26%).

**Figure 30 – What percentage of your council tax do you think goes to Cheltenham Borough Council?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)



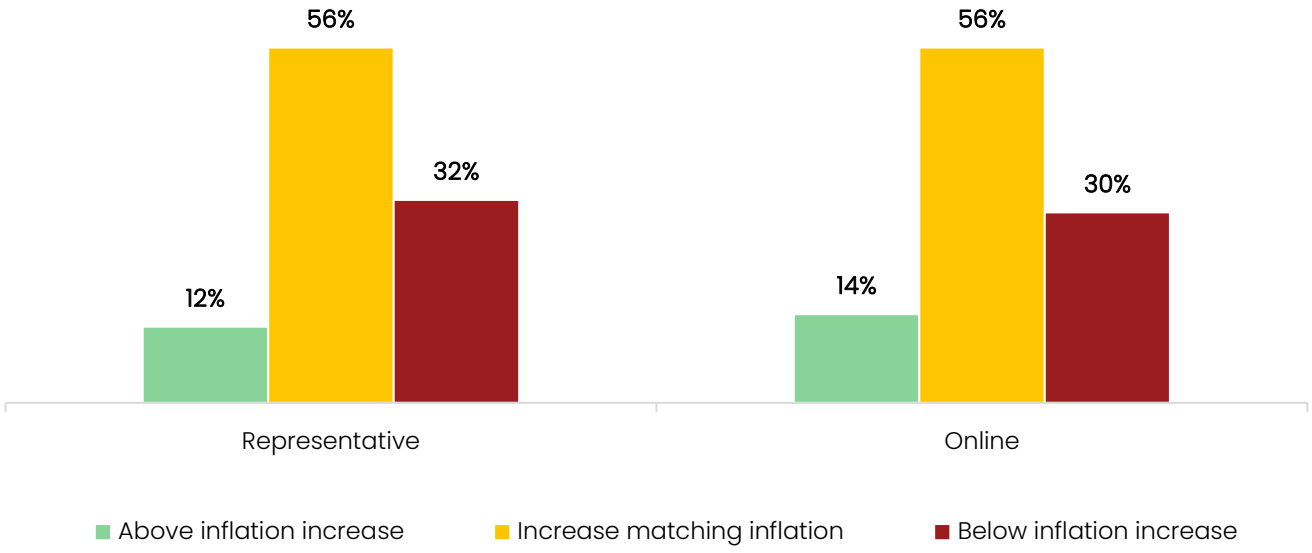

**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those aged 35+ were more likely to think that **20% or more** of their council tax goes to Cheltenham Borough Council (50%) when compared with those aged 16-34 (38%). By contrast, those aged 16-34 were more likely to say they **don't know** (45%) when compared with those aged 35+ (31%).

Due to the current unprecedented economic times, it is likely that Cheltenham Borough Council will need to raise council tax to continue to provide valued services and investment across the borough. Respondents were asked at what level council tax should be raised in relation to the rate of inflation at the time of the survey, which was 3.4%.

Respondents across both surveys were most likely to believe that council tax should be increased to *match inflation* (both at 56%). Around three in ten respondents across both surveys felt that a council tax increase should be *below inflation* (32% representative and 30% online), and smaller proportions thought an increase should be *above inflation* (12% representative and 14% online).

**Figure 31 – At what level should council tax be raised?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to say that council tax should be increased **above inflation** (12% overall) include:

- Male respondents (15%) vs female respondents (9%)
- Those aged 55+ (15%) vs those aged 16-54 (10%)

Subgroups more likely to say that council tax should be increased **below inflation** (32% overall) include:

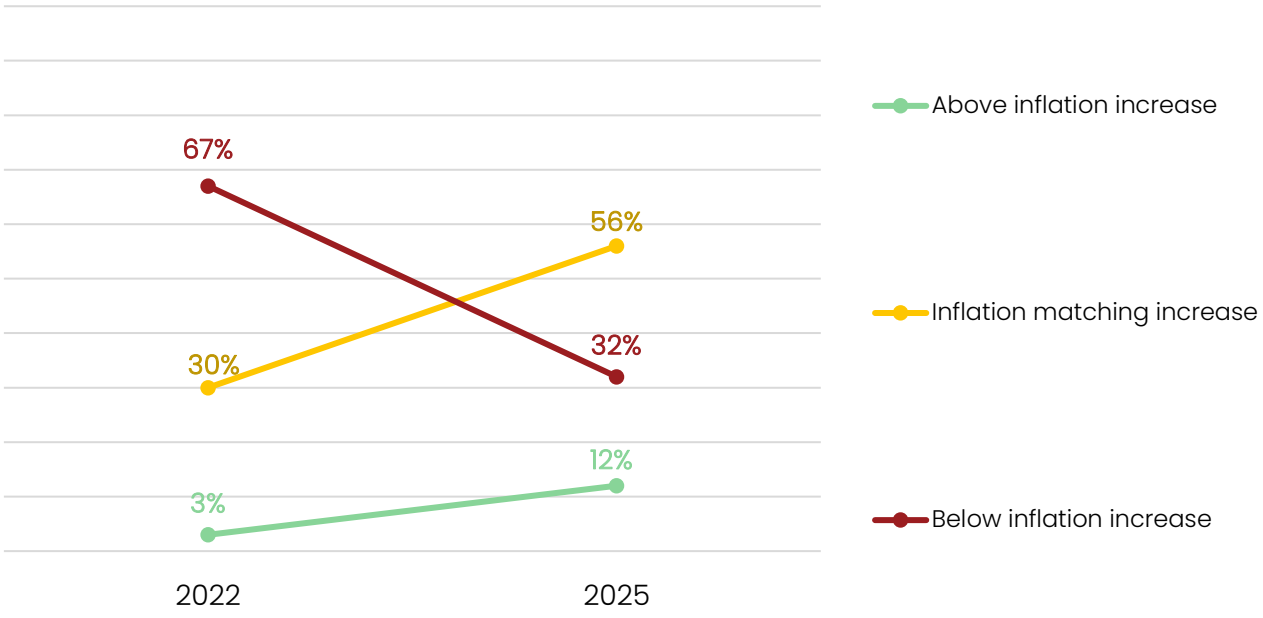
- Those aged 35-54 (42%) vs those aged 16-34 (30%) and 55+ (25%)
- Those living in Central (38%) and West Cheltenham (36%) vs those living in South East Cheltenham (22%)
- Those who have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household (39%) vs those who do not (29%)

The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question alongside the results from the previous survey for comparison.

Whilst respondents were most likely to say they would prefer a *below inflation increase* in the 2022 survey, the proportion of respondents who selected this option more than halved in this year's survey (-35%). This may be because the rate of inflation at the time of the 2022 survey was much higher at 10.1% when compared with this year's survey at 3.4%.

By contrast, larger proportions of respondents selected *inflation matching increase* (+26%) and *above inflation increase* (+9%) when compared with the previous survey.

**Figure 32 – Level that an increase in council tax should be raised compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100)

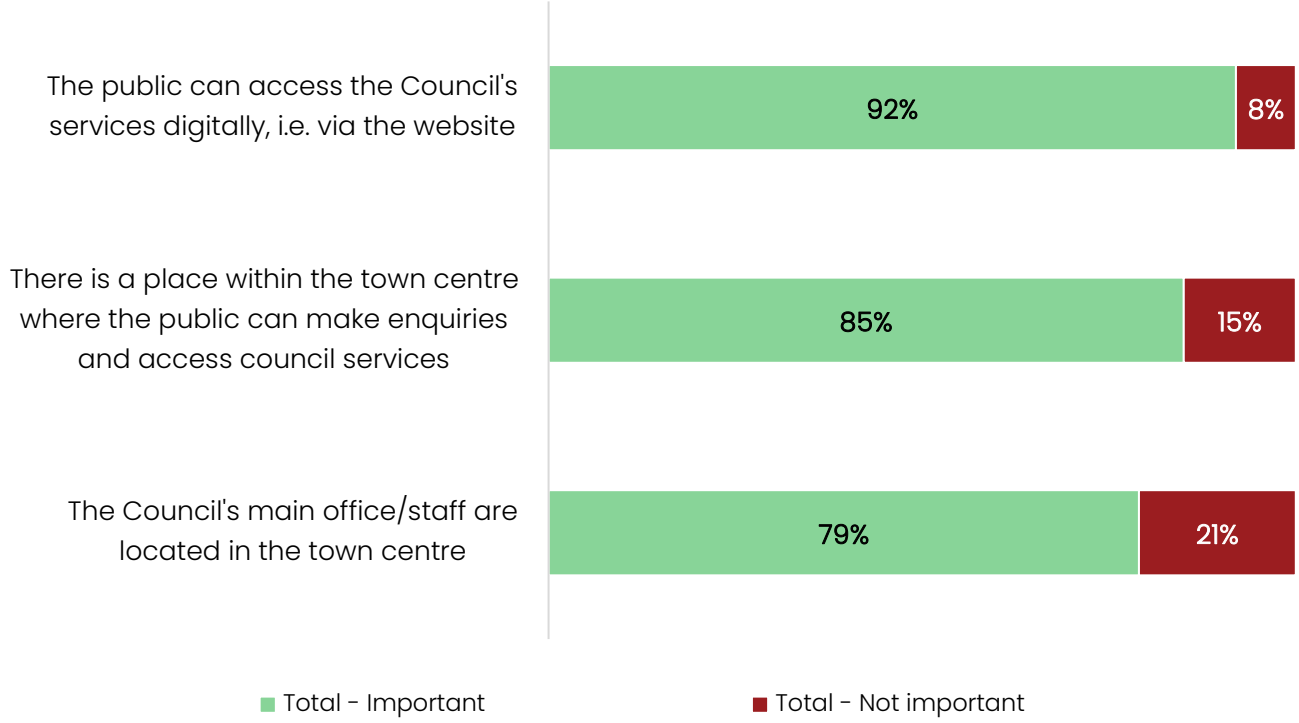


## The Council's presence

When considering the importance of the Council's presence both in the town centre and digitally, representative respondents were most likely to believe that a digital presence was most important, with nine in ten (92%) indicating that it is important that *the public can access the Council's services digitally.* A further 85% of representative respondents felt it was important that *there is a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services.*

Although still very high at 79%, representative respondents were least likely to believe it was important that *the Council's main office/staff are located in the town centre*, and a fifth (21%) felt that this was not important.

**Figure 33 – How important is it to you that...?**
Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those aged 16-54 were more likely to say it is **important** that **the public can access the Council's services digitally** (95%) when compared with those aged 55+ (88%).

Subgroups more likely to say it is **not important** that **the public can access the Council's services digitally** (8% overall) include:

- Those aged 65+ (17%) vs those aged 16-64 (5%)
- Those who have a disability (12%) vs those who do not (7%)

**Subgroup analysis continued (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to say it is **important** that **there is a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services** (85% overall) include:

- Female respondents (89%) vs male respondents (81%)
- Those aged 55+ (89%) vs those aged 16-54 (83%)
- Those who have a disability (91%) vs those who do not (84%)

Subgroups more likely to say it is **important** that **the Council's main office/staff are located in the town centre** (79% overall) include:

- Female respondents (83%) vs male respondents (75%)
- Those aged 55+ (81%) vs those aged 35-54 (75%)

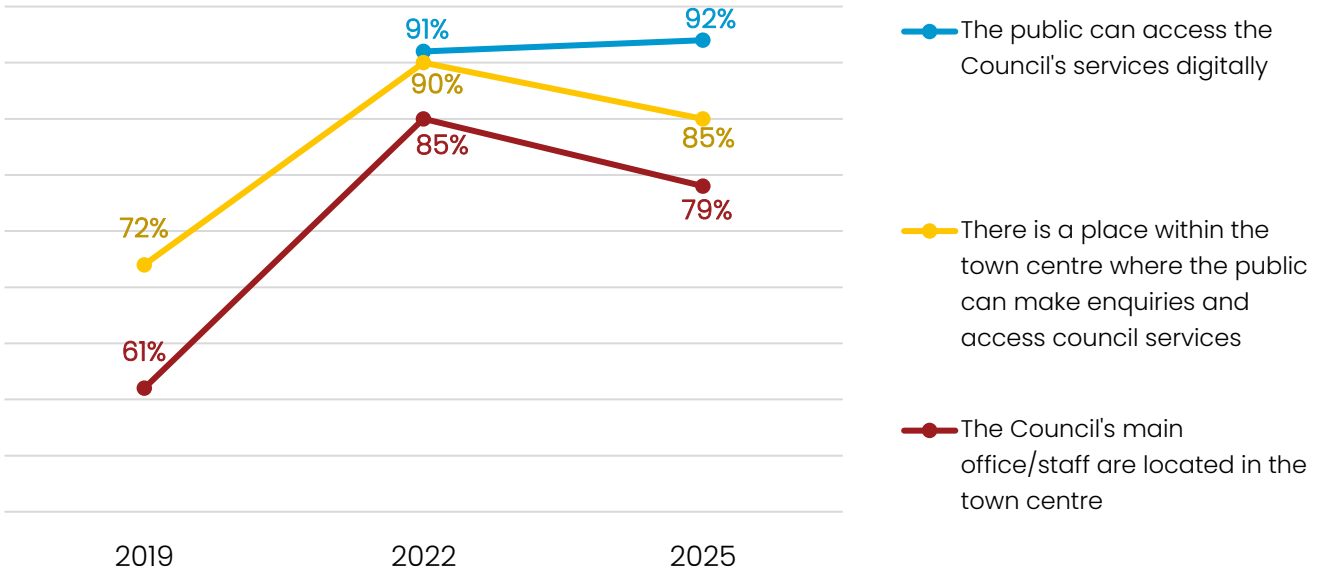
The chart below presents the results of the representative survey to this question (total important) alongside the results from the previous surveys for comparison.

When compared with the previous survey, the proportion of respondents who felt it was important that *the public can access the Council's services digitally* remained consistently high.

Following increases between the 2019 and 2022 surveys, this year's survey recorded decreases in the proportion of representative respondents who felt it was important that *there is a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services* (-5%) and that *the Council's main office/staff are located in the town centre* (-6%). Please note that the 2019 survey did not include *the public can access the Council's services digitally*.

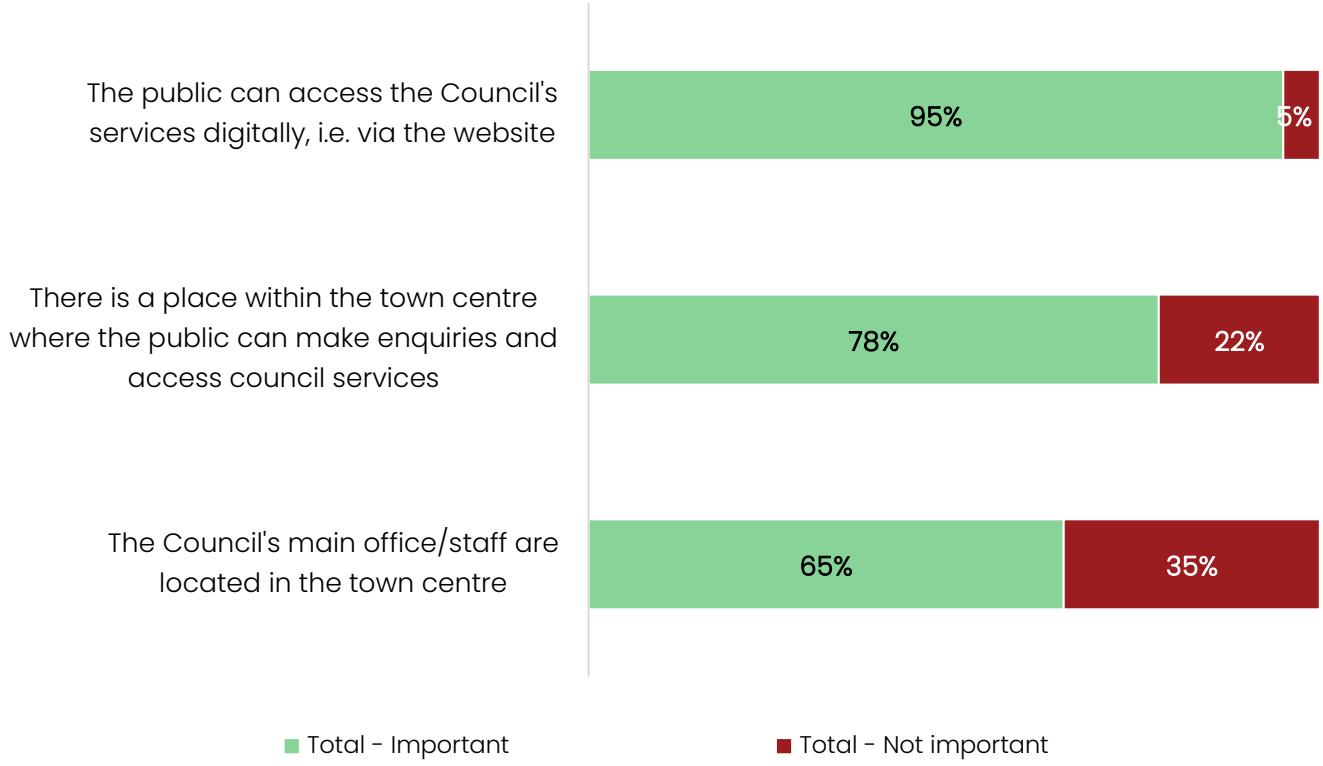
**Figure 34 – Importance of the Council's presence compared with previous survey results (representative survey only)**

Base: All representative respondents 2025 (1,100); 2022 (1,100); 2019 (1,534)



Nearly all online respondents (95%) felt it was important that *the public can access the Council's services digitally.* Eight in ten online respondents (78%) thought it was important that *there is a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services,* and two thirds (65%) believed it was important that *the Council's main office/staff are located in the town centre.*

**Figure 35 – How important is it to you that…?**
Base: All representative online 2025 (426)

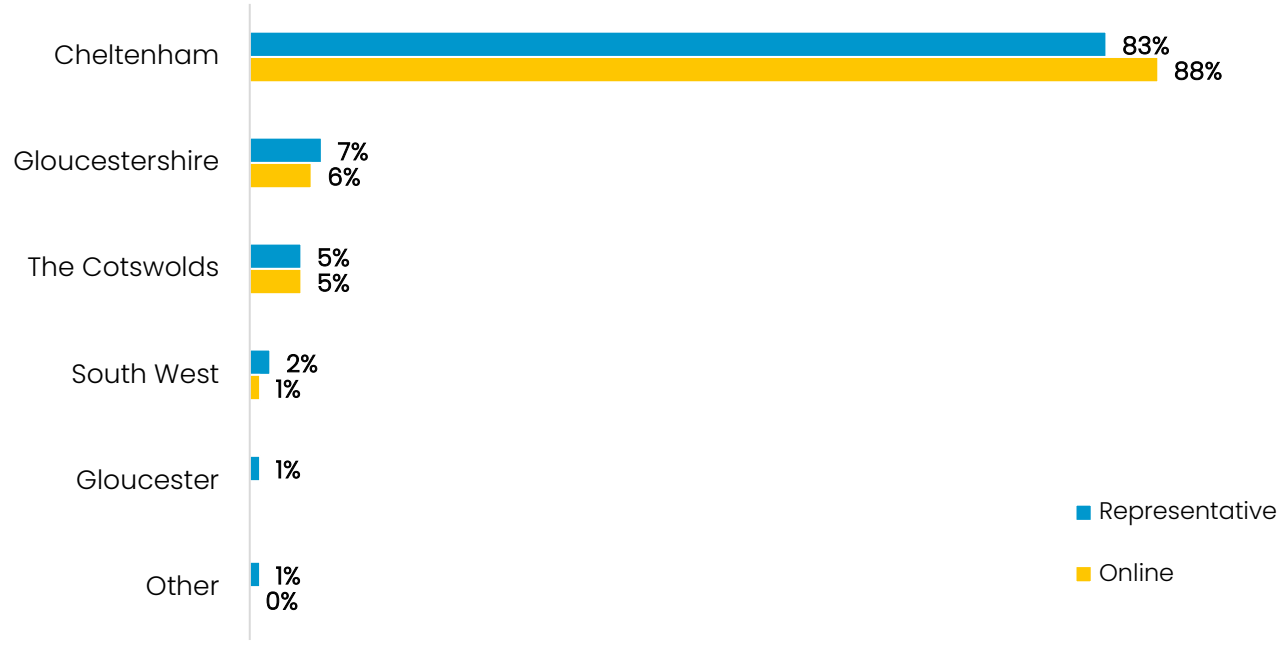


# Local representation

## Sense of place

When asked where they would say they lived if they were talking to someone from elsewhere in the UK, the most common response across both surveys was *Cheltenham* (83% representative and 88% online). This was followed by much smaller proportions who said *Gloucestershire* (7% representative and 6% online), *the Cotswolds* (both at 5%) and the *South West* (2% representative and 1% online).

**Figure 36 – If you were talking to someone from elsewhere in the UK, where would you say you live?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those aged 16-34 were more likely to indicate that they would say they live in **the Cotswolds** (7%) when compared with those aged 35-54 (3%).

Those living in South West and South East Cheltenham were more likely to indicate that they would say they live in the **South West** (4% and 3% respectively) when compared with those living in North Cheltenham (0 respondents).

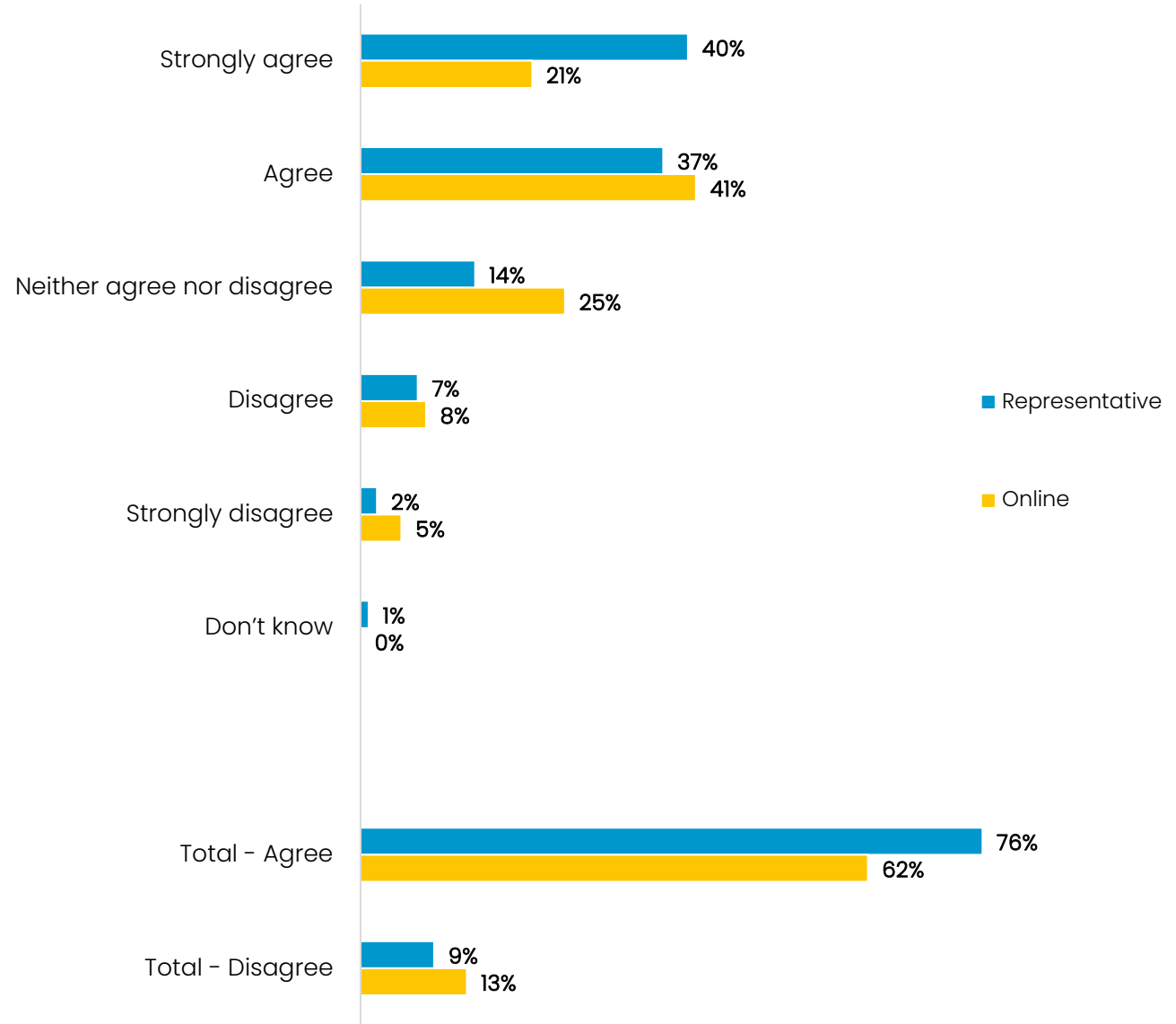
## Sense of belonging

Three quarters of representative respondents (76%) *agreed* with the statement *I feel a sense of belonging to my local area*, whilst only 9% of representative respondents *disagreed.* A further 14% said that they *neither agree nor disagree.*

Online respondents were also more likely to *agree* with this statement (62%) than *disagree* (13%). A quarter of online respondents (25%) said they *neither agree nor disagree.*

**Figure 37 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I feel a sense of belonging to my local area"?**

Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)



**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Subgroups more likely to **agree** that they feel a sense of belonging to their local area (76% overall) include:

- Those aged 55+ (81%) vs those aged 16-54 (73%)
- Those living in South East Cheltenham (82%) vs those living in Central (72%) and North Cheltenham (74%)
- Those who do not have a disability (78%) vs those who do (68%)

Subgroups more likely to **disagree** that they feel a sense of belonging to their local area (9% overall) include:

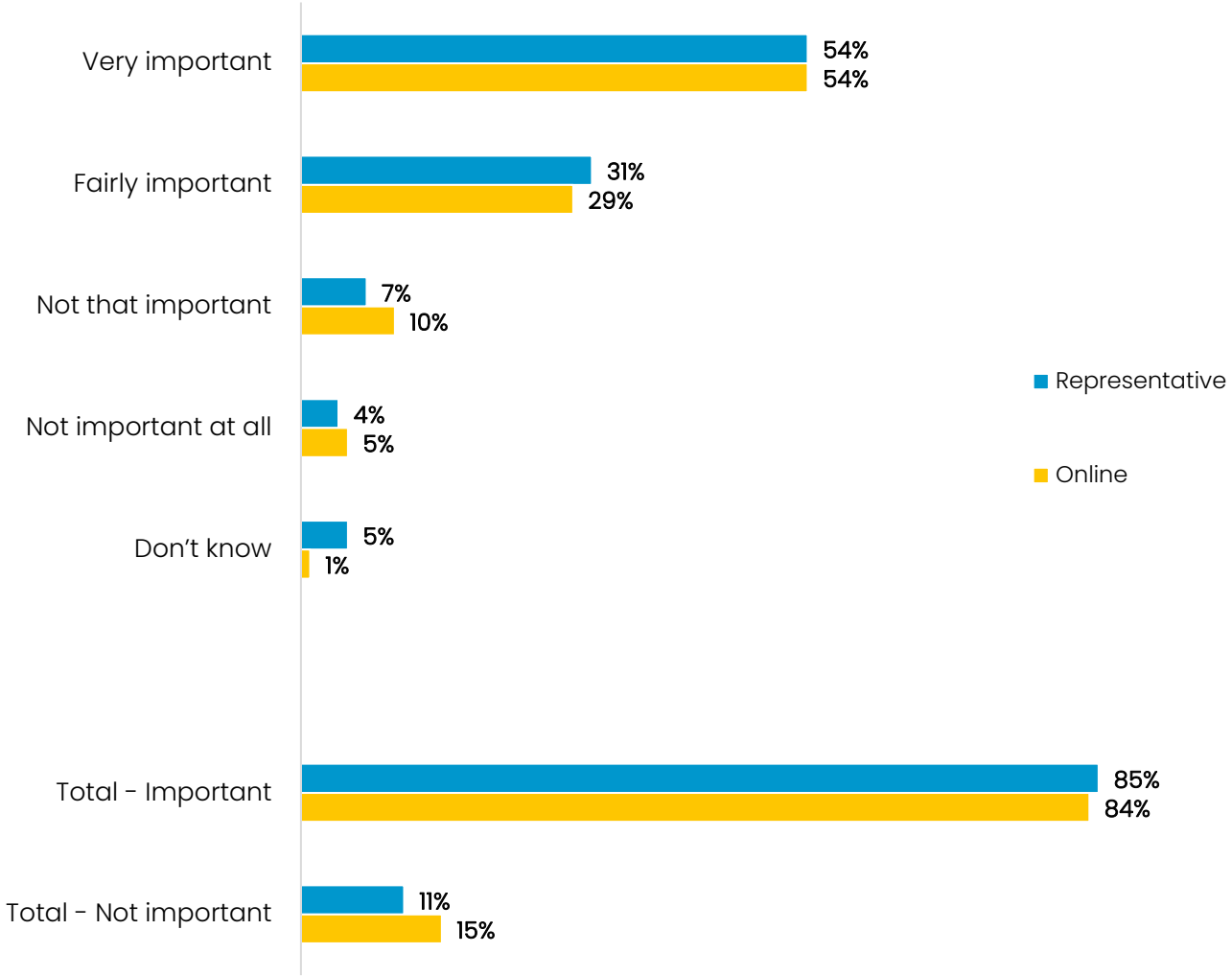
- Those aged 16-34 (11%) vs those aged 55+ (6%)
- Those living in Central Cheltenham (14%) vs those living in West (8%) and South East Cheltenham (5%)

## Importance of local representation

Over eight in ten respondents across both surveys (85% representative and 84% online) indicated that it was *important* to them that they are represented by a local council and local councillors. Online respondents were slightly more likely to feel that this was *not important* (15%) when compared with representative respondents (11%).

**Figure 38 – How important is it to you that you are represented by a local council and local councillors?**

Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)




**Subgroup analysis (representative survey)**

Those aged 25+ were more likely to say it is **important** that they are represented by a local council and local councillors (86%) when compared with those aged 16-24 (71%). Conversely, those aged 16-24 were more likely to say that they **don't know** (16%) when compared with those aged 25+ (3%).

# Survey respondent profile

**Figures 39 to 45** present the profile of those who took part in the representative and online surveys.

Compared with the representative survey which set quotas on gender, age and area of Cheltenham, certain groups were over-represented in the self-selecting online survey. This includes female residents (shown in **Figure 39**), those aged 45-74 (shown in **Figure 40**), and those living in Central and South East Cheltenham (shown in **Figure 42**).

**Figure 39 – Gender (quotas set for representative survey)**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)

| Gender | Representative survey | Online survey |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 48% | 38% |
| Female | 52% | 59% |
| I prefer to self-describe | - | - |
| Prefer not to say | 1% | 3% |

**Figure 40 – Age (quotas set for representative survey)**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)

| Age | Representative survey | Online survey |
|---|---|---|
| 16-18 | 4% | - |
| 19-24 | 8% | 0% |
| 25-34 | 16% | 8% |
| 35-44 | 16% | 10% |
| 45-54 | 15% | 19% |
| 55-64 | 15% | 24% |
| 65-74 | 12% | 25% |
| 75+ | 13% | 12% |
| Prefer not to say | 1% | 1% |

**Figure 41 – Ward**

Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)

| Ward | Representative survey | Online survey |
|---|---|---|
| All Saints | 6% | 11% |
| Battledown | 3% | 6% |
| Benhall, the Reddings & Fiddler's Green | 7% | 4% |
| Charlton Kings | 7% | 8% |
| Charlton Park | 3% | 3% |
| College | 4% | 5% |
| Hesters Way | 8% | 3% |
| Lansdown | 4% | 4% |
| Leckhampton | 6% | 8% |
| Oakley | 4% | 2% |
| Park | 4% | 9% |
| Pittville | 6% | 6% |
| Prestbury | 6% | 5% |
| Springbank | 6% | 2% |
| St Mark's | 4% | 6% |
| St Paul's | 6% | 4% |
| St Peter's | 4% | 3% |
| Swindon Village | 4% | 2% |
| Up Hatherley | 5% | 4% |
| Warden Hill | 4% | 2% |
| Don't know | - | 0% |
| Prefer not to say | 1% | 3% |

**Figure 42 – Area of Cheltenham based on ward (quotas set for representative survey)**
Base: Those who provided their postcode or ward – representative (1,088); online (413)

| Area of Cheltenham | Representative survey | Online survey |
|---|---|---|
| Central | 20% | 24% |
| West | 22% | 15% |
| North | 19% | 16% |
| South West | 19% | 19% |
| South East | 19% | 26% |

**Figure 43 – Ethnicity**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)

| Ethnicity | Representative survey | Online survey |
|---|---|---|
| White/White British | 94% | 94% |
| Asian/Asian British | 4% | 1% |
| Black/Black British | 1% | - |
| Mixed or multiple ethnic background | - | 0% |
| Other ethnic group | 1% | 1% |
| Prefer not to say | - | 4% |

**Figure 44 – Do any children or young people aged 0-18 live in your household?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)

| Children or young people living in household | Representative survey | Online survey |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 29% | 23% |
| No | 70% | 75% |
| Prefer not to say | 1% | 3% |

**Figure 45 – Do you have a disability?**
Base: All representative respondents (1,100); online (426)

| Disability | Representative survey | Online survey |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 17% | 13% |
| No | 82% | 82% |
| Prefer not to say | 1% | 5% |

# Conclusions and recommendations

The following conclusions have been reached by Enventure Research, an independent research agency, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Council.

**Cheltenham Borough Council is performing consistently with or above the national average on comparable measures**

The results from the representative survey compare favourably with the results from the most recent LGA Polling Survey conducted in October 2024. Satisfaction with the local area and agreement that the Council provides value for money is higher than that recorded in the national survey, whilst satisfaction with the way the Council runs things and agreement that the Council keeps residents well informed is consistent with the national survey.

**Some resident perceptions have decreased since the 2022 survey, but are generally consistent with those recorded in 2019**

Satisfaction on several measures relating to the Council and the local area have decreased since the 2022 Resident Survey. Satisfaction with the local area as a place to live has decreased since 2022, but is in line with that recorded in 2019.

Agreement with all statements about Cheltenham as a place to live have decreased since the previous survey, with the exception of agreement that living in Cheltenham offers the opportunity to grow careers, which has increased since 2022. However, it should be noted that the levels of agreement are generally similar to or higher than those recorded in 2019.

A decrease in satisfaction with most amenities in Cheltenham town centre can also be seen, most notably with the range of shops available, and a greater proportion feel their local area has got worse over the past year. A smaller proportion also agreed that the Council keeps residents well informed about the services and benefits it provides in this year's survey.

**Online survey respondents tend to hold more negative views than representative survey respondents with regard to the local area and Cheltenham Borough Council**

Reported satisfaction relating to the local area tended to be lower for online respondents when compared with those representative respondents. For example, online respondents were less likely to be satisfied with the local area as a place to live, to agree with statements about Cheltenham as a place to live, and to be satisfied with amenities in Cheltenham town centre, and were more likely to feel their local area has worsened over the past year.

Online respondents' views were also noticeably more negative towards the Council than representative respondents' views, with smaller proportions satisfied with the way the Council runs things, and agreeing that it provides value for money or that it keeps residents well informed.

**Many respondents would like to see improvements in the general upkeep, maintenance and cleanliness of Cheltenham, including road and pavement maintenance**

As seen in the previous Resident Survey, maintenance of roads and pavements was the most common theme arising in the responses from representative survey respondents when asked

what one change local councils could make to improve their experience as a Cheltenham resident. This was also the second most common theme arising in online respondents. Suggestions relating to a cleaner and better maintained local area with less litter were also common in both surveys.

Whilst the majority of representative respondents said they were satisfied with the general appearance and cleanliness of Cheltenham, a quarter were dissatisfied with these aspects, and dissatisfaction was higher in online respondents. Dissatisfaction with cleanliness and the appearance of Cheltenham was also more likely in those aged 55+.

Since general upkeep, maintenance and cleanliness are of high concern, Cheltenham Borough Council could focus on improvements in these areas to help increase residents' satisfaction with their local environment. Given that Gloucestershire County Council is responsible for highways, it may also be beneficial to remind residents that road maintenance and fixing potholes falls outside the remit of Cheltenham Borough Council, and to share these findings with the County Council.

**Perceptions of living in Cheltenham are generally positive, which is consistent with 2022, but there is room for improvement around opportunities for young people and growing careers**

The majority of representative respondents agreed that they would recommend Cheltenham as a place to live, that it has a vibrant culture and is an exciting place to live, and that it has a positive future. Smaller proportions agreed that Cheltenham is a place that offers opportunity for young people, and agreement has decreased since 2022. Agreement that living in Cheltenham provides the opportunity to grow a career is also lower, but has increased since the previous survey.

A similar pattern with the statements can be seen in online respondents, with agreement that Cheltenham offers opportunities for young people and to grow a career being lowest. It is suggested, therefore, that further development in these areas would help to improve the Cheltenham resident experience.

**General satisfaction with town centre amenities is high, but perceptions of Cheltenham in the evening are less positive than during the daytime**

Large proportions of respondents across both surveys were satisfied with events, safety during the day, and Cheltenham town centre as a place to visit in the daytime. However, satisfaction with the town centre as a place to visit in the evening is more mixed. Satisfaction with safety after dark was lowest across both surveys, and online respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with this.

Although satisfaction with the town centre as a place to visit in the evening has increased significantly since 2019, it should be noted that this question has previously been asked in a different way, referring instead to Cheltenham as a place to visit after dark.

Younger residents and those with children or young people living in their household were more likely to be satisfied with Cheltenham town centre as a place to visit in the evening. Satisfaction with safety after dark was more common amongst male respondents, younger respondents, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those who do not have a disability.

Considering these findings, efforts could be made to improve the appeal and perceived safety of Cheltenham town centre during the evening, with particular focus on meeting the needs of those groups who feel less satisfied, to foster a more welcoming town centre evening environment.

**Satisfaction with the range of shops in Cheltenham continues to fall, and residents would like to see fewer closed shops and a greater variety of independent and big name retailers**

Satisfaction with the range of shops available in Cheltenham has continued on a downward trend since 2019, falling to less than half in representative respondents and just over a third in online respondents. Of those who were dissatisfied, the most common reasons provided by both representative and online respondents were that there were too many closed shops, not enough variety of shops, and that they would like to see a greater range of independent shops.

To address the continued decline in satisfaction, it is recommended that efforts are made to engage with and support a range of retailers, helping to ensure a diverse and balanced high street offering to meet residents' needs which could increase footfall in the town.

**The majority of residents have already made behavioural changes to help tackle climate change, but some could be encouraged to do more**

When asked whether they have made any changes in the last three years specifically to tackle climate change, the most common response across both surveys was reusing and recycling more or producing less waste. Other frequently suggested actions included walking, cycling, using public transport more or using a car less, and minimising energy use at home.

Online respondents were more likely to have undertaken all listed actions related to tackling climate change, and representative respondents were significantly more likely to say they had not taken any actions. However, it should be borne in mind that this question was asked without prompting in the representative survey, whereas online respondents were provided with a list of possible changes to choose from when completing the survey.

Younger residents aged under 35 were more likely to have taken several climate-focused actions, as were those who have children or young people living in their household.

Considering the proportion of representative survey respondents who had not taken any action, there could be more promotion of changes that residents can implement to help support efforts towards improving climate change.

**Opinions are mixed on how easy it is to book a slot to visit a Household Recycling Centre and access is of concern to some residents**

Respondents in both surveys had mixed opinions in relation to how easy or difficult they found it to book a slot to visit a Household Recycling Centre run by the County Council. Representative respondents were slightly more likely to find it easy than difficult to book a slot, whereas online respondents were slightly more likely to find it difficult than easy.

Household Recycling Centre access was also a common theme arising in the free text comments relating to changes that respondents would like local councils to make to improve their experience

as a Cheltenham resident. The third most common theme from the online survey related to reopening the Swindon Road Household Recycling Centre or general access to Household Recycling Centres. This was also a common theme from the representative survey, albeit by a relatively small proportion.

These findings suggest that whilst it is easy for most residents to book a slot at a Household Recycling Centre run by Gloucestershire County Council, access is not straightforward for all residents. With this in mind, the County Council could be advised to simplify the booking process to ensure all residents are able to easily access a centre when needed.

**Residents agree that there is a need for more affordable homes to buy and rent in Cheltenham, but are less likely to agree with new homes being built on green space**

The majority of respondents agreed that there is a need for more affordable homes to buy and rent in Cheltenham, with representative respondents more likely to agree than online respondents. Respondents from both surveys, however, were more likely to disagree that they would accept some new homes being built on green spaces. Those most likely to disagree included those aged 55+, those of White ethnicity, and those living in South West Cheltenham.

Careful consideration should therefore be made when considering the location of new affordable housing developments, avoiding building on green spaces where possible.

**Awareness of the Golden Valley Development has increased, but many respondents do not feel the development is for people like them**

Almost two thirds of representative respondents said they were aware of the Golden Valley Development, which is an increase since the previous survey. However, respondents were more likely to disagree that the Golden Valley Development is for people like them, which was more likely amongst those aged 55+, those of White ethnicity, and those who do not have children or young people aged 0-18 living in their household.

Of those who disagreed, representative respondents were most likely to say this was because they are not interested in new housing, whilst online respondents were most likely to say it was because they don't work in technology or cyber security. Another common reason across both surveys was that respondents didn't want to work in technology or cyber security.

Given that many do not feel they are the target market for the Golden Valley Development, more information could be provided to residents about how the development could benefit them.

**Many residents are unaware of what proportion of their council tax is allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council and the majority believe that any increase should be in line with inflation**

Just one in eight representative respondents were able to correctly identify that 10-19% of the council tax they pay is allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council, whilst a larger proportion of online respondents correctly selected this response. Almost half of representative survey respondents believed that the figure was 20% or more, and four in ten online respondents said the same. The largest proportion in both surveys said they did not know what proportion of council tax

was allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council, suggesting that residents would benefit from being provided with more information about how council tax is allocated.

When asked at what level council tax should be raised, over half of respondents in both surveys said that the increase should match inflation. The proportion of representative respondents who said the increase should be above inflation has is higher than in 2022, where respondents were most likely to say that any increase should be below inflation. However, this may be influenced by the fact that the rate of inflation at the time of the 2022 survey was much higher when compared with this year's survey.

**Whilst digital access is perceived as most important, the majority also feel that it is important for the Council to maintain a physical presence**

The vast majority of respondents from both surveys indicated that it was important that the public can access the Council's services digitally and that there is a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services. Although the majority agreed, agreement that it was important that the Council's main office or staff are located in the town centre was lower in both surveys when compared with the other two statements.

Female respondents, those aged 55+, and those who have a disability were more likely to agree that there should be a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services. Similarly, female respondents and those aged 55+ were more likely to agree it is important that the Council's main office or staff are located in the town centre.

These findings suggest that, although digital access is viewed as crucial, residents still value and perceive the benefit of the Council maintaining a physical presence in the town centre. Given that this appears to be of more importance for certain groups than others, this should be borne in mind to ensure council services continue to be accessible to all in the future.

**Most respondents feel a strong sense of belonging to their local area and feel it is important that they are represented by a local council and local councillors**

The vast majority of both representative and online respondents would say that they lived in Cheltenham if talking to someone from elsewhere in the UK, with much smaller proportions who would say they were from Gloucestershire, the Cotswolds and the South West. The majority also agree that they feel a sense of belonging to their local area, with agreement higher in representative than online respondents.

Over eight in ten respondents in both surveys felt it was important that they are represented by a local council and local councillors, with those aged 25+ more likely to say this.

Given the high importance placed on local representation, the role and visibility of local councillors should be emphasised, and community belonging further fostered through locally focused events and services that reinforce Cheltenham's unique identity within the wider region.

# Appendix A

## Questionnaire

# Cheltenham Resident Survey 2025

INTERVIEWER NOTE

1. Interview Cheltenham residents aged 16 or over according to your given quota
2. Read the introductory text 'READ OUT' where it is provided, before asking the questions
3. Do not read out the 'don't know' category in questions

READ OUT: Good morning / afternoon / evening. My name is..... and I am calling from Enventure Research on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council, who have asked us to carry out a survey to help them understand the views of their residents about the local area, the Council and council services.

The interview should take around 12 minutes to complete. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential, and will be used to help inform the delivery of council services.

Would you have time to take part in the survey?

BOOK APPOINTMENT IF NECESSARY

All information provided will be analysed by Enventure Research, an independent research agency, and treated in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Enventure Research will only use information you provide to inform the research. Enventure Research is registered with the Data Controller and is a Market Research Society Company Partner. For our privacy notice, please refer to our website www.enventure.co.uk

*If resident seems unsure...*

You do not have to answer any questions if you don't want to, and you can end the interview at any time. Are you happy to proceed?

QA **Before we start, can I confirm that you are a Cheltenham resident?** *If resident is unsure, confirm they pay Council Tax to Cheltenham Borough Council*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (THANK AND CLOSE)

D1 **What is your gender?**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ I prefer to self-describe
- ☐ Prefer not to say

D1a **How do you prefer to describe your gender?**

☐

D2 **How old are you?**

- ☐ Under 16 (THANK AND CLOSE)
- ☐ 16-18
- ☐ 19-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

D3 **What is your ethnicity?**

- ☐ White – British
- ☐ White – East European
- ☐ White – Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller
- ☐ White – Irish
- ☐ Any other White background
- ☐ Asian / Asian British – Bangladeshi
- ☐ Asian / Asian British – Chinese
- ☐ Asian / Asian British – Indian
- ☐ Asian / Asian British Pakistani Any other Asian background
- ☐ Black / Black British – African
- ☐ Black / Black British – Caribbean
- ☐ Any other Black background
- ☐ Mixed or multiple ethnic background
- ☐ Any other ethnic group
- ☐ Prefer not to say

D4 **Which ward do you live in?**

- ☐ All Saints
- ☐ Battledown
- ☐ Benhall, the Reddings & Fiddler's Green
- ☐ Charlton Kings
- ☐ Charlton Park
- ☐ College
- ☐ Hesters Way
- ☐ Lansdown
- ☐ Leckhampton
- ☐ Oakley
- ☐ Park
- ☐ Pittville
- ☐ Prestbury
- ☐ Springbank
- ☐ St Mark's
- ☐ St Paul's
- ☐ St Peter's
- ☐ Swindon Village
- ☐ Up Hatherley
- ☐ Warden Hill
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say

D4a **[ASKED IF D4=DON'T KNOW] If you don't know which ward you live in, please could you tell us your full postcode? This won't be used to identify you in any way** *Please enter in capitals and correct format with space, e.g. HD6 4AH*

D5 **Do any children or young people aged 0-18 live in your household?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

D6 **Do you have a disability?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

## LGA questions

**READ OUT**: Throughout this survey we ask you to think about 'your local area'. When answering, please consider your local area to be the area within 15-20 minutes walking distance from your home.

Q1 **Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Fairly satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Fairly dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied
- ☐ Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

**READ OUT**: Your local area receives services from two councils, Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucestershire County Council. This survey asks about Cheltenham Borough Council, which is responsible for services such as refuse collection, street cleaning and planning.

Q2 **Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Cheltenham Borough Council runs things?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Fairly satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Fairly dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied
- ☐ Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

**READ OUT:** In considering the next question, please think about the range of services Cheltenham Borough Council provides to the community as a whole, as well as the services your household uses. It does not matter if you do not know all of the services Cheltenham Borough Council provides to the community. We would like your general opinion.

Q3 **To what extent do you agree or disagree that Cheltenham Borough Council provides value for money?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Tend to agree
- [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
- [ ] Tend to disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

Q4 **Overall, how well informed do you think Cheltenham Borough Council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- [ ] Very well informed
- [ ] Fairly well informed
- [ ] Not very well informed
- [ ] Not well informed at all
- [ ] Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

## Your local area

Q5 **Before we ask you some more detailed questions about living in Cheltenham, what one change would you want local councils to make to improve your experience as a Cheltenham resident?**
*DO NOT PROMPT - RESPONDENT SHOULD ONLY PROVIDE ONE RESPONSE*

Q6 **On the whole, do you think that over the past year your local area has got better or worse, or not changed much?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- [ ] Got better
- [ ] Not changed much
- [ ] Got worse

Q7 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**
*SELECT ONE RESPONSE PER ROW*

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham has a vibrant culture and is an exciting place to live | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Cheltenham is a place that offers opportunity for young people | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I would recommend Cheltenham as a place to live | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Cheltenham has a positive future | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| By living in Cheltenham, I have the opportunity to grow my career | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Q8 **Thinking about the town centre, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?**
*SELECT ONE RESPONSE PER ROW*

| | Very satisfied | Fairly satisfied | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | Fairly dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The overall cleanliness | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The general appearance | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Safety during the day | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Safety after dark | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the daytime | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Cheltenham town centre overall as a place to visit in the evening | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The range of shops available | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Events (e.g. Cheltenham Festivals, Farmer's Market, ice rink, Children's Festival etc.) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Q9 **[ASKED IF Q8=FAIRLY/VERY DISSATISFIED WITH 'THE RANGE OF SHOPS AVAILABLE'] Why have you said that you are dissatisfied with the range of shops available?**
*DO NOT PROMPT - MULTI CHOICE*

- ☐ Too many closed shops
- ☐ Closure of Cavendish House
- ☐ Not enough variety of shops / too many of the same type of shops
- ☐ Would like more independent shops
- ☐ Would like more big name/branded shops
- ☐ Would like more places to eat/drink
- ☐ Would like better shop opening hours
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**Other**

## Environment

Q10 **Have you made any changes in the last three years (since 2022) specifically to tackle climate change?**
*DO NOT PROMPT - MULTI CHOICE*

- ☐ No
- ☐ I walk, cycle or use public transport more / use car less
- ☐ I avoid or minimise travelling by aeroplane
- ☐ I am mindful of food consumption (e.g. growing food at home, minimising food waste, eating local/seasonal produce)
- ☐ I minimise energy usage at home
- ☐ I avoid single use plastics and plastic packaging
- ☐ I have improved the energy efficiency of my home (e.g. insulation, solar panels, LED bulbs, heat pumps etc.)
- ☐ I reuse and recycle more / produce less waste
- ☐ I drive an electric or hybrid vehicle
- ☐ I compost food/garden/pet waste
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**Other**

Q11 **How easy or difficult do you find it to book a slot to visit a Household Recycling Centre run by Gloucestershire County Council?** *NB: Closest HRCs are Wingmoor Farm, Fosse Cross and Hempsted*
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- ☐ Very easy
- ☐ Quite easy
- ☐ Neither easy nor difficult
- ☐ Quite difficult
- ☐ Very difficult
- ☐ N/A - I have not tried to book a slot
- ☐ Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

## Developing Cheltenham

Q12 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about housing in Cheltenham?**
*SELECT ONE RESPONSE PER ROW*

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| There is a need for more affordable homes to buy in Cheltenham | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| There is a need for more affordable homes to rent in Cheltenham | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I am willing to accept some new homes being built on green spaces | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Q13 **Are you aware of the Golden Valley Development?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

**READ OUT:** The Golden Valley Development will create a new district of Cheltenham and will create up to 12,000 jobs, mostly in the technology and cyber security industries. The Golden Valley Development will also provide more housing.

Q14 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "The Golden Valley Development is for people like me"?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

Q15 **[ASKED IF Q14=DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE] Why have you said that you disagree that the Golden Valley Development is for people like you?**
*DO NOT PROMPT - MULTI CHOICE*

- [ ] I don't know enough information to agree
- [ ] I am not interested in the Golden Valley Development
- [ ] I don't know where the Golden Valley Development is
- [ ] I don't work in technology or cyber security
- [ ] I don't have the right skills to work in technology or cyber security
- [ ] I don't want to work in technology or cyber security
- [ ] I am not interested in more housing
- [ ] Other (please specify)

**Other**

## Your views on Cheltenham Borough Council

Q16 **The council tax that you pay goes to Gloucestershire County Council, the Police and Cheltenham Borough Council. What percentage of your council tax do you think goes to Cheltenham Borough Council?**
*DO NOT PROMPT - SINGLE CHOICE*

- ☐ Less than 10%
- ☐ 10-19%
- ☐ 20-29%
- ☐ 30-39%
- ☐ 40-49%
- ☐ 50% or more

**READ OUT:** Approximately 11% of the council tax that you pay goes to Cheltenham Borough Council.

**READ OUT:** In the last five years, Cheltenham Borough Council has seen significantly increased costs due to inflation but is restricted by law to only increase council tax by a maximum of £5 per year per household.

Q17 **Due to these unprecedented economic times, it is likely that Cheltenham Borough Council will need to raise council tax in order to continue to provide valued services and investment in our town. At what level should it be raised? Please note the current rate of inflation is 3.4%**
*READ OUT - SINGLE CHOICE*

- ☐ Above inflation increase
- ☐ Increase matching inflation
- ☐ Below inflation increase

Q18 **How important is it to you that...?**
*SELECT ONE RESPONSE PER ROW*

| | Very important | Fairly important | Not very important | Not important at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| There is a place within the town centre where the public can make enquiries and access council services | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The Council's main office/staff are located in the town centre | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The public can access the Council's services digitally, i.e. via the website | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## Local government reorganisation

Q19 **If you were talking to someone from elsewhere in the UK, where would you say you live?**
*DO NOT PROMPT - SINGLE CHOICE. IF RESPONDENT SAYS MORE THAN ONE (E.G. CHELTENHAM IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE), PLEASE PROBE TO GET MAIN RESPONSE*

- [ ] Cheltenham
- [ ] Gloucester
- [ ] Gloucestershire
- [ ] The Cotswolds
- [ ] South West
- [ ] Other (please specify)

**Other**

**READ OUT**: When answering the next question, please remember that you should consider your local area to be the area within 15-20 minutes walking distance from your home.

Q20 **To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I feel a sense of belonging to my local area"**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

Q21 **How important is it to you that you are represented by a local council and local councillors?**
*SINGLE CHOICE*

- [ ] Very important
- [ ] Fairly important
- [ ] Not that important
- [ ] Not important at all
- [ ] Don't know (DO NOT READ OUT)

**Thank and close.**

enventure research

Thornhill Brigg Mill
Thornhill Beck Lane
Brighouse
West Yorkshire
HD6 4AH

01484 404797

www.enventure.co.uk

info@enventure.co.uk

Reg no: 4693096
VAT no: 816927894

MRS Evidence Matters™ Company Partner

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# Cheltenham Borough Council

# Council 17 November 2025

# Local Government Reorganisation – Business Case Submission

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**Accountable member:**

Councillor Rowena Hay, Leader

**Accountable officer:**

Gareth Edmundson, Chief Executive

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

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**Key Decision:** No

**Executive summary:**

In February 2025, the Government invited all two-tier local authority areas to bring forward Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals. This letter followed the intention of Government, as set out in the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, to replace the “two-tier system of local government” (district/borough councils and county councils) with a “a single tier” of local government serving an area through a “unitary council”.

The Government requested interim proposals by 21 March 2025 with final submissions by 28 November 2025. There are now three LGR proposals being put forward by Gloucestershire councils:

- Option 1: A single county-wide unitary authority (1UA) covering the whole county of Gloucestershire (population size c.660,000). Developed jointly by all councils in Gloucestershire.

- Option 2: Two east/west unitary authorities (2UA-EW) for the county, aligning with the district council boundaries in the east of the county (Cheltenham, Cotswold and Tewkesbury, population c.311,000) and the west of the county (Gloucester, Forest of Dean and Stroud, population c.349,000). Developed by all councils in Gloucestershire
- Option 3: A unitary for Gloucester and a unitary for the remainder of Gloucestershire (2UA-GG). This is comprised of a Greater Gloucester Council (an expanded footprint of the existing Gloucester City Council population c. 179,000) and a Gloucestershire Council (amalgamation of the remainder of the surrounding councils with a projected population of c.470,000). This proposal has been developed solely by Gloucester City Council.

It is ultimately a decision for Government which option for LGR is taken forward, based on assessment of the proposals against the following criteria:

- Be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks (min population 500k).
- Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services.
- Meet local needs and be informed by local views.
- Support devolution arrangements.
- Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) is committed to working together with all councils to deliver whichever option is selected by Government to be implemented. In addition, CBC has worked together with all other Gloucestershire councils to develop the 1UA and 2UA-EW found in appendix 3 and 4. However, previously at the interim proposal stage, CBC developed its own submission for an east/west two unitary model that was supported by full Council.

Under this mandate, the council has developed a further policy statement for review by full Council that sets out why a two unitary, east/west split is right for both Cheltenham and Gloucestershire. It explains why, having reviewed the evidence and local context, the east/west two unitary model is the stronger long-term option for Gloucestershire.

The accompanying document, Stronger Places, Stronger Gloucestershire: the case for East and West Gloucestershire. One County, Two Unitary Councils (appendix 6) summarises the strategic, financial and democratic rationale for this preference. It draws on the technical analysis in the business cases while placing greater emphasis on the factors that will ultimately determine success: public trust, place identity, economic specialisation and sustainable scale.

This is not a formal submission to Government, but a policy statement that will inform Cheltenham’s contribution to Government’s consultation on the options. It is intended to provide clarity on the council’s reasoning, to support constructive dialogue with

partners across Gloucestershire, and to ensure Cheltenham's voice is clear as options for reform are considered.

The council's view is that, if reform proceeds, two unitary authorities would:

- Reflect Gloucestershire's dual centres of economic gravity – Gloucester's clean-energy and sustainable-industry strengths and Cheltenham's leadership in cyber, technology and innovation.
- Offer the right scale for capability and connection, and
- Create councils that are trusted, agile and locally accountable, designed to endure for the next 50 years rather than focused on short term savings.

**Recommendations:**

That Council

1. Notes the completed final business cases and supporting documentation relating to:
    a. a single unitary for Gloucestershire, appendix 3
    b. a two unitary East and West Gloucestershire appendix 4
    c. a two unitary Greater Gloucester/Gloucestershire appendix 5
    d. stronger places, stronger Gloucestershire – the case for East and West Gloucestershire, appendix 6
2. Council undertakes separate advisory votes on each of the following options to gauge member support for each business case as follows:
    a. A single unitary for Gloucestershire as detailed in the business case in appendix 3
    b. A two unitary, East and West Gloucestershire as detailed in the business case in appendix 4
    c. A two unitary, Greater Gloucester and Gloucestershire as detailed in the business case in appendix 5
3. Refers the advisory votes on the business cases for LGR to Cabinet for consideration as part of their decision making on which LGR option to support in the joint submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities and local government.

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## 1. Implications

### 1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

The business cases attached in appendices 3-5 set out the projected "day 1" positions of each of the proposed options for LGR. In addition, the business cases set out the estimated savings that could be delivered from each of the business cases. However, all business cases are based on assumptions and estimates and

aim to support and inform decision making relating to LGR.

While there are no immediate financial implications that relate to the decision and submission of the LGR business cases, it expected that there will be significant future costs if the Government continues on the current timeline to implement unitarisation by May 2028.

The costs of implementation are not fully understood at this point but will likely involve backfilling vacancies with interim capacity as employees are utilised to implement the LGR programme, as well as significant costs associated to transformation. The amount of transformation that takes place, for example, investment in new systems, ahead of vesting day of the new local authority(ies) remains unknown but provision will need to be made and correlate to the extent of harmonisation and integration councils want to achieve ahead of May 2028.

Initial estimates suggest a figure of up to £2m in costs may be realistic over the medium term to support LGR. Consideration of this will be made as part of the budget setting process.

**Signed off by:** Jon Whitlock, Deputy 151 Officer

### 1.2 Legal implications

The legal process and implications are contained within the body of the report.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to invite areas to submit proposals for LGR. The Secretary of State has exercised those powers in his letter to various authorities dated 5 February 2025 and included within the March Cabinet Report.

The final decision on any unitary structure for Gloucestershire will rest with the government and legislation will be implemented to facilitate any changes.

The projected timescale for LGR implementation can be found in section two of the report. Any changes resulting from LGR will have a significant impact and will be the subject of detailed legal support and advice going forward.

**Signed off by:** One Legal – legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

### 1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

There are no environmental considerations at this stage, but full assessment of environmental implications will need to be considered as LGR progresses.

**Signed off by:** Richard King – Head of Construction

### 1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

Not applicable at this stage as the Government's preferred LGR option is yet to be selected, so an assessment can only be made once a decision has been made on the future shape of local government.

However, work is being undertaken with partner councils to scope each council's key corporate plan priorities so they can be considered as part of the LGR transformation process.

### 1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

See appendix 2.

---

## 2 Background

2.1 On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, wrote to all Gloucestershire Leaders inviting them to bring forward proposals for LGR. Reorganisation would abolish existing county and district councils and create new unitary authorities covering the same geography, aligning with the national English Devolution White Paper ambitions published in December 2024. The minister confirmed the timeline as follows:

- The deadline for the submission of interim proposals as 21 March 2025
- The deadline for the submission of full proposals as 28 November 2025

2.2 In a joint response to the minster submitted on 21 March 2025 Gloucestershire councils outlined three options for reorganisation being considered. These were

- A single unitary for the whole county
- Two unitary councils, one comprising of the districts of the Forest of Dean, Gloucester and Stroud in the west and the districts of Cheltenham, Cotswolds and Tewkesbury in the east.
- A city based unitary comprising of a 'Greater Gloucester' with the remaining footprint of the county forming the other unitary council.

2.3 The letter also attached two appendices these were:

- An options appraisal of a single county unitary and the east/west unitary commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC).
- An east/west two unitary interim proposal commissioned by CBC.

2.4 The Government has indicated that assessment of proposals will be against criteria that test whether new structures:

- Be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks (min population 500k).
- Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services.
- Meet local needs and be informed by local views.
- Support devolution arrangements.
- Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

2.5 The Minister's letter set out an expectation that Leaders in Gloucestershire would work collaboratively. Where more than one proposal is to be submitted, councils must state clearly which authorities support which option, using shared evidence based and consistent assumptions.

2.6 The local council elections in May 2025 resulted in a change in administration at GCC. Following the change of administration, it was then agreed that all councils would work together to develop the business cases for the single county unitary option and the east/west two unitary model.

2.7 GCC commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake both the analysis and full business case development of two options for LGR in Gloucestershire: a single unitary authority model and a two unitary, east west model (East / West). The analysis and the final business cases are designed to support an evidence-based assessment of both options against the government's published criteria, against which full proposals will be assessed.

2.8 The approach taken has been to evaluate all available data and evidence impartially, with no predetermined outcome. Joint governance was established across all seven councils that included Leaders, Chief Executives, senior officers and consultants who worked in a series of workstreams to gather data, conduct analysis and develop the final business cases.

2.9 Gloucester City Council has progressed the development of the Greater Gloucester proposal separately from the other councils. Although Gloucester City has developed its own proposal, all councils committed to sharing data and information openly to enable the development of all business cases.

2.10 This has resulted in three business cases that are now being put forward for Gloucestershire:

- Option 1: A single county-wide unitary authority (1UA) covering the whole county of Gloucestershire (population size c.660,000). Developed jointly by all councils in Gloucestershire.
- Option 2: Two east/west unitary authorities (2UA-EW) for the county, aligning with the district council boundaries in the east of the county (Cheltenham, Cotswold and Tewkesbury, population c.311,000) and the west of the county

(Gloucester, Forest of Dean and Stroud, population c.349,000). Developed by all councils in Gloucestershire.

- Option 3: A unitary for Gloucester and a unitary for the remainder of Gloucestershire (2UA-GG). This is comprised of a Greater Gloucester Council (an expanded footprint of the existing Gloucester City Council population c. 179,000) and a Gloucestershire Council (amalgamation of the remainder of the surrounding councils with a projected population of c.470,000). This proposal has been developed solely by Gloucester City Council.

2.11 Following the submission of the business cases, the high-level timetable is as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Statutory consultation by Government | November 2025 to January 2026 |
| Government decision on which proposal to implement | March 2026 |
| Making of secondary legislation to provide legislative basis for new unitary councils | Summer to Autumn 2026 |
| Elections to Shadow Authorities – Members elected to new council(s) | May 2027 |
| Shadow period | May 2027 to March 2028 |
| Vesting – unitary councils come out of “shadow” and existing councils are formally abolished | April 2028 |

2.12 In March 2025, full council expressed a clear preference for an east/west two unitary proposal to be submitted at the interim stage. CBC’s interim proposal set out the strategic rationale for an east/west structure while recognising that other councils might take a different view. Under the mandate, while CBC has clearly stated that it will work positively to implement whatever LGR decision is made by the Government, it has continued to develop a policy statement setting out the strategic case for two unitary councils.

2.13 The appended reports update that position considering the final full business cases being submitted to Government and the formal consultation that will follow.

2.14 A council may either submit its own proposal or a joint proposal with other authorities; however, a council cannot make multiple submissions and therefore cannot indicate support for more than one final proposal. The legislation requires

councils to be consulted on any proposal(s) for LGR within their area before it is implemented. That consultation will provide a further opportunity for CBC to contribute its views once Government has confirmed the next stage in the process.

2.15 While the Minister expressed a preference for a single submission from Gloucestershire, it is normal for multiple proposals to be received from areas with differing perspectives, as has been seen elsewhere in the country. CBC therefore sets out its preference for two unitaries as a matter of record, a statement of principle that will inform its engagement with partners and with Government during the forthcoming consultation.

## 3 Reasons for recommendations

3.1 LGR must create councils capable of serving Gloucestershire effectively for the next fifty years, not just the next five. The Government will ultimately make the final decision on the shape of local government in Gloucestershire. However, through the statutory invitation and the criteria set out, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have presented a once in a lifetime opportunity for members to both develop and have a view on which option will best serve residents and businesses in Gloucestershire.

3.2 All three LGR options that have been developed can be found in appendices iii-v. All business cases are lengthy and detailed documents which include everything from proposed democratic arrangements, financial analysis, outline operating model and options appraisals against the government criteria.

3.3 Significant portions of the content between the single unitary and the east/west unitary options is similar due to the nature of the way they were developed. However, differences in content appear within certain sections – particularly the financial analysis and options appraisal, where the single unitary and the east/west proposals diverge.

3.4 The Greater Gloucester business case is significantly different from the other two options as Gloucester City Council has developed this option separately to the other councils. Key differences in their assessment of the options appraisal demonstrate that explaining how proposals meet the Government’s criteria are subjective and open to interpretation. Ultimately it is up to the members to review all business cases in making their recommendations to Government and then up to the Government to make the final decision on which option will be delivered.

3.5 Following advice, it has been confirmed that it is a decision for the Cabinet on whether CBC chooses to support one of the proposals as part of the submission to Government. As such the role of Full Council is to both discuss and then fulfil an advisory role to the Cabinet. Alongside the opportunity to ask questions and

debate the options, Full Council will also undertake an advisory vote. The results of that vote will then support Cabinet in making their final decision at their meeting final decision on November 18 2025. Cabinet's decision on which LGR option to support will then form part of a joint submission to Government setting out which councils support each option.

**The case for an east/west two unitary council.**

3.6 At Full Council in March, the majority of members supported a two unitary, east/west model for Gloucestershire. Under this strong mandate CBC has continued to develop a case for why an east/west unitary would be the best long-term fit for Gloucestershire.

3.7 While all seven councils have worked extremely well together in development of two of the business cases, it is inevitable there were differing views across each of the councils as analysis was completed and sections were drafted. This resulted in compromises being made to reach content which was acceptable to all councils. The options analysis and financial analysis were two areas which received scrutiny due to the assumptions underpinning any financial model and the subjective nature and associated arguments contained in the options appraisal.

3.8 For these reasons, CBC has produced its own policy statement to accompany the business cases, ensuring that Cheltenham's voice – and the case for why a two-unitary model is the best fit for residents and businesses – is clearly presented. In appendix 6 the full policy statement *Stronger Places, Stronger Gloucestershire: the case for East and West Gloucestershire. One County, two unitary councils* can be found in full. The statement is included to ensure CBC's position is clear and evidence based as Government considers the options for reorganisation. LGR is a significant decision point for Gloucestershire. While it is ultimately for Government to determine the preferred structure, councils have the opportunity and responsibility to help shape the outcome. Expressing a clear position now enables CBC to influence the process constructively and ensure that any reform works for residents, businesses, and communities.

3.9 *Stronger Places, Stronger Gloucestershire* (appendix 6) supports the view that the two-unitary, east/west model best meets the test of securing the best future for Cheltenham and Gloucestershire in the long-term. It represents a once-in-a generation opportunity to design councils that reflect Gloucestershire's dual economic and civic centres and its network of market towns and rural communities. Two unitary authorities that would be large enough for strategic capability and financial resilience, yet small enough to stay connected and locally accountable.

3.10 Two unitaries would ensure:

- **Distinct place identity and economic opportunity:** Gloucestershire is not one place but a collection of diverse communities. A single structure risks flattening that diversity into county-wide averages. Gloucestershire's unique two centres of gravity, Cheltenham and Gloucester, and their contrasting geographies demand distinct leadership to unlock their full economic potential
- **Right scale for impact:** Councils of around 310–350,000 residents each would balance efficiency with visibility, enabling decisions that make sense locally.
- **Prevention and proximity:** Smaller, connected councils are better able to intervene early, use data intelligently, and build trusted relationships with residents.
- **Democratic legitimacy:** Residents must be able to recognise, reach, and trust their council; governance must feel close and representative. Two unitaries will also help protect numbers of councillors across Gloucestershire and not see reductions through future boundary reviews.
- **Reform that endures**: A structure designed to last that is agile, connected, and sustainable, avoiding unnecessary complexity or future restructuring.

3.11 The council's assessment of the business cases, alongside its own analysis of Gloucestershire's geography, economy and civic identity, indicates that a two-unitary model offers the strongest long-term foundation for effective local government. The case for this preference rests on five interrelated reasons:

- **Dual centres of gravity**: Gloucestershire's two urban anchors, Gloucester and Cheltenham, sit at the heart of contrasting but complementary economies. Separate unitaries allow each to lead with focus while preserving the diversity that defines the county.
- **Right scale for connection and capability**: Councils of 310–350,000 residents are large enough for strategic delivery and financial resilience, yet small enough to stay connected, agile and accountable.
- **Economic leadership through specialisation**: Two councils can drive growth in distinct national sectors: clean energy and sustainable industry in the west; cyber, technology and innovation in the east.
- **Reform that redesigns how we work**: Two unitaries create the conditions for prevention-first services, place-based housing delivery and agile, data-driven operations that respond quickly to residents.
- **Democratic legitimacy and long-term trust**: Residents identify with councils that reflect their communities. Two balanced authorities sustain visible leadership and political diversity without recreating additional governance layers.

3.12 Endorsing this position at this stage allows the council to:

- Demonstrate strategic leadership within Gloucestershire's ongoing reorganisation discussions.
- Provide clarity to Government, partners and residents on Cheltenham's preferred direction of reform.
- Ensure that the borough's interests are represented in shaping any future governance or devolution arrangements.

## 4 Devolution

4.1 The release of the Government's white paper in December 2024 promised devolution for all areas of England with the ambition to create Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSA) nationwide.

4.2 The first six areas were selected as part of the devolution priority programme. Gloucestershire was not in an advanced position and so was not included in that first wave of creating new MSAs.

4.3 At the time of writing this report, there has been no further update on when further rounds of devolution will be undertaken creating the risk that Gloucestershire may result in being left behind in its ability to gain greater regional powers.

4.4 LGR was intended to 'unlock' devolution but, at present, it is likely that Gloucestershire will move to implement unitary local government without participation of devolution.

4.5 All seven councils have been exploring Gloucestershire's devolution options. At the previous Council meeting in March, Council expressed a preference for Gloucestershire to join the West of England Combined Authority (WECA). However, this remains only a preference with other options still under consideration.

## 5 Alternative options considered

5.1 Three options for LGR are being put forward, as described above.

5.2 While this report and associated appendices highlight the council's previous preference for a two unitary, east/west model, it is ultimately a decision for members to debate the LGR business cases available. Following deliberation and council undertaking an advisory vote to express a view on each LGR option, Cabinet will then proceed to making the final decision on which option to support as part of the submission to Government.

5.3 A preference for a two unitary model and a policy statement supported by Council and subject to Cabinet decision will not impede the council's ongoing commitment to working collaboratively with Gloucestershire councils, stakeholders and Government as the process of LGR and devolution progresses and we will continue to work hard to ensure that, following the Government's decision on what structure to implement, Cheltenham's residents and businesses continue to receive high quality and sustainable services.

## 6 Consultation and feedback

6.1 CBC has worked collaboratively with partner authorities across Gloucestershire throughout the development of LGR business cases. This has included participation in the Leaders' Group, officer working groups and the commissioning of analysis. These forums have provided a shared evidence base, consistent assumptions and constructive discussion on the future shape of local government in the county.

6.2 As set out in the Minister's letter of February 2025, councils are expected to work jointly wherever possible while recognising that differing local preferences may emerge. It was therefore anticipated from the outset that more than one option would be brought forward. The business cases now reflect those differing perspectives.

6.3 CBC's previous preference for a two-unitary structure is grounded in the shared technical evidence but places greater weight on local identity, economic specialisation and democratic legitimacy. The council has discussed its emerging position with neighbouring authorities and has sought to maintain an open and constructive dialogue.

6.4 This report and the supporting document 'Stronger Places, Stronger Gloucestershire' in appendix 6 does not represent a separate LGR submission to Government but a policy statement designed to inform forthcoming consultation. The document will be shared with Gloucestershire councils, partners and stakeholders to ensure Cheltenham's reasoning is clear and to contribute to a county-wide conversation about the right long-term structure for local government.

6.5 Government will run the formal public and stakeholder consultation on the options in the coming months. CBC will participate fully in that process, working collaboratively with other Gloucestershire councils to ensure residents, businesses and partners can contribute their views.

## 7 Key risks

7.1 The main risks relate to the inherent uncertainty of the Government's reorganisation process and if the process is managed carefully. This risk is being actively managed through clear communication, shared evidence, and continued collaboration across Gloucestershire. These are set out in appendix 1.

---

**Report author:**

Gareth Edmundson, Chief Executive, gareth.edmundson@cheltenham.gov.uk

**Appendices:**

1. Risk Assessment
2. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening
3. Single Unitary Business Case
4. Two Unitary, east/west business case
5. Greater Gloucester/Gloucestershire Business Case
6. Policy Statement – Stronger Places, Stronger Gloucestershire

**Background information:**

Cheltenham Borough Council, Local Government Reorganisation, Interim Case and letter from Gloucestershire Leaders, March 2025

Local Government Reorganisation: Policy and programme updates

English Devolution White Paper

## Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

| Risk ref | Risk description | Risk owner | Impact score (1-5) | Likelihood score (1-5) | Initial raw risk score (1 - 25) | Risk response | Controls / Mitigating actions | Control / Action owner | Deadline for controls/ actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 408 | Local Government Reorganisation – if local government re-organisation is not managed effectively then it may impact on financial viability, services to residents, motivation and retention. | Gareth Edmundson | 4 | 4 | 16 | Reduce | Discussions with MHCLG and neighbouring councils ongoing.<br><br>Response to government consultation<br><br>Ongoing communication with staff e.g. all staff meetings | Gareth Edmundson | July 2026 |

# Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

## 1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

| a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment | |
|---|---|
| Officer responsible: Gareth Edmundson | Service Area: Cheltenham Borough Council |
| Title: Local Government Reorganisation | Date of assessment: 24/10/2025 |
| Signature: Gareth Edmundson | |

| b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project? | Other |
|---|---|
| Local Government Reorganisation final submissions | |

| c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project | |
|---|---|
| Local Government Reorganisation final submissions | |
| Is this new or existing? | **New or proposed** |
| **Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project** | |
| Devolution White Paper released by MHCLG in December 2024, followed by statutory invitation for local government reorganisation | |

| d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it? | |
|---|---|
| Aims: | • To make local government structures simpler for residents and businesses<br>• To deliver efficiencies<br>• To deliver high quality and sustainable services<br>• To improve and strengthen local or regional decision making and support economic growth, investment and prosperity |
| | • To deliver savings<br>• To make councils more resilient<br>• To deliver joined up high quality services |

| | |
|---|---|
| Objectives: | • To improve prevention and intervention<br>• Deliver more housing |
| Outcomes: | • Making taxpayers money go further<br>• Increase investment, jobs and economic growth<br>• Improve wellbeing of residents |
| Benefits: | • Reduce costs and demand on care services<br>• People living healthier for longer<br>• Reductions in unemployment<br>• More higher value jobs available to local people with the right skills to succeed<br>• Fewer children and young people requiring intervention |

**e. What are the expected impacts?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers. | **Yes** |
| Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative? | **Unsure** |

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

The Government has yet to decide on what structures will be in place in Gloucestershire, so it is premature to make a full assessment, however, the ultimate aim is to deliver more efficient, joined up government that improves services for residents and businesses.

**If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.**

**f. Identify next steps as appropriate**

| | |
|---|---|
| Stage Two required | **Yes** |
| Owner of Stage Two assessment | Gloucestershire-wide assessment required |
| Completion date for Stage Two assessment | To be considered when government have determined the structure of local government, likely in 2026. |

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# Local Government Reorganisation in Gloucestershire

## Single Unitary Authority (1UA) Full Proposal

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## Executive Summary

Gloucestershire is poised for a bold transformation in local governance. This proposal recommends replacing the current two-tier system of county, district, borough, and city councils with a **Single Unitary Authority (1UA)** serving all ~659,000 residents. The 1UA model will streamline decision-making, eliminate duplication, and unlock significant financial and operational efficiencies - while strengthening local identity and empowering communities through innovative **Neighbourhood Partnerships**.

**This reorganisation is not just structural, it's strategic**. It aligns with Ministerial criteria for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and positions Gloucestershire as a national leader in regional devolution, ready to shape the future of public service delivery.

### Economic and Demographic Context

- Gloucestershire's economy generated **£22.1bn GVA** in 2023, with strengths in **advanced manufacturing, cyber, aerospace, and agri-tech**
- **The population is projected to grow by 17.6% by 2047**, with a sharp rise in residents aged 65+
- Pressing challenges include **housing affordability**, **rural isolation**, and **climate resilience.**

### Our Vision and Ambition

We're building on what makes Gloucestershire great to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, bold ideas, and opportunities for everyone. LGR is the enabling change that allows us to meet these challenges and deliver a ***smarter, fairer, and greener Gloucestershire***. Our six ambitions are:

1. **Driving breakthrough innovation for national resilience**
2. **Harnessing digital to tackle inequality, improve services, and drive innovation**
3. **Empowering communities through co-design and local decision-making**
4. **Putting wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery at the heart of growth**
5. **Unlocking talent, skills, and housing for inclusive growth**
6. **Using data to transform transport and public services**

These ambitions are designed to unlock Gloucestershire's full potential and deliver tangible benefits for residents.

## The 1UA Financial Case

| **Potential day one financial position (c. 1st April 2028)** | |
|---|---|
| Total income | £851.4m |
| Total expenditure | £851.4m |
| Net position | £0.0m |
| **Reorganisation Costs and Benefits** | |
| Gross annual reorganisation savings | £21.1m |
| Ongoing annual disaggregation costs | £0.0m |
| Net annual savings | £21.1m |
| One-off transition costs | -£21.3m |
| Payback period | 2.0 years |
| Cumulative net saving after 5 years | £58.7m |
| Cumulative net saving after 10 years | £164.0m |
| Transformation benefits | |
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Base** | £16.0m |
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Stretch** | £26.2m |

## Governance, Democracy, and Place

- **110 councillors** for Gloucestershire
- A unified electoral cycle and **streamlined decision-making**
- Strong locality working via **Neighbourhood Partnerships** (15–25 neighbourhoods, 20k–50k population each)
- **Trusted, innovative partnerships** with Town and Parish Councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sectors.

## Digital, Data, and Technology (DDaT)

- A **digitally enabled council** with inclusive, responsive services
- Investment in **AI**, **predictive analytics**, and **cloud platforms**
- Focus on **digital inclusion** and robust infrastructure.

## Built together, backed by evidence

Our proposals have been developed by **all Gloucestershire councils working together** in setting the vision, using a common evidence-base, and working within a single financial model and option appraisal process.

Our **public and stakeholder engagement has enriched and improved our proposals**. We are committed to delivering better outcomes for and with local people and making **LGR the platform for a better Gloucestershire.**

Both the single unitary (1UA) and two unitary (2UA) proposals have been developed using a common evidence base, shared data sources, and consistent analytical methods. As a result, there are significant similarities across both proposals.

In addition to the geographic footprints, key differences between the 1UA and 2UA proposals are highlighted within the shared options analysis and the respective financial cases.

## Introduction and Context

**Gloucestershire isn't like anywhere else in the UK.**

From postcard-perfect Cotswold villages to codebreaking at GCHQ and the roar of the Shed at Gloucester Rugby, this is a county where history fuels a thriving present. Our culture, economy, and identity are deeply rooted yet rapidly evolving.

We're not defined by a single centre. Gloucestershire is a proud network of city, towns, villages, and rural communities, each with its own pulse. Cheltenham leads in innovation, Stroud bursts with creativity, the Forest of Dean harnesses natural assets, Tewkesbury drives manufacturing, Gloucester powers civic life, and the Cotswolds are shaping the future of sustainable energy.

Our diverse places have built a rich patchwork of industries, cultures, and stories. And now, with a bold vision for the future, a single tier of local government could unlock even more. A devolved Gloucestershire would be decentralised, interconnected, and resilient - ready to turn its unique strengths into shared success.




This document sets out the case for change for a new model of local government in Gloucestershire – a model that will enable us to build on what makes Gloucestershire great, to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, fresh ideas, and opportunities for everyone.

## About Gloucestershire

**Gloucestershire sits at the northern edge of the South West - perfectly placed and powerfully connected.** It borders three unitary authorities - South Gloucestershire, Swindon, and Wiltshire - and links to Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Monmouthshire. Sitting to the north of the M4 / M5 crossroads, with the M5 weaving northwards through the county, Gloucestershire links north and south, east and west, and connects several major UK cities Cardiff, Bristol, Birmingham, Oxford, and London. The River Severn winds through the county's core, shaping both landscape and life.

Though 87.5% of the county is rural, **over 70% of residents live in urban areas**[1]. Cheltenham and Gloucester are the beating hearts of business, education, culture, and commerce, supported by a network of vibrant market towns that fuel local economies and serve rural communities.

- The population of Gloucestershire is currently 659,276[2]
- Gloucestershire spans 265,253 hectares[3]
- We are proud to have two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean
- Gloucestershire also has 12 National Nature Reserves and some 120 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within its borders
- According to the 2011 Census, 83.1% of Gloucestershire residents also work in the county[4].

## Population Change

**Gloucestershire is growing, and fast.** Between 2014 and 2024, the county's population has risen by 7.8%, outpacing the national average of 5.9%. But growth hasn't been even. Districts like Tewkesbury are booming, with a staggering 16.6% population increase, ranking in the top 10% of fastest-growing local authorities six times since 2014[5].

At the same time, **Gloucestershire is ageing.** People aged 65+ make up 22.1% of the population, well above the national average of 18.8%. In rural areas like the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean, that figure climbs above 25%. The county also has fewer children and working-age adults than the national average.
Gloucester and Cheltenham have the highest proportions of young people within

[1] Rural Urban Classification 2021
[2] Mid 2023 Population Estimates, ONS
[3] SAM 2023, ONS Area to Mean High Water Excluding Area of Inland Water (Land Area) (AREALHECT)
[4] 2011 Census, ONS
[5] Mid Year Population Estimate. ONS

the county, reflecting their urban character and the presence of educational institutions.[6]

Looking ahead, the population is projected to grow by **113,929 people by 2047** - a 17.6% increase, far above the 12.7% forecast for England and Wales. Tewkesbury and Stroud are set for even greater projected growth of 29.6% and 22.2% respectively, driven by more available land for development. Cheltenham, by contrast, is expected to see the smallest rise at 10.1%[7].

## Economy

**Gloucestershire's natural beauty is both a challenge and a magnet.** With AONBs covering large parts of the county, development can be constrained, but this same environmental quality makes the county a magnet for talent, investment, and tourism.

**The economy is strong, diverse, and resilient.** In 2023, Gloucestershire's economy generated £22.1 billion in GVA - 12.8% of the South West's output and 1% of the UK total[8]. It's a county where quality of life meets business opportunity.

Gloucestershire offers a powerful mix: **a skilled workforce, strong connectivity, available land, and a high-quality environment.** That's why it's home to major players like GE Aviation, Safran, Renishaw, EDF Energy, Ecotricity, Unilever-Walls, and St. James's Place, alongside a thriving ecosystem of entrepreneurs and innovators.

With deep roots in defence and aerospace, the county remains a manufacturing powerhouse, especially in advanced engineering. It's also a national centre for cyber and intelligence, anchored by GCHQ, the National Cyber Security Centre, and a growing cyber business park.

Despite its specialisms, **Gloucestershire's economy is diverse and balanced.** In 2023, the top employment sectors were wholesale and retail (14.8%), health and social care (13.8%), and manufacturing (10.6%)[9] - a mix that supports **stability and adaptability**.

## Challenges Facing Gloucestershire

**But Gloucestershire isn't without its challenges.** Demographic change, widening inequalities, pockets of deprivation, environmental pressures, and rural isolation all pose serious hurdles to inclusive, sustainable growth.

[6] Mid Year Population Estimate. ONS
[7] 2022 based Subnational Population Projections, ONS
[8] Regional gross value added (balanced) per head and income components, ONS
[9] BRES, ONS

## Demographic Change

**Gloucestershire's population is ageing, and faster than the national average.** By 2047, the number of residents aged 65+ is projected to surge by 43.4% (compared to 38.6% nationally), making up over a quarter (26.8%) of the county's population. Tewkesbury is set to see the sharpest rise at 54%, while even the lowest increase - 32.4% in the Forest of Dean - is significant[10].

At the same time, the working-age population (18-64) is barely growing, and the number of children and young people is expected to decline. This shift is reshaping the county's social and economic landscape.

**More people are living with disabilities and long-term conditions across all age groups.** There's also a rise in single-person households with limited family support, and a growing number of children with special educational needs (SEN) since 2015, all adding pressure to already stretched health and social care services.

By 2047, Gloucestershire's **dependency ratio** (the number of dependents per 100 working-age people) is projected to rise from 65 to 70[11]. That means fewer people supporting more, placing increasing strain on services, budgets, and the local economy.

**The challenge is clear:** how do we continue delivering high-quality care and support while maintaining a healthy, productive economy in the face of rapid demographic change?

## Inequalities and Deprivation

**Gloucestershire performs well overall, but averages hide deep inequalities.** While county-wide outcomes often exceed regional and national benchmarks, they mask stark local disparities. 12 neighbourhoods across Gloucester, Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Forest of Dean (home to a combined 3.2% of the county's population) rank among the **10% most deprived in England[12]**.

Some communities face even greater barriers to inclusion and opportunity, including **rough sleepers, non-white and non-English speaking residents, traveller communities, and asylum seekers**. For these groups, access to healthcare, education, and skills development is often harder, and outcomes are worse.

[10] 2022 based Sub-national Population Projections, ONS
[11] 2022 based Sub-national Population Projections, ONS
[12] Indices of Deprivation 2019

## Access to Housing

**Housing in Gloucestershire is expensive, and getting on the property ladder is tough.** In 2025, the average home cost **8.6 times the median salary**, higher than the national average (7.5) and just above the South West average (8.5). But this affordability varies widely: in Gloucester, the ratio is 7.3 and, in the Cotswolds, it soars to 13.8.

With mortgage lenders typically capping loans at 4.5 times income, many residents are priced out, forced into unsuitable housing, or pushed out of the county altogether. This makes it harder to attract and retain young people, key workers, and future talent[13].

Despite these pressures, housing supply has grown. Between 2019 and 2024, the number of dwellings in Gloucestershire rose by **5.2%**, outpacing both the regional (4.6%) and national (4.7%) averages[14].

**Yet unlocking further housing and growth remains a major challenge.** Much of Gloucestershire doesn't have a five-year housing supply, increasing the likelihood of speculative planning applications, misalignment with local priorities, and unsustainable growth. Planning constraints, infrastructure limitations, and the need to protect Gloucestershire's natural and historic environment all create friction. Balancing growth with sustainability, affordability, and community needs will be critical to the county's future.

Recent updates to the National Planning Policy Framework and the anticipated Planning and Infrastructure Bill promise a step change in housing delivery. The Bill will introduce a statutory Spatial Development Strategy, giving Gloucestershire a powerful new tool to shape future growth. Combined with the streamlining of the planning system via unitarisation, this could unlock significant sustainable development across the county. We must seize this opportunity, while being conscious of possible environmental and democratic risks.

## Rural Isolation

**Gloucestershire's rural charm is one of its greatest strengths, but also one of its biggest challenges.** With 87.5% of the county classed as rural and nearly 30% of residents living in these areas, access to essential services isn't always easy[15]. Nearly **one in five people** live in areas ranked among the **20% most deprived in England** in terms of Barriers to Housing and Services[16].

[13] Median House Prices to Median Workplace Earnings, ONS
[14] Live tables on dwelling stock, MHCLG
[15] Rural/Urban Classification, 2022, ONS
[16] Indices of Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG

Travel times to key services - whether by public transport, car, or active travel - are longer than both regional and national averages[17]. And while high-speed broadband now reaches almost every address, **digital exclusion persists**: 4.4% of residents didn't use the internet at all between May 2023 and March 2024. In rural areas, where public internet access points can be over 45 minutes away by bus, those without a car face real digital isolation[18].

**The challenge is clear:** we must ensure Gloucestershire's most vulnerable and isolated residents stay connected - to services, to support, and to opportunity.

## Climate Change and Flooding

**Gloucestershire is making strides on sustainability, but the climate crisis is accelerating.** Despite strong progress by county and district councils in cutting emissions and embedding greener practices, the risks to our communities, infrastructure, and economy are growing.

**Climate Leadership Gloucestershire** has been established as a strategic partnership of public sector bodies - including local councils, the NHS, police, and academic institutions - to coordinate and lead the county's response to the climate and ecological emergency.

**Extreme weather is becoming more frequent and more severe.** Gloucestershire is impacted by severe flooding, droughts, and heatwaves. A growing risk of wildfires has also been highlighted by agencies including the Forestry Commission, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

Flooding remains one of Gloucestershire's biggest climate threats. The devastating 2007 floods damaged around 5,000 homes and 500 businesses, leaving 135,000 people without water for two weeks. Even less intense events in 2012 and 2013 caused widespread disruption. But the impact goes far beyond damaged buildings. **Flooding hits lives, livelihoods, and mental health, especially for the most vulnerable.** That's why climate resilience must be front and centre in our housing strategy and growth plans.

## The Current Model of Local Government in Gloucestershire

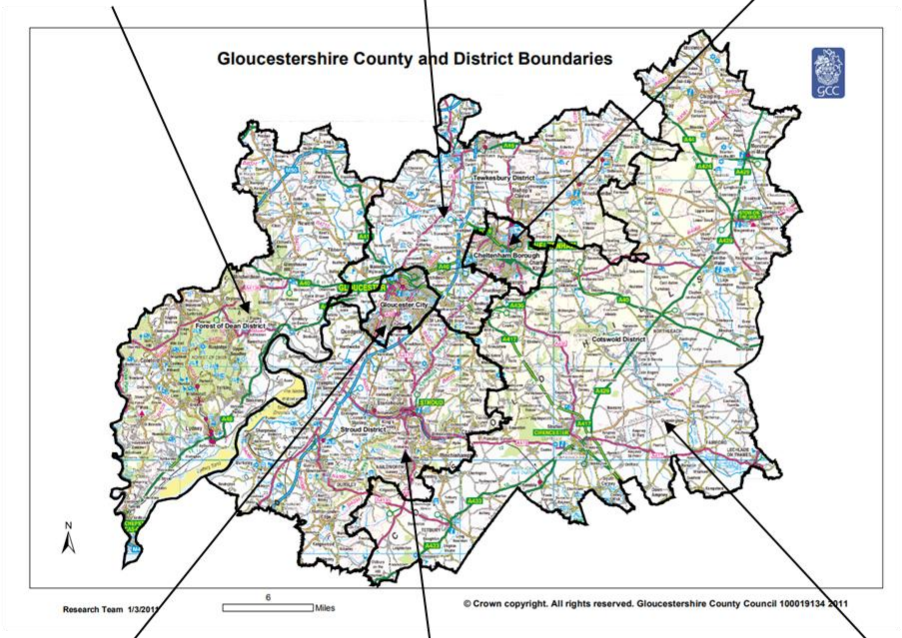
**Gloucestershire operates under a two-tier system**: a single county council alongside five district and borough councils and one city council. Most of the county is also covered by a network of **267 parish and town councils**, adding a third layer of local governance in most areas.

[17] Journey Time Statistics 2019, DfT
[18] Participation Survey, DCMS

**Tewkesbury Borough**
**Administrative centre:** Tewkesbury
**Population:** 98,896
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£7,884,000

**Forest of Dean District**
**Administrative centre:** Coleford
**Population:** 89,104
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£10,413,000

**Cheltenham Borough**
**Administrative centre:** Cheltenham
**Population:** 120,255
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£18,698,000




**Gloucester City**
**Administrative centre**: Gloucester
**Population**: 134,991
**Net Revenue Expenditure**:
£17,543,000

**Stroud District**
**Administrative centre:** Stroud
**Population:** 124,540
**Net Revenue Expenditure::**
£21,176,000

**Cotswold District**
**Administrative centre:** Cirencester
**Population:** 91,490
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£16,028,000

## Political Landscape

With each council on a different electoral cycle, Gloucestershire holds local elections every year, creating a constantly shifting political landscape.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham Borough Council | Leader and Cabinet model | Liberal Democrat majority administration |
| Cotswold District Council | Leader and Cabinet model | Liberal Democrat majority administration |
| Forest of Dean District Council | Leader and Cabinet model | No overall control; Green minority administration |
| Gloucester City Council | Leader and Cabinet model | No overall control; Liberal Democrat minority administration |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Stroud District Council | Committee system | No overall control; Green minority administration |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | Committee system | No overall control; Liberal Democrat minority administration |
| Gloucestershire County Council | Leader and Cabinet model | No overall control; Liberal Democrat minority administration |

Table 1: Current political control across Gloucestershire

**Gloucestershire's seven councils have 295 councillors, 37 of whom serve at both county and district / borough levels.** In many areas, overlapping ward boundaries mean residents can be represented by up to **four different councillors**: one at the county level and three at the district or borough level. This layered system can create complexity in local representation and decision-making.

| **Number of councillors** | **Gloucester City** | **Cheltenham Borough** | **Tewkesbury Borough** | **Stroud District** | **Cotswold District** | **Forest of Dean District** | **Gloucestershire County Council** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Liberal Democrats* | 17 | 36 | 16 | 2 | 21 | 1 | 27 |
| *Labour / Labour and Co-operative* | 7 | | | 18 | | 4 | 1 |
| *Conservative* | 11 | | 9 | 6 | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| *Green* | | 3 | 4 | 24 | 2 | 15 | 9 |
| *Independents / Other* | 4 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 1 |
| *Reform* | | | 1 | | | 2 | 11 |

Table 2: Current political make up of Gloucestershire's councils

## Partnerships and Joint Working

**Gloucestershire thrives on strong partnerships within the county and beyond.** We have a proven track record of coming together to tackle big challenges, and unitarisation offers a powerful opportunity to build on that foundation, strengthening collaboration and delivering even greater impact.

### Statutory Partners

**Gloucestershire's public sector is unusually coterminous.** A single police constabulary and one police and crime commissioner serve the entire county. The county council also acts as the fire and rescue authority, with Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service fully integrated. While the county is currently served by a single NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB), this arrangement is set to evolve with the

formation of a new cluster alongside Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) ICB, marking a shift in how integrated care is coordinated across the South West region.

Some smaller units of delivery, such as primary care networks, fit within current district boundaries. There are three universities, the largest of which is the University of Gloucestershire, and over 300 schools.

**A single unitary authority would unlock the full potential of Gloucestershire's aligned public services,** turning these coterminous boundaries into a powerful platform for joined-up leadership, smarter delivery, and a stronger future for the county.

## Joint Working

Gloucestershire already has a strong foundation for joint working, backed by a range of formal and informal governance arrangements**.** These reflect the close ties between different parts of the county and a shared commitment to collaboration.

Key structures include:

- **Leadership Gloucestershire:** a strategic alliance of senior public sector leaders - spanning councils, health, police, and key agencies - providing unified direction on cross-cutting issues to benefit communities countywide.
- **Gloucestershire City Region Board**: a joint committee of all seven councils, driving a shared vision for strategic growth and economic success, and championing Gloucestershire with partners, such as the Western Gateway Partnership, to attract further investment and growth.
- **Joint Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee:** a joint scrutiny committee which holds the Gloucestershire City Region Board to account - reviewing decisions, tracking the impact of economic investments, and shaping future growth priorities.
- **Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and a Health and Wellbeing Integrated Care Partnership (ICP):** the HWB leads strategic coordination across health, social care, and public health services, bringing together leaders to tackle health inequalities and improve population wellbeing. The ICP develops and delivers the five-year integrated care strategy to improve health and care outcomes, aligning efforts across partners to reduce disparities and improve access and experience.
- **Strategic Local Plan**: when finalised, this will shape future housing and employment growth across three local planning authority areas.
- **Climate Leadership Gloucestershire**: an innovative public sector partnership of councils, NHS, police and academia institutions, developing solutions to tackle the climate emergency.

- **Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool:** Gloucestershire boosts local growth by pooling business rates to keep more revenue circulating within the county.
- Other informal arrangements exist to enable joint working on other areas of shared responsibility, e.g. **Gloucestershire Resources and Waste Partnership**, **Gloucestershire Strategic Migration Partnership**, **Gloucestershire Housing Partnership**, and the **Gloucestershire Children and Young People's Coalition**.

Beyond formal governance, collaboration is also embedded in service delivery:

- **Ubico**: a local authority-owned company delivering a range of environmental services across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire, including waste, recycling, and street cleansing.
- **Publica**: a shared services partnership owned by Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Cheltenham, and West Oxfordshire councils. The councils work together through Publica to share skills and resources, including services such as ICT, customer services, benefits administration, housing, and car park enforcement.
- **Shared services**: various arrangements between different groups of councils for sharing back-office services, such as internal audit and risk (ARA) and legal services (One Legal).
- **Co-located services**: the Public Services Centre in Tewkesbury brings together the county council, borough council, police, health services, and the voluntary sector to provide a single access point for customers, pioneering the first Jobcentre Plus co-location in a local authority building.

These partnerships show what's possible but also highlight existing complexity. A more streamlined governance model could build on this strong collaborative culture, reducing duplication, and unlocking even greater impact for Gloucestershire's communities.

## Economic Partnerships

**Strong economic partnerships are the backbone of Gloucestershire's success - and devolution can take them even further.**

Gloucestershire's Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), GFirst, established in 2011, has played a key role in uniting business, public, and voluntary sectors to secure government funding and drive job creation. Its **Strategic Economic Plan** (SEP) has supported business growth and skills development and maximised the county's strategic location along the motorway corridor. In 2024, its functions transitioned to the county council, marking a new chapter with the creation of the **Gloucestershire City Region Board**.

Gloucestershire is actively shaping a bold, county-wide vision for inclusive and sustainable prosperity through the development of a **Local Growth Plan (LGP)**.

Although not mandated as for mayoral authorities, Gloucestershire's public sector leaders are stepping up with a LGP that reflects a **shared ambition to unlock the county's full economic potential and improve life for everyone who lives here**. Co-created by all local authorities and shaped through extensive collaboration with businesses, education providers, the voluntary sector, and local communities, the LGP sets out a clear, compelling roadmap for long-term growth and resilience.

By aligning with national frameworks, the plan positions **Gloucestershire as a key contributor to the UK's economic and social missions**, ready to attract investment and drive innovation.

Across the county, **district councils are leading bold, community-driven innovation**, including:

- **Cheltenham**: partnered with Hub8 by Plexal to launch the **MX Innovation Centre**, a workspace for the local tech community.
- **Cotswold:** rolled out a **low-income family tracker** to target support for households in financial difficulty.
- **Forest of Dean**: Forest of Dean District Council, the Centre for Sustainable Energy, and local resident-led group Forest Community Energy have partnered to roll out the AURORA project in the area. This project, supported by several European universities, **promotes energy saving** awareness through inspiring events, a carbon tracker app, and community-owned solar panels.
- **Gloucester:** acknowledged by Nesta and others as sector-leading in asset-based community development, including the establishment of an innovative community development organisation.
- **Stroud:** introduced a **crowdfunding platform** to empower community-led projects and access a share of funding from the council.
- **Tewkesbury**: the **Growth Hub** offers fully funded business support in partnership with the borough council.

**A unitary model would supercharge this local innovation, strengthening place-based leadership, aligning economic strategy, and making it easier to deliver joined-up, community-focused growth.**

## VCFSE Partnerships

**Gloucestershire's voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, powered by over 4,000 organisations, is vibrant and vital.** At its heart is the **Gloucestershire VCS Alliance**, the independent voice that informs, strengthens, and develops the sector. The alliance promotes equal partnerships

between VCSE (voluntary, community, and social enterprise) groups and the public and private sectors, supporting VCSE groups and organisations to become more sustainable.

**The Know Your Patch (KYP) networks**, launched in 2018, are another standout success. Led by local VCFSE organisations in each district, they bring together community groups, service providers, and public sector partners around a shared belief: **strong, connected communities are the foundation of resilient lives**.

# The Strategic Case (Vision & Ambition)

## Local Government Reorganisation Enabling **a Smarter, Fairer, Greener Gloucestershire**

**Local government reorganisation (LGR) gives Gloucestershire the chance to deliver more for its residents and to play a stronger role – together – in supporting national priorities.** Current structures can be complex and duplicative, making it harder to deliver the best outcomes for our residents and to join up decisions across planning, housing, transport, health, skills, and the environment. **Reorganisation offers the opportunity to simplify accountability and cut duplication, offering our residents greater clarity and improved services.**

This change is what makes our ambitions deliverable. Breakthrough innovation can be scaled when investment, land use, and regulation are aligned. Digital inclusion can be advanced when infrastructure, skills, and social support are considered together. Communities can have a stronger role when co-design is embedded consistently across local services. Wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery can be treated as interconnected priorities rather than separate silos. Talent and skills can be directly linked to affordable homes and clear career pathways. Underpinning this is how data can be used effectively across the system to improve services, strengthen transport connectivity, and prevent people from falling through the cracks of a widely dispersed county.

Gloucestershire brings major strengths; we have a world-class economy rich in both heritage and future innovation, outstanding natural capital, and a collaborative civic culture. We also face challenges: 19% of our residents live in the lowest national quintile for access to housing and services, our population has distinct and diverse needs, and opportunities are unevenly shared. LGR is the enabling change that allows us to meet these challenges and deliver a ***smarter, fairer and greener Gloucestershire***. Our six ambitions set out how:

- **Driving breakthrough innovation for national resilience**: harnessing Gloucestershire's industrial and research strengths to create resilience-focused solutions in cyber, aerospace, agri-tech, advanced manufacturing, and natural capital.
- **Harnessing digital to tackle inequality, improve services, and drive innovation**: ensuring every resident has the skills, connectivity, and confidence to access services, education, training, and work.
- **Empowering communities through co-design and local decision-making:** giving residents a stronger role in shaping services, with tools and partnerships that make delivery more responsive to local needs.

- **Putting wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery at the heart of growth:** treating health, affordable homes, and environmental recovery as the foundations of prosperity.
- **Unlocking talent, skills, and housing for inclusive growth:** linking education and training pathways directly to housing and careers that help people stay and thrive in Gloucestershire.
- **Using data to transform transport and public services:** creating trusted, joined-up intelligence to improve safeguarding, support early and anticipatory intervention, and deliver more effective integrated transport.

Our Vision: **We're building on what makes Gloucestershire great to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, bold ideas, and opportunities for everyone.**

## Our Six Ambitions for Gloucestershire

### Ambition 1: Driving breakthrough innovation for national resilience

Gloucestershire will build on its established strengths in cyber, aerospace, defence, agri-tech, and advanced manufacturing to become a national leader in resilience-led innovation. We will draw on pioneering anchors such as GCHQ, Golden Valley[19], and the proposed Severn Edge project[20] along with our agricultural research centres at Hartpury University[21] and the Royal Agricultural University[22]. By fostering clusters of excellence and supporting research and development (R&D), the county will generate high-value jobs, attract private and public investment, and contribute solutions in areas such as energy security, sustainable food systems, secure supply chains, and the restoration of natural capital. With the upcoming Western Forest[23], alongside our ambition that the Forest of Dean achieves biosphere status[24], we can work at scale on innovation in land management, biodiversity recovery, and climate adaptation.

**With our landscapes working alongside our technological advancements, we can ensure that Gloucestershire's resilience is rooted in both its environment and its economy.** LGR will strengthen this by removing fragmentation across planning, investment, and regulation, allowing innovation to move from pilots and single clusters to an at-scale resilient economy. This

[19] www.goldenvalleyuk.com
[20] https://western-gateway.co.uk/news-and-blogs/news/severn-edge-sites-potential-home-new-smr-technology/
[21] www.hartpury.ac.uk
[22] www.rau.ac.uk
[23] www.nationalforest.org
[24] www.fdean.gov.uk/planning-and-building/biosphere

integration means that innovation breakthroughs in our resilience-led sectors are both developed here and deployed consistently, ensuring benefits are felt not only by residents and businesses in Gloucestershire, but the whole of the UK.

Example benefits:

- **A start-up in Cheltenham's Golden Valley innovation district collaborates with local universities and industry partners to develop new cyber-security tools.** With LGR removing fragmentation across investment and regulation, the start-up can scale faster, attract national contracts, and create high-value local jobs - further anchoring Cheltenham's role in responding to the UK's cyber resilience requirements.
- **A farmer in the Cotswolds adopts new agri-tech tools developed in county innovation hubs.** By using soil sensors and precision irrigation, they improve soil health and resilience to climate change while reducing water and fertiliser use and costs. This not only strengthens the farm's long-term viability but also contributes to Gloucestershire's national reputation in sustainable food systems.
- **A small manufacturer in Tewkesbury trials AI-driven production planning in a regulatory sandbox, enabled by LGR.** The new system helps them cut waste, lower emissions, and respond more flexibly to supply chain pressures. Located near Ministry of Defence and defence sector supply chains, the firm boosts competitiveness and secures new contracts in low-carbon defence and aerospace markets. This demonstrates how resilience-led innovation can be scaled across advance manufacturing – the sector responsible for Gloucestershire's largest Gross Value Added (GVA) – while connecting with other resilience-led sectors, both locally and nationally.
- **A STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) student in Stroud takes part in placements within Gloucestershire's clean energy sector, working directly on projects linked to the Severn Edge site.** They gain hands-on experience that secures their future career within their own community, while local employers benefit from a pipeline of home-grown talent that supports the county's transition to net zero and enhances the energy security of the UK.

## Ambition 2: Harnessing digital to tackle inequality, improve services, and drive innovation

Digital inclusion remains inconsistent across Gloucestershire. Digital access is no longer optional – it is essential to ensuring opportunity and engagement with services. Residents, especially those living in rural areas, can suffer limited access to employment opportunities, education, or care, further exacerbating the hidden

poverty in the county. Building on projects such as the county-wide DigiHubs[25], based in GP surgeries and community centres, **Gloucestershire will ensure that every community has the infrastructure, connectivity, and skills to benefit from the world that digital offers.**

By tackling digital exclusion, we can ensure that residents who struggle to access services, training, or employment are not left behind. LGR offers the opportunity to align responsibility for infrastructure and respond to diverse demand across a complex geography, ensuring the benefits of digital investment are shared fairly across all communities. This also means all can match the pace of our most advanced future-facing sectors, as we offer support for those at risk of being left behind, so that innovation moves forward inclusively. Improved digital confidence will empower residents to participate fully in their communities, access vital support, and offer increased visibility of opportunity. **Digital innovation will drive the sustainable growth agenda, creating jobs and wealth for the county.**

Example benefits:

- **An older adult in Deerhurst, a rural village in Tewkesbury, manages chronic conditions from home using virtual healthcare tools.** Through secure video consultations and remote monitoring, they reduce hospital visits. LGR can enable this by aligning NHS and council investment in digital infrastructure, so rural areas have the same access to connectivity and digital services as urban centres.
- **A young person in Coleford, a market town in the Forest of Dean, accesses digital skills bootcamps**, gaining confidence and new opportunities in cyber, coding, and creative industries.
- **Carers can use predictive care tools to anticipate needs, freeing time to focus on personal interaction.** By receiving alerts when the person they support may need intervention, they are less reliant on emergency services and more able to plan ahead. This is only possible when health and social care data are brought together, made easier by LGR through creating a single system for sharing data securely and consistently.
- **One of Gloucestershire's many micro businesses uses digital tools to reach new customers and improve their service capability**, e.g. through online ordering or remote collaboration with suppliers. With coordinated county-wide investment in digital connectivity, even the smallest firms in rural areas can compete in wider markets, driving inclusive economic growth.

[25] Delivery of Digi-hubs | Gloucestershire County Council

## Ambition 3: Empowering communities through co-design and local decision-making

LGR offers Gloucestershire the opportunity to expand co-design across the county by strengthening the role of the VCFSE sector in service design and delivery. **By giving communities real influence over budgets, priorities, and data, services will be more inclusive, locally responsive, and sustainable.**

Gloucestershire has already demonstrated how effective this approach can be: carers have shaped new support pathways through the Carers Hub[26], and the Gloucestershire Gateway Trust[27] has reinvested profits from the M5 services into projects in Gloucester and Stroud that tackle poverty and improve skills. Local groups in Stroud[28] and the Forest of Dean[29] have influenced health and wellbeing initiatives through community hubs.

With 19% of our population living in the lowest national 20% for access to housing and services[30], empowering communities to shape services based on their local needs is critical to both equity and prevention. Neighbourhood Partnerships are just one example of how LGR could provide a clear framework for convening services with residents – they would sit alongside a wider set of tools to ensure community voices are embedded in decision-making. This approach is founded on building trust and ensuring outcomes are shaped not only by those closest to the challenges, but those experiencing them.

Example benefits:

- **Local residents, councillors, and health practitioners in a Neighbourhood Partnership work together to reduce social isolation in Newent, a Forest of Dean market town.** By combining professional expertise with insights from local people, the Partnership develops community-led activities and accessible support. LGR enables this by aligning funding and decision-making, so neighbourhood priorities can be resourced and embedded within wider service planning.
- **A young carer in Cheltenham is able to provide input into the development of a digital tool with schools and youth services to balance education and caring responsibilities.** The tool provides tailored reminders, wellbeing check-ups, and links to local peer support groups. Because LGR enables education, health, and social care data to be better connected, the young carer's lived experience regarding the previous systems' lack of navigability are reflected. This makes services easier to

[26] https://gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk
[27] https://gloucestershiregatewaytrust.org.uk
[28] https://cscic.org/programmes/community-hubs/
[29] www.inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/engagement/community-hubs/
[30] Accessibility - Transport | Inform Gloucestershire

find and use, ensuring their needs are met quickly without having to repeat their story to multiple service providers.

- **A community group in Gloucester collaborates with health providers to design culturally sensitive wellbeing services, improving uptake and trust.** By co-creating mental health support, for example, that recognises diverse cultural practices, more residents feel confident seeking help. LGR supports this by embedding the VCFSE sector within local decision-making frameworks, ensuring community voices are heard alongside statutory providers.
- **Families co-produce services in a local family hub in Tetbury, a Cotswold market town, which provides a family-friendly space.** Parents can take part in shaping early years support, parenting programmes, and wellbeing provision while their children are supported in a safe environment. This is possible because LGR brings together children's services, public health, and community development under one coordinated approach, so family hubs can act as genuine centres for co-creation and prevention.

### Ambition 4: Putting wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery at the heart of growth

**Wellbeing – with housing and nature recovery at its roots – will be a guiding principle in all policy and investment decisions.** From affordable homes and transport to skills and public health, growth plans will be designed to reduce inequalities, improve access to green and blue spaces, and boost Gloucestershire's natural capital. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity, improving land use, and supporting nature-based solutions will strengthen resilience against climate change and create healthier environments for future generations.

Gloucestershire's natural assets also underpin a strong visitor economy. By linking tourism with wellbeing and nature recovery, communities benefit from thriving local businesses while ensuring green spaces remain accessible for residents. Aligning local priorities with Integrated Care System (ICS) prevention goals and CORE20PLUS5[31] frameworks targeting the most deprived 20% of the population (as well as groups experiencing worse-than-average outcomes), will help narrow health and wellbeing gaps across the county.

LGR would make this ambition deliverable by enabling a clear line of accountability across health, housing, and the environment. This coordinated approach can act to turn investment and service delivery into better outcomes for residents. This integration will allow decisions about new housing, green infrastructure, and public services to be planned together – ensuring that residents

[31] www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/national-healthcare-inequalities-improvement-programme/core20plus5/

have both the secure homes and healthy environments they need. In Stroud, community-led housing and green infrastructure projects have already shown how affordable homes and access to nature can be developed hand-in-hand. With devolved powers, these approaches could be embedded and scaled county-wide, linking wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery as the foundation for genuinely inclusive growth.

Example benefits:

- **In the Forest of Dean, a community-led housing scheme integrates affordable homes with woodland management and local energy generation.** Residents not only gain secure housing but also benefit from reduced fuel bills, shared green spaces, and volunteering opportunities that strengthen community ties. This model reflects the Forest's long tradition of working with its natural assets and could be replicated across Gloucestershire, where LGR enables housing, environment, and community to be planned together.
- **A family in Northleach, a Cotswold market town, regularly uses redesigned green spaces that combine play areas, biodiversity planting, and community facilities.** These spaces give children safe places to play and create opportunities for families to meet neighbours, take part in local activities, and benefit from cleaner air. With wellbeing and social connection at their core, such spaces help reduce isolation and improve health outcomes across generations.
- **A disabled resident in Minchinhampton, a semi-rural town, moves into newly built affordable housing designed with accessibility and sustainability at its core.** The home is energy-efficient, reducing bills, and is linked to inclusive transport and nearby green infrastructure, such as sensory trails and accessible walking routes. This combination gives the resident greater independence, reduces their reliance on more intensive services, and enhances their quality of life. By ensuring housing is planned together with transport and green spaces, these wellbeing outcomes become part of everyday provision rather than specialist exceptions.
- **A landowner in South Cerney, a Cotswold village, participates in a countywide nature recovery scheme that restores habitats, improves flood resilience, and generates long-term natural capital value.** By adopting regenerative practices and working in partnership with local authorities and communities, they help protect biodiversity while strengthening the resilience of nearby housing and infrastructure. Crucially, this in turn enhances residents' wellbeing through multi-faceted environmental improvements that contribute to healthier, more secure day-to-day lives. The wellbeing gains are felt both immediately – through safer,

greener environments – as well as in the longer term, as communities experience less disruption and stress from climate-related risks.

### Ambition 5: Unlocking talent, skills, and housing for inclusive growth

Gloucestershire will be able to establish a countywide skills and careers pathway to support lifelong learning and inclusive economic growth. By linking education providers, industry, and employers, residents of all ages and backgrounds will have access to training, apprenticeships, and reskilling opportunities. Tourism and hospitality provide major entry routes into work for young people and career changers. In aligning training pathways with this sector, LGR can help us ensure residents can build stable futures in one of Gloucestershire's most significant industries. Affordable and secure housing will be central to this ambition, providing the stability people need to seize learning opportunities and grow with the confidence that comes from a safe, stable home.

LGR would enable this ambition by aligning housing, skills, and economic development within the same framework. Currently, responsibilities are spread across multiple agencies, making it more difficult to ensure that new homes are built where they connect to training opportunities and local employment. **Gloucestershire can create a coordinated system where homes, learning hubs, and jobs are planned together.** There are strong examples to build on: in Gloucester, the University of Gloucestershire's City Campus Development is bringing new teaching and community space into the heart of the city, while the Forwards Employment Service[32] shows how employers, colleges, and community groups can collaborate to support residents into sustainable work. With LGR, these successes can be scaled across the county, **ensuring that talent is not only retained but is skilled to face the future, knowing their own is secure.**

Example benefits:

- **A Year 12 student in Highnam explores immersive career pathways at a local skills hub**, linking them to mentors in future-focused industries, such as cyber security, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and engineering. These hubs make it easier for young people to see a future in Gloucestershire, rather than having to move away to build a career. In Gloucester, the University of Gloucestershire's new City Campus development strengthens this offer by providing teaching and community space in the heart of the city, connected to wider affordable housing and employment initiatives. Together, these projects make it easier for young people to see a future in the county rather than moving away. With LGR, this integrated approach to housing, education, and employment can be

[32] www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/disabilities/forwards-employment-service/

scaled across Gloucestershire, ensuring that all students - including those in rural areas - can access the same opportunities.

- **A mid-career learner in Winchcombe, a market town in Tewkesbury, retrains in low-carbon construction through flexible programmes**, improving their earning potential while supporting the transition to clean energy. Thanks to housing, public transport, and skills being planned together, they can study locally without facing long commutes or the insecurity of poor-quality rental housing. With stability at home, they are free to focus on building new skills and contributing to Gloucestershire's net zero economy.
- **A young mother in Cheltenham accesses a tailored learning pathway in sustainable construction and materials innovation**, supported by a family-friendly environment and counselling services at a local Family Hub. Over time, she develops expertise and becomes a mentor to others - showing how inclusive pathways strengthen both individual resilience and community cohesion. LGR makes this possible by coordinating housing, skills, and wraparound services under one framework – removing barriers so talent can both flourish and contribute.
- **A young family in Stroud secures affordable housing linked to training opportunities,** allowing them to pursue new careers without instability. Freed from the instability of high housing costs, they can take up retraining and new jobs without the stress of insecure tenancies or long journeys. This stability directly supports wellbeing and ensures Gloucestershire retains and grows its talent base by linking housing delivery with economic inclusion.

### Ambition 6: Using data to transform transport and public services

LGR offers Gloucestershire the chance to bring together fragmented data from across multiple authorities and agencies. With devolved powers, this can be turned into usable intelligence that supports earlier intervention and ensures no one is left behind. This separation makes it harder to spot risks early or to design services that reflect real needs. Reorganisation would provide a framework for data use, allowing us to introduce a trusted, secure data infrastructure that can enable services to anticipate needs, respond in real time, and act preventatively.

Linking education, health, housing, transport, and social care data could improve safeguarding measures, reduce waiting times, and ensure fair provision across urban and rural areas. Open data initiatives and live mobility platforms will offer improved journey options, reduce congestion, and promote more sustainable travel choices.

The Robin demand-responsive bus service[33] shows how transport data can connect rural residents to jobs and services, but integration with housing and employment data would make it far more effective. Family hubs can link education, health, and social care data to improve safeguarding and ensure families access support at the right time. Flood management schemes in the Severn Vale already rely on environmental data to protect communities in real time. With LGR, these initiatives could be joined together, scaled across the county and embedded into **a trusted, secure data infrastructure that works for every resident.**

Example benefits:

- **Residents in flood-prone areas receive early warnings through live data platforms.** By combining real-time river levels with local emergency planning, households are given practical, trusted alerts that improve safety, reduce disruption, and protect lives. With devolved powers, these systems could be scaled across Gloucestershire to cover multiple risks, from flooding in the Severn Vale to wildfire risk in the Cotswolds.
- **A commuter in Frampton on Severn, a rural village in Stroud, uses a transport app with real-time data, reducing journey times and supporting sustainable travel.** Backed by devolved powers, the system can ensure affordable fares, reliable rural coverage, and accessible journey options. This also allows councils to use data on passenger demand and road conditions to prioritise road maintenance.
- **At a family hub in Gloucester, a family sits down with staff and views a joined-up record that brings together information from school and health services.** It shows that their child has had a recent dip in attendance and that the parents have both reported stress to their GP. The family are able to identify that they need extra learning support and access to parenting advice before the situation requires a more acute response. The hub uses the data infrastructure to coordinate the right support quickly, reducing pressure on the family and preventing escalation.
- **Farmers can access county-wide soil moisture and yield-forecasting data that helps them to adapt to dry weather conditions and protect arable production.** By bringing agricultural, environmental, and water data together under one system, it fills a current evidence gap and allows farmers to take preventative steps, boosting Gloucestershire's food security and the wider country's resilience to the impacts of climate change.

[33] www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/transport/the-robin/

## Ambition in Action: Towards a Resilience-led Economy

The Golden Valley Development (GVD) is a nationally significant innovation powerhouse, **recognised by government as driving the UK's cyber and secure technology ambitions.** By bringing together industry, academia, and the public sector, GVD is advancing national security and resilience - supporting the UK's mission to embed resilience in critical supply chains infrastructure.

Anchoring Gloucestershire at the heart of the UK's resilience economy, and creating a ripple effect of prosperity across the South West and the nation, the GVD will support supply chains, jobs, and long-term competitiveness.

To unlock its full potential and deliver lasting benefits for local communities and the nation, **we are seeking Designated Area (DA) status for the GVD** - enabling Gloucestershire to retain 100% of business rates growth generated in this area, worth around £385.6m over the designation period. **This locally retained investment will accelerate infrastructure, boost investment, and drive a virtuous cycle of prosperity across the county and beyond.**

DA status means more funding for local infrastructure, skills, and public services - supporting our vision and ambitions for Gloucestershire. Nationally, it will help power UK growth, strengthen resilience, and spark prosperity and innovation across the country.

## Summary

We have a bold vision for Gloucestershire - rooted in our heritage and driven by our innovation, shaped by the ambitions of our people, and designed to make every community ***smarter, greener, and fairer***. Through our six ambitions we have shown how services, places, and opportunities can be reimagined to meet the needs of today while preparing for tomorrow.

To bring this vision to life, we have developed a number of personas (see Appendix 1) that illustrate what our ambitions would mean in practice for residents and communities across Gloucestershire. These personas help ground our strategy in real experiences, making clear the tangible benefits of transformation.

The opportunities before us are clear: breakthrough innovation, inclusive digital access, thriving talent pipelines, stronger communities, wellbeing-focused growth, and data-enabled services. **Together they show how Gloucestershire can lead nationally and transform lives locally.**

We know what we need to do. LGR gives us the means to do it through simplifying structures, aligning priorities, and enabling decisions that connect ambition with delivery. With the right reform, Gloucestershire can bring its economic, social, and natural strengths together to create a future where every resident has the chance to succeed.

LGR will allow us to continue **building on what makes Gloucestershire great to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, bold ideas, and opportunities for everyone.**

# Future Devolution

LGR is a key opportunity for Gloucestershire to reach its full strategic potential, locally and nationally. **As England moves towards wider regional governance, Gloucestershire is well-placed and eager to contribute.**

## Our Economic Distinctiveness

**Gloucestershire is notably resilient to economic shocks[34].** It has significant strengths in advanced manufacturing and engineering and food security innovation (a combined 23.7% GVA)[35] and is exceptional in the high-growth sectors that utilise emerging technologies[36]. **Our strongest sectors align closely with the priority sectors of the 2025 Industrial Strategy.** Gloucestershire's strong industrial roots in aerospace and engineering, combined with innovation driven by GCHQ, help it **outperform neighbouring areas in productivity, new business creation, and entrepreneurship**. We also host a skilled population, supported by strong universities, colleges, and research networks that have proactively reached out into regional networks.

Inherent to Gloucestershire is our natural capital. From the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean to the Severn Vale, Gloucestershire's landscapes give us the space and resources to lead on the challenges of the 21st century. As part of the Severn Estuary corridor, we can offer clean energy, sustainable food, water management, and climate adaptation. **Few places can match the combination of industrial heritage, high tech growth, and natural assets that define Gloucestershire's offer.**

Gloucestershire blends its landscapes, cultures, and economy into a unique identity that draws on west country heritage and lifestyle to inform future thinking. From the invention of the jet engine to pioneering hydrogen flights at Cotswold Airport[37]; from the Wheatstone Bridge to the Golden Valley; from being home to the invention of the lawnmower to hosting one of the deepest water research sites in the world in Tidenham[38], **our economy is a major asset for regional and national partners in the devolution context.**

Devolution is the key to realising this potential. With greater funding flexibility, joined-up services, and empowered local decision-making, **Gloucestershire can play its full role as a regional engine of growth at the crossroads of the South West, the Midlands, the South East, and Wales.**

[34] Economic Strategy Evidence base
[35] Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry, ONS
[36] Gloucestershire's Economic Strategy 2024–2034 Summary
[37] ZeroAvia completes initial Dornier 228 flight test campaign - Pilot
[38] DEEP - Engineering Wonder

## Our Potential Devolution Partners

**Gloucestershire is actively exploring three strategic partnerships** to the north, south, and east[39]. We found each offer unique opportunities to accelerate growth and influence:

- West of England Combined Authority (WECA)
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Swindon and Oxford

## Our Devolution Option Analysis

**A range of metrics were assessed against economic, legislative, cultural, and implementation criteria** to identify which partnership could deliver the greatest impact in line with national devolution goals.

### Option 1: West of England Combined Authority (WECA)

**Geography and Governance**

- Existing combined authority with metro mayor which is fully compliant with the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill 2025 and December 2024 Devolution White Paper.
- Combined population (Gloucestershire + WECA *with North Somerset* rises above the minimum 1.5 million threshold guidance for strategic authority formation).

**Strategic Authority Alignment**

- Highest degree of alignment across the English Devolution Bill's seven statutory areas of competence, particularly health and care integration, transport and infrastructure, economic development, environment, and public safety.
- Pre-existing governance, transport corridors, NHS integration, and multi-agency delivery capacity provide a rapid implementation route.

**Economic Geography Alignment**

- Strong alignment in advanced manufacturing, digital/cyber, green technologies, and creative industries.
- Strong worker migration pattern across the borders.
- Potential to position Gloucestershire as an agri-tech leader within a wider innovation economy, offsetting WECA's urban focus.
- Gloucestershire may become a junior partner in the highest growth R&D sectors without a clearly defined role in bringing forward its strengths (e.g. agri-tech).

WECA holds the path to the most immediately deliverable option and offers the broadest alignment with national reform priorities and fastest route to full strategic authority status.

[39] Not an exhaustive list – three options were selected according to the shared length of boundary with Gloucestershire and consideration of whether agreements had been made for bordering counties to join alternative partners.

## Option 2: Swindon and Oxfordshire

**Geography and Governance**

- No current combined authority membership so would require LGR and mayoral combined authority formation.
- Joint population threshold met with 1.6 million combined.

**Strategic Authority Alignment**

- High capability in economic development, skills, and net zero, but weaker in health, care, and integrated public service reform.
- Existing regional partnerships are largely informal or nascent.

**Economic Alignment**

- Significant longer-term potential in R&D partnerships (AI, life sciences, clean tech).
- Synergy in advanced manufacturing and cyber, but less alignment with agri-tech and rural economy; greater focus on life sciences than securing emerging technologies in the innovation sectors.
- Lower short-term economic integration due to weaker commuting links and business interdependencies.

Swindon and Oxfordshire offer strong innovation potential for the long term but would be slower to establish full statutory competencies with less immediate integration in health and rural sectors.

## Option 3: Herefordshire and Worcestershire

**Geography and Governance**

- No current combined authority and therefore would require LGR and mayoral combined authority formation.
- Population slightly below the threshold so may require additional partners or special consideration.

**Strategic and Policy Alignment**

- Medium alignment across statutory competencies with strengths in environment, rural transport, and agri-tech, but limited in digital innovation and large-scale economic growth.
- Less alignment with national reform agenda’s focus on integrated care and high-growth sectors.

**Economic Alignment**

- Closest match in current rural economic strengths and historical cultural context.
- Gloucestershire would likely lead on scale and innovation, but partners offer limited capacity in high-growth digital and tech sectors.

## Options Analysis Summary

**1. West of England Combined Authority (WECA)**

- **Why**: Existing governance, metro mayor, statutory compliance, strong sectoral fit (advanced manufacturing, cyber, green tech), and clear commuting / economic flows; existing regional partnerships across arts, culture, health, and the broadest range of services of all options; similar urban / rural profile, reflecting shared challenges in housing and transport planning.
- **Risk:** Gloucestershire risks becoming a junior partner unless it defines a distinctive role (e.g. agri-tech leader completing a 'whole of tech' future economy).
- WECA provides the high-growth innovation engine, Gloucestershire complements the ecosystem with agri-tech and natural capital.

**2. Herefordshire and Worcestershire**

- **Why:** Close match in rural economy, heritage, and agri-tech; natural cultural legacy fit; scope for Gloucestershire to play a leading role in innovation and scaling up; slightly under population threshold, but culturally congruent and offers Gloucestershire leadership space.
- **Risk:** Limited digital / tech capacity in partners and weaker alignment with national reform priorities.
- Rooted in shared rural economy and heritage, with Gloucestershire as a natural partner to inject innovation and scale.

**3. Swindon and Oxfordshire**

- **Why:** Strong in R&D, life sciences, AI, and clean tech; good synergies in advanced manufacturing and cyber, but requires completely new governance; has weaker cultural alignment, and less short-term integration with Gloucestershire's rural and health economies.
- **Risk:** Longer-time horizon to deliver; innovation is research-led and urban, less aligned with Gloucestershire's wider economic identity; very few established regional partnerships.
- Offers long-term potential in global-facing R&D and science but less immediate and less place-congruent.

Gloucestershire has the assets and ambition to contribute strongly within any of the potential partnerships. WECA provides the most immediately deliverable and policy-aligned option, while the Herefordshire and Worcestershire option offers an alternative in which Gloucestershire could play a leading role. The partnership with Swindon and Oxfordshire remains a credible longer-term prospect, particularly for research-led collaboration, but is less immediately aligned to Gloucestershire's wider economic and governance priorities.

## Gloucestershire's Aims for Devolution

**Through LGR and further devolution, Gloucestershire can unlock the tools to drive a high-growth, resilience-focused economy and smarter services for residents.**

Devolution would allow Gloucestershire to:

- **Power growth through innovation:** using devolved economic powers to create the Severn Resilience Corridor, bringing together cyber, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, and clean energy. This will attract major private investment, generate high-value jobs, and cement Gloucestershire's role as a national growth engine.
- **Strengthen resilience for the 21st century:** with greater control over housing, health, skills, and transport, Gloucestershire can deliver joined-up solutions for climate resilience, energy security, and sustainable food systems.
- **Put data to work for residents:** a county-wide data platform, anchored in Golden Valley's cyber infrastructure could integrate transport, housing, health, and utilities in real time. This will reduce duplication, cut costs, and provide residents with more personalised, responsive services, from flood alerts to smart mobility and integrated healthcare.

## Summary

Gloucestershire's strengths in advanced manufacturing, securing emerging technologies, agri-tech, and clean energy, combined with our strategic location and cultural identity, position us as a valuable partner in building a balanced and high-growth regional economy. To achieve this potential, we are now seeking active cooperation from Government and regional partners.

| | **WECA** | **Herefordshire and Worcestershire** | **Swindon and Oxfordshire** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Governance and Deliverability** | • Existing combined authority with metro mayor<br>• Fully compliant with Devolution Bill<br>• Immediate path to strategic authority. | • Would require new mayoral combined authority<br>• Population below threshold, may need extra partners. | • Would require new mayoral combined authority<br>• Threshold met but no existing structures. |
| **Strategic Alignment** | • Highest alignment across all statutory areas: health / care integration, transport, economic development, | • Medium alignment: strong in environment, rural transport, and agri-tech; weaker in digital and national reform priorities. | • Strong in economic development, skills, and net zero; weaker in health and integrated public services. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | environment, and public safety. | | |
| **Economic Synergy** | • Strong overlaps: advanced manufacturing, cyber, green tech, and creative industries<br>• Clear commuter flows<br>• Gloucestershire could specialise in agri-tech. | • Strongest rural economy and cultural fit<br>• Gloucestershire likely to lead innovation<br>• Partners weaker in high-growth sectors. | • High R&D and research potential: AI, life sciences, and clean tech<br>• Lower commuting / business interdependencies<br>• Less rural alignment. |
| **Risks** | • Gloucestershire may be junior partner in innovation without defined agri-tech/natural capital role. | • Weak tech / digital sector capacity<br>• Weaker alignment with national reform. | • Long time horizon<br>• Urban R&D focus less congruent with Gloucestershire's broader identity<br>• Weak regional partnerships. |
| **Overall Takeaway** | • Most deliverable, innovation engine, culturally and economically aligned. | • Strong cultural / rural fit<br>• Gloucestershire can lead<br>• Weaker on growth / reform. | • Long-term R&D potential<br>• Least deliverable in short term<br>• Weaker identity fit. |

Table 3: Strategic partnerships options analysis summary table

## Options Analysis

Our options analysis is an objective assessment of the reorganisation options being explored for Gloucestershire[40]. Each option has been assessed using ministerial criteria, supplemented by local criteria, drawing on a range of both qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered throughout this proposal's development. Additionally, challenge and consensus sessions were held with council leaders and chief executives from across the seven councils.

This analysis provides some key considerations which should inform any overall conclusions. However, in the interests of objectivity and respect for the democratic process, the analysis does not provide a concluding recommendation of a preferred option.

The options analysis presented in this proposal mirrors that submitted for the two unitary authorities option.

All the analysis undertaken in this options analysis is subject to the policy decisions of whichever new authority / authorities are established as a result of LGR in Gloucestershire. This analysis is also contingent on the outcome of the national Fair Funding Review, which remains uncertain at this stage.

This analysis assumes there are no modifications to the boundary between East and West Gloucestershire. Should boundary modifications arise, the underpinning evidence – particularly the financial case and RAG ratings – would need to be revisited.

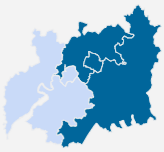
| Option | Description | Geography | | Population |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 1: Single Unitary Authority (1UA)** | **One new council delivering all local government services across Gloucestershire.** |  | Based on current **Gloucestershire County Council** boundary | **~ 659,276** |
| **Option 2: Two Unitary Authorities (2UA – East and West)** | **Two new councils: one for East Gloucestershire, one for West Gloucestershire. Each delivers all services within its area.** |  | **East:** currently **Cheltenham, Cotswold and Tewkesbury** districts | **~310,641** |
| | | | **West:** currently **Gloucester, Stroud and Forest of Dean** districts | **~348,635** |

Table 4: Options analysis summary table

[40] Not including 'Greater Gloucester/Gloucester Unitary' which has not been subject to a shared process of development

## Demographic and Economic Context

The following tables present a side-by-side comparison of key demographic, financial, and economic indicators for Gloucestershire as well as East and West Gloucestershire.

### Population and Ageing Trends

The table below provides an overview of demographic patterns across Gloucestershire, East, and West, focusing on population size and age-related growth to inform future service planning and statutory obligations.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population (2024)** | ~659,276 | ~310,641 | ~ 348,635 | The West has a larger population, which may affect baseline service volumes and statutory responsibilities. |
| **Growth in 65+ population (2026–2030)**[41] | +2.32% | +2.39% | +2.26% | Gloucestershire overall faces a challenge in relation to a population ageing faster than national averages, raising considerations around potential future supply for long-term care. |
| **Growth in 0-19 population** | Declining | Neutral | Declining | The West may see declining demand pressures on school places in the future. |

Table 5: Demographic comparison

### Financial Resilience and Income Base

This table compares financial indicators across the regions, offering insight into household income levels and the fiscal position of each area, to assess long-term financial sustainability.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gross disposable household** | £23,527 | £26,149 | £21,191 | Residents in the East have higher disposable income. |

[41] Population projections, 2022, ONS

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **income per capita**[42] | | | | |
| **Council debt per capita (2023/24)**[43] | £819 | £674 | £948 | The West would be created with a higher per-resident council debt burden*, potentially impacting its financial sustainability. **General fund not Housing Revenue Account (HRA)* |
| **Net assets per individual**[44] | £1,454 | £1,810 | £1,137 | The East would hold significantly more assets per resident, offering greater long-term financial flexibility. |

Table 6: Financial indicators comparison

## Service Demand and Social Vulnerability

This table highlights variations in social care spending and indicators of vulnerability, helping to identify areas with greater baseline need and potential service demand.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Adult social care spend per resident**[45] | £522 | £405 | £629 | Adult social care spend per resident would be significantly higher in the West. |
| **Children's social care spend per resident**[46] | £142 | £129 | £156 | Children's social care spend per resident would be higher in the West. |
| **Children in low-income families (per 100k)**[47] | 14,594 | 12,274 | 16,609 | The West has a much higher rate of child poverty, potentially requiring it to provide more targeted early help and support. |

[42] GDHI Per Capita, 2022/2023, Nomis
[43] LA Debt per capita, 2023/2024, GOV.UK
[44] Net Assets Per Capita, 2023/2024, District Councils
[45] ASC Spend per resident, 2024, Newton
[46] CSC spend per resident, 2025, Newton
[47] Children in Low Income Families per 100k, 23/24, DWP

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Household benefit claim rate**[48] | 15.82% | 13.8% | 17.9% | The West has a larger proportion of residents reliant on benefits, potentially indicating higher baseline need. |
| **Deprivation index score (higher = worse)**[49] | 15.1 | 12.7 | 17.2 | Deprivation is significantly higher in the West, potentially driving greater demand on multiple services. |

Table 7: Social care spending and indicators of vulnerability comparison

## Economic Activity and Infrastructure

This table examines differences in employment, productivity and digital infrastructure, providing context for economic performance and access to opportunity.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Job density (jobs per working-age person)**[50] | 0.9 | 1.0 | 0.8 | The East has a more active labour market, potentially creating better access to employment and economic mobility. |
| **Gross value added**[51] | £39.0 | £41.9 | £35.7 | Productivity is higher in the East, potentially reflecting a stronger economic base. |
| **Business growth rate**[52] | -0.1 | +1.1% | –1.2% | The East has seen modest growth in its business base, while the West has experienced decline; this is likely to be localised to the Forest of Dean. |
| **5G availability (% area covered)**[53] | 68.0% | 58.1% | 83.0% | The West outperforms the East in mobile coverage, |

[48] Household benefit claim rate, 23/24, GOV.UK
[49] Deprivation, 19/20, MHCLG
[50] Job Density, 23/25, ONS
[51] GVA per hour worked, 22/23, ONS
[52] Business Growth (%), 23/24, ONS
[53] % of High Digital Connectivity, 24/25, OFCOM

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | reflecting the larger rural footprint in the East. |

Table 8: Employment and productivity comparison

### Implications for Reorganisation

The baseline differences between East and West highlight demographic and economic imbalances that will shape the financial operating environment for either council that would be created in a two unitary authority scenario:

- A **single unitary authority (1UA) scenario** would need to manage these variations internally, redistributing resources and planning across areas with different levels of income, need, and growth.
- A **two unitary authority (2UA) scenario** would crystallise the variations between East and West, requiring each council to plan for its own financial and service challenges from vesting day, with a smaller scale of internal pooling of risk.

## Criteria Analysed

This analysis is structured around nine criteria; these include six statutory criteria issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG), and three additional criteria that reflect Gloucestershire's local priorities and values (criteria 7 to 9).

Each criterion has been broken down into sub-criteria to allow structured assessment across both models. We have assessed how 1UA and 2UA would potentially perform at the point of implementation and over time.

**Only those elements of the published ministerial criteria which are relevant to a RAG (red, amber, green) rating and comparative analysis in Gloucestershire are included in the tables below. In most cases we have summarised the full text of the criteria.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **KEY** | **MHCLG criteria** | |
| | **Gloucestershire-specific criteria** | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Sensible single tier of local government** | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | This criterion assesses whether the model removes two-tier governance, creates a coherent single-tier structure, and reflects a logical financial and spatial footprint. | B) Sensible economic breakdown, with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities |
| | | C) Sensible geographic breakdown, which will help increase housing supply and meet local needs |
| 2 | **Right-sized local government**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model is large and resilient enough to deliver effective government. It considers population size, potential for efficiency, organisational capacity, and the complexity of transition. | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless specific local factors make this unreasonable) |
| | | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers |
| | | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand financial shocks |
| | | D) Manageable transition costs |
| 3 | **High quality, sustainable services**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model supports effective, long-term service delivery. It considers integration, transformation potential, and the ability to improve outcomes in complex, high-need areas. | A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation |
| | | B) Opportunity for public service reform including where this will lead to improved value for money |
| | | C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk of negative impact on, crucial services |
| 4 | **Meets local needs**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model responds to the needs, identities, and priorities of local communities. It considers civic identity, community variation, and responsiveness to engagement. | A) Meets local needs and is informed by local views |
| | | B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural, and historic importance |
| | | C) Addresses local concerns |
| 5 | **Supports devolution arrangements**<br><br>This criterion tests whether the model supports Gloucestershire's ability to unlock devolution powers and funding, and whether it creates a strategic authority footprint with appropriate population scale, coherence, and alignment to regional structures | A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution |
| | | B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | **Local engagement and empowerment**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model can support stronger local democracy and provide practical tools for neighbourhood-level decision-making. | A) Enables stronger community engagement |
| | | B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment |
| 7 | **Environmental and climate protection**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model strengthens the council's ability to lead on climate and environmental goals. | A) Ensures the new authority / authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans |
| | | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB) |
| | | C) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. Fairer Greener Forest, Climate Emergency responses) |
| 8 | **Civic engagement and participative democracy**<br>This criterion assesses whether the model provides meaningful democratic representation at community level. | A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy |
| 9 | **Inclusive growth and equity**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model enables inclusive economic development, supports vulnerable residents, and maintains service levels while pursuing financial sustainability. | A) Tackles disparities in wealth, employment, and service access |
| | | B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration |
| | | C) Ensures that financial sustainability is not achieved at the expense of service levels |

Each option has been consistently assessed against these nine criteria. RAG ratings have been used to summarise alignment and are supported by detailed commentary.

## Scoring Method

To support comparison between the two options, this analysis uses a structured **Red–Amber–Green (RAG) rating system**.

The RAG system provides a simple, visual way to understand how well each option aligns with each criterion and sub-criterion.

| Rating | Meaning |
|---|---|
| G | Meets the criteria |

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Partially meets the criteria / could meet the criteria, with mitigations |
| R | Does not meet the criteria |

- Ratings are applied to each **sub-criterion.**
- No weighting is applied; all criteria are treated equally.
- Each rating is accompanied by narrative commentary, drawing on qualitative and quantitative evidence, if available.

## Evidence Base

This analysis applies a structured, consistent approach to assess how well each reorganisation model aligns with the nine agreed criteria.

The analysis draws on a wide evidence base, as outlined below, bringing together quantitative analysis, professional insight, and stakeholder perspectives. Evidence has been applied consistently across both models to support an impartial and transparent comparison.

### Phase 1 options analysis (completed as part of the interim plan submission in March 2025)

- Developed the original RAG scoring framework used in this analysis.
- Set out the early comparison of structural options based on feasibility, financial scale, and policy alignment.
- Established baseline assumptions around governance design, service footprint, and transition cost implications.
- Informed the scoring approach and structure of commentary.

### Demographic and Economic Analysis

- Provided a detailed comparison between the proposed East and West Gloucestershire councils, across:
    - Population trends and age profiles.
    - Financial resilience (e.g. council tax base, gross disposable household income (GDHI), debt levels).
    - Demand for adult and children's social care.
    - Deprivation, employment, and digital access.
    - Economic activity and infrastructure.
- Highlights the different starting points for each authority under a 2UA model, and the internal variation that a 1UA model would need to manage.
- Forms the main statistical evidence base used throughout this options analysis.

### Service-level disaggregation and aggregation discussions

- Provided detailed, operational insights from service leads across core upper and lower tier services including (but not limited to): adults, children's and education, transport, revenues and benefits, housing, leisure, and parking.
- Considered issues including:
    - Shared systems and data platforms (e.g. Liquidlogic, Capita, Uniform).
    - Workforce and statutory leadership duplication.
    - Locality delivery and place-based presence.
    - Contracting, service level agreements (SLAs), and external provider arrangements.
    - Gloucestershire-specific practical and technical issues

### Stakeholder engagement feedback

- Reflective of responses from partners involved in local services and governance.
- Provided insight into perceptions of:
    - Strategic leadership.
    - Democratic representation and identity.
    - Integration of housing, care, and place-based services.
- Helped assess both models against criteria related to public engagement, identity, and local responsiveness.

## Overall Summary of Options Analysis

### Summary of Option 1: Single Unitary Authority (1UA)

This option would replace the current two-tier council system with one single council for all of Gloucestershire's ~659,000 residents. This is a size that's been successful in other areas like North Yorkshire and meets government guidelines. Having one council means **decisions can be made more quickly and clearly** and **the county can speak with one voice** when it comes to funding, transport, and big projects.

A 1UA maximises opportunities to retain existing county-wide systems and services (like core service case management systems), which **minimises the cost and disruption associated with splitting things up and any potential duplication.** This is especially important for services like adults' social care (ASC), children's social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and safeguarding, where **keeping teams and systems together helps protect and maximise service continuity for the most vulnerable people across the county.**

Local services would still be shaped around communities, in line with the proposed locality arrangements for Gloucestershire. This includes local partnerships and

boards, budgets that are managed locally, and retaining local identity through ward names, events, and branding.

There are differences between the east and west of the county, e.g. in income levels, spending on adult social care, and levels of deprivation. With 1UA, **financial resources are pooled and can be shared and targeted where they're needed most**, increasing overall financial resilience (noting there are still unknowns around the dedicated schools grant deficit and fair funding review which impact all LGR options being considered).

The main risk is around ensuring that local voices are heard from the start – this can be managed by setting up strong local governance early on.

### Summary of Option 2: Two Unitary Authorities (2UA)

The 2UA model **prioritises local visibility, civic identity, and flexibility** by creating two councils based on existing district clusters: East (~310k) and West (~348k). Smaller footprints (in comparison with a 1UA) may make members and officers seem more accessible, which some stakeholders, especially parish councils, may see as a strength.

However, the model introduces significant **duplication and disaggregation challenges**. Systems like Liquidlogic, SAP, and Capita One would need to be split or reprocured; safeguarding boards, SEND services, and commissioning frameworks would require parallel governance. Service leads warned this could increase cost, slow transformation, and risk divergence in quality or access. The fire and rescue service in a 2UA model would be legally required to disaggregate from local authority structures and finances, creating additional cost and risk.

The West's higher demand (particularly in relation to social care services) and lower income could constrain its investment capacity without sustained external funding and there may be concerns around longer-term financial sustainability for the West UA (with current estimates projecting a c.£21.9m deficit on day one).

Like the 1UA, local services would still be shaped around communities, in line with the proposed locality arrangements. This includes local partnerships and boards, budgets that are managed locally, and keeping local identity through ward names, events, and branding.

### Comparative (RAG) scoring summary by **main criteria**

| Criteria | 1UA | 2UA |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Sensible single tier of** | • Creates a single tier of local government. | • Creates a single tier of local government. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **local government** | • Enables pooled resources and redistribution to address potential imbalances countywide, e.g. in homelessness and housing supply.<br>• Aligns with existing partner boundaries. | • Similar tax bases across both UAs but potential fiscal disparities in LA debt (£ per capita (23/24) of £948 in West compared to £674 in East) and service cost (ASC spend per resident of £405 in East vs £629 in West). |
| **2. Right-sized local government** | • Exceeds MHCLG expected population threshold of 500,000 (1UA population is ~659,000).<br>• Economies of scale across a single larger UA.<br>• Improved capacity and resilience (financial and workforce).<br>• Lower transition costs (one-off costs ~£21.3 million). | • Meets viability threshold of 300k but below 500k (East: ~315,349, West: ~354,031).<br>• Reduced duplication across lower tier services; duplication of upper tier services.<br>• Opportunities to put in place targeted shared service arrangements.<br>• Higher transition costs (with two programmes, one-off cost ~£30.1 million). |
| **3. High quality, sustainable services** | • Maintains integrated ASC, CSC, and public health.<br>• Innovation opportunities at scale.<br>• Protects multi-agency safeguarding and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements. | • May fragment countywide services which could cause challenges with quality and cost of service delivery e.g. ASC, CSC, public health etc.<br>• Fire and rescue will need to move to a non-local authority governance, financial, and service arrangement (i.e. the creation of an independent fire and rescue authority), which will incur additional costs (estimated to be c.£2.8m net total additional pressure for year one) and may increase risk of sustainable service provision. |
| **4. Meets local needs** | • Local stakeholder support for retaining single voice and shared infrastructure.<br>• Concerns around merging distinct local identities.<br>• Perception of overcentralisation, which can be | • Builds on existing district boundaries.<br>• Retains a sense of place identity for the two largest urban centres (Cheltenham and Gloucester) but could risk alienating other more rural areas. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | managed with continued place-based delivery. | • Risks financial imbalance in West which could compromise ability to meet local needs. |
| **5. Supports devolution arrangements** | • Simplifies engagement with partners.<br>• Increased scale and negotiating influence.<br>• Meets 1.5m Combined Authority (CA) population benchmarks. | • Allows tailored devolution asks.<br>• Each UA could join different CAs.<br>• Some scenarios risk falling below 1.5m population benchmark. |
| **6. Local engagement and empowerment** | • Can deliver countywide engagement structures.<br>• Embeds neighbourhood partnerships consistently.<br>• Needs deliberate design to avoid remoteness. | • Smaller footprints could improve councillor visibility.<br>• As for 1UA, effective engagement depends on deliberate design. |
| **7. Environmental and climate protection** | • Countywide environmental plans, but with the ability to still retain tailored, local strategies where needed.<br>• Unified stewardship of landscapes.<br>• Scales up local climate initiatives. | • Ability to still retain tailored, local strategies where needed.<br>• Retain joint governance for shared assets. |
| **8. Civic engagement and participative democracy** | • Scales up digital tools and participatory decision-making countywide.<br>• Risk of democratic deficit. | • Two smaller councils could feel more accessible, with closer member-resident link in comparison with a 1UA.<br>• Risk of democratic deficit. |
| **9. Inclusive growth and equity** | • Increased countywide resilience to drive growth and equity.<br>• Unified regeneration.<br>• Consolidation savings can be reinvested back into front line service delivery. | • Potential risk or difficult decisions needed in the West if current demand and cost trajectories for ASC continue. |

## Summary of Options Appraisal Against Criteria and Sub-Criteria

This section sets out a summary view of the options appraisal against the six MHCLG criteria and three additional local context criteria and sub-criteria, with ratings in RAG format providing a simple, visual way to understand how well each

option aligns with each criterion and sub-criterion. A more detailed description against each sub-criteria can be found in Appendix 5: Detailed Options Analysis.

When assessing each option against the MHCLG criteria, we note that the potential impact of the government's fair funding review remains unknown. This creates a degree of uncertainty for both options, as future funding allocations could materially affect relative financial sustainability and capacity. As a result, no definitive assessment of fair funding implications has been included within the criteria analysis for either the 1UA or 2UA option.

This options analysis has been prepared based on the current Gloucestershire boundaries. No boundary changes have been proposed or modelled at this stage. Any suggested boundary modification could significantly alter population totals and financial profiles, which in turn would affect assessment against several criteria and may change the RAG ratings presented.

## Comparative (RAG) Scoring Summary by **Main Criteria and Sub-Criteria**

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Sensible single tier of local government** | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned | **G** | • Removes two-tier structure and creates one accountable body. | **G** | • Removes two-tier structure and creates two accountable bodies in a single tier. |
| | B) Sensible economic breakdown, with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities | **G** | • Allows pooled resources and supports appropriate redistribution from East to West. | **A** | • 2024 tax base (band D equivalents after council tax support) suggest similar tax bases across both authorities (49% in the West and 51% in the East) with clear sectoral priorities to drive economic growth within each UA.<br>• However, there are potential fiscal disparities in LA debt (£ per capita (23/24) of £948 in West compared to £674 in East) and service costs, particularly in ASC (spend per resident of £405 in the East vs £629 in the West). |
| | C) Sensible geographic breakdown, which will help increase housing | **G** | • Aligns with existing partner geographies e.g. NHS, ICB, police etc and enables strategic planning to address disparities in housing needs and land supply across different parts of the county (five-year housing supply | **A** | • Misalignment of boundaries with key partners incl. the ICB, police, and fire and rescue.<br>• Variations in homelessness (higher in the West at 0.21% vs 0.11% in the East) and |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | supply and meet local needs | | target is 4.97 years for East and 3.83 years for West, with a countywide shortfall of 4.37 years). | | housing land supply (lower in the West at 3.83 vs 4.97 in East). This could result in more demand for housing in the West with less supply to meet this efficiently within the new UA borders.<br>• Average house prices illustrate that the private housing market faces greater challenges in the West, where values are lower (e.g. Gloucester £225,000; Forest of Dean £291,000) compared to the East (e.g. Cotswolds £419,000; Cheltenham £324,000), reducing profit margins and making it less likely that the private sector will deliver sufficient supply without public intervention. |
| **2. Right-sized local government** | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless specific local factors make this unreasonable) | **G** | • Serves ~659,000 people, meeting MHCLG's expected population threshold of 500,000. | **A** | • Both councils exceed 300,000 (minimum viability threshold is met) but fall below the MHCLG preferred 500,000 (East: ~315,349, West: ~354,031). |
| | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers | **G** | • Opportunities for economies of scale e.g. across smaller specialist contracts for services such as cyber and asbestos and | **A** | • Reduced duplication of lower tier services and improved coordination between areas such as transport, housing, and regeneration. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | increased market influence to enable market management.<br>• Delivery of potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£21.1m per annum. | | • However, duplication of countywide service infrastructure e.g. two statutory officers for CSC, two core systems for CSC etc will add in additional costs.<br>• Delivery of potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£10.7m per annum (split as ~ £4.9m for the East, and ~ £5.8m for the West). |
| | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand financial shocks | **G** | • Enables pooling of specialist professional resource to allow for flexible deployment across the county.<br>• Improves financial resilience to manage imbalances in demand and cost between different areas in the county.<br>• Services like ASC and CSC are preserved in their current state with senior capacity maintained and increased workforce resilience.<br>• Current financial analysis indicates that a 1UA for Gloucestershire would be established with a balanced budget on day one. This assumes the full delivery of unidentified savings required by all seven councils between now and vesting day (1 | **A** | • Opportunities to continue operating shared service arrangements in a targeted way to drive efficiencies and provide an increased number of senior officers, potentially resulting in increased capacity.<br>• However, potential significant financial burdens for the West in relation to ASC (around the demand and cost of working age adult placements).<br>• Current financial analysis indicates that the East council in a 2UA scenario would be established with a day one general fund surplus of ~ £21.9m. Whilst a West council would be established with a day one general fund deficit of ~ £21.9m. This assumes the full delivery of unidentified |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | April 2028) and does not fully account for the impact of the fair funding review (subject to further detail from government). | | savings required by all seven councils between now and vesting day (1 April 2028) and does not fully account for the impact of the fair funding review (subject to further detail from government). |
| | D) Manageable transition costs | **G** | • Requires creation of only one new authority and legal structure, minimising transition costs - estimated to be ~£21.3m. (Based on the assumption of a continuing authority).<br>• This includes lower costs of systems migration e.g. no need to split out or duplicate existing countywide systems such as Liquidlogic; lower costs of statutory senior officer roles as only one set of roles is required; lower costs of setting up two separate implementation portfolios to manage transition etc. | **A** | • Higher transition costs as governance and activities would need to be undertaken twice – currently estimated at ~ £30.1m.<br>• Specific examples of additional costs incurred include the recruitment of two sets of statutory officer roles, the increased costs of disaggregation of core county wide services and systems, the costs of setting up two shadow authority structures. |
| **3. High quality, sustainable services** | A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | **G** | • Preserves current integrated delivery in ASC, CSC, transport, and public health.<br>• Also results in minimal disruption to current multi-agency partnership arrangements.<br>• There may be challenges in delivering quality services across such a diverse | **A** | • Opportunities to potentially strengthen local partnerships with organisations within each area.<br>• Services that require aggregation will have a simpler journey as East / West will each aggregate from three districts into one. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | geography, but continued strong locality working can help to mitigate this.<br>• This involves the aggregation of six councils into 1UA, which is likely to be complex and costly e.g. alignment of different policies etc. | | • However, a 2UA will result in the likely disaggregation of core countywide services including ASC, CSC, education, transport, public health, trading standards, and libraries which could result in financial viability considerations (e.g. in ASC given the imbalance in demand and cost) as well as variations in service delivery and offer (e.g. in relation to public health services).<br>• Under the provisions in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, fire and rescue will need to move to non-local authority governance, financial, and service arrangement (i.e. the creation of an independent fire and rescue authority), which will incur additional net costs (estimated to be c.£2.8m additional pressures on day one for the new councils) and may increase risk to sustainable service provision. |
| | B) Opportunity for public service reform, including instances where this will lead to | **G** | • A larger organisation will have increased scale, resilience, and influence in working with local and national partners, driving longer-term improvements including the creation of a single trusted front door for | **A** | • Enables each council to innovate locally and make targeted investments in line with local priorities with greater agility and easier implementation, but at a potentially |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | improved value for money | | residents, a single data platform to drive prevention and early intervention, and the ability to innovate at scale quickly.<br>• For example, in areas like health and social care, a single larger organisation is likely to have a stronger voice and influence as part of the ICB in comparison with smaller organisations. | | reduced scale compared to countywide delivery. |
| | C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk to, negative impact on crucial services | **G** | • Allows flexible resource allocation across the county, directing investment to areas of highest demand such as ASC and CSC in the West.<br>• Consistent service standards for countywide functions.<br>• Preserves MASH arrangements and avoids artificial borders that could disrupt education and care placements. | **A** | • Disaggregating core services such as education, SEND, admissions, and safeguarding systems risks disrupting end-to-end care pathways, hospital discharge, and home-to-school transport. |
| **4. Meets local needs** | A) Meets local needs and is informed by local views | **A** | • Findings from local engagement undertaken with Gloucestershire residents in July 2025 indicated that 205 out of 225 residents (who had a view on local government structures) preferred a 1UA for Gloucestershire. | **A** | • Findings from local engagement undertaken with Gloucestershire residents indicated that 14 out of 225 residents (who had a view on local government structures) preferred a 2UA model. However, concerns were raised in broader qualitative |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Parts of the county's strategic partner base (NHS, police, business networks) and the VCFSE emphasised that a single accountable body could also simplify engagement and reduce duplication across multiple districts. However, some parish councils and VCFSE groups raised concerns that this needs to be supported by robust locality governance so that a 1UA does not feel more distant, especially in rural areas.<br>• The 1UA model reflects existing countywide delivery of ASC, CSC, public health and transport, noting that service leads supported retaining local operational footprints even under this arrangement. | | commentary around fairness, division, and efficiency, with references to "creating a rich side and a poor side of the county".<br>• Concerns were raised around large urban centres within each unitary dominating focus and resources, potentially leading to rural areas receiving a lower standard of service.<br>• Risks include fragmentation where communities span boundaries or rely on countywide networks (e.g. education, safeguarding, housing).<br>• Parts of the VCFSE warned that splitting the county may marginalise rural transition areas such as the Severn Vale and North Cotswolds. |
| | B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural and historic importance | **A** | • Civic identity kept through 267 parish councils, new city / town councils for Gloucester and Cheltenham, and use of local names and branding.<br>• Neighbourhood partnerships (30k–50k population) bring decision-making closer to communities and build on existing local networks. | **A** | • Aligns with current district geographies.<br>• Equalities impact assessment (EqIA) analysis shows differing community profiles: East combines Cheltenham's urban diversity with older rural areas, while West combines Gloucester's ethnic diversity with rural Forest of Dean and Stroud communities. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Area-based practice in ASC / CSC and precedents from other unitaries show local visibility can be maintained under a 1UA model.<br>• Local engagement with residents raised concerns that a unitary authority may not recognise the individual places that have their own unique identity. For example, residents spoken to at the Coleford Music Festival wanted to maintain the identity of the Forest of Dean as a unique place. | | • However, several stakeholders noted that smaller authorities don't necessarily directly correlate with improved community engagement – the underlying structures and design are crucial to success.<br>• Findings from local engagement with residents also highlighted that it could be difficult to create local identities for each unitary that do not revolve around the largest towns which would exclude other areas. |
| | C) Addresses local concerns | **A** | • Risk of overcentralisation can be mitigated by strong locality governance and retaining local delivery (e.g. social work teams).<br>• A 1UA enables countywide planning to address inequalities (e.g. child poverty, which is higher in West) while flexibly allocating resources by place.<br>• Unified capital and housing functions allow targeted investment in local priorities, such as brownfield regeneration in the West and transport access in the East. | **A** | • The West faces greater cost pressures due to higher deprivation (indices of deprivation - East: 12.71, West: 17.16); higher ASC costs per resident (East: £405, West: £629); and higher claimant rates (East: 13.79%, West: 17.87%).<br>• Cross-boundary issues (e.g. housing, transport, tech corridors, flood risk) require joint working, limiting full localisation.<br>• Unified capital and housing functions allow targeted investment in local priorities, from brownfield regeneration in the West to transport access in the East. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5. Supports devolution arrangements** | A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution | **G** | • Gives Gloucestershire a single, unified voice in national negotiations.<br>• Streamlined governance and one point of entry improve clarity for partners and enhance the county's profile when securing investment and funding.<br>• Unified leadership supports countywide priorities such as housing, infrastructure, skills, and transport, while preserving links to both the South West and West Midlands regional partnerships. | **A** | • No single voice for Gloucestershire overall which could weaken influence in negotiations but there may be improved opportunities for each authority to tailor devolution asks based on distinct priorities. However, there is limited evidence to support this. |
| | B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | **G** | • Population sizes for potential combined authority options being considered for Gloucestershire just about meet the minimum 1.5m benchmark set by government as illustrated by the combined population estimates below:<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + WECA Core: 1.6m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + WECA (incl. North Somerset): 1.81m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire: 1.45m (falls a little short of the 1.5m threshold). | **G** | • Opportunities for each UA to join potentially different combined authorities due to potential political divergence.<br>• Two smaller Gloucestershire authorities would cause concerns around meeting the minimum 1.5m benchmark in all potential combined authority scenarios, e.g. Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a combined population of c.806,000 so if only one of the Gloucestershire authorities was to form a combined authority with these two areas, this would fall short of the minimum |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ○ Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire + Swindon: 1.63m<br>• However, concerns were noted around the relative size of a single Gloucestershire unitary authority in comparison with other partners in a combined authority. For example, in the case of a WECA option, Gloucestershire would be the largest partner in WECA, with a population of c. 659,276, compared to Bristol's c.472,400, South Gloucestershire's c.290,400 and Bath and North East Somerset's c.193,400 (population figures based on ONS 2021 census). This could potentially make a single unitary less appealing for other partners. | | 1.5 million threshold (at a maximum, it would be c.1.2m).<br>• In terms of relative size of two smaller Gloucestershire authorities compared with potential partners, this may be more palatable. The populations of c.300,000-350,000 for Gloucestershire would not be significantly higher than potential partners, particularly in the case of a WECA option. |
| **6. Local engagement and empowerment** | A) Enables stronger community engagement | **G** | • A 1UA removes districts but can create countywide frameworks for neighbourhood partnerships, reducing duplication and clarifying responsibilities.<br>• Effective engagement depends on deliberate design; partners stressed the need to "build in real localism" to avoid perceptions of distance. | **G** | • Smaller footprints could improve councillor visibility and allow warding and committees to reflect local settlement patterns.<br>• Effective engagement depends on deliberate design; partners stressed the need to "build in real localism" to avoid perceptions of distance. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • The 1UA model generates the largest potential reorganisation savings (c.£21.1m annual net savings), creating capacity to invest in local forums co-designed with partners including the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), ICB, and the VCS Alliance. | | • Service leads stressed that effective engagement depends on design, resources, and authority, not size alone. |
| | B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment | **G** | • A 1UA can formalise locality governance through neighbourhood partnerships and area committees, co-designed with communities and partners – noting it may be difficult on such a large footprint (OPCC, ICB, VCS Alliance).<br>• Existing hubs and parish clusters can be aligned to locality areas, ensuring services like ASC, CSC, and planning remain close to residents, while using shared systems and standards countywide.<br>• Concerns have been raised that removing levels of government risks democratic deficit. | **G** | • A 1UA can formalise locality governance through neighbourhood partnerships and area committees, co-designed with communities and partners – noting it may be difficult on such a large footprint (OPCC, ICB, VCS Alliance).<br>• Concerns have been raised that removing levels of government risks democratic deficit. |
| **7. Environmen** | A) Ensures the new authority has / | **G** | • Countywide plans and partnerships on climate, nature recovery, and flood risk (e.g. | **G** | • Strategic collaboration could continue through Climate Leadership |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| tal and climate protection | authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans | | Climate Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) role) continue seamlessly under a 1UA.<br>• Scale enables coordinated budgets, specialist teams, and single ownership of assessments and bids, strengthening capacity for investment and delivery.<br>• Neighbourhood partnerships embed environmental priorities locally, supporting community-led climate and nature actions. | | Gloucestershire, but duplication of plans and scrutiny would add cost.<br>• Requires countywide coordination on cross-boundary issues (which can continue to build on the success of partnerships such as Climate Leadership Gloucestershire).<br>• The smaller scale of two unitary authorities should not have an adverse impact on the effectiveness. |
| | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB). | **G** | • Maintains single local plan, LNRS, and biodiversity net gain framework, avoiding fragmented policies across natural assets and landscapes.<br>• Supports countywide coordination of infrastructure, flood schemes, and biodiversity corridors while retaining local tailoring through the proposed locality arrangements.<br>• Provides consistent planning approach on issues like nutrient neutrality, with parish and community networks shaping local priorities. | **G** | • Local initiatives such as Cheltenham's Net Zero Plan and Fairer Greener Forest could be advanced under separate leadership. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | C) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. "Fairer Greener Forest", Climate Emergency responses). | G | • Local climate programmes (e.g. Fairer Greener Forest, Stroud Climate Action Network (CAN), Cheltenham net zero) can continue with countywide support, funding and systems.<br>• A 1UA enables one climate plan, shared datasets, and a single scrutiny framework to align priorities and track delivery.<br>• Some partners highlighted through engagement that 1UA simplifies collaboration, supporting targeted investment in rural, urban, and flood-risk communities. | G | • Two councils could retain and develop existing local climate plans, keeping accountability close to members and communities.<br>• Local ownership may strengthen engagement, but alignment is needed on countywide priorities like emissions, transport decarbonisation, and biodiversity. |
| **8. Civic engagement and participative democracy** | A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy | A | • Countywide engagement tools and resident panels can be delivered at scale, avoiding duplication across districts.<br>• A single framework protects equal access to participation for both rural parishes and urban neighbourhoods.<br>• Builds on local co-design pilots and VCFSE partnerships, enabling grassroots leadership within a countywide democratic structure. | A | • Both authorities would be able to develop civic engagement strategies suited to their geographies and communities.<br>• Smaller councils could feel more accessible to residents, with closer member–resident links.<br>• Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. | | represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. |
| **9. Inclusive growth and equity** | A) Ability to tackle disparities in wealth setting up one unitary authority or two unitary authorities | **G** | • A 1UA enables countywide planning and pooled resources to tackle disparities, targeting regeneration in areas with lower GDHI, job density, and higher deprivation (notably in the West).<br>• Avoids postcode inequality by ensuring consistent access to services and funding across the county.<br>• Strengthens Gloucestershire's case for levelling up and national investment by presenting one accountable body. | **A** | • Lack of countywide redistribution may leave the West struggling with higher deprivation (East: 12.71, West: 17.16) and demand pressures (e.g. ASC costs per resident East: £405, West: £629 and Adults with no qualifications East: 13,375 per 100,000, West: 16,169 per 100,000).<br>• Risks include divergence in neighbourhood regeneration and reduced ability to deliver countywide programmes to close equalities gaps. |
| | B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration | **G** | • Shared datasets enable consistent targeting of unmet need (e.g. higher child poverty rates in the West).<br>• Countywide safeguarding boards and integrated commissioning are retained, while services continue to deliver locally | **G** | • The West may face difficulty funding high-need regeneration without redistribution, exposing resource and commissioning gaps. However, funding may become more readily available to the West as their relative deprivation would no longer be |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | through hubs, schools, and VCSFE partners.<br>• A 1UA simplifies cross-cutting delivery (e.g. mental health, housing, substance misuse) and links neighbourhood action plans to countywide priorities. | | hidden by the averages of the West and East combined. |
| | C) Ability to balance financial sustainability with service levels | **A** | • Consolidation of contracts, systems, and infrastructure delivers savings in back-office functions, allowing reinvestment in frontline and preventative services.<br>• A single commissioning function strengthens market position in areas such as ASC and SEND, reducing fragmentation and securing better value.<br>• Countywide reserves and income provide flexibility to sustain high-cost services and manage financial risk across the whole area.<br>• Countywide dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficit projected to reach ~£234m by vesting day (1 April 2028). If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks. | **A** | • Each authority would have its own independent medium term financial strategy (MTFS) and budgets which can be aligned with local service priorities.<br>• The West faces higher ASC demand and costs (ASC costs per resident East: £405, West: £629) and CSC costs (CSC costs per resident East: £129, West: £156), creating greater budget pressure without access to countywide reserves or subsidy.<br>• Countywide DSG deficit projected to reach ~£234m by vesting day (1 April 2028). If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks.<br>• The impact of the fair funding is currently unknown, presenting further financial |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | 2UA (East / West) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | • The impact of the fair funding review is currently, presenting further financial uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. | uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. |

## The New Council: Future Operating Model

LGR is a chance to reshape how councils in Gloucestershire work. To deliver better, more sustainable services and tackle inequalities, **a clear and consistent future operating model (FOM) is essential.**

This section outlines how the new council could engage with residents, collaborate with partners, and operate internally. While the final model will be decided by future council leaders, this proposal offers **a framework to support long-term resilience, local decision-making, and community-focused service delivery.**

### Our Opportunity to Modernise

Gloucestershire is in a unique position – ready to harness its strengths whilst fundamentally transforming to address some its challenges, ultimately improving outcomes and delivery of high-quality services for all residents, businesses, and staff.

Through LGR, the new council can take advantage of:

- **Simplified access to services making it easier for residents to get the help they need** without having to be passed between councils.
- **A strategic approach to prevention and integration** across social care, public health, environmental health, leisure, housing, and other services. Given Gloucestershire's higher than average ageing population, this approach is key to future demand management and financial sustainability.
- **Opportunities to partner with local organisations.** Gloucestershire already has great foundations to build on – like our place-based family and youth hubs across the county and the Ow Bist Community Hub[54] in Cinderford. Ow Bist is a great example due to its co-designed ethos; the community named the building and shaped its offer, which blends council, health, and VCFSE services.
- Accelerated opportunities for transformation enabled by **shared intelligence and predictive analytics**. Housing and homelessness are an example of how a more integrated operating model can enable more evidence-driven and predictive responses for vulnerable people.
- **Fresh impetus for broader public service reform across Gloucestershire** to address service modernisation, integration, prevention, and demand pressures**.**

[54] www.fvaf.org.uk/owbist

## Our Design Principles

We've set out clear design principles to guide every decision behind our FOM:

- **Values-led:** everything we do will be rooted in clear values and led by outcomes – **doing the right thing for the people of Gloucestershire.**

- **People at the heart:** we're here for all our people, businesses, and communities – everyone is equally valued. We design with people, not for the, **building relationships rooted in listening, trust, transparency, and inclusivity.** Our ambition is to create places and services that actively support wellbeing and happiness, helping everyone to thrive.

- **Locality-focused:** our commitment to localities means **real place-based working, genuine co-production, and enabling community-led delivery.** One size won't fit all, and we will support different places in different ways.

- **Online by default and accessible for all:** our strategic 'online by default' culture maximises the impact of technology, simplifying and automating our processes, with alternative provision where it is desired or needed, so that **nobody is left behind**. And as we innovate, we stay mindful of the environmental and ethical impact of our digital choices.

- **Collective ownership:** we'll drive collective ownership throughout the new council with a **'one-team ethos'**. This empowers service leads, managers, and staff to make smart, local decisions and adapt quickly to what our communities need most.

- **Partnerships with purpose:** our **partnership working will be purposeful** to make a positive difference to our communities and achieve shared goals. Every delivery model is shaped by what works best for each place, not by a one-size-fits-all approach.

- **Intelligence led decision-making:** we will harness evidence to spot things early, be proactive, influence strategy, and drive meaningful change, using data and insights to improve service delivery and ways of working.

- **A great place to work:** we'll value, train, and care for an agile and resilient workforce, building clear career pathways and enabling development of specialist service experts, multi-skilled individuals, and those that want to move between service areas. We champion **a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects our communities**, promoting equality, equity, and belonging for all.

## Key Components of our FOM

With our design principles as our foundation, we're clear about what this means in practice.

**Two-way engagement and a first point of contact for residents, businesses, and the community**

- Fostering participation and co-creation with neighbourhoods and other communities to encourage genuine partnership working and empowerment; exploring investment in community assets, libraries, and outreach to support place-based access and digital inclusion.
- Wherever possible, ensuring that services feel consistent and connected, powered by shared customer data, especially for those with complex or multiple needs.
- Blending digital self-service and effective triage (enabled by AI, including voice and chat automation) to free up our people to provide higher value, personal services.
- Utilising resident and community demand data and insights to feed neighbourhood and community support, commissioning, and corporate planning, which will allow the council to use data to drive decisions and improvements.

**Bringing together frontline and place-based service delivery for residents, businesses, and communities**

- High-risk, regulated, and a range of other services are likely to stay in-house (or potentially even be brought in house) to protect quality, value, and flexibility.
- A workforce that blends specialist staff, who understand the technical nuance and risks of frontline services, with flexible, multi-skilled staff, who can provide challenge and strong leadership.
- Visible and responsive services in local areas through place-based forums and outreach which adapts to diverse populations and cultural needs.
- A seamless flow of contact, triage, and resolution into operational teams – with clear service standards and safeguarded pathways for urgent or high-risk cases.

**Commissioning in-house specialist capabilities associated with services the council acquires externally**

- Strategic commissioning capabilities to link insight, market knowledge, service needs, and outcomes (aligned to the corporate strategy and community needs).
- Lead with intelligence – using demand, neighbourhoods, and supply insights to drive every decision so that they are outcomes-focused and needs-based.
- Joint working with partners built on trust and shared goals (not necessarily always full-service integration), enabled by strong governance and clear exit strategies.
- An ethos of continuous review and improvement, making sure services remain resident-focused and outcome-driven, encouraging maximum value for money.

*Note: An initial view of potential delivery models for core service areas (i.e. commissioned, shared services, in-house) is set out in Appendix 6: Proposed Service Delivery Models (noting that ultimately the final decisions on these will be for the new authority).*

**Strategic enablement: driving the council's strategic direction, transformation agenda, and operational excellence**

The new council will need a strategic enablement capability to lead direction, retain decision-making sovereignty, and deliver on its political and strategic priorities. This will help drive:

- Coordination of corporate strategy, transformation, and financial performance to ensure alignment and accountability across the council.
- A robust business partnering model turning strategy into action. Central teams will manage systems, standards, and high-volume transactions, with business partners embedded within or alongside directorates.
- Insight and performance information will flow both ways between services and strategic leadership, enabling real-time learning, smarter resource use, and targeted interventions.
- Investment in the right tools, skills, and culture, pairing data with human judgement and local context to ensure decisions are ethical, inclusive, and effective.
- Outcome-driven performance management – using insight to monitor progress, drive change, and enable services to reach their full potential for residents.

# The New Council: Workforce

The workforce approach builds directly on the strategic ambitions proposed in the FOM. The new council's FOM provides an opportunity to reimagine what it means to work for our council and to invest in continuing to develop **a diverse, valued, and multi-skilled workforce that represents, and is best placed to service, Gloucestershire's residents and communities.**

By reshaping how we attract, develop, and empower staff, we unlock **greater mobility, clearer career pathways, and the chance to embed a culture of innovation and continuous improvement** across services.

## Gloucestershire's Workforce Challenges

**Our workforce is talented and dedicated**, but we're not immune to the pressures facing local government. LGR is our chance to tackle these challenges head-on and build a workforce that's resilient, inclusive, and future-ready.

- **Recruitment and retention**: stability is impacted by competition for talent, especially in social care, education, and technical roles. To attract and keep the best, we need to offer more than just a job. Flexible working is increasingly expected, and career pathways could better reflect diverse progression routes.
- **Diversity and representation:** there are gaps in workforce diversity, with underrepresentation in some roles and areas. Promoting Gloucestershire's strengths more widely can help attract a broader range of talent.
- **Wellbeing and change fatigue:** staff are under pressure, particularly in middle management and specialist roles. A stronger focus on wellbeing and open communication can help build a culture that embraces change and supports growth, ready for what comes next.
- **Skills for the future:** rapid technological change means we must invest in digital and data skills across all roles. Updating job structures and expanding access to learning will help build a confident, adaptable workforce ready to lead transformation.

## Unlocking New Opportunities for Our Workforce

LGR provides a unique moment to reshape how our councils engage, support, and develop their workforces. By aligning people strategies with the broader transformation agenda, we can unlock new potential and build a future-ready organisation.

Through LGR the council can:

- **Reset organisational culture** by embedding inclusive values, energising teams, and empowering staff to shape services. This fresh start unites

colleagues through adoption of new behaviours, attracts new talent, and creates real ownership and pride, across every corner of Gloucestershire. By putting wellbeing and resilience at the centre, we'll tackle change fatigue and build a workforce that's more connected, motivated, and driven by a shared mission.

- **Strengthen recruitment and retention** by reducing internal competition for talent, enabling more flexible resource sharing, and creating clearer pathways for retraining and upskilling. Structural changes, such as refining spans of control and smarter job design, can improve efficiency and clarity - especially important in high-demand areas like social care, education, planning, and technical services. LGR will allow our council to become a more attractive employer, offering rewarding careers and development opportunities.

- **Build skills and capability** by investing in digital literacy, data competence, and shared training – raising standards and opening-up new career routes. We'll close skills gaps in areas like AI, development operations, data analysis, and data engineering, competing with the private sector and positioning the council as a forward-thinking employer, ready to meet future challenges with confidence. And by sharing these skills with wider partners and the community, we'll boost employment prospects and deliver real social value across Gloucestershire.

- **Support diverse career pathways** by recognising the value of both specialists and generalists and creating structures that reward horizontal and vertical progression equally. Through investing in specialist skills – like commissioning, contract management, market shaping, and quality assurance – we'll help staff feel more valued for their unique strengths and open up fulfilling career journeys across the organisation.

- **Promote workforce diversity and representation** by setting the standard for an inclusive workplace. Addressing persistent gaps in representation and removing cultural and structural barriers in recruitment and progression, we'll build a workforce that better reflects the communities it serves, and where everyone can thrive.

## Gloucestershire's Workforce Priorities

Through collaboration across all seven councils, we've identified opportunities to shape a workforce that can deliver on Gloucestershire's bold vision and ambitions:

| |
|---|
| **1. Create a ‘fresh start’ for the new organisational culture, marking the opportunity to reset organisational identity and behaviours following reform, creating a more inclusive and energising environment.** |
| LGR offers a valuable opportunity to reset organisational culture. It’s a chance to reaffirm shared values, refresh our identity, and foster a more dynamic, inclusive workplace. By moving beyond legacy behaviours and empowering staff to shape the new culture, we’ll boost morale, strengthen engagement, and inspire pride in our future. |
| **2. Accelerate digital confidence and capability, reflecting the commitment to equip staff with digital skills and tools.** |
| We’re embedding digital, data and technology (DDaT) at the core of the new council, backed by real investment in upskilling our people so that they have the tools and support they need to thrive. By expanding graduate schemes and digital apprenticeships, we’ll build a workforce that’s digitally confident, ready to innovate, and equipped to deliver modern, responsive public services. |
| **3. Design inclusive career pathways, reflecting the commitment to support both specialist and generalist progression by creating flexible, transparent career routes that value diverse skills and aspirations.** |
| We’re committed to clear, flexible career pathways that let both specialists and generalists thrive, without being pushed into unsuitable management roles. Current structures often lack the flexibility to support dual career tracks, which can limit the development of specialist expertise. By valuing every route equally, supporting career exploration, and being transparent about role expectations, we unlock talent at every level. And for regulated professions, such as S151 officers, we’ll keep the depth and accreditation that excellence requires. |
| **4. Championing diversity of thought and inclusive behaviours, highlighting the importance of embedding equity and inclusion in recruitment, leadership, and everyday practice.** |
| LGR is our platform to embed inclusive practices and celebrate diversity of thought at every level. We’re tackling underrepresentation head-on, making sure all staff feel seen, heard, and valued. Our priorities include inclusive recruitment, diverse leadership pipelines, and open dialogue across teams. By championing different |

perspectives and lived experiences, we'll strengthen decision-making, build community trust, and create a workforce that truly reflects the population it serves.

**5. Building leadership capability – referring to the qualities, skills, and support needed for leaders to guide teams effectively through change and deliver high-quality services**

Strong leadership is key to navigating change and delivering high-quality services. LGR creates valuable opportunities to grow leadership at every level. Through shared training, mentoring, and clear development pathways, the council can support leadership growth while defining the qualities needed for the future. By investing in our leaders, we'll boost confidence, enhance engagement, and equip managers to lead with clarity, empathy, and purpose – amplifying the strengths already thriving across our teams.

**6. Creating an anchor institution for the wellbeing of our communities**

The 2021 Gloucestershire Director of Public Health's annual report "Sources of Strength"[55] described how 'anchor organisations' can support community health and wellbeing and help tackle inequalities in their places. Anchor organisations like the new unitary council will take direct action in areas like employment policies, procurement, buildings, the environment, and place-shaping – leveraging our assets and influence for local benefit. As one of Gloucestershire's largest employers, we'll lead by example.

**7. Supporting staff who may not continue in the new unitary council**

LGR is also about looking after our people. For those not transitioning into new roles within the new organisation, we'll offer tailored support – including CV writing, interview preparation, and access to redeployment resources – so that everyone feels respected, empowered, and ready for their next step. This compassionate approach values individual contributions and helps maintain a positive organisational culture throughout the change.

[55] www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/nb5dugc1/dph-report-2021-sources-of-strength.pdf

# The New Council: Digital, Data and Technology

## Designing a Digitally-Enabled Organisation for Gloucestershire

Since the announcement of LGR, we've worked with the Local Government Association (LGA) and other councils who've already navigated this process to understand the realistic opportunities and learn from their experiences in digital, data and technology (DDaT) transformation. This collaborative approach has enabled us to identify opportunities, challenges, and best practices, ensuring that our DDaT aspirations are informed by real-world experience and aligned with the government's digital blueprint[56].

**Putting residents and communities first is at the core of our DDaT approach.** We're designing digital services that work for everyone – whatever their age, ability, or access to technology. While we're investing in DDaT to improve outcomes and experiences, we recognise that not everyone can or wants to access services online. We'll continue to offer alternative ways to get support and information, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Our DDaT vision is to **transform the experience of local public services**, designing an organisation truly fit for the digital age: innovative, efficient, and built to meet the expectations and needs of our local people, communities, and staff.

By uniting all seven councils, we can simplify and standardise services, so every resident enjoys a consistently good experience – no matter where they live or what service they use. This means **easier access, less confusion, and no need to repeat information or navigate multiple systems.** It allows us to focus resources where they are needed most, respond quickly, and deliver joined-up, reliable support. Ultimately, we're building a council that is more efficient, more responsive, and better able to meet the needs of our communities.

## What Do We Mean by Digital, Data, and Technology?

**Digital:** we're creating an empowered and user-centred culture – investing in the right skills and tools to deliver seamless, end-to-end online services that people choose to use because they're simple and effective.

**Data:** we'll use data strategically and ethically to drive smarter decisions and deliver personalised support. At the heart of our data use will be secure and ethical data sharing, improving interoperability across systems, and using insights to redesign services around real need.

**Technology:** our approach is robust, secure, and flexible – from cloud and low-code to open-source tools and responsible use of AI. We'll deliver resilient,

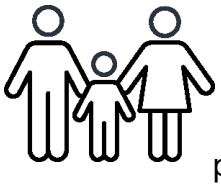
[56] www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-blueprint-for-modern-digital-government

scalable systems that support innovation and work together effortlessly, so every experience feels joined-up and intuitive.

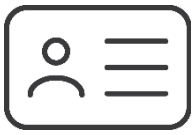
## What Difference Will Designing a Digitally Enabled Organisation Make?



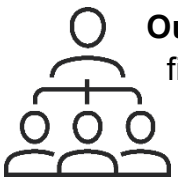
**Our residents and businesses** across Gloucestershire will access services that are consistent, proactive, accessible, and responsive – joined-up across the council and its partners. By using data smartly (where it makes sense to rather than 'just because'), we'll deliver the right support at the right time, cutting out repetition and confusion. Whether its online, by phone, via email, or face-to-face, everyone gets the same reliable service. And because digital exclusion is real, we're committed to making sure that everyone – regardless of how they choose to engage – can access the support and services they need.



**Our communities** will have more opportunities than ever to shape services and share their views. Digital platforms will make it easier to access data, share views, respond to consultations, and work in partnership with us – building fairness, trust, and real empowerment. This means communities are enabled to respond to local issues themselves, as well as target support and resources where they are needed most, strengthening local resilience.



**Our staff** will have the right tools and connected systems, working in a culture that champions learning and collaboration. Routine tasks will be automated, freeing up time for complex work and collaboration within and outside the organisation. We'll trust our staff to experiment, adapt, and grow, supporting them every step of the way to build new skills.



**Our leadership** will have real-time, high-quality insights at their fingertips, enabling confident, informed decisions. With LGR unlocking joined-up data, we'll see across systems, anticipate future needs, and target resources where they'll have the greatest impact.



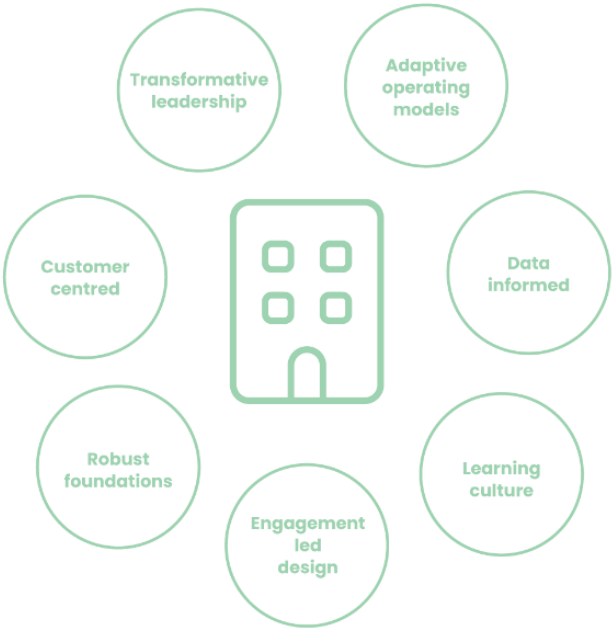
**Our new unitary authority** will be better equipped to manage demand, streamline processes, and evolve services in innovative ways. By harnessing digital and data capabilities, we'll break away from traditional models of local government service delivery, enabling more targeted support and adaptive operating models. We're committed to becoming an

employer of choice: attracting and retaining talented people by fostering a modern, inclusive, purpose-driven workplace where staff feel empowered to make a real difference.

**Our partners** will benefit from shared platforms, ethically aligned data, and collaborative delivery, making it easier to work across organisational boundaries. We'll reduce duplication, remove barriers, and create seamless experiences for people using services across different agencies.

## Strategic Components of Our Approach

DDaT sits at the heart of Gloucestershire's transformation. We've identified seven key areas that will help us turn our ambition into action – each focused on delivering better outcomes for residents, communities, and businesses.




### Transformative leadership

Our leadership will encourage bold innovation – **challenging the status quo** and championing joined-up services across teams, organisations, and sectors. Leaders will foster a culture where experimentation is encouraged, help remove barriers, and use data to make informed decisions. They'll empower staff to 'build, test, learn', embracing continuous improvement over perfection at the first iteration. They'll ask the right questions, equip staff with the tools to answer them, and act confidently on what data reveals.

### Adaptive operating model

We'll adopt reusable common components wherever possible, ensuring data portability and a consistent user experience across services.

All services will be online by default (with alternative channels available), underpinned by a single digital process regardless of contact channel. We'll remove unnecessary hand-offs, reduce duplication, and make it simpler and quicker for residents to get what they need. By joining forces with partners across the public and voluntary sectors, we'll deliver a simple and consistent experience across the whole system.

**Data-informed decisions**

Traditionally, local government has faced challenges with fragmented datasets – both within and between organisations – making early intervention difficult. LGR offers a real opportunity to break down these silos, joining up services and data to enable earlier intervention, faster responses, and more effective prevention. **Evidence-based decision making and investment in analytics, predictive modelling, and AI will better equip us to anticipate demand and drive continuous improvement.**

Robust data governance is non-negotiable. We'll use information safely, securely, and ethically, joining up across services and with partners when there is consent and clear purpose. Clear principles and accountability will guide how we use AI and data, building trust and delivering value responsibly.

Our new unitary authority will enable the implementation of a joined-up predictive analytics platform across adult and children's services, education, housing, and health. By pooling data that used to be locked in districts and county silos, the system will help identify early warning signs of safeguarding risks – such as school absence, housing instability, or repeat A&E visits – and trigger coordinated interventions when needed. In our MASH, for example, we'll enable real-time data sharing across agencies, standardised data formats and dashboards, predictive analysis to identify risk earlier, standardisation of risk thresholds, and automation of routine processes (e.g. triage and referrals).

**Customer-centred services**

Customer experience and our approach to digital must go hand-in-hand.

**Our aim is to deliver intuitive, accessible, and consistently high-quality online services for all residents and customers, putting them at the heart of our service design.** One phone number. One website. An integrated digital front door – incorporating tools like live chat and chatbots for 24/7 availability. With smart digital tools and AI, we'll track progress on cases, keep people updated, and

resolve issues faster, freeing up our staff to focus on supporting people with more complex needs.

**We'll build public trust through transparency** – open dashboards showing our performance, reliability, and commitment to high standards. By connecting information across services, we'll build a fuller picture of our communities' needs and respond with care.

User-centred design and continuous improvement will be our standard. We will test new services and features with real users, gather feedback, and keep improving, so that what we deliver is always intuitive, accessible, and genuinely useful. This will help us to identify and address issues early, refine our services, and make sure our services work for everyone.

### Learning culture

We're creating a culture where **curiosity is celebrated, change is embraced, and learning never stops.** We'll blend the best of our existing strengths with our appetite for more experimentation, collaboration, and continuous learning.

We'll learn from the best – partnering with national initiatives like the LGA and the Government Digital Service to improve digital consistency across the sector and drawing inspiration from places that have already led the way, like Greater Manchester and Data Mill North. We'll bring together the council, NHS, universities, technology start-ups, and other partners to pilot bold new ideas and turn innovation into action.

We'll invest in digital skills at every level, including digital apprenticeships, to **build a workforce that can deliver and sustain transformation.**

### Listening to our residents and stakeholders

To build online services that are truly inclusive and genuinely responsive to our residents' expectations and needs, we must actively listen to them and recognise the digital exclusion challenges across the county.

Our digital engagement approach will support Gloucestershire's residents and communities to easily provide feedback, join resident panels, and co-design services. Aligned to our proposed locality arrangements, we'll make appropriate data and insights available so that our communities are empowered to shape solutions to local concerns and issues. By teaming up with partners like the VCSFE and parish councils, we'll boost digital skills and deliver meaningful digital engagement.

We'll use data and digital platforms to tailor engagement by location, interest, or demographics. **Robust feedback loops, co-design practices, and transparency will improve inclusive service delivery and build trust with our residents.**

And we're committed to true accessibility. If digital isn't an option, we'll meet people where they are – by phone, in person, or through trusted local partners.

Regardless of the contact channel, the process and experience must feel consistent, joined up, and fair, **ensuring that no one is left behind in our digital transformation.**

**Robust infrastructure**

The success of the new council will fundamentally rely on robust and dependable technology foundations. We'll ensure our infrastructure, devices, applications, and data are up-to-date, secure, resilient, and dependable.

We'll move to the cloud-based platforms where it makes sense. But we won't just simply replace legacy systems in the cloud – **we'll seize every chance to transform services, using flexible, open-source solutions to promote transparency, efficiency, and innovation.**

Every investment in our infrastructure will be futureproof: cyber-secure, sustainable, and built to last. We'll set clear design principles to prioritise standardisation and interoperability. Environmental sustainability will be a key consideration, ensuring our technology decisions support the council's broader climate and carbon reduction commitments.

We'll equip teams with the right digital tools – like low-code platforms – to design, test, and launch new solutions at speed, scale, and lower cost. We'll tackle 'shadow IT' – where tools, apps, or systems are procured without the approval of the central DDaT service – to ensure every technology decision is strategic, centralised, and fully aligned with our DDaT ambitions.

Our DDaT investments must go beyond devices and platforms to include connectivity. While most of Gloucestershire already enjoys superfast broadband, we'll close the gaps, especially in rural and digitally excluded areas. As a unitary council, we'll be better placed to coordinate infrastructure investment, work with national programmes, and ensure that all communities, regardless of geography, can benefit from modern, reliable, and inclusive digital services.

## Summary

Designing a digitally enabled council for Gloucestershire isn't just bold, it's essential. **We're laying the foundations for a modern, responsive, and inclusive organisation.**

The risk of not embedding a clear digital strategy and robust DDaT foundations from day one is real. Without it, we risk building on fragmented systems, outdated processes, and inconsistent data – driving up costs, slowing progress, and limiting our ability to innovate, collaborate, and meet rising expectations.

Our case studies (Appendix 2) already show how **digital is improving outcomes** across the county, streamlining services, and supporting those who need us most. But the real opportunity lies ahead: working together to deliver consistent, high-quality outcomes for everyone who lives, works, or visits Gloucestershire.

As we move through the phases of LGR, our strategy will balance innovation with stability. We'll embed customer focus from the outset and set a clear roadmap for future transformation.

Ultimately, our DDaT ambitions will enable us to become a proactive council that delivers meaningful outcomes. Our new council will feel modern, human, and trustworthy – **designed around the people we serve and powered by the best of digital, technology, and data insight.**

## The New Council: Democratic Arrangements

**We're creating a single, unified council with a bold vision for Gloucestershire. One that speaks with one voice, champions the whole county, and delivers for every resident.**

**Local members will be strong representatives and true community leaders**, deeply connected to local priorities and aspirations, clearly accountable for services, and powerful convenors who bring people and partners together to deliver real impact.

**Bringing together the county council and district councils into one unitary authority** will simplify local government, making it easier for residents to engage with the council, with local members at the heart of that relationship.

Right now, electoral arrangements across seven councils mean that every year sees a council election in at least one part of the county. **A single council means coherent leadership, long-term planning, and a stronger, more consistent voice for Gloucestershire.**

| Council | Number of Councillors | Electoral cycle | Next election |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 55 | All out every 4 years | May 2029 |
| Cheltenham Borough Council | 40 | Elected in halves every 2 years | May 2026<br>May 2028 |
| Cotswold District Council | 34 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Forest of Dean District Council | 38 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Gloucester City Council | 39 | All out every 4 years | May 2028 |
| Stroud District Council | 51 | All out every 4 years | May 2028 |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | 38 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Total | 295 | | |

Table 9: Current electoral arrangements

**A single unitary council will simplify local democracy, reduce councillor numbers, and create a more stable political landscape for Gloucestershire. But this isn't about centralisation - it's about strengthening local voices.**

We're committed to **enhancing democracy**, not diluting it. Local members will be empowered to lead, listen, and act, backed by a council culture that puts communities first.

The new council will start with **110 members**, with each current county division electing two councillors. This builds on a recent boundary review, ensuring **fair representation** without delay or disruption. Existing district ward boundaries aren't

fit for purpose; unequal elector ratios and inconsistent structures (single-, double-, and triple-member wards) make them unworkable for a modern, unified council.

A streamlined council of 110 members - one for every 4,477 electors - matches the average for similar unitary authorities, avoids the need for an immediate boundary review, and ensures:

- **Capacity to lead through transition,** while staying closely connected to communities.
- **Representation across large, rural divisions** with multiple parishes.
- **Clear democratic accountability from day one**, with councillors who are visible, accessible, and responsive representatives of their communities.

**In time, a boundary review will be requested, which may in turn reduce the council to around 90 members** (approximately 5,472 electors per member), moving to smaller, single-member divisions for clearer public accountability.

A new unitary council would result in an **initial reduction of 185 councillors**, followed by a **further reduction of 20 councillors within a few years,** striking a balance between a simpler, more effective system and strong local representation.

**Our governance will be built on four core principles:**

- A clear, unified voice for Gloucestershire
- Seamless collaboration across the public sector
- Strong transparency and accountability
- Community needs at the heart of every decision.

**We're designing a modern, responsive council - one that leads with clarity, collaborates with purpose, and puts communities at the heart of everything it does.**

We'll deliver this through:

- **Strong, visible leadership** from a proactive Leader and Cabinet, fully engaged in shaping Gloucestershire's role in the future Combined Authority.
- **Engaged, flexible scrutiny** that brings together all political groups - and where needed, external voices - to shape policy and hold decisions to account. We will use creative, constructive approaches to scrutiny, working at both a strategic and a local level to make sure we're meeting the needs of our communities.
- **Proud civic leadership**, preserving the heritage and ceremonial roles of Gloucester and Cheltenham, while strengthening county-wide identity through the Chair of the council and ties with the Lord Lieutenancy.
- **Local decision-making** power through area planning committees with real powers over planning and other place-based matters.
- **Neighbourhood Partnerships** that reflect real communities and local priorities, shaping services, guiding funding, and driving community-led development.
- **A stronger role for Town and Parish Councils**, backed by a jointly owned charter and new opportunities to take on devolved powers, tailored to each council's appetite and capacity.

- **Real opportunities for children and young people** to share their views and help shape the decisions that affect them.
- **A culture of participation**, with co-production and engagement embedded in how we work, reaching every community, including those in non-parished areas.

# The New Council: Empowering Gloucestershire – Our New Locality Arrangements

Unitarisation provides us with a unique opportunity to **rewire the connections between places, people, and organisations**. Since the English Devolution White Paper was issued, Gloucestershire's seven councils have worked together to **reimagine our system, with local places at its heart.** The result is a proposal to unlock the strengths in our community organisations, in our diverse places, and above all, in the people of Gloucestershire.

Our council leaders are united in a desire to shift the extent and quality of community empowerment. We want to take the best of our smaller scale and localised good practices, delivered by councils and key partners, and scale them up - making it central to how we work as a new council.

## Grounding our approach in evidence

We've worked closely with local associations and organisations to understand what truly empowers communities and to map the strengths of our current system. We've drawn on insights from over 20 unitary councils with area-based arrangements and conducted a review of national best practice. Our early conclusions were clear: given the scale and diversity of a unitary Gloucestershire, **a neighbourhood approach is essential** for our future accountability, effectiveness, and cohesion.

Among many learning points, the following stand out:

- **Trust and consistency matter:** Too often, new unitary councils have struggled to deliver the locality promises set out in their proposals, risking trust, especially with parishes and the VCFSE sector. Our approach puts **long-term relationships and trust at the heart of everything we do.**

- **A whole council priority:** Neighbourhood arrangements are not an 'add-on'. To deliver prevention, participation, and wellbeing, good practice cannot be confined to a neighbourhood model. **Leadership, culture, and structure must be joined up and focused on empowering communities.**

- **Community development drives real change:** Unitary councils have made strides on using area-based arrangements to act on visible economic and environmental issues, but many have found tackling health, inequalities, and social challenges at the neighbourhood level has been tougher. By **applying resources and focus to community development**, working together with the VCFSE and NHS, we will unlock better outcomes. In our model, the role of public health is central - bridging the priorities and capacities of health and local government systems.

- **Area-based approaches build stronger communities:** The evidence is clear: when councils work across sectors and issues, communities thrive. But a top-down, overly formal approach stifles innovation and inclusivity.

We're committed to test-and-learn, and genuine engagement in ways that make sense to people - making sure every resident feels included.

These learning points have been crucial in shaping our model and proposals.

## Our current locality models

Neighbourhood approaches are already woven into the fabric of local services, delivered by councils and partners at various geographic scales. As current district boundaries become less relevant, our focus shifts from serving broad populations of 100,000+, to local communities of 20,000 - 50,000. **It's about putting people at the centre - organising around natural communities and driving real change where it matters most.**

*The Gloucestershire Place Pyramid*

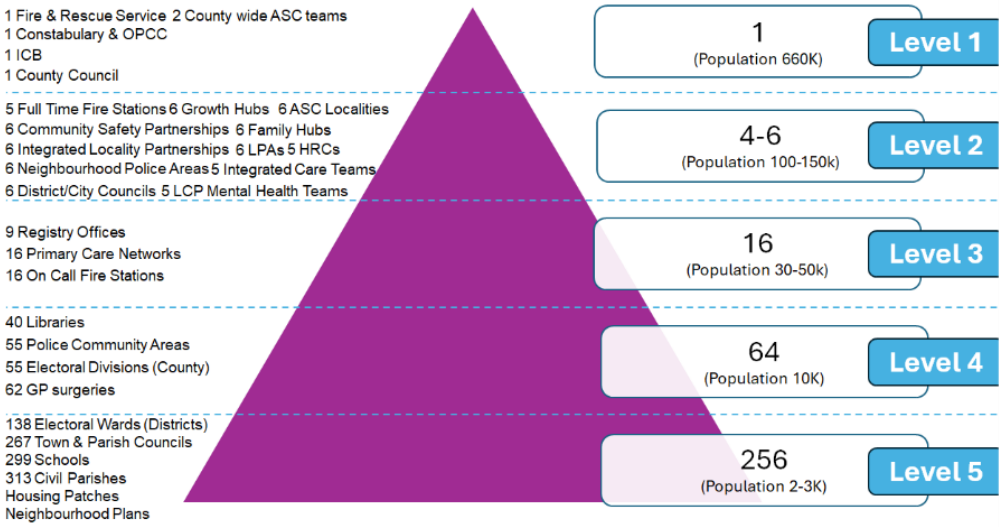



Diagram 1: Gloucestershire's current locality approaches

Across our seven councils and partners, we see a rich diversity of approaches – each driving positive change in its own way:

- **Stroud's community hub approach:** born during the pandemic, but now evolved into a dynamic partnership - bringing together local voluntary organisations, parishes, and housing providers to tackle social isolation and health and wellbeing
- **Integrated Locality Partnerships (ILPs):** led by the NHS, uniting health and other partners at a local level, currently based on district footprints
- The wealth of **community-centred regeneration and economic initiatives**, including the award-winning Gloucester Forum and the Golden Valley development in Cheltenham – proof that **local ambition delivers real results**
- **The Forest of Dean's innovative partnership** between the district council and Forest Voluntary Action Forum has developed a dynamic approach to youth services and more
- The recent successful launch of **Gloucestershire's** Family Hubs and associated Family Hub Networks. Organised in five locations across the county, with an emphasis on wider outreach. Partners include the

Gloucestershire Gateway Trust which has developed a neighbourhood and community led approach to supporting children and families

- The area-based **community development approach pioneered in Tewkesbury** and closely tied to the rapid housing and business growth in the area
- Cotswold District Council's active approach in its unique geography supports 115 parish and town councils, with the annual **'Cotswold Parish and Town Summit'** as a showcase for local leadership and collaboration.

**We know that great practice already exists in Gloucestershire – but much of it needs to be scaled up and shared across boundaries.**

## Neighbourhood Partnerships: A new way of engaging and delivering

**We're proposing a new system of Neighbourhood Partnerships**[57]. Each partnership will have the freedom to set its own agenda and priorities, **rooted in what matters to local people.** Their scope is broad by design – giving every place the space to shape its own future. The five key roles each partnership will perform are set out below:

| Core roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships | |
|---|---|
| **Engagement and empowerment** | Each neighbourhood will build on existing great work to get local residents and organisations involved. **Neighbourhoods will be the go-to forum for the council and other agencies to listen, consult, and make sure actions are relevant and responsive to local needs.** |
| **Community development** | Neighbourhoods will be backed by real resources to drive community development. Working with public health, and other expert capacities, community development will play a key role in **tackling inequalities and amplifying the voices of those too often unheard**. Neighbourhoods will work closely with the VCFSE sector to shape and provide this function. |
| **Service access and delivery** | Each neighbourhood will map local services, data, assets, and capacity. **All council services will work together with neighbourhoods**, with many having a visible, accountable presence at the local level. How different services are involved will naturally vary. |
| **Funding and decision-making** | Neighbourhood Partnerships will have a main committee made up of local councillors and non-voting members from local organisations. Neighbourhoods will get **funding and staff resources to deliver** on its priorities. Committees will set their own work programmes, decide how resources are used, and make decisions on local priorities. They'll be accountable to |

[57] 'Neighbourhood Partnerships' would fulfil the role of 'Neighbourhood Area Committees' set out in the current Devolution Bill

| Core roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships | |
|---|---|
| | local people, shape council work on the ground, and play a key role in the planning system. |
| **Prevention and Wellbeing** | **Neighbourhood structures aren't a *'nice to have'* – they're essential**. Connected communities achieve better outcomes, from early years and health to democracy and community safety. We'll put data and evidence at the centre of neighbourhood working, powered by our public health and performance capabilities. Neighbourhoods, whilst setting their own priorities, will have **a duty to focus on prevention in everything they do.** |

Table 10: The core roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships

We've built these core roles by listening to the views and experience of councillors from all seven councils. At a recent all member webinar, councillors ranked the key roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships in order of importance – and the results are clear. Service accountability, residents voice, health and wellbeing, community development, and joined up working between the council, parishes, and partners all came out on top. This will continue to be tested with local people and organisations.




Diagram 2: Results from all member webinar ranking exercise

## The size and shape of our Neighbourhoods

**Neighbourhood size and boundaries won't be drawn in isolation – they'll be shaped by thorough consultation**. Our research suggests each neighbourhood needs to be big enough for the council and partners to focus resources, but small enough to reflect a natural community. Most will be made up of a main town and its surrounding villages, or a recognisable neighbourhood within a major town or city. We're suggesting populations of 20,000 - 50,000, with options set out within the consultation process. The result will be between 15 and 25 Neighbourhood Partnerships for Gloucestershire.

We're proposing the current county electoral divisions as the main 'building blocks' of neighbourhoods. But boundaries aren't set in stone - this will form part of the consultation and some adjustments will be needed to better reflect natural communities. Neighbourhood committees will be composed of between four and ten local councillors (depending on size), in addition to co-optees.

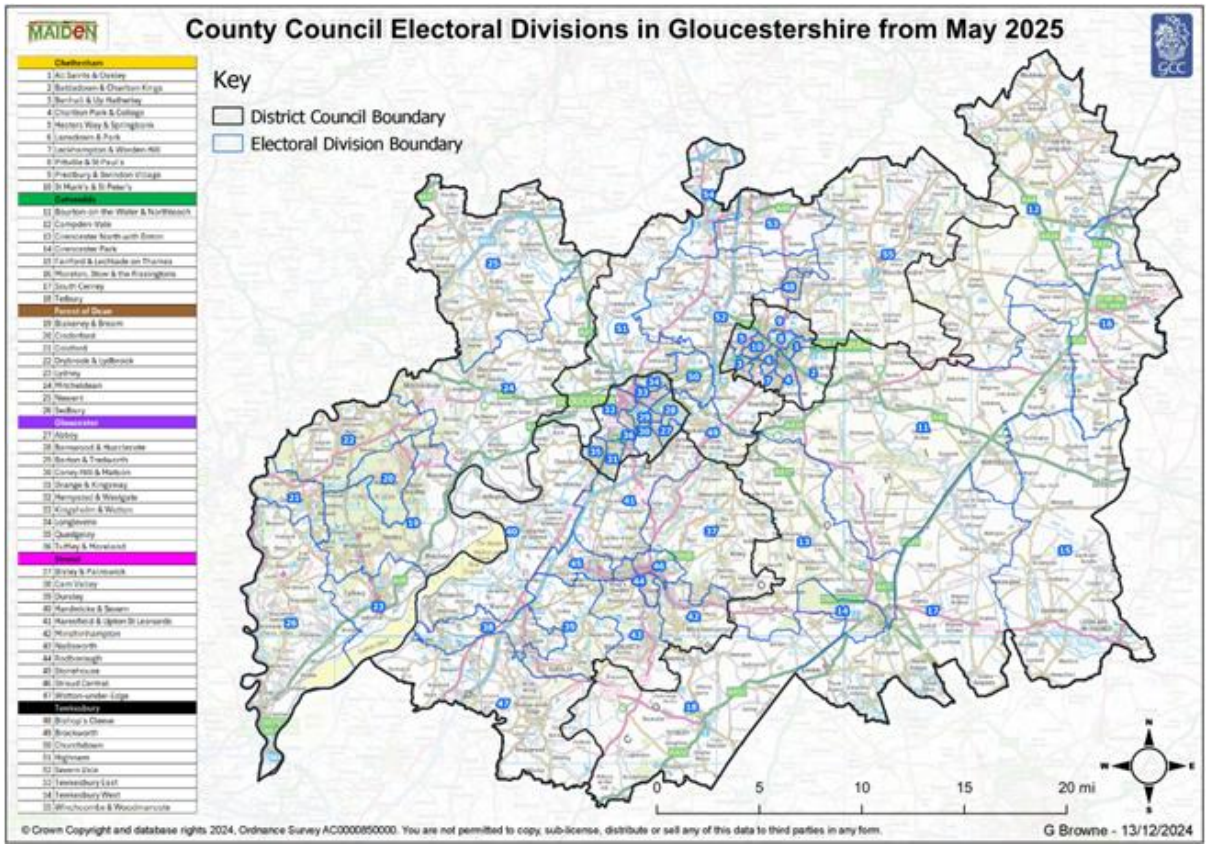



Diagram 3: the current county electoral divisions

## Our adaptive and flexible approach

Not everything the council does will fit neatly into our structure of Neighbourhood Partnerships. We would expect the shadow authority to consider area-based Development Control committees on a larger scale than Neighbourhood Partnerships. But **Neighbourhood Partnerships will still play a vital planning role** - acting as consultees in a future *Statement of Community Involvement* and, where it makes sense and is wanted locally, in the development of *Neighbourhood Plans*.

## Investing in Neighbourhoods

**An expert team will be built around our Neighbourhood Partnerships**:

- **Chair of the Neighbourhood Partnership**: An elected councillor, nominated by councillors in the neighbourhood
- **Neighbourhood Partnership manager**: Together with the chair, this role will form a crucial leadership partnership in making the neighbourhood work successfully
- **A council neighbourhoods team**: Officers assigned to each neighbourhood. A mix of practically focused managers, town and parish liaison officers, and community development specialists
- **Departmental council officers:** Located in family hubs, housing patches, planning, public health, or social care, these officers will have a strong relationship with neighbourhoods
- **VCFSE:** The VCFSE sector will play a crucial role in the grass roots work for each neighbourhood, some potentially working with the council in managing and facilitating a whole neighbourhood, or providing expertise in community development
- **Partner organisations:** Health, fire and rescue, police, schools, and registered housing providers will also play a vital part. Over time, we expect to see stronger alignment of partner boundaries with that of our Neighbourhood Partnerships
- **Performance team**: Data and evidence specialists will be assigned to neighbourhoods to help identify insights and needs, and track progress
- **Public Health:** Professional oversight and support, ensuring Neighbourhoods use data, policy, and evidence to maximum effect.
- **Director-level officer champions:** Each neighbourhood will be assigned a director-level officer champion to support leadership and delivery
- **Services**: Every external-facing council service will develop a neighbourhood offer, ensuring the approach runs through everything we do
- **Budgets:** We anticipate providing a budget for each neighbourhood to fund projects and activities. We also want neighbourhoods to have real influence on other funding streams, both from council departments such as highways and transport, and as part of central government bids.

Every neighbourhood will have its own context, needs, and ambitions. Whilst all will get a baseline support offer, the new council, with partners, will focus on addressing inequalities, some of which will be more prominent for particular neighbourhoods.

## Enabling the VCFSE to achieve more

To strengthen our commitment to residents and Gloucestershire's 4,600 VCFSE organisations, **we'll create a Civil Society Covenant with the Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance**. This Covenant, backed by a clear action plan, will set out how local government and the VCFSE will work together for stronger communities. A governance body of councillors and VCFSE representatives could be formed during the Shadow period.

## Making the role of local councillor more effective and accountable

Unitarisation means fewer councillors covering more service areas, bigger geographies, and more electors. **Neighbourhoods provide the crucial local member role with greater structure, capacity, and convening authority.** Neighbourhoods bring partners around the table, helping councillors address issues collectively and with expert support. This joined-up approach reduces duplication and supports meaningful two-way engagement between elected members, residents, and organisations.

## Working with local councils (parishes and towns)

Gloucestershire's 267 parish and town councils are a vital part of our communities – and LGR will have a real impact on them. **Parish and town councils are an essential, vibrant part of our communities**, and we see their development as a vital ingredient in our unitary future. The lesson from elsewhere is that where trust and respect between principal councils and local councils break down, opportunities are missed and outcomes suffer.

We'll work with the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) and the Gloucestershire Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) to **develop a new charter**. A draft will go to the shadow authority for adoption, setting out clear rights, responsibilities, and governance arrangements to maximise collaboration and two-way communications. **This charter will be the foundation for strong, effective partnership between principal authorities and local councils.**

Neighbourhood Partnership will be a linchpin for locality working - and town and parish councils have a valuable role to play in these structures.

As the county's major urban areas, we expect **special consideration by the new council will be given to parishing Gloucester and Cheltenham**. Each has major historical and future importance for Gloucestershire, and parishing will help protect their identity and drive momentum. Subject to consultation, we expect community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment to be strengthened by the good governance through parishes that cover most of each urban area. In Gloucester, this could mean a single large parish (city) arrangement, potentially excluding the existing parish of Quedgeley. In Cheltenham, options include a single town council or a federated parish model, combining existing parished and unparished areas. These new arrangements would hold some of the key cultural, civic, and public realm responsibilities, and play a major part in boosting the visitor economy.

Beyond Gloucester and Cheltenham, many parishes are eager to develop their offer. We'll work positively with these parishes to maximise value for local people and places, keeping value for money in mind**. There will be equal opportunities for larger areas (like Cheltenham and Gloucester) and smaller towns or parishes to take on services and assets.** The new council will keep a close eye on overall council tax levels, including parish precepts. Any new parishing, or extension of parish responsibilities, will be a matter for the new principal council to consider and subject to Community Governance Reviews.

**We support recent Ministerial statements that have made clear the differences between parish and neighbourhood roles.** Strong parish arrangements are vital, but they don't replace the need for a neighbourhood offer anywhere in Gloucestershire. We have valuable local capacity in our towns and parishes, and so we see their involvement in neighbourhoods as important. We celebrate the diversity in the parish offers across Gloucestershire as a reflection of what local people want and need in their communities.

## Implementation

**Seven activities will shape our work over the pre-shadow period, and are built into our implementation roadmap:**

1. **Formal consultation on Neighbourhood Partnerships:**

We'll deliver a **formal consultation on Neighbourhood Partnerships** in the shadow authority period, enabling implementation in Year 1 of the new unitary council. We'll test our thinking through early engagement in the pre-shadow period. Our engagement and consultation will include:

- Neighbourhood Partnership geographies and boundaries
- Core roles and responsibilities
- Local priorities, services, and needs
- Alignment with partner organisations on approaches and geographies
- How Neighbourhood Partnerships may evolve over time
- The support, capacity, and resources needed to make them work (bearing in mind financial constraints).

2. **Civil Society Covenant:**

During the pre-shadow period, we'll co-design a Civil Society Covenant with the VCSE Alliance and partners, with a draft covenant ready for the shadow authority to consider and consult on in readiness for Year 1 of the new council.

3. **Local Councils Charter**

Working with GAPTC and SLCC, we'll develop a draft charter and action plan for the shadow authority to consult on. It is anticipated the charter will be governed by a body of councillors and local council representatives. The seven principal councils will also work together in the pre-shadow period to ensure clear, consistent communications and policies are in place for working with local councils.

4. **Parishing Cheltenham and Gloucester:**

In partnership with Cheltenham Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, and the parish associations, we'll develop a model for how parishing can support the continued **identity, good governance, and regeneration / growth in our major urban areas**. Decisions on the precise form of proposals and consultation process will rest with the new council.

5. **Service planning:**

We'll consult with all county and district services in the pre-shadow period to shape how they'll work with neighbourhoods - feeding into service planning for the new council and establishing a clear **'services and assets offer'** for each area.

6. **Policy development:**

A range of **policy development work** will ensure:

- Neighbourhood approaches are supported by good evidence
- Frameworks and models are established for different types of activity (such as community development, project funding, and neighbourhood action plans)
- Robust neighbourhood governance
- Neighbourhood level data and data insight tools are developed

7. **Partner integration:**

We'll work together with all our statutory partners to integrate our proposals with their frameworks and priorities. **Our neighbourhood structure will provide a powerful channel for partners to engage with communities**. We share the excitement and interest in how the NHS 10 Year Plan will translate into action in Gloucestershire, particularly regarding proposals for a 'Neighbourhood Health Service' and its emphasis on prevention. We will continue to work closely with our health partners and others to ensure the local geographies and approaches we use are aligned in the best interests of Gloucestershire's residents.

# The Financial Case for a Single Unitary for Gloucestershire

**The financial cases for both the 1UA and the 2UA options have been developed together, using the same financial model, assumptions, calculations, and governance.**

Leaders, Chief Executives, and Section 151 officers from across all Gloucestershire councils have worked together to develop, scrutinise, and sign off all key inputs, assumptions, and outputs. This joint approach means both financial cases are robust, transparent, and carry a high level of local assurance.

The financial case for the **1UA proposal** is set out in four stages:

1. **Financial case summary**
2. **Day one financial position[58]:** This is the starting baseline in terms of potential income and expenditure that the new council would inherit
3. **Reorganisation costs and benefits:** The financial impact of the structural changes that are likely as a result of LGR, including:
    a. One-off transition costs e.g. for data and systems migration or implementation management
    b. Recurring reorganisation savings e.g. in relation to service consolidation
4. **Transformation benefits:** Savings as a result of fundamental changes to ways of working e.g. digitisation, automation, changes to ways of working, investment in prevention, or procurement.

**Our financial case assumes that Gloucestershire County Council is designated within the LGR Structural Changes Order as a continuing authority. This approach will allow unnecessary costs and effort to be avoided, but is intended to have no impact on the change opportunity all current councils agree will be a major factor in delivering the 1UA proposal in the best interests of the people of Gloucestershire.**

## Overall financial case summary

The table below sets out the key headlines for the 1UA proposal.

| **Potential day one financial position (c. 1st April 2028)** | |
|---|---|
| Total income | £851.4m |
| Total expenditure | £851.4m |
| Net position | £0.0m |

[58] The analysis takes account of the likely impact of the outcome of the Government's *Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation*. Local assumptions, supported by the latest *Pixel* model available (*Pixel LGR Disaggregation Model August 2025 v1.2*), have been made in relation to Fair Funding. The projected financial positions will therefore need to be updated once national funding allocations are confirmed in the forthcoming Local Government Finance Settlement.

| **Reorganisation Costs and Benefits** | |
|---|---|
| Gross annual reorganisation savings | £21.1m |
| Ongoing annual disaggregation costs | £0.0m |
| Net annual savings | £21.1m |
| One-off transition costs | -£21.3m |
| Payback period | 2.0 years |
| Cumulative net saving after 5 years | £58.7m |
| Cumulative net saving after 10 years | £164.0m |
| Transformation benefits | |
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Base** | £16.0m |
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Stretch** | £26.2m |

Table 11: Headlines from 1UA financial case

Note: Values preceded by a '–' symbol indicate a deficit.

## Potential day one financial position (the starting baseline)

One day one, the 1UA authority would inherit a balanced budget, with both income and expenditure set at £851.4m. This position has been prepared on the basis that the seven councils will take any action required to achieve a balanced budget over the period leading to the anticipated Vesting Day of 1 April 2028.

| **Potential day one financial position (c. 1st April 2028)** | |
|---|---|
| Total income | £851.4m |
| Total expenditure | £851.4m |
| **Net position** | **£0.0m** |

Table 12: 1UA day one financial position

**Total income:** This figure aggregates council tax, retained business rates, and government grants, providing a simplified revenue base for service delivery. The Fair Funding Review is expected to reduce the overall level of resources for Gloucestershire and therefore, total income projections from 2025 MTFS have been adjusted downwards at the time of writing. However, these numbers are likely to change further following the 2026/27 Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2025.

**Total expenditure:** This figure consolidates the full range of service responsibilities currently delivered across both county and district councils, including the county council's projection of £486m spend by 2028/29 on both adult and children's services.

*Note: The source data for income and expenditure is based on each council's individual MTFS and each council has applied their own local assumptions on how to achieve balanced budgets over the four-year period to 2028/2029 e.g. in relation to how reserves are deployed.*

In addition to the total income and expenditure position, it is also important to consider what the new council will likely inherit on its balance sheet in terms of assets and long-term liabilities:

- **Assets:** 1UA would inherit long term assets with a total value of £4.4 billion on Vesting Day. This figure reflects the combined current long-term assets with planned capital expenditure to 2028/29. The portfolio comprises assets such as property, investments, and heritage assets, in addition to Housing Revenue Account assets.
- **Long-term Liabilities:** 1UA would also take on long-term liabilities of £1.1 billion, which includes outstanding borrowing and a Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit of £234.3 million.

The DSG deficit is a material factor in the financial outlook for Gloucestershire. The most recent MTFS projects that the DSG deficit will rise from £76 million at the end of March 2025 to more than £100 million by March 2026. By 2028/29, the cumulative deficit is forecast to exceed £200 million.

At present, the statutory override allows councils to hold DSG deficits "off balance sheet". However, this override is due to end in March 2028. If no new national policy is introduced, councils across the country would be required to absorb these deficits within their core budgets, creating a significant risk to financial stability.

For Gloucestershire, this means the DSG position must be kept under close review, with the statutory override and national reforms determining the future treatment of the deficit and ongoing cost of service provision.

## Reorganisation costs and benefits

Moving to a unitary model creates a clear set of costs and benefits. These arise directly from consolidating seven councils into a single authority. The financial analysis brings these costs and benefits together to show the savings that can be achieved, the costs of implementation, and the overall net impact.

## Estimated savings, disaggregation costs and transition costs of LGR in Gloucestershire

| | Annual gross saving | Additional Annual Costs | Net annual saving | One off transition costs | Payback Period | Cumulative net saving after 5 years | Cumulative net saving after 10 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1UA** | £21.1m | £0.0m | £21.1m | -£21.3m | 2.0 years | £58.7m | £164.0m |

Table 13: Summary of 1UA estimated reorganisation costs and benefits

The 1UA proposal is projected to deliver annual gross savings of £21.1 million with one-off transition costs of £21.3 million. This results in a payback period of just two years (noting that the annual reorganisation savings are phased and not all fully delivered in year 1).

## Savings drivers

Key drivers for savings are as follows:

- **Democratic streamlining –** Through reducing the number of councillors (from 295 to 110) and frequency of elections, savings of c.£0.9m per annum can be achieved e.g. from reduced member allowances and election costs.

- **Workforce rationalisation -** Consolidating senior leadership teams and streamlining back office functions such as finance, HR, ICT, and customer contact result in workforce savings (as these are likely to be positions and teams which are duplicated across all seven councils).

- **Third party procurement and contract consolidation –** Opportunities to aggregate procurement, renegotiate contract terms, and standardise specifications will reduce cost and complexity. In financial terms, a single authority could be expected to deliver annual third party savings equivalent to approximately 1.5% of its addressable third party spend.

- **Property rationalisation -** Currently both county and district councils operate buildings that serve overlapping functions in the same localities. A single UA allows for rationalisation of this estate, with duplicated sites removed and more efficient use made of shared service centres. In financial terms, a single authority could be expected to deliver annual property savings equivalent to approximately 12%.

## One off transition costs

Establishing a new authority requires significant upfront investment covering the full programme of standing up new governance and operational structures; ICT integration and migration; development of a new legal and constitutional framework; public consultation; branding; communications; and programme management. For a single UA, this is estimated to cost c.£21.3m.

**These costs are based on assuming that the Reorganisation Order would name Gloucestershire County Council as a Continuing Authority.**

| **Type of transition cost** | **Estimated cost (£)** |
|---|---|
| Redundancy | 4,033,000 |
| External comms, branding and implementation | 366,000 |
| External transition, design and implementation support | 4,700,000 |
| Internal programme management | 2,200,000 |
| Creating the new council | 700,000 |
| Contingency | 5,500,000 |
| Organisation closedown | 400,000 |
| Public consultation | 274,500 |
| ICT costs | 2,800,000 |
| Shadow costs | 311,100 |
| **Total** | **21,285,000** |

Table 14: Estimated transition costs for 1UA

## Transformation benefits

Reorganisation can deliver structural savings, but the greater opportunity lies in the subsequent transformation that can take place. This means using the scale of a new authority or authorities to modernise services, redesign ways of working, and create efficiencies beyond what structural change alone can achieve.

Financial analysis has identified five main categories where transformation savings are realistic and quantifiable. For each category, we have tested two scenarios for transformation:

- **Base case:** Assumes cautious delivery of savings in line with past performance across Gloucestershire's councils. The base case is

deliberately conservative and ensures that assumptions remain credible and deliverable without requiring major change programmes.

- **Stretch case:** assumes sustained investment in digital and organisational redesign, drawing on best practice from other unitaries. Including a stretch case is important as it demonstrates the potential prize available if early reorganisation savings are reinvested into transformation.

| Category | Base % | Stretch % | Rationale |
|---|---|---|---|
| Front office staff | 6% | 12% | Workforce rationalisation through the structural impact of LGR accounts for savings that can be made through removing duplication. However, potential opportunities through utilising the potential of AI, automation, and channel shift will reduce the demand on customer contact centres. |
| Service delivery staff | 3% | 6% | Transformation can strengthen demand management, early intervention, and integrated pathways particularly in services like adults and children's services. Service redesign and new operating models will also unlock additional opportunities e.g. through digital, process redesign etc. |
| Back office staff | 7% | 9% | Consolidating support functions such as HR, finance, payroll, and ICT enables investment in shared systems and automation. This creates opportunities for streamlined processes and reduces overheads. |
| Third party spend | 2.5% | 3.75% | Unified procurement and contract management can deliver efficiencies by aggregating contracts, renegotiating supplier terms, and redesigning commissioning arrangements. However, savings targets are cautious overall recognising Gloucestershire councils already include procurement savings in their MTFSs, leaving limited headroom. |
| Income (sales, fees and charges / commercial) | 1.3% | 2.1% | Transformation also includes growth in fees and charges, commercial activity, and investment in economic development. This builds on the county's strengths in advanced manufacturing, cyber, and green technology, and on planned growth initiatives such as the Golden Valley and Severn Edge projects. Overall targets are conservative given volatility and underperformance in past income forecasts. |

Table 15: Estimated transformation savings for 1UA

Transformation savings are not expected to be immediate. They are profiled to phase in gradually as programmes are implemented. The model assumes full delivery by **Year 5,** with the savings per annum expected by this point set out in the table below.

| Transformation savings | Base case | Stretch case |
|---|---|---|
| Savings per annum by Year 5 | £16.0m | £26.2m |

Table 16: Total transformation savings in £ terms for a 1UA

## Options for funding LGR and enabling transformation

Delivering the 1UA option requires significant upfront investment with estimated transition costs of reorganisation of £21.3m.

There are several options for funding these costs:

- **Reserves -** Councils hold reserves that are not earmarked that can be applied to one-off expenditure. These provide an immediate source of funding without adding to ongoing revenue pressures.
- **Capitalisation Direction -** Subject to government approval, some costs could be treated as capital rather than revenue. This option, known as capitalisation, has been used in previous reorganisations to reduce pressure on the revenue budget. It applies to costs such as redundancy and ICT integration.
- **Government Support -** Additional funding may also be provided by central government. This could be in the form of transitional grant support, flexibility in financial rules, or early devolution funding. Engagement with the government will be required as proposals are developed.
- **Reinvestment Principle -** Early reorganisation savings can be ring-fenced and reinvested in transformation. This ensures that efficiencies are not absorbed by service pressures but are used to fund programmes in digital, automation, and service redesign. By doing this, initial savings are recycled to create larger recurring benefits in later years.
- **Benefits Compounding -** Investment in transformation compounds over time. For example, reinvesting a portion of early savings into digital customer platforms reduces front office demand, delivering recurring efficiencies by year five. Similar reinvestment in automation and AI can reduce back office and service delivery costs.

## Council Tax Alignment (CTA)

Council tax is a major source of income for any new authority. When seven councils with different council tax rates are merged into a new authority, these rates must be aligned. The way this is done affects both residents and the financial

resilience of the new council. It is also a fiscal lever that can be used to balance out net operating deficits or provide funding to invest in service improvements or resident priorities.

### Approach to Council Tax Alignment

To inform decision making, detailed modelling has been undertaken to show how different alignment options would affect what residents are required to pay in the future. The modelling uses the 2024 council tax base as the starting point, net of local council tax support, and applies the councils' own projections to forecast growth in the tax base inclusive of the collection rate. Future Band D rates are assumed to increase annually by 4.99% for county and unitary councils and 2.99% for district councils up to Vesting Day in April 2028, consistent with current MHCLG guidance. From Vesting Day onwards, a new unitary authority rate is assumed to increase at 4.99% per year.

The methodology compares projected receipts under alignment with a baseline of what each council would have collected if they continued independently. The difference between these two scenarios represents the additional income gained or foregone through alignment.

### Alignment Options

The analysis models a main scenario using the weighted average where rates align to an average Band D calculated across the county, weighted by the tax base. This is the option chosen in most recent local government reorganisations.

Each option can be implemented in one year or phased over several years, with the statutory maximum alignment period set at seven years. The period over which council tax is aligned is an important decision. A longer alignment period of up to seven years minimises the immediate impacts on residents by phasing changes gradually. However, aligning earlier allows the new authority to secure additional income more quickly, providing funding for services. Earlier alignment also avoids the perception of unfairness, where residents in some areas continue to pay higher rates for longer while receiving the same services.

### Summary of potential impact

Council Tax Alignment alters Band D charges across districts because current rates differ. The scale of change depends on which alignment option is chosen and whether this is implemented in one year or phased over several years.

Under the **weighted average** option for a 1UA in one year, Band D households in Cheltenham, Gloucester, the Forest of Dean, and Stroud would see reductions in their bills, ranging from £5 to £41 per year. In contrast, Band D households in Cotswold and Tewkesbury would see increases of £57 and £62 respectively.

| Current District | Aligned Band D rate (£) | Change in Band D rate (£) | % change in Band D Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham | 2,170.38 | -37.01 | -1.68% |
| Cotswold | 2,170.38 | 57.20 | 2.71% |
| Tewkesbury | 2,170.38 | 62.17 | 2.95% |
| Gloucester | 2,170.38 | -32.05 | -1.46% |
| Forest of Dean | 2,170.38 | -5.01 | -0.23% |
| Stroud | 2,170.38 | -41.40 | -1.87% |

Table 17: Weighted average council tax alignment in one year in a 1UA

Note: A '–' sign in front of the number and green text indicates a reduction for residents in their bills.

## Engagement to Discover and Improve

Our engagement approach has been shaped by the guidance within the invitation to submit proposals: it's been rooted in genuine discovery and learning, not campaigning for any particular outcome. This focus on open engagement has been enabled by:

- **Unified, option-neutral engagement:** We agreed that both the single unitary and East / West two unitary options would be developed side-by-side, without using the collective engagement activity to campaign or advocate for preferences
- **Strong political leadership:** Gloucestershire's Leaders set the tone – driving a shared engagement plan across councils
- **Clear accountability:** A lead Chief Executive was appointed to oversee all communications and engagement activity
- **Joint working:** Every council played an active role through a joint communications and engagement workstream
- **Prioritised investment:** We prioritised MHCLG LGR funding to support joint engagement activities.

These early actions, underpinned by a clear sense of purpose, enabled us to deliver a wide range of non-partisan engagement activities – each designed to listen, learn, and feed real insights back into the development of our proposals.

### Our key engagement activity

Our joint engagement activity from March 2025 – September 2025 is summarised in the table below:

| Engagement type | Key activities |
|---|---|
| **Public** | • Option-neutral Future Gloucestershire microsite[59] presenting clear, factual information<br>• Online survey, designed to discover values, concerns and ambitions of local people (3,112 completed surveys, including 1,480 open-text responses)<br>• In-person community events, enabling over 500 one-to-one conversations (12 events in total, two in each district)<br>• Two county-wide public webinars<br>• Information leaflets and display banners (used principally at council offices and community events)<br>• Regular social media information updates and paid advertising for wider promotion of the survey. |

[59] https://futuregloucestershire.org.uk

| Engagement type | Key activities |
|---|---|
| **Stakeholders** | • Over 40 stakeholder interviews (almost all with multiple attendees) encompassing statutory partners, VCFSE organisations, and key businesses and business associations. Interviews focused on issues of importance and concern in relation to LGR and Devolution<br>• A leadership conference was held to develop common ambitions, involving key partners in statutory services, business, and civil society in Gloucestershire. |
| **Place** | • Engagement webinar for VCFSE (hosted by Gloucestershire VCS Alliance) with over 100 attendees<br>• Engagement webinar for Town and Parish Councils hosted by GAPTC with over 100 attendees<br>• Representation on Place Model workstream from NHS (ICB and providers), GAPTC, OPCC, SLCC, and VCS Alliance. |
| **Staff** | • Regular LGR staff communications and briefings<br>• Senior officers from principal councils represented on all LGR workstreams, with different Chief Executives acting to lead and chair<br>• Specialist service officers engaged in structured, cross-council aggregation and disaggregation workshops. |
| **Council members** | • Interactive all-member webinars<br>• FAQs and other written briefings<br>• Bespoke briefing and democratic processes delivered by individual councils. |
| **MPs**[60] | • Gloucestershire County Council Leader and Chief Executive monthly engagement with Gloucestershire MPs<br>• Other district ad hoc engagement with local MPs |
| **Other** | • In addition to Place (above), workstreams conducted bespoke engagement as relevant. For example, the Vision and Ambition workstream conducted a range of briefings with senior district leaders to develop an understanding of place-based perspectives. |

[60] At their meeting on 9 October 2025, Principal Authority Leaders agreed that Gloucestershire councils would jointly engage with local MPs to objectively gather their views on the published proposals, informing both councils and Ministers.

## Additional reports

The online survey and in-person community events were co-designed and facilitated by an external specialist engagement organisation, *Cratus*. Their independent report can be found in Appendix 3.

The county council-led stakeholder interview exercise was conducted using consistent open questions. A short report detailing the key themes, together with information about the stakeholders engaged, can be found in Appendix 4. Following these interviews, some stakeholders chose to write to the county council offering views. Where appropriate, this correspondence is also appended.

## Our learning and insights

Our learning themes synthesise the responses from a variety of methods and types used. As far as possible, we have avoided significant focus in this proposal on feedback on the relative merits of structural options, since the primary aim of engagement was to discover common concerns and ambitions of local people and organisations. However, some of this data, from the public survey and stakeholder interviews is shown for transparency. It should not be read as representative data on the preferences of the public and partners.

Three big themes have emerged:

1. Belonging in Gloucestershire
2. Service improvement
3. Vulnerable people and communities

### Theme 1: Belonging in Gloucestershire

Our engagement revealed something powerful: people in Gloucestershire feel a strong sense of belonging - whether that's to a village, an estate, a district, or the county as a whole. Local identity runs deep, and it's clear that "home" means different things to different people.

This insight is crucial. It shows that the new council must enable participation and engagement at every level - recognising and supporting the many overlapping communities that make Gloucestershire unique.

| **Key actions to shape our proposals: Belonging in Gloucestershire (Theme 1)** | |
|---|---|
| **Place Model** | Proposals for our locality arrangements have avoided prematurely drawing 'lines on maps'. We will deliver a carefully designed engagement and consultation process to develop the spatial scale, competency, and differentiation (by Place) of our Neighbourhood Partnerships. This commitment is reflected in our implementation roadmap. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Future Operating Model (FOM)** | The differentiation of Gloucestershire's places is recognised in both the design principles and key features of the Future Operating Model. We have reflected place and identity strongly in engagement, commissioning, and service delivery features. |

### Theme 2: Service Improvement and Efficiency

Our survey captured a wealth of feedback on council services. Most areas scored well, with the majority of residents rating services as 'good' or 'very good'. However, roads, pavements, and streetlights stood out as clear concerns - mirroring national trends, where dissatisfaction with highways is common.

When asked what should shape future council services, 'community' - meaning representation, voice, and engagement - was the top priority. 'Transport' (including public transport, road maintenance, and connectivity) also featured strongly.

Stakeholder interviews reinforced this theme, highlighting the need for simpler, more efficient services and better integration with partners.

The message is clear: while there are specific areas to address, any improvement must be rooted in local context and connectivity - making sure services work for people and places across Gloucestershire.

| Key actions to shape our proposals: Service Improvement and Efficiency (Theme 2) | |
|---|---|
| **Vision and Ambition** | Our vision and ambition includes a specific focus on the use of data to transform transport and wider public services. The feedback we have received on public transport in particular has assisted with shaping this ambition.<br>Our vision and ambition also reflects the excitement and energy in the Gloucestershire business community to drive growth. We pay particular attention to the economic opportunities in Gloucestershire, and the desire to use LGR to accelerate our trajectory of breakthrough innovation in economic clusters, such as cyber, clean energy, and agri-tech. |
| **Future Operating Model (FOM)** | Our strategic enablement feature within the FOM is specifically designed to create capacity and capability to drive improvement and transformation. |
| **Place and FOM** | Our neighbourhood model is linked to service delivery within the FOM, with a proposed specification to tailor on a locality basis, addressing some of the feedback about different satisfaction and experience in different parts of Gloucestershire. |
| **Financial Case** | Our financial case shows our desire not simply to reorganise, but to transform. We will reinvest structural and transformation savings into services that people want to see improve. The council will feel local and responsive but be powered by scale and efficiency for the benefit of everyone. |

### Theme 3: Vulnerable people and communities

A key theme from our engagement with partners was the opportunity for the new council to do more for Gloucestershire's most vulnerable people and communities.

- **Community development and local engagement must be front and centre.**
- **There's real appetite for public sector reform.** From the emerging Neighbourhood Health Service to new powers for neighbourhood working, they see LGR as a chance to join up regeneration, health, and community development - especially where VCFSE organisations are already leading the way.
- **Tackling deep-rooted inequalities is essential.** We know there are sharp divides between urban and rural areas, and that data and lived experience is important to drive local action and smarter service design.

Respondents have made it clear that LGR offers a huge opportunity to address these challenges and opportunities.

| Key actions to shape our proposals: Vulnerable people and communities (Theme 3) | |
|---|---|
| **Vision and Ambition** | Our vision makes it clear that we want to use LGR to spark a transformation in community empowerment. We can be closer to communities and people than before, e.g. utilising better and more widely the 'hub' approach to delivering preventive, community-led activity, as well as more tailored services for vulnerable people, families, and communities.<br>We are also clear in our vision that we will more consciously link with partners on wellbeing, housing, climate action, and nature recovery – feedback is showing these are connected issues for local people. |
| **Data, Digital and Technology (DDaT)** | Our proposals are clear there are major opportunities to use DDaT to drive better environments, interventions, and services for vulnerable people. We have set out a bold ambition to develop a joined-up predictive analytics platform across adult and children's services, education, housing, and health. |
| **Place** | Our place research has revealed a wealth of current good practice in evidenced-based community development. We have hard-wired into our neighbourhood proposals a focus on community development, supported by data insight, the skills of our public health team, and dedicated staff and other resources. |

## Feedback on structural options

Both the survey and the partnership interviews provided feedback on structural options. This feedback is not based on a statistically reliable sample and it was not the purpose of either exercise. We expect the forthcoming Ministerial consultation to provide clearer data and information on local preferences for structural options. This exercise will be conducted once local people and organisations have had the benefit of considering proposals. The survey feedback is as follows:

A total of 225 respondents (7%) gave active preferences in open text responses concerning which unitary council option they would prefer from the three proposed at the time of survey. Of these, 205 preferred a single unitary council governing the whole county, 14 preferred the East/West option, and three preferred the Greater Gloucester option. Three people said they preferred two councils without specifying which option.

# Implementation Roadmap

**We've developed an implementation plan that sets out how Gloucestershire will move from submission of this proposal to Vesting Day and beyond. It's how we'll guarantee residents continue to access the support they need, safeguard statutory services, and lay the robust foundations for ambitious, ongoing transformation.**

Whilst we continue to sharpen the details and map out specific activities, this section sets out our initial considerations and phases of activity. The key programmes set out in this section are likely to evolve over time as the national and local context and priorities change.

**Our roadmap assumes that Gloucestershire County Council is designated within the LGR Structural Changes Order as a continuing authority. This approach will allow unnecessary costs and effort to be avoided, but is intended to have no impact on the change opportunity all current councils agree will be a major factor in delivering the 1UA proposal in the best interests of the people of Gloucestershire.**

## Framing our approach

Experience from previous LGR programmes highlights several factors that are critical to success for Gloucestershire:

- **Clarity of purpose:** a shared understanding amongst all organisations involved helps maintain momentum and alignment during planning and delivery, which will need to be undertaken collaboratively across all councils involved.
- **Early planning and mobilisation:** Early proactive planning (beginning before any MHCLG decision) is critical to manage delivery and improve implementation outcomes.
- **Robust portfolio and programme management:** LGR is complex and high stakes. We'll need a strong portfolio approach, with defined programmes, clear responsibilities, and the right resources in place to govern and manage delivery at pace.
- **Early appointment of senior leadership:** Recruiting into key posts such as the Chief Executive, S151 Officer, and Monitoring Officer early to provide leadership and stability.
- **Engagement and transparency:** Early, ongoing, and open communications is essential. Keeping staff, members, residents, and suppliers updated builds trust, enables proactive management of key risks, and provides confidence and reassurance to stakeholders.

## Working together

All councils in Gloucestershire have agreed how they will work together in the run-up to MHCLG's decision and during the shadow period, ensuring that staff, members, partners, and residents remain confident in the process. Our shared principles are as follows:

**Continue to involve all our staff proactively:** we'll continue to keep staff from all councils actively involved in co-designing our journey to Vesting Day – drawing on their collective expertise to lead, design, and manage key LGR programmes.

**Remain aligned around our shared future vision:** we will stay focused on our shared vision for the new council and make the most of our collective strengths.

**Open and honest communication and collaboration:** We will continue to be transparent about activities, challenges, and decisions - with no hidden agendas - and commit to working in partnership across all seven councils.

**Aligned decision-making and transitional support:** As Vesting Day approaches, we'll agree practically how significant financial and other decisions are made across each council, and how we'll support each other – so that every council delivers on its existing plans and commitments. The transition programme will include a draft shadow constitution, a combined MTFS, a risk register, and a costed investment strategy to guide transition.

**Invest in core skills:** We'll need the right people in the right roles. That means bringing together not just technical specialists, but also standout leaders in programme management, procurement, change, and digital transformation. We'll harness strengths already in our councils – and invest in new talent and capacity wherever its needed – to make sure Gloucestershire's transition is expertly led from day one.

## Roadmap to Vesting Day

The roadmap to Vesting Day is structured across five clear phases aligned with indicative timelines, based on MHCLG guidance.

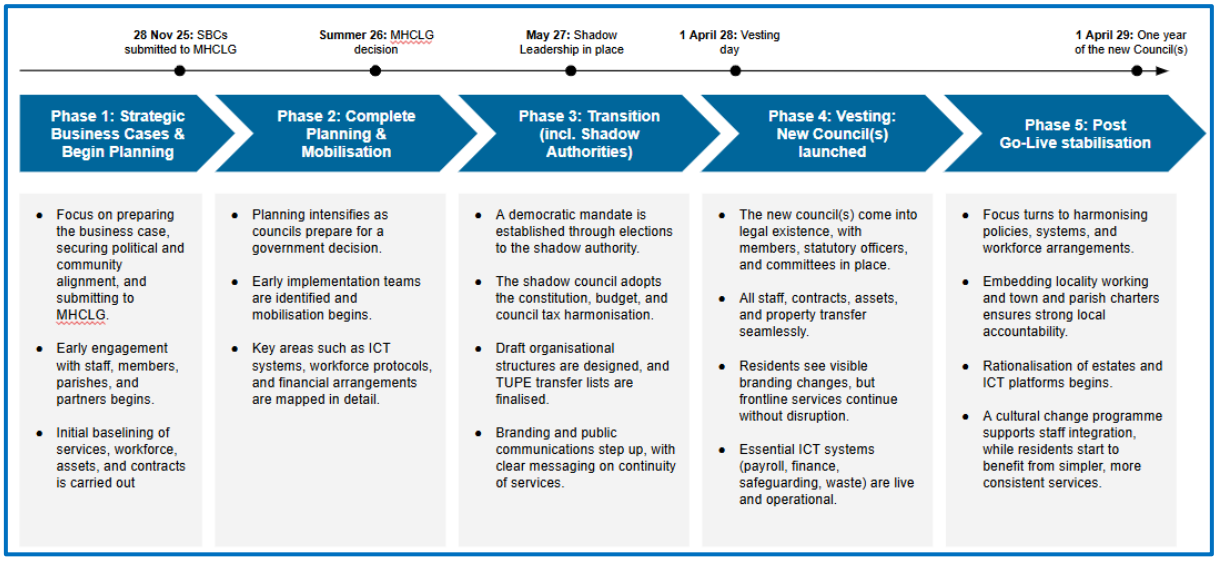



Diagram 4: roadmap to Vesting Day

## High-Level Activities by Phase

### Phase 1 – Strategic business cases (SBCs) and begin planning (to Nov 2025)

In this phase of work, councils focus on preparing and submitting the SBCs and starting to undertake preparatory baselining of key infrastructure across all seven councils (including workforce, assets, finances, policies, contracts etc). Continued engagement with staff, members, towns and parish councils, and partners ensures early buy in and alignment, which is critical for the coming months.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- All seven councils in Gloucestershire will finalise and submit a SBC to MHCLG by 28 November 2025 (setting out all options for LGR that are under consideration)
- Each council will start to gather baseline data on current services, strategic risks, establishment data, assets, contracts, and vacancies to work towards a consistent baseline across all seven councils
- The joint LGR portfolio and programme management capability will be designed, setting out key roles, role profiles, and capabilities required including an overall LGR Portfolio Director
- A more detailed transition and implementation plan will be developed in line with the five key phases of activity
- Staff will start to be invited to join core LGR programmes (e.g. secondments etc) to support detailed planning and delivery work
- Councils will engage with town and parish councils to co-design a town and parish charter and initial governance approach.

### Phase 2 – Complete planning and mobilisation (Nov 2025 – Summer 2026)

Detailed planning will continue to take place while awaiting MHCLG's decision, particularly preparatory work which would be required irrespective of which option is chosen. The full LGR portfolio, including core programmes, will be mobilised, with staff in place to lead and deliver activities. This phase is crucial to ensuring alignment and clarity on how transition will be managed so that activities can progress at pace immediately after a decision is made.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- Portfolio management capability in place and actively running
- All core LGR programmes stood up with staff in place (either from existing councils or through external support being brought in where required)
- Detailed planning will be completed in readiness for MHCLG's decision, including timelines for key decisions such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) selection and resident contact channels on Vesting Day
- All seven councils will focus on cleaning data to get it into a consistent and complete format across areas such as staff (aligning with finances), contracts, systems, assets, strategic risks, existing policy frameworks etc. This will enable the development of a consistent Gloucestershire wide baseline of core infrastructure, service delivery, and risks, which will need to be managed by the new council
- Implementation of Section 24 controls, as needed, to make sure significant financial decisions and contractual commitments made by the current councils do not adversely impact the new council
- Development of options and policies for managing the HR implications of staffing changes, covering vacancy management, joint approaches to recruitment, redeployment approaches, senior staff implications, pay and grading harmonisation, and benefits harmonisation
- Discussions with trade unions on managing the HR approaches to ensure early and proactive involvement and challenge
- Development of a detailed communication and engagement plan (internal and external)
- Continued staff and partner engagement through communications and co-design opportunities to consider service aggregation and delivery model opportunities
- Starting to create a shadow authority decision log, including areas such as the new council's budget, council tax, and policy requirements

- Early engagement with suppliers to consider any potential implications of contract novation and other key supplier issues
- Draft design of neighbourhood governance, form, and function.

### Phase 3 – Transition (Summer 2026 – March 2028)

Councillors will be elected to a shadow authority who will lead the transition - making important decisions on how the new council will be governed and funded, and how council tax will be set. Behind the scenes, preparations will focus on getting staff, IT systems, buildings, contracts, and locality arrangements ready for Vesting Day. Communications and branding will help residents understand the changes and feel confident about what's coming.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- Elections will be held (likely in May 2027) for a shadow authority which will, in turn, appoint key officers, approve the new constitution, set the budget, and decide how council tax will be aligned across areas
- Final TUPE staff transfer lists will be confirmed, and draft organisational structures will be developed and shared. Staff will begin to be recruited, trained, and sent letters confirming their roles, pay, and work locations
- The shadow authority will also agree on the new council's values, branding, and communications plan
- Detailed service transition planning and service operating models will take shape, with aggregation and disaggregation implications
- Pay dates and staff benefits will be standardised in agreement with trade unions to ensure consistency before Vesting Day (critical for equal pay considerations)
- Senior leadership positions will be appointed, including Chief Executive, S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, and other key statutory roles such as Director of Adults Social Care (DASS)
- Asset and property registers will be updated, and health, safety, and compliance responsibilities clearly assigned
- Policies for transferring community assets and services will be developed (working alongside town and parish councils and the VCFSE)
- Engagement with suppliers will agree and formalise any contractual changes including termination, novation, and extensions
- Detailed design will progress for the key contact channels that residents will use on day one

- Neighbourhood Partnerships will be designed, costed, and implementation underway
- A Town and Parish Councils Charter and a Civil Society Covenant will be finalised, neighbourhood forums designed, and public-facing branding and communications stepped up, including the development of a new website for the new council
- The council's future operating model will be agreed, supported by a corporate plan that aligns services with strategic goals
- Financial support schemes like council tax and business rate relief will be aligned to ensure equity for residents
- Payroll arrangements for staff will be established
- The shadow authority will review and sign off the MTFS, investment plan, financial chart of accounts, and savings plans.

### Phase 4 – Vesting: new council launched (1 April 2028)

All current councils legally cease to exist on 31st March 2028 (subject to decisions on continuing authority status for the county council). Staff, contracts, assets, and systems transfer to the new council. Essential services continue without disruption for residents. Residents will see new branding but experience continuity in delivery of services.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- The existing councils will formally cease, with all staff, functions, assets, property, and contracts legally transferred to the new authority
- TUPE transfers will be completed, payroll will run without disruption, senior staff savings will be realised, and members will take up their roles under the new constitution with committee structures operational from day one
- All critical ICT systems - ERP, payroll, planning, ASC, CSC, safeguarding, waste, and the new electoral system will be live and stable (it is not anticipated that all systems will be aggregated / disaggregated on day one)
- Neighbourhood Partnerships will be live
- Staff will receive a new email address, but the majority will still be working on the same ICT hardware (laptops, phones etc) and from the same office locations on day one
- New phone numbers and email addresses for residents to contact the new council will be live, with redirects in place on legacy contact channels

- New branding will be rolled out on tax bills, vehicles, uniforms, and signage to signal visible change and reassure residents the new council is up and running
- Opening balance sheets will be agreed and predecessor accounts closed and audited
- Senior staff changes, including role realignment, redundancies, and benefits will be realised
- A high-profile public launch campaign will be delivered on day one and the immediate period thereafter to make sure there is appropriate awareness amongst residents, partners, and businesses.

### Phase 5 – Post go-live stabilisation (April 2028 onwards)

In this phase of the programme, the focus shifts to aligning policies, systems, and workforce arrangements, embedding new ways of working, and delivering against the transformation opportunities identified to enable long-term design and delivery of the identified benefits.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- Fees and charges will be harmonised through a single register
- Ongoing change management programme to embed new organisational values and behaviours, supported by engagement and communications with staff, partners, and residents
- Development and implementation of more detailed organisational structures (likely in a phased manner, aligned with service transition plans)
- ICT systems will be consolidated and rationalised over time, with cyber security and data governance strengthened
- Procurement policies will be harmonised and guided by a new supplier strategy, while estate rationalisation continues
- Customer service standards will be embedded consistently across services, supported by a FOM action backlog that drives harmonisation and redesign beyond day one
- Continued communications and engagement with all stakeholders including residents, partners, members, and staff.

## Managing Delivery: Portfolio Structure

To oversee, manage, and deliver these transition and implementation activities, we will set up a robust portfolio and programme management structure.

Wherever possible, we would resource capacity and capability from across the seven councils by repurposing existing resources. There are likely to be certain capabilities or points during the five stages of the roadmap where we may need to bring in additional external capacity or capability to drive delivery at the pace required.




Diagram 5: LGR Portfolio Programmes

The scope of these 12 programmes could include:

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| **Communications, Engagement and Branding** | • Internal and external communications and engagement strategies for partners, residents, staff, councillors<br>• Design and agreement of new branding<br>• Public launch campaign<br>• Monitoring effectiveness of communications with feedback loops to other programmes to act on sentiment and feedback. |
| **Governance and Legal** | • Design and adoption of the new constitution and governance structure<br>• Leading the legal establishment of the shadow authority, including oversight of elections<br>• Developing and embedding scrutiny arrangements<br>• Legal transfer of functions and statutory responsibilities from predecessor councils<br>• Policy oversight, ensuring that critical policies are in place for day one and that no decisions are taken that undermine continuity |

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| | • Legal assurance for implementation decisions and considerations, including service specific considerations such as transfers of assets and contracts. |
| **Finance and Risk** | • New financial structures and chart of accounts<br>• MTFS, annual budget, and statement of accounts<br>• Implementation of Section 24 controls<br>• Managing and delivering council tax harmonisation policies<br>• Opening balance sheet and closure/audits of predecessor accounts<br>• Development and management of the strategic risk register. |
| **Performance** | • Developing performance frameworks to measure delivery of the transition and implementation portfolio<br>• Establishing metrics to track service continuity, staff engagement, ICT readiness, and financial stability<br>• Management of the benefits realisation framework. |
| **Property and Assets** | • Property and asset implications, including rationalisation opportunities, development of asset and estate strategy, and investment properties<br>• Consolidated asset and property register<br>• Ensuring health and safety responsibilities for all property and assets are clearly assigned<br>• Supporting the transfer of ownership of all land, buildings, and property rights from predecessor councils<br>• Delivering against the estate rationalisation programme ambitions. |

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| **Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT)** | • Ensuring all critical ICT systems are operational on day one, including ERP, payroll, safeguarding, and operational service systems<br>• Design, procurement, and implementation of a new ERP system<br>• A new email address for all staff on day one<br>• Ensuring legacy systems can integrate or run in parallel where required<br>• Longer-term system harmonisation and embedding of cyber security and data governance practices<br>• Developing and delivering against data migration requirements from predecessor councils, with a focus on security and GDPR compliance. |
| **Customer Contact** | • Designing the customer journey for the new council, agreeing the balance between online by default and other forms of access and engagement.<br>• Establishing clear customer contact points for Vesting Day, including phone numbers, websites, and email addresses<br>• Ensuring legacy contact channels redirect residents seamlessly to new channels<br>• Embedding consistent customer service standards across all services during the stabilisation period. |
| **Development of the FOM (incl. service redesigns)** | • FOM blueprints and implementation plans for the new council<br>• Where needed, supporting specific services (e.g. leisure) to manage aggregation/disaggregation implications and consider operating model choices. |
| **People and Culture (incl. OD)** | • Baselining workforce structures and establishments across all current councils<br>• Redeployment and recruitment processes |

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| | • TUPE transfers<br>• Harmonisation of pay dates and benefits in negotiation with trade unions<br>• Staff engagement programme, including opportunities for staff to join LGR programmes and co-design services<br>• Cultural change projects to embed new organisational values, identity, and ways of working. |
| **Neighbourhoods and Communities** | • Design, consultation, and implementation of Neighbourhood Partnerships including elements which relate to Neighbourhood Area Committee legislation<br>• Policies for parish asset and service transfers<br>• Towns and parishes engagement<br>• VCFSE engagement<br>• Town and Parish Charter and Civil Society Covenant<br>• Community engagement (non-geographic), including corporate and service approaches to resident and stakeholder engagement and participation |
| **Devolution** | • Political and strategic engagement with senior leaders on long-term devolution options<br>• Planning for potential strategic authority over the medium/long term. |
| **Procurement, Contracts and Commercials** | • Baselining of all contracts and external spend across all seven councils<br>• Identification of key contracts for novation and engagement with suppliers<br>• Harmonisation of procurement policies |

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| | • Exploring further opportunities for commercialisation, joint arrangements, and income generation. |

Table 18: the proposed scope of each LGR programme

## Portfolio and Programme Management

A Portfolio and Programme Management team will be established to oversee, coordinate, and manage delivery of the implementation roadmap - anticipated to be in place until at least March 2029.

The team is likely to consist of a range of programme, transformation, and change roles, and will be at the heart of managing the overall transition and implementation portfolio. This includes:

- Detailed planning and management of progress
- Enabling consistency across all LGR programmes
- Supporting the overall governance arrangements of the portfolio
- Providing regular progress reporting and internal assurance
- Developing and delivering the benefits realisation plan
- Working closely with the programmes in the portfolio, including in managing risks and interdependencies.

## Managing strategic risks

There will be a range of strategic, operational, and service level risks associated with transition and implementation. Strategic risks will likely include:

| Risk | Potential Mitigation |
|---|---|
| **Potential delay in Vesting Day timelines nationally -** There is a risk that changes or slippage in the agreed national timelines for the LGR process will undermine our ability to plan and sequence key activities effectively. This could lead to misalignment across programmes, | Establish clear checkpoints both with MHCLG representatives and locally to monitor timelines and make sure there is early notification of any potential delays or changes in national timelines particularly around Vesting Day. |

| Risk | Potential Mitigation |
|---|---|
| reduced stakeholder confidence, and delays in achieving critical milestones. | |
| **Scale and complexity of change -** The level of change involved for all seven councils is significant (e.g. changes to how residents are engaged, policies, processes, organisational structures, leadership and culture, new services being delivered etc) and needs to be delivered and managed in very short timescales. | • Develop a detailed transition and implementation plan which enables a smooth transition (as far as possible)<br>• Implement a robust portfolio and programme management capability as soon as possible to help manage and drive change, including managing interdependencies and risks. |
| **Capacity and capability to support transition and implementation -** There is a risk that we struggle to bring in the right capacity and capability to drive delivery alongside maintaining BAU service delivery for our residents and communities. | • Identify early the key resources required to enable successful delivery, including any subject matter experts. Engage with other councils who have been through LGR to identify resourcing needs<br>• The seven councils to consider where existing resources can be redeployed or reprioritised to support transition and implementation, including opportunities for secondments into the LGR portfolio<br>• Set aside specific funding as part of the overall transition investment to bring in additional external support where needed and support backfill arrangements. |
| **Maintaining service continuity –** Most service areas will be impacted by LGR and will need to be involved | • Prioritise the principle of being 'safe and legal' on day one, with |

| Risk | Potential Mitigation |
|---|---|
| in supporting the portfolio (including service transition planning). There is a risk that service performance or continuity could be adversely impacted during transition or immediately post Vesting Day. | no resident experiencing a worse service than they do currently<br>• Develop a prioritised service transition plan to manage the transition and transformation in a phased manner<br>• Form early working groups for core service areas (across all seven councils) to undertake detailed transition planning - making sure any considerations for maintaining operational service continuity can be managed e.g. systems access. |
| **Financial sustainability -** There is a risk that the transition budget is insufficient to cover unexpected or unforeseen circumstances or that the savings that have been identified cannot be delivered. | • Contingency has been built into the transition costs to account for unexpected circumstances<br>• A clear benefits realisation framework will be established to track and manage benefits delivery<br>• The portfolio and programme management capability will be responsible for making sure there is a tight grip on all costs and benefits associated with LGR, so any financial risks can be proactively identified and mitigated. |
| **Alignment with key stakeholders -** There is a risk that key stakeholders including staff, partners, members etc are not aligned with the vision for the new council or experience change | • Establish early a clear communications and engagement strategy for all stakeholders and agree key messages for each group at different stages of the implementation |

| Risk | Potential Mitigation |
|---|---|
| fatigue from the level of change and disruption they are going through. | • Involve stakeholders early on to help co-produce plans<br>• Dedicated change management resource to help embed the change successfully<br>• Investment in leadership and managerial development so that they are equipped to support staff and engage with partners. |

Table 19: strategic risks and mitigations

## Managing the Aggregation of Services

Bringing seven councils together is a major undertaking - and keeping services running smoothly for residents is our top priority. **Aggregation means uniting services, systems, and teams into a single structure, unlocking better coordination, less duplication, and more consistent delivery across Gloucestershire.**

We'll manage the challenges and opportunities presented from aggregation by:

- **Enabling services to lead design:** The people who know services best will shape how delivery changes - ensuring practical solutions and continuity for residents
- **Managing existing shared service and wholly owned company arrangements:** Shared services like Ubico, One Legal, and Publica already show the power - and complexity - of joint working. Where aggregation is straightforward, we'll keep it simple; where it's more complex, we'll manage the transition carefully, including TUPE and out-of-county partners, such as West Oxfordshire District Council
- **Considering data and system aggregation:** Consolidating IT and data platforms will drive savings (likely in later years) and consistency, but we know it takes careful planning and upfront investment
- **Keeping services local:** Even as we aggregate, we're committed to place-based delivery - tailoring services to local needs and making Neighbourhood Partnerships central to our approach

- **Strengthening our workforce:** Aggregation lets us pool talent, invest in skills, and create new career pathways - especially in high-demand areas like cyber, data analytics, and surveying
- **Driving prevention through integration:** By bringing together district and county services, like public health, housing, leisure, and planning, we can drive improved outcomes for residents, such as tackling the wider determinants of health at greater scale.

# Appendix 1: Vision and Ambition 'Personas'

| CHARLIE'S BIO | |
|---|---|
|  | Charlie is a 15-year-old student living in Parkend. His area has limited public transport and he feels disconnected from school and community life. His school engagement is low, and he is often absent or disengaged in class. With limited access to youth facilities, Charlie spends most of his time online, often unsupervised. |
| **DESIRES** | **CHALLENGES** |
| Charlie is digitally curious and likes learning and connecting with people online. | Emotional isolation, lack of trust in adults, feels invisible in the community, vulnerable to online radicalisation and has limited access to safe youth spaces. |

**BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE**

- ✓ By co-creating services that work for everyone, Charlie gains access to safe, inclusive digital and physical spaces shaped by young people like him.
- ✓ Digital services connect him to mentors and wellbeing resources, reducing isolation and offering healthy alternatives to unsupervised online use.
- ✓ Collaboration between community groups, schools and digital platforms helps rebuild Charlie's trust and sense of belonging.

**TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS**

- Driving Breakthrough Innovation for National Resilience: Forest of Dean becomes a pilot site for 'Project Beacon', an initiative using AI-powered early intervention tools, leveraging expertise from the Golden Valley Cyber Hub in Cheltenham These tools spot early signs of disengagement and connect young people like Charlie to trusted mentors and support networks. Workshops, both in-person and online, build digital resilience across the county in partnership with schools, the police and industry.
- Creating Together: Inspired by Project Beacon, Charlie becomes involved with the Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF). Working alongside community groups and local mentors, he helps design online platforms that promote resilience and peer support, as well as new youth activities that reflect what young people actually want. This gives Charlie a stronger sense of belonging, builds his confidence and ensures services are responsive to the needs of all generations.

## THE V**ARMA** FAMILY'S BIO



Priya (34 years old) and Arjun (33 years old) live in rented housing in Cheltenham with their young son, Ravi (9 years old) who has additional learning needs. Like many families in the town, they are balancing work, caring responsibilities and the rising cost of housing.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Priya and Arjun are eager to retrain to another industry to better financially support the family. Ravi enjoys music and building things. | The family struggles with insecure housing, long assessment wait times and navigating the education, health and social care services.<br>Priya and Arjun feel stuck in low-paid work and torn between caregiving responsibilities and pursuing career opportunities. Meanwhile, Ravi feels behind in school due to overstimulating environments and a lack of tailored learning approaches. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ By co-creating services that work for everyone, Arjun and Priya can help shape flexible training and SEND support that fits their family's real needs.
- ✓ Using digital inclusion initiatives, Ravi has access to secure, joined-up learning tools that support his education needs both in and out of the classroom, and give his parents visibility of his progress.
- ✓ Through linking housing skills and innovation locally, Arjun and Priya can take up retraining opportunities without moving away or compromising Ravi's care

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Using Data to Transform Transport & Services: Integrated data systems link Ravi's SEND support, the family's housing needs, and the parent's retraining. Because services communicate, the social care professionals are able to provide the Patels with proactive care. It is through this better data integration that Arjun and Priya are offered a suitable retraining programme through the Talent for Life initiative.
- Unlocking Talent, Skills & Housing for Inclusive Growth: Through linking housing, skills and innovation locally, Arjun and Priya can retrain in secure jobs while knowing Ravi's care and education are supported close to home. This gives Ravi access to new learning opportunities from tailored digital tools to his family's attendance at 'taster days' in local industries, helping him discover his own future pathway.
- Driving Breakthrough Innovation for National Resilience: Ravi discovers a passion for advanced manufacturing through hands-on activities at local skills hubs. With access to mentoring, modern equipment and real-world projects linked to clean energy and sustainable production, he is able to see how his interests connect to solving national challenges. As he grows up, these opportunities give him the skills and confidence to pursue a career in advanced manufacturing, contributing directly to Gloucestershire's role in building resilience for the United Kingdom.

## MARGARET'S BIO



Margaret (82 years old) lives alone in a small flat in Gloucester City. She has limited mobility and digital literacy, and no nearby family. Before retirement, she used to work in a garden centre where she enjoyed advising customers on garden needs.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Margaret has a strong desire to be a part of the community and is willing to engage if supported. | While public transport is available, she finds it difficult to navigate without support and feels overwhelmed by the pace of digital change. This makes it hard to access services or stay socially connected. She feels forgotten by the fast-changing world around her. She wants to remain in her own home for as long as possible and her family need assurance that she can be safe and cared for. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ Co-designed neighbourhood and health services reflect Margaret's needs and preferences, restoring her dignity and independence.
- ✓ Digital inclusion initiatives supported through LGR, give Margaret the confidence to use online health services and stay socially connected.
- ✓ Local community groups and health providers collaborate to bring companionship and tailored wellbeing support directly into her neighbourhood, reducing isolation.

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Putting Wellbeing, Housing & Nature Recovery at the Heart of Growth: Every policy and service in Gloucestershire is shaped by a wellbeing-first approach, ensuring Margaret's needs are central. From transport to housing, decisions prioritise her dignity and independence helping her remain at home and part of her community. Over time, this creates a fairer community where ageing is fully supported.
- Empowering Communities through Co-Design & Local Decision Making: Margaret contributes her experience to a local Neighbourhood Partnership, shaping age-friendly housing ideas and intergenerational community projects. This gives her a place in the community while ensuring older residents' voices are embedded in local decision-making.
- Using Data to Transform Transport & Public Services: Trusted, real-time data links Margaret's health, housing and care needs, ensuring services coordinate seamlessly. Her GP and social care team receive the same up-to-date information, avoiding duplication and preventing issues from escalating. Her family also gets reassurance through regular wellbeing updates.

## EMILY'S BIO



Emily (26) lives in Cirencester. She works part-time in admin and has caring responsibilities for her family. She is passionate about sustainability and wants to pursue a career in the field without leaving her district. However, she's not sure if that is possible within Gloucestershire. From her knowledge, she feels she needs to move to other areas like Bristol and London to access the opportunities she is looking for, an option not available to her

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Emily wants to find flexible, on-the-job training opportunities that offers career mobility, alongside care support for her father so she doesn't have to compromise on her ambitions. | Emily struggles to find local green skills programmes that are flexible, adaptable to her schedule and will help secure her a job in the industry. She feels torn between her caregiving responsibilities and her aspirations. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ Breakthrough innovation in clean energy and climate technologies creates local career pathways that allow Emily to stay close to her family while contributing to a globally significant sector.
- ✓ Collaboration across transport and training clusters connects her to opportunities in Stroud and Severn Edge.
- ✓ Digital tools support remote learning and flexible work, helping her balance ambition with caregiving.

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Unlocking Talent, Skills & Housing for Inclusive Growth: Emily accesses flexible, online training tailored to her caregiving schedule, gaining credentials in clean energy. This allows her to build a local career in sustainability without sacrificing her family responsibilities whilst also connecting Emily to high potential sectors across the whole of Gloucestershire.
- Harnessing Digital to Tackle Inequality: Digital inclusion projects mean Emily can use high-quality online learning platforms and remote working hubs in the Cotswolds, supported by affordable transport to training centres for in-person learning.
- Driving Breakthrough Innovation for National Resilience. By linking into Gloucestershire's growing clean energy sector, Emily gains placements and mentoring that tie her personal goals to the county's contribution to net zero and energy security. Within a decade, she leads a flagship initiative promoting green fuel and zero-carbon mobility for visitors to the Cotswolds AONB.
- E**mpowering Communities through Co-Design and Local Decision Making:** Emily connects with peer support groups through local Family Hubs, finding access to wellbeing and respite care support. This provides visibility of a pathway for Emily to achieve her career goals and care for her loved ones.

## RACHEL'S BIO



Rachel is in her mid-30s and lives in Bussage with her two children. She commutes daily to Bristol for her job in marketing. The journey is long and expensive, with poor rail connections. She spends hours in traffic and pays high parking fees in Bristol. She's considering remote work or relocating but loves her home and community in Stroud.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| More time with family and friends, affordable and direct commuting options, local work flexibility. She hopes to grow her career, ideally without having to relocate. | Whether rail or car, Rachel's commute has caused her stress. She feels like she has little to no time to enjoy life during the weekdays. Her mother is currently helping with school pick-up but has expressed a desire to relocate outside of Stroud. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ By shaping local transport priorities through local community forums, Rachel has a voice in decisions that directly affect her daily life. .
- ✓ Improved connectivity enables hybrid working, reducing the need for Rachel to commute daily.
- ✓ Smart mobility platforms give Rachel real-time journey planning, reliable timetables and targeted pothole repairs that make her routes safer and quicker.

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Using Data to Transform Transport & Public Services: Strategic partnerships underpinned by employee migration data make the case for improvement in regional connections. This reduces costs and journey times for Rachel. Smart data systems also prioritise road maintenance and pothole repair, making daily travel safer and more reliable. Together, these improvements give Rachael a quicker, more affordable commute and more family time all while ensuring she can progress in her career.
- P**utting Wellbeing, Housing & Nature Recovery at the Heart of Growth**: Transport and housing are planned with wellbeing in mind. Rachel benefits from community facilities linked to commuting routes, making family and work easier to combine.
- Harnessing Digital to Tackle Inequality, Improve Services and Drive Innovation: Rachel uses digital platforms to plan hybrid working and smarter travel, helping her stay rooted in Stroud while keeping access to regional career opportunities in the sectors where she has the most skills.

## DARREN'S BIO



Darren (52 years old) lives in Bishops Cleeve. Darren has been working hard to overcome addiction and is determined to build a new life. He wants to work and contribute more to his community but faces stigma and limited access to tailored employment support. He's proud of his recovery and seeks meaningful ways to stay on track and help others.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Darren wants a stable employment that can enable him to be financially independent. Inspired by the support he has received from health and social care professionals, he wants to contribute and give back to those in need. | Darren feels socially isolated and is conscious of being judged by others. He has yet to find a stable job in Tewkesbury that will give him financial security, causing him stress, which he fears may cause him to relapse. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ Integrated services mean Darren can access recovery, housing advice and employment support in one place, removing the barriers he previously faced navigating separate systems.
- ✓ Local employers and VCFSE partners offer supported routes into meaningful work, helping Darren rebuild confidence while contributing to his community.
- ✓ Digital tools track Darren's progress and connect him to peer networks, reinforcing his recovery and helping him sustain long-term stability

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Putting Wellbeing, Housing & Nature Recovery at the Heart of Growth: Darren accesses a new joined-up wellbeing and employment hub model that integrates housing advice, health support and training opportunities under one roof. Unlike existing services, the hub is embedded in local housing and regeneration projects, giving Darren stability in his home environment as well as tailored pathways into work. This integration reduces the stigma he's faced in fragmented systems and helps maintain recovery.
- Empowering Communities through Co-Design and Local Decision Making: Darren helps co-design recovery-to-employment programmes with local employers and VCFSE partners in Tewkesbury. His lived experience is treated as expertise, shaping more inclusive pathways that others in recovery can access. Over time, Darren takes on a mentoring role, feeding into decision-making that improves services county-wide and strengthens trust between residents and providers.
- Unlocking Talent, Skills & Housing for Inclusive Growth: Darren joins a reskilling programme linked to local employers, with wraparound housing and wellbeing support. He starts with part-time work at a social enterprise in Bishop's Cleeve, progresses into a supervisory role and ultimately secures a qualification that allows him to mentor others. By linking employment with social support, Darren's recovery is reinforced while also contributing to Gloucestershire's inclusive growth.

## Appendix 2: Digital, Data, and Technology Case Studies

Digital, data, and technology (DDaT) are already transforming services across Gloucestershire – making them smarter, faster, and more joined-up. These examples show how a customer-centred, data-informed approach improves outcomes, reduces avoidable demand, and enables proactive service delivery.

Right now, delivery varies by council. But applied across a single council, our DDaT approach unlocks consistent, high-quality services for everyone – wherever they live.

**Case study 1:**

### Customer experience

**Streamlining and opening up data through AI (Tewkesbury BC)**

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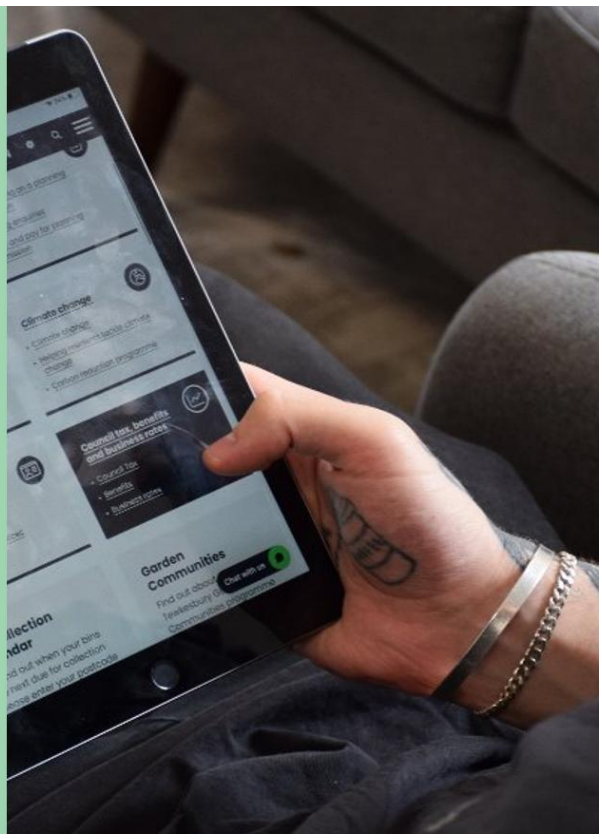
AI is redefining our customers' experience over the phone and online - there's no longer a need to navigate a lot of webpages or a maze of phone options (or to sit waiting on hold).

The customer types their issue into a responsive AI-driven chatbot online or speaks through a Large Language Model assistant over the phone (with a single phone number for all issues). If the issue is particularly complex, the customer seamlessly passes through to a human advisor who already knows why they're calling. If the teams are particularly busy, a simple call-back option is offered.

Residents are less frustrated, receive support quicker and have more confidence in contacting the council when they need help.

Real-time dashboards mean teams manage demand dynamically, and seamless integration into the council's digital platform means that customer contact can trigger automatic workflows depending on what they're contacting about.

| 50% | 38% | 17% |
|---|---|---|
| reduction in wait times in 6 months | shift to online services in 6 months | decrease in abandoned calls in 6 months |





Case study 2:

## AI virtual care

**Helping vulnerable residents live in their own homes for as long as possible (Gloucestershire CC)**

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Innovative AI-powered virtual care will help transform how social care is delivered. Using smart plugs, motion sensors and other remote devices installed in residents' homes to monitor daily activity and wellbeing.

Devices feed data into a technology-enabled care system (recently procured by Gloucestershire CC), which uses AI to detect changes in behaviour that may signal a health concern.

The proactive approach allows care teams to intervene early – before a crisis occurs. In Sutton, this has led to around 25 residents per month being supported by community response service, avoiding ambulance callouts and hospital admissions.

The technology supports residents to live independently for longer, with the reassurance that help is available 24/7. It also eases pressure on overstretched adult social care services.

Case study 3:

## Bulky waste

**Reducing demand by keeping customers updated (Tewkesbury BC)**

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Bulky waste bookings take place through an intuitive online booking system – no need to call or visit (although that option is available).

The online experience is really enjoyable. Information is clear and there's a basket for items to be added, and an integrated payment system – nowhere close to the traditional clunky online local gov experience. Residents get to choose a collection date that suits them from a calendar of availability.

Through automated communications, residents are kept informed at every stage of the process - from booking confirmations to collection updates. These messages, delivered via email and text, are clearly branded and consistent with the council's digital identity.

Live data integration allows collection crews to update the system in real time, enabling customer services to respond swiftly to any queries.

Similar proactive approaches will be used for missed bin reports, planning applications and many other services.

In six months:

| 60% | 70% | 261% |
|---|---|---|
| collections booked online | of items now recycled | rise in income |





Case study 4:

## Open Digital Planning

**MHCLG-funded programme to improve planning online (Gloucester City and Tewkesbury BC)**

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MHCLG's Open Digital Planning is transforming the planning service through systems that reduce invalid applications, improves customer experience and streamlines internal processes.

Plan X uses spatial data to assess site-specific constraints and guides users online through a tailored, question-based journey. This empowers applicants to self-serve, reducing calls to the council and improving the quality of submissions.

Through further development the system will integrate with Idox Uniform, enabling applications to be submitted directly and automatically populate back-office systems.

Gloucester City is also part of Back Office Planning System (BOPS), which is being developed with planning officers to improve the planning process - their input will help shape the system ensuring it meets the needs of planning officers and reduces the double handling and outdated processes in legacy back office systems.

- **Plan X:** Avg 113 visits per week for 'do I need planning permission?' tool (Glos City and Tewks BC).
- **BOPS:** 20% reduction in householder application processing time (Glos City).
- **Plan X:** Ratings of 'excellent' and 'good'.

Case study 5:

## Flooding

**Using spatial data to protect vulnerable residents (Tewkesbury BC)**

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A data-informed approach helps keep flood-risk communities and vulnerable residents safe.

With the introduction of a new digital system in ArcGIS, we can capture information quickly and accurately. Integrating satellite imagery with other datasets (such as the EA river gauge imagery and rainfall) means we can create predictive models of flood extent and impact.

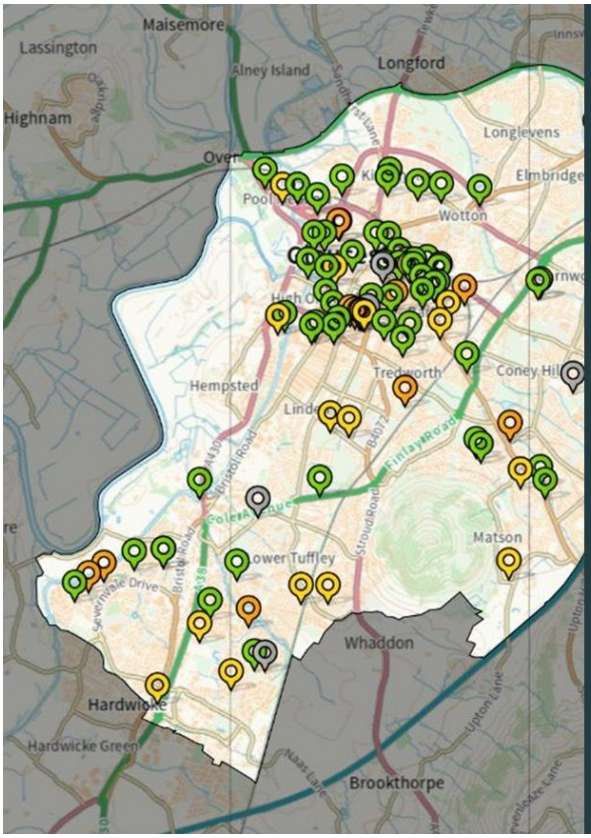
We know what different river levels mean on the ground, and mapped data will show where to direct support, such as:

- Where sandbags and rest centres are best located
- Which householders require targeted alerts and information
- Which vulnerable residents need welfare checks

This approach isn't just about reacting, but about being proactive in supporting at-risk communities.

LGR will enhance this approach even further by enabling a unified, cross-county view of flood risk and response. It allows for the consolidation of data sources from county and district councils, streamlined decision-making, and coordinated deployment of resources - ensuring that support reaches the right places faster and more effectively.






**Case study 6:**

## Fix My Street

**Fix My Street, a simple, map-based tool, lets residents report issues like potholes, fly-tipping, and broken streetlights via the web or mobile app.**

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Users drop a pin, add details and photos, and the report is sent directly to the right team—whether that's the City Council, UBICO, or the County Council.

The system links with in-cab tech, asset layers, and back-office systems to ensure accurate routing and real-time updates for crews. A public map shows reported issues and progress, improving transparency and removing the need for users to understand council responsibilities.

This streamlines service delivery, reduces call volumes, and improves the quality of reports across multiple authorities.

- City council: Average time to resolve issues dropped from **5.25 days** (previous process) to **1.25 days** with FixMyStreet and Alloy integration.
- GCC and city council: Of 198 city council cases reported to the county's FixMyStreet, **100% were automatically routed** to the city council **without any manual intervention.**
- GCC: **60% of highways issues** now reported through FixMyStreet – an increase of 20% on old process.

## Case study 7: CoPilot

**Gloucestershire CC: Average hours saved per week on different activities using M365 Copilot**




Future Gloucestershire
Digital, Data and Technology workstream

*Hours saved per week based on feedback received from 127 users*

# Appendix 3: Public Engagement Report (Cratus)

Cratus group

We're more than an agency.
We're change makers.

# Gloucestershire Local Government Reorganisation
# Public Engagement

August 2025

## Executive Summary

Between July and August 2025, Cratus Group engaged residents and stakeholders across Gloucestershire to gather views on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The programme combined 12 in-person events, two countywide webinars, and a countywide survey which in total generated more than 3,100 responses. A dedicated microsite and multi-channel campaign ensured broad reach across all six districts, though younger residents were notably under-represented.

Residents expressed a strong sense of belonging to their communities, with green spaces, safety, and access to essentials like buses and GPs ranked as the most important local priorities. Council services such as rubbish and recycling, libraries, and parks were generally well regarded, while roads, pavements, buses, and aspects of social care received lower satisfaction ratings. Respondents experience of engaging with councillors and/or council officers was relatively positive.

When considering the future of local government, most respondents prioritised making services better and ensuring council tax is well spent over issues of identity or representation. Community identity, transport infrastructure, housing, and environmental protection were the most commonly prioritised themes in the additional written feedback. Many residents are wary of change, as shown in the written feedback and noted in our conversations. In terms of those who gave a preference as to which model they felt would work best, a single countywide unitary was by far the most supported option. The East/West split and 'Greater Gloucester' model were widely opposed, with concerns about fairness, division, and efficiency.

The next stage of communication should focus on reassurance: showing that local voices and identities will not be lost, underlining the financial and service benefits of change, and clarifying how the new system will work in practice. Simplification of council responsibilities is a persuasive message, but trust will depend on continued engagement and transparency throughout the process.

## Introduction

This report summarises the engagement activity undertaken by Cratus Group in Summer 2025 on behalf of Gloucestershire councils around the future of local government in the county and sets out an analysis of the feedback received.

Please note that throughout this report, for brevity, we use the term 'district' to refer to city, borough and district councils in Gloucestershire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole figure for neatness.

## Background and context

The Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) community engagement programme in Gloucestershire was initiated to gather views from residents, stakeholders, and partner organisations on the future shape and priorities of local government in the county. This work forms an early stage in the process of developing proposals for submission to Government in November 2025.

The aim was to engage communities across all six districts, ensuring that a broad range of voices contributed to the discussion. Importantly, this engagement did not ask people to choose between fixed options or vote on pre-defined models. This will be the focus of formal Government consultation during the early part of next year. Instead, it invited open conversation about the principles, priorities and values that matter most to people in Gloucestershire.

By building understanding and listening to what communities have said they want and need, the engagement sought to generate insights that will help inform decision-making later in the year. The process was designed to be transparent, inclusive and accessible, ensuring that residents could help inform the county's future governance arrangements.

## Objectives

- To inform residents about the context for potential changes to local government in Gloucestershire and the reasons for exploring these changes.
- To understand people's priorities, values and concerns in relation to the organisation of local government and the services it provides.
- To engage as widely as possible across all districts, reaching communities in both urban and rural areas.
- To gather insight that can be used to support councils in the development of proposals for submission to Government in November 2025.

## Methodology

The engagement was undertaken using a hybrid approach, combining online and face-to-face engagement to ensure broad coverage and accessibility.

We followed the principle of 'going where the people are', integrating with existing community events and venues to reach a diverse cross-section of residents, while also providing digital channels for those who preferred to take part online.

In person engagement included a set of materials summarising the changes and signposting to the survey.

## Survey

A county-wide survey was the central element of our public engagement. Hosted on Gloucestershire County Council's Engagement HQ platform, and developed with input from all seven councils, the survey included a blend of closed and open questions. This approach allowed for both quick responses and more detailed commentary.

- The survey was open to the public from **1 July to 8 August 2025**.
- The full list of questions is available in Appendix 1.

**Engagement and demographics**

We achieved high levels of engagement, with over 3,000 responses received. The demographic reach was also strong, with the distribution across most categories closely aligning with the general demographic makeup of the county of Gloucestershire, with the caveat that women were slightly over-represented (53% vs 51% in the 2021 Census) and the respondents skewed slightly older than the general population (33% over-65 vs 22% in 2021 Census). This suggests a broad range of residents chose to participate.

It is important to note that a digital survey of this nature is a self-selecting process rather than a representative poll. This means that people chose to engage with the survey, whether they found it online via social media or council content, or participated in person with a member of our team. Unlike a representative poll, we did not actively contact individuals with the aim of reaching a

statistically significant and truly representative sample of the county's or districts' populations. This was not feasible within the project's scope, budget, or timeframe.

Despite not being a statistically representative poll, we are confident that the feedback is robust and highly useful. The high level of engagement and the broadly representative nature of the respondents' demographics mean that the data provides clear and valuable trends. This feedback is therefore a reliable resource for councils as they develop local government reorganisation (LGR) options.

*Note: While the data aligns broadly with 2021 Census data for the county, this has not been assessed at a District level so we cannot assert that the views expressed are representative of individual Districts.*

The survey achieved good, useful results at a fraction of the cost and time a full-scale representative poll would have required, proving to be an effective and efficient engagement tool within the project's constraints.

## Microsite

A dedicated microsite – www.futuregloucestershire.gov.uk – was created to provide background information on LGR, answer frequently asked questions, and list details of upcoming engagement events and webinars. It also provided a direct link to the survey, ensuring a single point of access for the public.

## Outreach and marketing

To maximise reach, the survey and microsite were promoted through a range of channels:

*Elected members and council officers*
Councillors and officers received information to share with their networks, including a set of informational banners and flyers provided for each district council. Staff across district councils and partner organisations were reached through newsletters and intranet posts.

Gloucestershire County Council officers attended the parish and town council AGM in July to share information.

*Residents and community networks*
Social media activity included both organic and paid campaigns. Paid advertising targeted postcodes with lower response rates during the final two weeks of the engagement.

Posts were shared by each council's communications team via Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn and Nextdoor, alongside digital newsletters, community bulletins and business mailing lists. Flyers were also sent to libraries and other council owned buildings across the county.

*Events and webinars*
In-person engagement took place at two existing community events in each of the six districts, and two online webinars were held to enable countywide participation. All activities were designed to ensure residents could access clear information, ask questions, and provide feedback in a way that suited their needs.

## Engagement summary

As a result of online promotion, 12 in-person events (two per district) and 2 online webinars with countywide attendance, 3,112 survey responses and 1,480 written comments to open-text questions, providing rich qualitative insight, were received.

Events brought conversations into the heart of communities – from busy market towns to rural villages, whilst the online offer ensured residents could take part at any time. This mix of formats generated a balanced evidence base: hard data from the survey for statistical analysis, and detailed personal perspectives from written feedback.

# Engagement findings

## Events

The 12 events are detailed in the following section, with approximate figures for the engagement at each.

Teams attending the events had flyers to hand out, pull-up banners at the stands, and activities to attract people's attention.

People attending the events were encouraged to complete the survey, but discussions also provided useful insights into opinions on council services. Key findings are summarised below. People were encouraged to take flyers home, both as a reminder to fill out the survey themselves and to share with family, friends and neighbours, as we emphasised the desire to reach as many residents as possible.

### Stroud Show

Saturday, 12 July – Stroud district

~ 15 Surveys ~ 40 conversations ~ 70 leaflets handed out

The audience was largely local to Stroud, and local councillors and district leadership were also in attendance. Many people felt that the local voice would be lost under LGR reforms, and they weren't supportive of change. However, many acknowledged that the different levels of local government now were confusing.

Quite a few specifically mentioned that they liked their Parish Councils. Residents complained about the lack of buses and public transport. A few discussed personal council issues.

### Gloucester Quays Shopping Centre Pop-up

Saturday, 12 July – Gloucester City district

~ 8 Surveys ~ 50 conversations ~ 30 leaflets handed out

Feedback varied from disinterested to well-informed. Some attendees reported themselves as being from Gloucester, and identifying as such, but actually living within Stroud or Tewkesbury council areas.

There was some concern that unitary councils would not recognise the individual places that have their own unique identity under current arrangements. There was also a concern that any authority which contained Gloucester would have their resources diverted to the city. More broadly, there was a limited understanding of the difference between the levels of government and some disinterest in how services are delivered.

### Coleford Music Festival

Sunday, 13 July – Forest of Dean district

~ 4 Surveys ~ 25 conversations ~ 15 leaflets handed out

Conversations tended to focus on very local issues including the role of Town and Parish Councils, noting that the Coleford Town precept had gone up dramatically in recent years. All residents spoken to wanted to maintain the identity of the Forest of Dean as a unique place and were not supportive of any option to become a unitary council.

Some councillors had been to the parish event on the 12th and were keen to understand more about what other authorities were doing elsewhere in the country. There was some feedback that the northern part of the Forest of Dean faces toward Herefordshire and could benefit from becoming part of that authority.

## Moreton-in-Marsh Market

Tuesday, 15 July – Cotswold district

~ 21 Surveys ~ 25 conversations ~ 36 leaflets handed out

The busy market had a large tourist presence, making it harder to reach local residents. To counter this, the team engaged stallholders and shop staff directly. This approach ensured meaningful conversations with those living and working in the area.

Generally, there was a lack of trust of Cotswold District Council, partly due to the market stall holders themselves not having a positive experience when dealing with council officers. Aside from this, one of the biggest issues facing local people seemed to be with buses as some routes are being reduced or stopped altogether.

Regarding LGR, most were not aware this was happening but once explained, understood the reasons for the changes. Most were pleased with the idea it could lead to more effective and efficient councils.

## Lydney Community Day

Saturday 19 July – Forest of Dean district

~ 2 Surveys ~ 45 conversations ~ 30 leaflets handed out

Feedback reflected concerns that the Forest of Dean is already overlooked for investment and that Lydney, on the edge of the district, is even more marginalised. Local transport limitations and dependence on cars were raised.

The ‘Greater Gloucester City’ model was criticised as exclusionary. Residents feared that roads and services would be deprioritised in favour of higher-traffic areas. A young carer noted potential benefits if services became more joined-up.

Councillors expressed opposition to reorganisation, with some arguing the county/district system should remain. Other comments touched on roadworks coordination, declining community events, and the importance of youth engagement.

## Churchdown Summer Fun Day

Saturday, 19 July – Tewkesbury district

~ 1 Survey ~ 25 conversations ~ 15 leaflets handed out

Residents voiced concerns about historic boundary and naming issues, stressing Churchdown’s distinct identity from Gloucester and Tewkesbury. Some frustration was expressed that the process was not consulting on whether reorganisation should happen at all.

The general sentiment was that change felt imposed and unnecessary, though residents still engaged with engagement materials. Issues raised included access to waste facilities and representation.

## Cirencester Town Centre Pop-up

Sunday, 20 July – Cotswold district

~ 5 Surveys ~ 20 conversations ~ 15 leaflets handed out

Engagement included younger shop workers and local business owners. Leaflets were displayed in shops and community spaces.

Residents asked about potential combined authorities and whether reorganisation was required by national government. Concerns were raised about losing local identity, confusion over service responsibilities, and how planning could adapt to different topographical needs.

## Tewkesbury Market

Wednesday, 23 July - Tewkesbury district

~ 35 Surveys ~ 40 conversations ~ 10 leaflets handed out

Residents valued Tewkesbury's historic identity and stressed the importance of a localised response to flooding. While many saw opportunities for improved efficiency under reorganisation, concerns were voiced about differences between districts such as the Cotswolds and Gloucester and what this would mean if the local authority areas were combined.

## Gloucester City Centre Pop-up

Friday, 25 July – Gloucester City district

~ 30 Surveys ~ 50+ conversations ~ 10 leaflets handed out

This high-footfall location enabled engagement with a broad mix of residents. Safety, cleanliness, and homelessness in the city centre were key concerns, particularly from younger respondents.

Issues raised included a shortage of affordable housing, the use of hotels for temporary accommodation, and the pressures of migration on housing. Calls for more youth facilities, investment in health services, and stronger support for tourism were common themes.

## Greenways Fun Day

Saturday, 26 July – Stroud district

~ 10 Surveys ~ 40+ conversations ~ 6 leaflets handed out

Residents voiced concerns about east–west divisions in the county creating inequalities. They called for prioritisation of affordable homes for young people and better responses to anti-social behaviour.

As a busy, family-friendly event, it was harder to focus people on doing the survey then and there but there was a lot of interest and people took photos of the materials and/or scanned the QR code to follow up later.

## Cheltenham Town Centre Pop-up

Saturday, 2 August – Cheltenham district

~ 36 Surveys ~ 40+ conversations ~ 33 leaflets handed out

Engagement was steady throughout the day, with neutral or positive views towards reorganisation in the majority. Issues raised included concerns over council tax, immigration, potholes, and buses.

Awareness of local councillors was generally low, and most had not contacted council departments in recent years. Some raised issues with local SEN support.

## No Child Left Behind Festival

Wednesday, 6 August - Cheltenham district

~ 37 Surveys ~ 30+ conversations ~ 22 leaflets handed out

The family-focused event drew strong engagement. Activities at the stand encouraged conversations with parents and carers.

Recurring issues included poor road and street maintenance, lack of awareness of councillors, and concern that a county-wide unitary would erase local identity. Some welcomed the idea of area forums to retain local voices.

## Webinars

Two webinars took place, on 5 and 6 August, one held during the working day and the other during the evening, allowing for different people's schedules. Both events were advertised across social media channels by all the councils. A recording of the presentation was then hosted on the www.futuregloucestershire.co.uk website for those who could not attend.

The main sentiment from the Q&A portion of the webinar was requests for more details on exactly how the process will work, from questions about which council buildings will be kept to details on how departments will be organised and who will be responsible for policies.

The structure of local government beyond district and county level was raised, with several queries about how the potential combined authorities and mayoral areas will be organised, and on the other side, how this will affect Town and Parish Councils. It became clear that attendees had heard rumours about how both could work, including the concern that parishes will be given further responsibilities without more resources.

We learned that residents will need reassurance throughout the process. People were concerned about things like how council housing will work, whether libraries will be affected, whether staff are at risk of losing their jobs, and where council offices will be.

Also, a couple of comments concerned future updates, while attendees were happy to hear that the details were still not finalised, they were keen to hear the results of the survey and details as they emerge – so Gloucestershire councils must keep up the good momentum of engagement and information sharing.

We had 71 attendees across the two days (45 on Tuesday, 5 August and 26 on Wednesday, 6 August). The audience was a mixture of residents, council staff and councillors from all tiers of council.

Unlike some in-person conversations and the survey results, webinar attendees did not request that the status quo remain. This shows that if it is clearly explained then people do understand that LGR is a national government requirement, and change will be taking place. Attendees commented that they found it helpful and were grateful for the engagement.

## Survey results

### Demographics

The survey gathered demographic data from respondents so we could assess how representative the respondents were of Gloucestershire's population. Where possible, this has been reviewed against the 2021 Census data.

The key demographic findings are as follows:

Age: The majority of respondents were aged 55 and over (57%), followed by those aged 35-54 (30%), and under 35 (9%). Gloucestershire does have an older population than the national average, however given that the figures for 65+ at a county level are 22%, the survey responses skew to an older demographic than is fully representative.

Sex and Gender Identity: The respondents were almost evenly split between female (53%) and male (47%), with a slightly higher number of women than men responding, slightly higher than the census data which has 51% female. Almost all respondents indicated that their gender identity is the same as their sex at birth.

Sexual Orientation: About 80% of respondents identified as heterosexual/straight, which is less than the census data which 90% identified as such. Smaller proportions identified as asexual (~3%), bisexual (~3%), gay man (~2%), or lesbian/gay woman (~1%). The number of respondents identifying as LGBTQ+ was higher among under-35s (16%) compared to those aged 55 and over (less than 4%).

Ethnicity: The largest ethnic group was White British (87%), followed by White European (4%) and White Irish (1%). Other individual ethnic groups each accounted for less than 1%. This is reflective of the demographics of the county (based on the 2021, 88% of the population is White British with a further 5% coming from other White backgrounds).

Religion or Belief: The most common responses were 'No religion' (46%) and 'Christian' (44%). 'No religion' was more prevalent among under-35s, while 'Christian' was more common among older age groups, reaching around 62% in those aged 75 and over. The county levels for 'Christian' are higher at 48%, and lower for 'No religion' at 43%.

Long-term Illness or Disability: About 19% of respondents reported having a long-term illness or disability that limits their day-to-day activities, less than the census figure of 23%.

Caring Responsibilities: Approximately 20% of respondents had caring responsibilities, mainly for older family members (15%). A smaller proportion (4%) cared for children with additional needs, and around 1% had dual caring responsibilities. This is higher than the census' average of 9% providing unpaid care.

## Survey responses in detail

### Section 1: A sense of belonging

This section of the survey focused on where people lived and where they identified as 'home' within the county. Respondents were asked for their postcode (first half only), which councils they

thought represented them, and where they consider they live. The latter was to determine whether people's local identity is more closely tied to the county, district, or local neighbourhood.

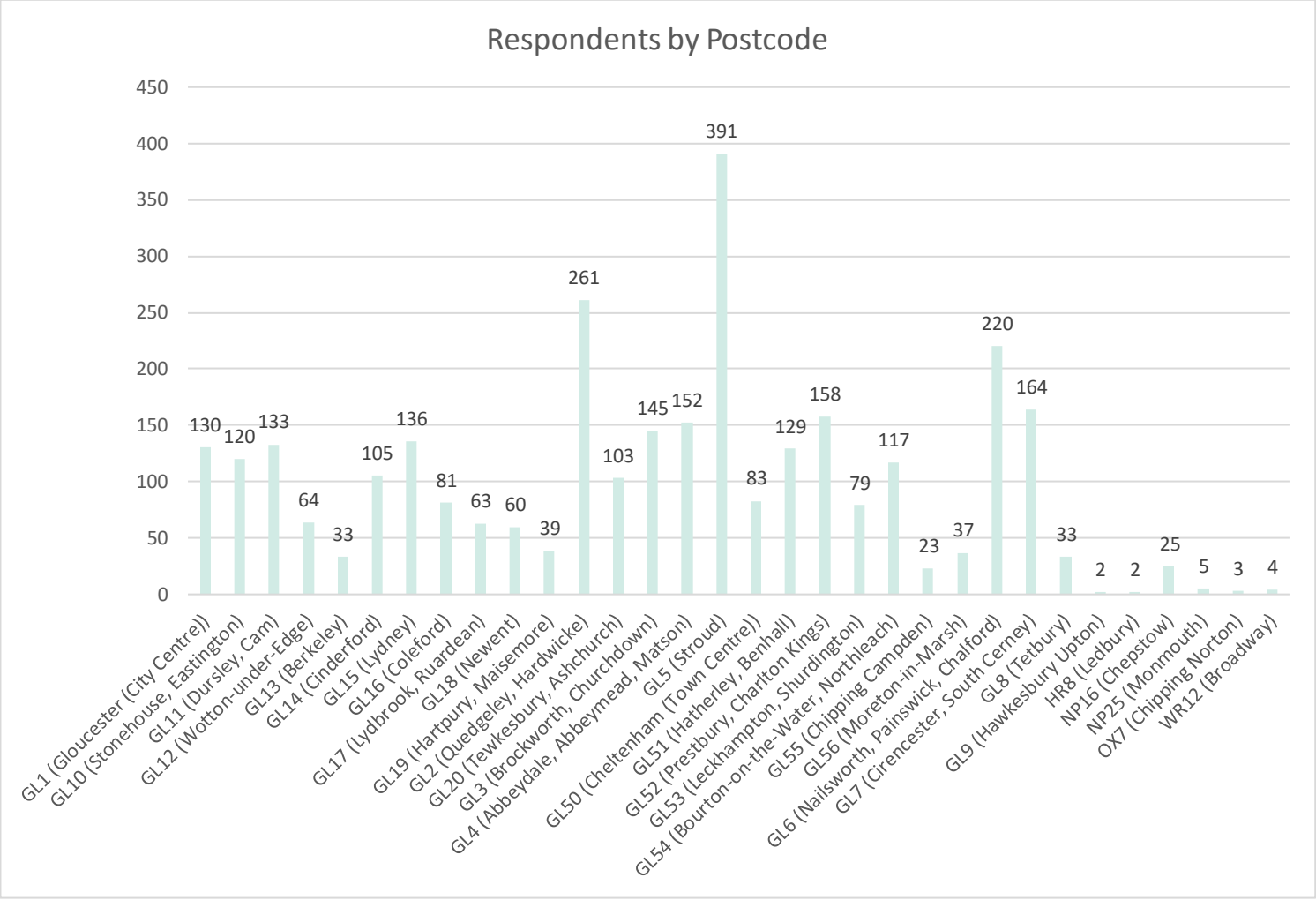



*Figure 1*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents across postcodes and the most commonly associated areas within the postcodes. There is notably high turnout from GL5 (Stroud), GL6 (Nailsworth, Painswick, Chalford), GL7 (Cirencester, South Cerney), GL52 (Prestbury, Charlton Kings), GL4 (Abbeydale, Abbeymead, Matson) and GL3 (Brockworth, Churchdown).

Eleven respondents gave a hometown postcode outside of Gloucestershire, explained by the fact some lived on the borders or visited the county for work. Those postcodes were: GL9, BS37, IP2, GL20, GL8, GL12, OX7 and TA1.

People were asked to select their council, with the option of all six districts, the county council, and 'other.' 52 (2%) were not sure which council they were served by, indicated by either selecting 'not sure' or by selecting multiple district councils. However, we were able to allocate all except seven using the postcode and description of where they live for the purpose of effective survey analysis.

1,012 (33%) included Gloucestershire County Council as part of their answer, with 15 of those placing it as their only council. This shows that 2,090 (67%) respondents either do not realise this is their council or do not see it as much a part of their day-to-day life as their district council.

As shown in Figure 2, the districts were relatively evenly represented in responses, except for Stroud District Council which saw a considerably higher response rate.

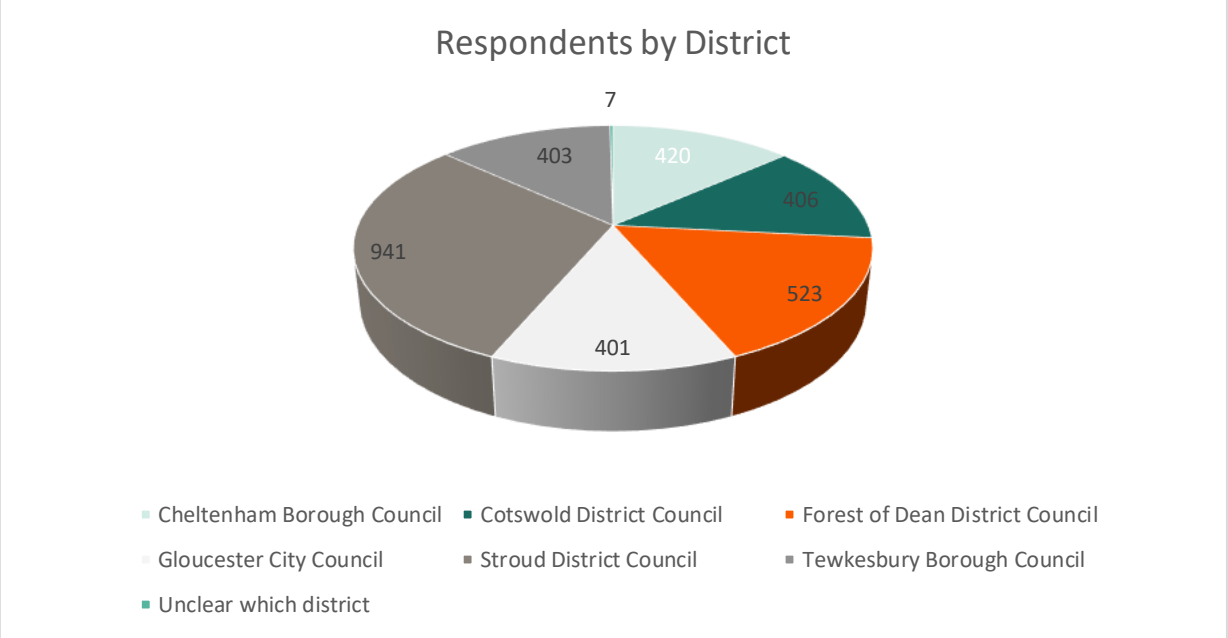



*Figure 2*

34 people added a council after selecting 'other'. Of these, 23 were Parish Councils and 11 were councils outside of Gloucestershire County Council lines (e.g. South Gloucestershire, Wychavon, West Oxfordshire, Malvern Hills, Somerset and Ipswich).

Next, people were asked to tell us first where they lived (Figure 3) and then what they considered to be their 'local area' (Figure 4). The word-clouds below summarise the most common responses to each.




*Figure 3*

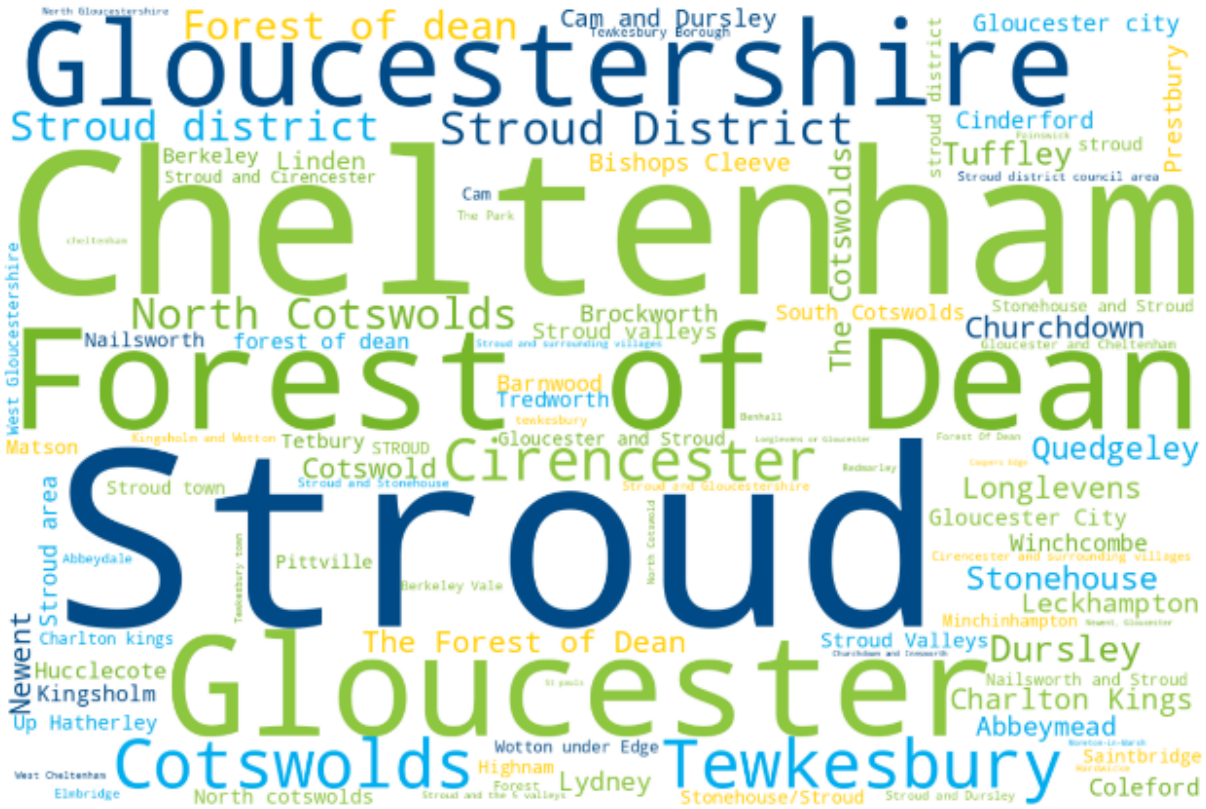



*Figure 4*

These two questions were designed to get people thinking about where they feel most connected to, rather than thinking solely in terms of council boundaries. The results show that people are

more specific when thinking about where they live vs what is their local area, and that while the district names are mentioned frequently, hundreds of smaller towns and villages are included, suggesting people's sense of home is more complex than which district or county they belong to.

We then asked people to what extent they felt a 'sense of belonging' to the local area they just identified. The responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive, with 1,503 (48%) saying strongly agree, and only 218 (7%) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (shown in Figure 5).

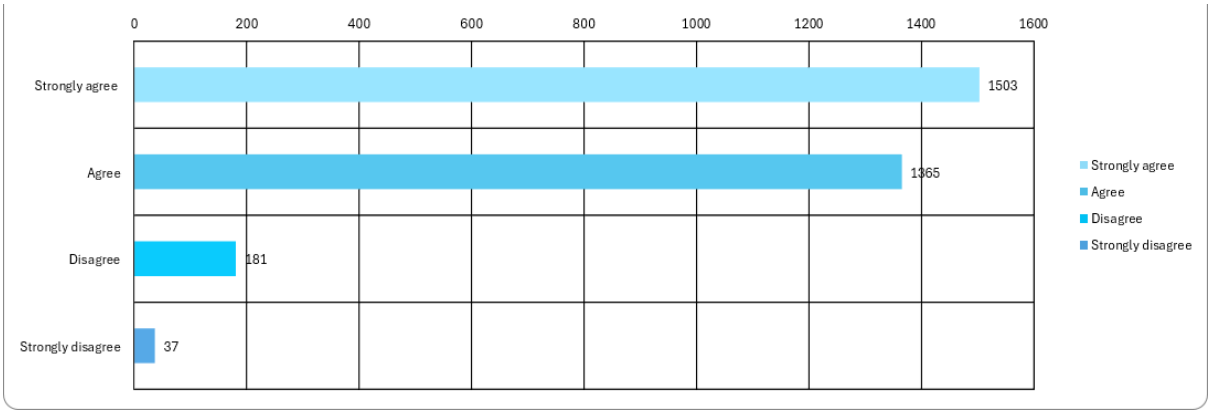



*Figure 5*

We then asked respondents to rank the importance of various key factors in contributing to this 'sense of belonging'.

Overall, green open spaces were rated as the most important element, with 72% saying they were 'very important'. Safety was the next priority, with 70% rating it very important, followed by 65% saying 'easy to get to important things like buses, schools and the GP' were very important.

Only 40% said history and heritage was very important to them, however overall, all elements were seen as more important than not important. 9% said events were not at all important, and this was the highest percentage of all 'not at all important' rankings.

## Section 2: Council Services

In this next section of the survey, respondents were asked for feedback on their council services as they are now, including assessments of a series of council services and feedback on their engagement with councillors and officers.

Overall, 2,215 (71%) know who their councillors are, and 1,045 (34%) have contacted them in the last two years. 77% were satisfied or very satisfied with the response from their councillor.

1,904 (61%) have contacted a council department, and 73% were happy or very happy with the response from the relevant department.

In terms of services provided, rubbish and recycling and parks and green spaces consistently receive a high positive sentiment across all councils, while roads and pavements are the weakest area – in almost every council, these saw the lowest 'very good' ratings and highest negative feedback.

Residents across all councils received good ratings on average, with little differentiation between the six districts.

Overall average satisfaction per district (rated 1–4 scale):

Cheltenham Borough Council: 2.89
Cotswold District Council: 2.70
Forest of Dean District Council: 2.72
Gloucester City Council: 2.81
Tewkesbury Borough Council: 2.87
Stroud District Council: 2.86

Each council's individual feedback figures are summarised below:

## Cheltenham Borough Council

420 responses were from residents in Cheltenham Borough Council. Table 1 shows how respondents from Cheltenham ranked the council services. Key things to note are that parks, gardens, and other green spaces were the highest rated, with 93% 'very good' or 'good', and roads, pavements, and streetlights were rated the lowest, with only 2% rating them as 'very good' and 76% as 'not good' or 'not very good at all'.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 32% | 55% | 9% | 4% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 2% | 21% | 48% | 28% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 40% | 53% | 6% | 1% |
| Schools and education | 23% | 69% | 6% | 2% |
| Libraries | 22% | 60% | 15% | 4% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 32% | 57% | 9% | 2% |
| Local buses | 14% | 59% | 23% | 4% |
| Social care and benefits | 5% | 56% | 29% | 10% |

*Table 1*

Engagement with Councillors
The survey included two questions about residents' awareness and interactions with their district or county councillors.

*Awareness*
A significant portion of residents (75%) are aware of their councillors, with 35% having actively engaged with them in the last two years. 15% did not know who their councillors were and 10% were unsure or did not respond.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 27% were very satisfied with the response, 40% were satisfied, 22% were dissatisfied, 10% were very dissatisfied and 1% did not respond.

The satisfaction levels are relatively positive, with 67% expressing satisfaction (either very satisfied or satisfied). However, the dissatisfaction rate of 32% (dissatisfied or very dissatisfied) indicates that there is still a notable portion of the population that feels their concerns are not being adequately addressed.

Engagement with Council Officers
The survey also included questions about residents' interactions with council departments over the past two years.

*Contact*
65% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years, some respondents mentioned contacting a different borough, possibly related to friends or family across the border or where they work.

*Satisfaction*
Of those who had contacted a council department, 19% of respondents were very happy with their experience, 47% were happy, 21% were not happy, 12% were not at all happy and 1% did not respond.

## Cotswold District Council

406 responses were from residents in Cotswold District Council. The rating of the services is detailed in Table 2 below. There were several well rated services in this district, with 90% rating Schools and education as 'good or very good', 89% rating rubbish and recycling as the same and 87% for parks, gardens, and other green spaces.

Roads, pavements and streetlights were less well rated, with 56% rating 'not good' or 'not very good at all', and 42% saying the same for social care and benefits.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 35% | 54% | 8% | 3% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 22% | 44% | 32% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 17% | 70% | 11% | 2% |
| Schools and education | 21% | 68% | 9% | 2% |
| Libraries | 18% | 60% | 16% | 6% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 15% | 58% | 22% | 5% |
| Local buses | 4% | 25% | 41% | 29% |
| Social care and benefits | 7% | 51% | 32% | 10% |

*Table 2*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
42% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 37% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 13% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 39% were very satisfied with the response, and 40% were satisfied. However, 15% were dissatisfied, and 6% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
65% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
18% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 46% were happy. However, 26% were not happy, and 9% were not at all happy.

## Forest of Dean District Council

523 responses were from residents in Forest of Dean District Council. Table 3 shows the range of ratings given to the services by the residents.

Rubbish and recycling were rated very highly, with 95% of respondents rating it as 'good or very good'. Roads, pavements, and streetlights, and local buses were seen as poor, with 67% and 64% rating them 'not good' and 'not very good at all' respectively.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 51% | 44% | 4% | 1% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 30% | 43% | 25% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 26% | 60% | 11% | 3% |
| Schools and education | 12% | 69% | 15% | 4% |
| Libraries | 16% | 62% | 16% | 5% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 10% | 56% | 27% | 6% |
| Local buses | 5% | 31% | 40% | 24% |
| Social care and benefits | 4% | 49% | 35% | 12% |

*Table 3*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
34% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 33% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 23% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 39% were very satisfied with the response, and 44% were satisfied. However, 10% were dissatisfied, and 7% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
59% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
26% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 52% were happy. However, 13% were not happy, and 8% were not at all happy.

## Gloucester City Council

401 responses were from residents in Gloucester City Council. Table 4 details the ratings given by people in this district. The data reveals that while some services, such as rubbish and recycling, are well-regarded (92% saying very good or good), but other areas are seen as sub-par, with 56%

reporting roads, pavements and streetlights as ‘not good’ or ‘not very good at all’ and 42% saying the same for social care and benefits.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 34% | 58% | 5% | 3% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 41% | 41% | 15% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 11% | 68% | 18% | 3% |
| Schools and education | 13% | 69% | 15% | 3% |
| Libraries | 18% | 66% | 13% | 3% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 9% | 57% | 28% | 5% |
| Local buses | 17% | 55% | 23% | 5% |
| Social care and benefits | 5% | 53% | 35% | 7% |

*Table 4*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
30% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 38% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 23% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 25% were very satisfied with the response, and 47% were satisfied. However, 17% were dissatisfied, and 12% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
61% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
16% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 46% were happy. However, 18% were not happy, and 10% were not at all happy.

## Stroud District Council

The district with the most responses was Stroud with 941, and the service ratings are below in Table 5. Responses were very positive overall, especially relating to rubbish and recycling which received 97% ‘good or very good’ ratings. Parks, gardens, and other green spaces, schools and education. Libraries all also had positive ratings above 85%.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 60% | 37% | 2% | 1% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 28% | 48% | 21% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 30% | 63% | 7% | 1% |
| Schools and education | 20% | 68% | 9% | 3% |
| Libraries | 26% | 59% | 12% | 3% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 19% | 67% | 12% | 2% |
| Local buses | 5% | 33% | 40% | 22% |
| Social care and benefits | 5% | 54% | 33% | 9% |

*Table 5*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
33% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 38% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 19% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 51% were very satisfied with the response, and 36% were satisfied. However, 8% were dissatisfied, and 5% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
63% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
33% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 44% were happy. However, 16% were not happy, and 7% were not at all happy.

## Tewkesbury Borough Council

403 responses were from residents in Tewkesbury Borough Council. The survey results indicate that Tewkesbury residents were most positive about rubbish and recycling services (96% very good or good), with schools and education second (84%) and most negative about roads, pavements and streetlights, with 66% rating them not good or not very good at all.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 63% | 33% | 4% | 0% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 4% | 30% | 43% | 22% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 17% | 62% | 18% | 3% |
| Schools and education | 16% | 68% | 14% | 2% |
| Libraries | 24% | 57% | 15% | 3% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 16% | 60% | 20% | 4% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local buses | 18% | 47% | 24% | 11% |
| Social care and benefits | 7% | 52% | 34% | 7% |

*Table 6*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
30% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 40% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 20% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 36% were very satisfied with the response, and 36% were satisfied. However, 19% were dissatisfied, and 7% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
56% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
25% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 46% were happy. However, 20% were not happy, and 9% were not at all happy.

## Other Services

An additional option after rating the eight specified services was 'I'd like to rate a different service'. Across all respondents, 261 respondents chose to respond to this question, just over 8% of the total respondents. This has been analysed across the county rather than by district, as the relatively low response rate to this question would imply

Issues around planning and highways dominate the comments - these two areas alone account for more than half of all service mentions. By noting that people felt the need to add extra analysis to topics such as roads and schools that had already been rated in the previous questions shows the strength of people's opinions.

For each, we have included a sentiment score[61] and some examples of the kind of comments included.

a) Planning / Development / Building Control - 16.5% of comments

[61] *Each comment in the survey was tagged with a sentiment label: **Positive**, **Neutral**, or **Negative**. To quantify overall sentiment for each issue, these labels were converted into numerical scores as follows:*

- ***Positive** → **+1***
- ***Neutral** → **0***
- ***Negative** → **–1***

*For each category, the **average sentiment score** was calculated by taking the mean of all individual comment scores associated with that issue. This provides a simple, interpretable metric:*

- *A score **closer to +1** indicates generally positive feedback.*
- *A score **around 0** suggests mixed or neutral sentiment.*
- *A score **closer to –1** reflects predominantly negative feedback.*

*This approach allows for easy comparison across service areas and helps highlight where public perception is most favourable or critical.*

Average Sentiment Score: -0.27

There were concerns raised about new development, density, lack of local consultation and poor enforcement of planning decisions. There were also complaints raised about the performance of planning services.

- *"Planning decisions - this should be more under the umbrella of the town council not the district most of which do not live in the area".*
- *"Planning applications are dealt with extremely slowly... little consistency between councils."*

b) Roads / Highways / Potholes - 10.0% of comments
Average Sentiment Score: -0.30

There were recurrent complaints about potholes, poor road maintenance, resurfacing delays and local road safety. There were also localised complaints about the streetscape, covering issues like parking availability and enforcement, and litter and graffiti.

- *"Highways- not very good at all. Far too many road closures, and temporary traffic lights."*
- *"Fix my pothole website... a pothole in my street was fixed within the week!"*

c) Housing / Homelessness / Council houses - 5.5% of comments
Average Sentiment Score: 0.09

A number of comments were frustrated that housing services have not improved in the area.

- *"Lack of social housing for people."*
- *"Housing officers aren't good as they have too much work to do".*

d) Schools / Education - 4.0% of comments
Average Sentiment Score: 0.00

A small number of people raised issues around education, from a lack of nurseries through to problems with the education system overall. There were a number of comments about poor transport to school.

- *"Early careers - needs to be better in schools"*
- *"I think we should not have an 11 plus grammar school system. It is divisive. I went to a comprehensive school in Oxford."*

e) Children's services / Child protection - 3.5% of comments
Average Sentiment Score: -0.43

Similar to schools / education, a small number of people raised real concerns with children's services, mostly from parents trying to access SEND support for their children.

- *"Children's services - not good at all"*
- *"Parents trying to negotiate SEND provisions for children with extra needs is a lengthy and high stress process. This needs huge investment as these children will slip through the*

*cracks."*

f) Waste / Bin collections / Recycling - 3.5% of comments
Average Sentiment Score: -0.14

Missed collections and recycling issues appear across a number of comments. There was a surprisingly strong opposition to the way recycling centres operate with multiple people raising frustration with having to register in advance to attend and feeling that these centres make it harder for them to recycle.

- *"Any suggestion of bin collection every 3 weeks should be stopped".*
- *"Recycling Centres: Not very good at all due to having to book for a slot".*
- *"Recycling Household Centre. The registration of cars should be removed".*

g) Public transport / Buses - 3.0% of comments
Average Sentiment Score: -0.50

There were a range of complaints about bus reliability, frequency and connections — and a recognition that these impact people's ability to travel without a car. Many of these were very specific complaints about a local service.

***a)*** *"The Number 10 bus service: Inconsistent every single day, rarely happens according to the schedules at the bus stops. Many busy stops rely on printed schedules as they do not have electronic schedules. The Stagecoach West app sometimes lies about where buses are. And the overall cost is terrible. The monthly Rider Plus ticket now costs £85 per 28 days (i.e. £1,020+ per year). This is reaching a point where private transport is becoming economically comparable and vastly more comfortable and convenient over public transport. This is exactly the reverse of where public transport as a service in Gloucestershire should be heading."*

h) Council tax / Benefits / Finance - 2.5% of comments
Average Sentiment Score: -0.20

***b)*** *"Cost of council tax value for as council tax is incredibly expensive for the services received/provided."*

***c)*** *"Council tax can vary greatly in cost between councils & also which parish you live in."*

## Section 3: Local government reorganisation

In this section of the survey, we focused on questions about LGR and the future of councils in Gloucestershire.

### What are your top priorities when it comes to reorganising councils in Gloucestershire?

We first asked respondents to rank in order of priority the four key objectives of LGR, as set out by National Government:

'Make sure your council tax is well spent' was the top priority for most people, with 1,267 rating this highest. Next highest was 'make local services better', named as the top priority by 1,128 respondents.

There is then a large gap with only 330 naming 'provide a sense of community' as their highest priority and a similar figure of 337 saying 'provide a stronger voice for residents'.

We can see from this that overwhelmingly people's priority is the practical day-to-day spending and work of the council, rather than feeling the council should focus on issues of identity and feeling included.

### Is there anything else you think should be a priority, or anything you would like us to think about when putting together plans to reorganise Gloucestershire's local government structure?

The final question in the survey asked if there was anything else respondents wanted us to consider when designing proposals for how new council services will be delivered under LGR. Almost 60% of respondents answered this question and their comments are summarised below, divided into overall comments and specific references to different structures.

#### Topics to consider

Almost 60% of respondents answered this question and their comments are summarised below, grouped into key categories:

| Theme | Percentage (%) | Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Community | 16.06 | Concerns about local representation, community identity, and engagement in decision-making. |
| Transport | 9.36 | Issues related to public transport, road maintenance, and connectivity. |
| Housing | 5.47 | Comments on housing affordability, development planning, and infrastructure. |
| Environment | 3.51 | Feedback on climate action, sustainability, and environmental conservation. |
| Economy | 2.8 | Suggestions for economic growth, job creation, and business support. |
| Healthcare | 2.19 | Concerns about access to medical services and hospital facilities. |
| Education | 2.06 | Issues regarding schools, learning opportunities, and educational infrastructure. |
| Safety | 1.64 | Mentions of crime prevention, policing, and community safety. |

*Table 7*

Of the above, the most common concerns were:

- Community engagement and local representation – Emphasis on keeping decisions local and maintaining identity.

1. *"Local government is not just about providing services, it is also about being a place leader and convenor for the local system and communities. I am concerned that discussions about LGR are so reductive - just focusing on what the boundary should be. If I had a preference it would be for two authorities to retain local identity and prioritisation of areas that may be overlooked on a larger footprint with joint working to achieve economies of scale in service delivery."*

2. *"Support for community hubs which provide a point of contact for services and places for people to come together."*

3. *"The decision should be based on what's best for residents, NOT local politicians."*

- Transport infrastructure – Calls for better public transport, road maintenance, and connectivity.
- *"Integrated public transport network."*
- *"Churchdown is part of Tewkesbury. I can't get to Tewkesbury on a bus from Churchdown."*
- *"Improve transport across the county as a one Gloucestershire scheme, not just good in the urban areas of Gloucester and Cheltenham."*
- Housing development – Concerns about affordability, planning, and infrastructure support.
- *"I recognise the need for more housing… but it's SO important that the roads and parks/green spaces around these new estates is managed well."*
- *"Local housing only for local people and ex-military."*
- *"Housing needs to be prioritised. Limited and get infrastructure right before new homes."*
- Environmental protection – Requests for climate action, conservation, and sustainability.
- *"Protecting our green spaces, fields, woods, and farmland from development."*
- *"Climate and nature action for the transition to a low carbon economy."*
- *"Environmental concerns, green energy and net zero."*

Other Issues

Several other issues were raised, although in much smaller numbers. These included:

- Youth Services
- Public Health / GP services
- Cycling infrastructure
- Libraries and museums
- Environmental services
- Parking / Car Parking
- Services Older People
- PROW (Public Rights of Way)
- Policing

### Council Structure

While at no point were respondents asked to give their view on the proposed structure options of the future unitary council, 225 (7% of the respondents) actively gave preferences in the written text on which unitary council formation they would prefer out of the three currently proposed options. Of these, 205 (91%) preferred one single unitary council governing the whole county, 14 (6%) preferred the East / West split, and 3 (1%) preferred the Greater Gloucester City model. Three (1%) people said they preferred a two-council split but did not specify the split.

There were concerns that the East / West split would essentially be seen as a rich / poor divide. Few were in favour of the East / West approach, with even fewer in favour of the 'Greater Gloucester' approach. There were some disparaging remarks about the latter not "making sense" and references to this model being a "political" manoeuvre.

- *"It would be extremely unfair to split our county into two councils, especially along the lines proposed - which would effectively mean a "rich" side and a "poor" side of the county, as this would likely cause greater feelings of division between people."*

- *"The Greater Gloucestershire option is also very silly. It's just a political idea that will make us poorer."*

Some people saw the two-council option as a half-measure, continuing to cause confusion over who is responsible for what, and causing disruption to existing services while not achieving the efficiency LGR claims to provide.

- *"Providing a 'one stop' shop for council services across the County, to eliminate confusion as to who does what. Also not to break up services that operate perfectly well at the moment to further a 'two unitary' arrangement."*

- *"To have two unitary authorities would be divisive, inefficient (compared to one), and cause identity confusion (with the additional factor of South Gloucestershire already existing)."*

Many said one large council was the most efficient option, noting concerns about splitting Gloucestershire County Council regarding health, fire, police services. Economies of scale were mentioned.

There was a feeling from Forest of Dean residents that they would be neglected in a larger council.

There were those who mentioned options outside those currently proposed. Many wanted the system to stay as it is, however, many who mentioned this realised this was not an option. Some offered alternative solutions such as areas joining Wiltshire or Herefordshire or South Gloucestershire Councils.

## Conclusions

### Headline conclusions

Existing councils are generally well-thought of, with high ratings for both services and interactions with councillors and officers. While this reflects well on local services, it does mean that residents may be concerned about any potential change to the way their councils operate. Several comments, in person and online, reflected a contentment with the current system and a preference for no change at all.

Reviewing any negative ratings and written feedback should guide improvements in the new system, especially by addressing limitations in the current two-tier system to improve services that are less

successful now. This could include emphasising that housing and infrastructure would now be more joined-up which was requested, or it could be shown that the change gives a chance to improve the environmental credentials of the councils.

Despite many concerns about local identity and community being lost, when respondents were asked to clearly rank their priorities for the future, efficient use of council tax and good service provision were far above sense of community and a local voice.

The whole Gloucestershire model was given as the preference by the majority of those who offered an opinion on future structures.

## Resistance to change

There is a need to explain to people that LGR is a national policy with wider objectives – and that no change is therefore not an option.

Our engagement activities have included informing residents about the purpose and requirements of LGR, so this process has already begun. Based on discussions and shared information, it appears that more residents now understand the national government's requirements. Although some express a preference for maintaining the current system, there is recognition that change will occur.

Many people were also aware of the wider plans for devolution, ranging from conversations about combined authority mayors to potential increased roles for parish and town councils. Future information will need to include references to what will happen here as soon as possible, to avoid the current information spreading which could be misleading.

## Next steps: Clear communications

It is important to build on the engagement already carried out, to keep residents' trust and prevent any misinformation. The key learnings of the engagement show which concerns were raised and where reassurance will be needed in future communications.

People wanted to see financial efficiencies – but not a service reduction: Those who preferred a unitary system cited financial efficiencies and the main priority was effective council tax spending and day-to-day services. Presenting evidence that supports these outcomes would strengthen the case.

People are confused about which council they belong to and who is responsible for what, leading to frustration when passed between councils. Messaging should highlight that a simpler system would be easier to navigate and encourage more engagement.

Each area has a distinct identity, so it must be made clear that the change is aimed at improving administration and efficiency, rather than changing altering the local character. Neighbourhood initiatives can help maintain a sense of community and clear roles for parish and town councils.

Another primary consideration is maintaining a sense of belonging to Gloucestershire, balancing local representation with broader identity. It should be noted that local representation will remain in place, and it will become more straightforward to identify and contact representatives.

Concerns were raised that larger councils will mean decisions are made for areas by people further detached from the area in question. Measures will need to be put in place to ensure officers or councillors handle this carefully.

Residents currently happy with the council services provided will need reassurance as to how services will be managed during the period of transition – mentioning the shadow council period and being open about the fact it may take a while but will provide a better service long term.

There were concerns raised that there was no real chance to state preference for the system. Since this was a period of engagement, rather than a formal consultation, the materials clarified that an official consultation would follow. When recommendations go to the government, local messages should make it clear that people can and should provide feedback.

As detailed plans to guide the choice of options are formed by officers, these facts and figures should then be used to support communications to residents, to work together to bring forward the future of Gloucestershire.

## Appendix 1: Survey questions

Section 1: A sense of belonging

What is the first part of your postcode (e.g. GL5)?

What is your local council (tick all that apply)?

- Cheltenham Borough Council
- Cotswold District Council
- Forest of Dean District Council
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Gloucester City Council
- Tewkesbury Borough Council
- Stroud District Council
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

Where do you live?

What do you consider to be your local area?

Thinking about your answer to the last question, tell us how much you agree with the following statement: 'I feel a sense of belonging here'

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

How important are the following aspects in contributing to your sense of belonging to where you live?

Local places to go like shops, community centres, sports and fun places.

- Very important
- Important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important
- I don't have a view

Things happening nearby like festivals and events.

- Very important
- Important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important
- I don't have a view

People you know in your area like friends, family, and neighbours.

- Very important
- Important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

I don't have a view

Green areas like parks, communal gardens, nature, and open spaces.

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

Easy to get to important things like buses, schools and the GP.

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

How safe you feel in your area.

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

History and heritage like important things from the past and local traditions

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

Section 2: Council services

For each of the following everyday council services, please rate how well you believe they are working in your area.

Rubbish and recycling collection

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Roads, pavements and streetlights

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Parks, gardens, and other green spaces

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Schools and education

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Libraries

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Sports facilities/festivals/events

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Local buses

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Social care and benefits

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

I'd like to rate a different service:

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Do you know who your DISTRICT or COUNTY councillors are, and have you contacted them within the last two years?

Yes, and I've contacted at least one of them
Yes, but I've not contacted them
I'm not sure
No, I don't know who they are

If you answered 'Yes, and I've contacted at least one of them', overall, how happy were you with how the dealt with your questions, concern or comment?

Very satisfied

Satisfied
Dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Have you contacted a council department (for example, parking, council tax, housing, etc) in the last two years?

Yes - several times a year
Yes - once or twice a year
No

Which council(s) did you contact?

Gloucestershire County Council
Cheltenham Borough Council
Cotswold District Council
Forest of Dean District Council
Gloucester City Council
Stroud District Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council

Think about the last time you contacted your council. Overall, how happy were you with the experience?

Very happy
Happy
Not happy
Not at all happy

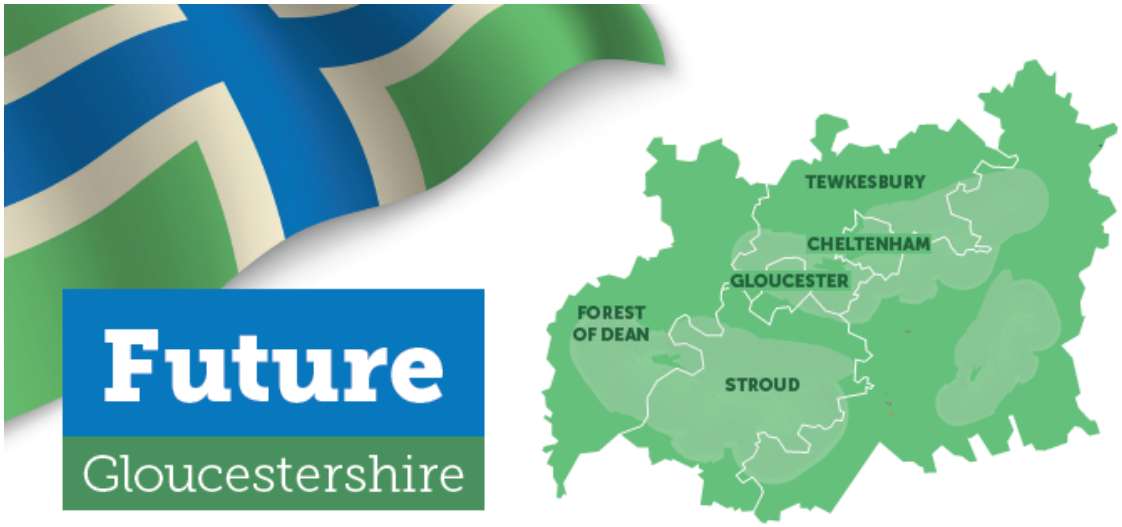
Section 3: Local government reorganisation – what matters to you?

What are your top priorities when it comes to reorganising councils in Gloucestershire? Please rate the following priorities from 1-4 (where 1 is the most important) based on how important they are to you:

Make local services better: This means improving things like rubbish collection, parks, and other services you use every day.
Make sure your council tax is well spent: Provide good local services without wasting your council tax.
Provide a stronger voice for residents – listening and responding to your concerns.
Provide a sense of community and belonging – respect the unique character of Gloucestershire, like its history and culture.

Is there anything else you think should be a priority, or anything you would like us to think about when putting together plans to reorganise Gloucestershire's local government structure?

## Appendix 2: Flyers and banners




### What is Local Government Reorganisation?

The national government wants to change how local councils work. You currently have one county council and six smaller district councils in Gloucestershire. The different types of councils are responsible for different services (explained overleaf).

The plan is to swap them for fewer, bigger councils that look after all services. These are known as 'unitary' authorities, and have existed across the UK in many places for several years - they can cover a whole county, part of a county or a large town or city.

The government produced an official document in 2024, showing their plans for devolution (handing power from national to local government) and saying that a unitary council system is the best way to achieve this.

### What does it mean for Gloucestershire?

Rather than stating the plans for reorganisation, the government asked local councils to produce proposals on how they would like to move to a unitary model. In Gloucestershire, this could involve combining all six districts into one unitary council or dividing into two separate unitary councils.

The district councils and the county council are discussing what the best plan would be, both individually and as a group. The views of residents and communities are an important part of the decision-making process.

These changes give us a chance to check all the services we offer, to give people in Gloucestershire good, strong, and effective public services for years to come.

### When will be know what is happening?

The deadline for all seven local councils to submit a joint final plan is the end of November 2025. If the seven cannot agree a shared plan, each council can submit one proposal, and the government would make the final decision.

**The transfer of services would take place gradually over two years, and the unitary authority or authorities would be up and running fully by 2028.**

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Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

# What do councils do?

## County Council Services that Gloucestershire County Council is responsible for include:

- Helping children, including fostering and adoption
- Helping older people and adults who need support
- Making sure roads, paths, and cycle routes are safe and usable
- Buses, park & ride, and school travel
- Streetlights and traffic lights
- The fire and rescue service
- Making sure shops sell things fairly (Trading Standards)
- Registering important life events: births, deaths, marriages, and civil partnerships
- Working with businesses to create more jobs and help people learn new skills
- Free bus passes for older people and blue badges (parking for people with disabilities)
- Education
- Public Health - services that support people to become or remain healthy
- Libraries
- Large recycling centres and disposal of household waste collections

## District Council

Cheltenham Borough Council · Cotswold District Council · Forest of Dean District Council · Gloucester City Council · Stroud District Council · Tewkesbury Borough Council

- Home rubbish and recycling collection, and street cleaning
- Collecting Council Tax
- Public spaces like footpaths, parks and trees on streets
- Planning and Building Control - Looking at plans for new buildings
- Culture, sport and leisure e.g. events and museums
- Providing homes and reducing homelessness
- Community safety teams, preventing and dealing with issues such as vandalism or noise complaints
- Community wellbeing - looking how to make people happier and healthier
- Managing benefits to help people pay their rent and council tax
- Licencing - permits for things like pubs, taxis, and events.
- Making sure places like restaurants are clean and safe
- Collecting taxes from businesses in the area (Business Rates)
- Public toilets

## Town and Parish Councils

The most local voice you have is the town or parish council, although they do not have as many required roles to carry out as district, county or unitary councils. Each one could carry out different roles than their neighbour, and not all areas will have one. These will be unaffected by any plans for local government reorganisation. Responsibilities can include:

- Supporting local community groups
- Allotments
- Car parks
- Community centres
- Providing local grants
- Playgrounds
- Vandalism
- Neighbourhood plans
- Providing an official neighbourhood voice e.g. on planning applications

Future Gloucestershire

SCAN ME




# Have your say!

**Your district and county council want to hear from you:**

How well do you feel council services in our area work?

Have you ever spoken to your local council or councillors?

What about your community is most important to you?

How can we make Gloucestershire run as smoothly as possible?

**To fill out our survey, scan the QR code or visit www.futuregloucestershire.org.uk**

Future Gloucestershire

SCAN ME



# Local Government Reorganisation

Did you know there are national plans to re-structure the way local government works?

The system will change from a 'two-tier' to a 'unitary' authority – come and ask us what this means!

Help your local councils shape the future of Gloucestershire.

**To fill out our survey, scan the QR code or visit**
**www.futuregloucestershire.org.uk**

Gloucestershire COUNTY COUNCIL

# Appendix 4: Summary Report of Feedback from Partner Organisations (Engagement conducted June - August 2025)

## Background

Ministerial guidance for LGR has provided clarity about the role and purpose of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) stakeholder engagement in the proposal development process. Criteria 4c of the Ministerial criteria makes clear that:

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

In addition, GCC has been mindful of its role in providing most of the 'crucial services' referenced in criteria 3c:

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

Guidance has also been provided to ensure wider public sector providers are engaged as proposals are developed. The relevant guidance is contained within the Letter to Leaders from the (former) Local Government Minister.

In this context, it was necessary for a stakeholder engagement exercise to be undertaken, at pace, to ensure GCC's county-wide stakeholders were positively engaged. All engagement was conducted in the context of GCC Cabinet policy to be agnostic of structural options.

The feedback from stakeholder groups has been considered alongside the outcomes of other forms of engagement and is addressed clearly in the substantive engagement chapter of this proposal.

## Objectives and methodology

Over June – August 2025, senior GCC officers held stakeholder meetings concerning LGR, focusing on services or matters of relevance to the council's work.

The objectives of the engagement process were to:

1. Ensure stakeholder views were taken into account as proposals for the single unitary and east/west two-unitaries were developed;
2. Gather intelligence about the impact of LGR on stakeholder organisations;
3. Understand what aspects of LGR were of most importance to stakeholders, as well as any concerns; and
4. Gauge appetite and interest for future involvement in LGR (and Devolution).

To achieve these objectives, the following information was provided as part of each meeting:

- An update on how LGR proposals and Devolution discussions are progressing in Gloucestershire;

- An update on the LGR policy position of GCC's new Cabinet (i.e. to be agnostic and evidence-led in considering both a one unitary and two unitary model); and
- The timetable and key processes underway.

A total of 41 meetings were held. Many of the meetings, particularly those involving Gloucestershire associations, were attended by multiple attendees. Some stakeholders chose to write to us after the meeting setting out their views. Where consent has been obtained, this correspondence is appended.

## Analysis of responses – key themes

The stakeholder discussions have been synthesised and anonymised. Four key themes, together with short quotations, are set out in the table below:

### Theme 1: Structural options

There was a preference amongst stakeholders for a single county unitary model. This was described by one as the *"only workable solution"*. Further comments included that two unitary authorities would *"create economic chaos and a social divide"*, whereas a single unitary would *"open up opportunities, creating aspiration"*.

Creating two unitary authorities was referred to as *"risky"*, potentially resulting in *"confusion, disruption and duplication"* and creating *"barriers and bureaucracy where it isn't needed".*

Further comments included that a two unitary model would *"exacerbate existing disparities, particularly in rural western areas such as the Forest of Dean"* and *"create greater division over time, due to the further potential different political leadership".*

Concerns were expressed that *"job losse*s", *"delay and disruption in services"* and *"loss of local identity"* would follow as a result of a two-unitary solution.

Some stakeholders supported a two-unitary model for its targeted benefits. One noted potential *"savings of £4–6 million annually"*, and argued that the West would not be disadvantaged, citing evidence of *"affluent people moving to the Forest of Dean"*.

Stakeholders that supported the two unitary model emphasised its potential to deliver more localised and responsive governance. As one stakeholder observed, *"Splitting the county would enable each authority to focus on the priorities unique to their communities, providing services that truly reflect local needs."* Another stakeholder remarked, *"With two unitaries, there's an*

*opportunity for healthy competition, driving innovation and ensuring better value for our residents."*

An education leader commented that a two unitary model would *"lead to a long period of protracted negotiation and uncertainty"* and *"make the delivery of public services more challenging and not achieve the same economies of scale"*.

Special school headteachers felt that a two unitary model would *"make it even more challenging to place all the children who require specialist provision in an appropriate setting – sufficiency is already one of the key barriers".*

Stakeholders from the adult social care sector raised a concern about continuity of care under a two unitary model with one stakeholder feeling that, *"waiting times for adult social care services would increase."*

## Theme 2: Local identity

There was widespread support for a stronger neighbourhood approach and a place model to drive increased engagement, with repeated calls for *"co-design"* and consultation informing boundaries.

Faith and voluntary leaders highlighted that *"relationship is at the heart of what it means to be human,"* urging that *"an emphasis on neighbourhood-level engagement and the creation of place-based structures"* should underpin reform.

## Theme 3: Devolution/strategic partnerships

Some stakeholders felt that West of England Combined Authority (WECA), based on patterns of economic activity and travel, was the right devolution partner. However, there was also support for considering broader Devolution models (e.g., three counties) to maximise economic opportunities and regional collaboration.

Some also saw merit in partnerships with Herefordshire / Worcestershire, especially for sectors like cyber and agri-tech. However, there was also concern that Devolution would result in "*loss of local voice"* and *"funding competition*".

## Theme 4: Finances and implementation

A stakeholder stated that analysis shows *that "single unitary models incur lower transition and ongoing costs"* and *"clear benefits in annual gross savings, payback period and net savings".*

Business groups felt that *"the two unitary model would create confusion and lack identity outside of the county. They also felt that it would weaken our ability to promote the place for investment and create an artificial economic split"*.

Stakeholders mentioned the benefits of simplification, cost savings, and better use of resources under a single unitary authority.

A risk highlighted was the potential for *"paralysis in any of the seven existing authorities, during the period of change/implementation and public sector realignment"* and whether *"the anticipated savings being promoted in the LGR take into account the investment required to create the best countywide service departments"*.

There was also concern over central government interference potentially impacting coordinated implementation.

## Stakeholder Meetings

Engagement took place with the following organisations and individuals:

| Name | Organisation | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Alistair Russell | Laing-Russell | Business Membership Group Member |
| Sam Holliday | Federation of Small Businesses | Representing 4,000 small business members in Gloucestershire |
| Helen Bojaniwska, Chair | Gloucestershire Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) | |
| Mark Gale, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Gateway Trust | |
| Matt Lennard, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire VCS Alliance | On behalf of VCSE Strategic Partnership and Integrated Locality Partnership representatives in Gloucestershire. Eight organisations represented in meeting |
| Barbara Piranty, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) | |
| Simon Pickering, Chair | Energy Business Group | 14 individuals in meeting representing different businesses and other organisations |
| | Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers | Numerous attendees |

| Name | Organisation | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | Federation of Principals – Further Education and Higher Education | Numerous attendees |
| | Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers | Numerous attendees |
| | Gloucestershire Association of Secondary School Leaders | Numerous attendees |
| Francesca Inman | Chief Executive, Cheltenham Business Improvement District | |
| Andy Bates, Chief Financial Officer | Gloucestershire College | |
| Robert Nettleton, Chief Executive & Martyn Blackman, Chief Investment Officer | Bromford Housing | |
| Ruth Dooley, Partner | Hazelwoods LLP | |
| Anonymised | CyNam | |
| Rupert Waters | Social Value Gloucestershire | |
| Simon Carey, Managing Director | Barnwood Construction | |
| | Northrop Gumman | Name not shared for security reasons |
| Rob Stemp | Deepminds Ltd | |
| Bishop Rachel Treweek | Bishop of Gloucester | Joined by senior clergy including Deans of the Diocese |
| Michael Ratcliffe | MR Insurance Services & Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce | |
| | Adults Collaborative Board | A group of people with lived experience of adult social care |
| | Gloucestershire Care Providers Association | GCPA Board Members:<br>• Cathy Andrews<br>• Chris Atkins<br>• Claire Hopkins<br>• Della Gilby<br>• Josh Isaac<br><br>GCPA Staff: |

| Name | Organisation | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Pip Wilson<br>• Riki Moody |
| Sarah Bell-Hartley | Barclays Bank | |
| David Goodall | FW Capital | |
| Suzanne Hall-Gibbins, Angela Edwards | C2S Ltd | Business membership organisation |
| Chris Farr, Regional Adviser (South West), | Country Land and Business Association (CLA) | |
| Michael Jones, Warden | The Honourable Company of Gloucestershire | |
| | Construction and Infrastructure Business Group | Numerous attendees |
| Chris Haine, (Chief Executive), Kerrin Wilkinson (Strategic Support Officer) | Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) | |
| | Cyber Tech Business Group | Numerous attendees |
| Ruth Greenwood (OPCC Chief Officer), Chris Nelson, (PCC), Maggie Blyth, Chief Constable | Gloucestershire OPCC, Gloucestershire Constabulary | |
| Sarah Truelove (CEO), Dame Gill Morgan (Chair) | Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board | |
| Phil Smith, Chief Executive | Business West | |
| Matt Bishop MP, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, Alex McIntyre MP, Simon Opher MP, Cameron Thomas MP, Max Wilkinson MP, Roz Savage MP | Gloucestershire Members of Parliament | |

## Written responses

Some stakeholders, listed below, chose to provide further feedback via email or letter. Their responses, together with any other organisation or association who chose to write to GCC, are included below:

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Matt Lennard, Chief Executive | On behalf of VCSE Strategic Partnership and ILP Representatives in Gloucestershire |
| Maggie Blyth, Chief Constable | Gloucestershire Constabulary |
| Stephen Limbrick, Chair on behalf of the group | Construction and Infrastructure Business Group |
| Fran Inman, Chief Executive | Cheltenham BID |
| Bishop Rachel Treweek | Diocese of Gloucester |
| Gill Blackwell, Chair | Hucclecote Parish Council |
| Gloucestershire FE Colleges (Federation of Principals) | Gloucestershire College, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, Cirencester College, Hartpury College and University, National Star College |
| Hollie Wakefield | CyNam and Cyber Tech Business Group Member |
| Kerry Cunningham, Co-chair | Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH) |
| Barbara Piranty, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) |
| Steve Rudd, Associate Director of Strategy and Transformation and Gloucester GP | Gloucestershire GP Collaborative (GDOC) |
| Sarah Truelove, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board |

## Response from VCSE sector

**Date:** 05/08/2025
**From:** VCSE Strategic Partnership and ILP Representatives in Gloucestershire
**To:** Siobhan Farmer and Alex Khaldi

Firstly, we would like to thank Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) for engaging meaningfully with the VCSE sector throughout this process. We have welcomed the opportunity to take part in open and constructive dialogue about the future of local government in our county.

As representatives of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, we recognise the scale and significance of this reorganisation. The decisions taken will shape how communities are supported and how services are delivered for many years to come. It is therefore vital that the voice of the VCSE is heard and that the implications for our sector, our communities, and the wider population are carefully considered.

One of Gloucestershire's longstanding strengths lies in its coterminous structure. This alignment has enabled strong partnership working, effective strategic planning, and efficient use of resources across the public and VCSE sectors. A move away from this model, by dividing the county into two separate unitary authorities, would risk undermining these strengths. For the VCSE sector, the consequences could include duplicated relationship management, more complex and fragmented commissioning and monitoring processes, and reduced capacity for coordinated delivery at scale. These risks carry both financial and operational costs, particularly for organisations already operating under significant pressure.

We are also particularly concerned about the impact of structural changes on smaller, place-based VCSE organisations. Many of these groups are deeply rooted in specific districts and neighbourhoods and play a critical role in supporting their communities. Splitting the county into two unitary authorities could dilute the visibility and influence of such organisations. In contrast, a single countywide unitary, if designed with strong local engagement in mind, offers a more stable platform for inclusive, locally responsive governance. It would allow for consistent commissioning approaches, clearer points of contact, and reduced administrative complexity, ensuring that smaller groups are not required to navigate multiple, potentially inconsistent systems.

We understand that the move to a unitary structure is part of a broader national policy direction, as outlined in the 2024 English Devolution White Paper and reiterated in the June 2025 *Local Government Reorganisation: Summary of Feedback on Interim Plans*. These documents emphasise the importance of clear rationale in decision-making, particularly where population thresholds are concerned. However, we do not believe the case for splitting Gloucestershire into two unitaries

has been sufficiently made. There is currently no robust evidence that such a model would improve outcomes for residents or offer any advantage to the VCSE sector.

On the contrary, analysis from PricewaterhouseCoopers suggests that single unitary models incur lower transition and ongoing costs compared to two-unitary models. Furthermore, Gloucestershire's unique geography and the clustered distribution of employment, housing, and inequalities suggest that a single structure would be better placed to support equitable development. There is a real risk that a split would exacerbate existing disparities, particularly in rural western areas such as the Forest of Dean and reduce the strategic capacity of each authority to respond to future challenges.

We appreciate the ongoing engagement from GCC officers and the commitment to working with the VCSE. Our shared ambition is for a Gloucestershire where all communities thrive, inequality is actively addressed, and services are delivered efficiently, equitably, and in partnership with the people and organisations who know their communities best.

We believe that a single unitary authority offers the clearest path toward this vision by preserving the strengths of our current system while enabling more joined-up and responsive governance.

We look forward to continuing this important conversation and to working together to co-produce a future that works for everyone in Gloucestershire.

**Signed,**
Matt Lennard
CEO, Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance
*On behalf of the VCSE Strategic Partnership and ILP Representatives*

Response from Gloucestershire Constabulary

**Gloucestershire Constabulary**
Police Headquarters
No.1 Waterwells, Waterwells Drive
Quedgeley, Gloucester. GL2 2AN
**www.gloucestershire.police.uk**

Jo Walker

Chief Executive

Gloucestershire County council

Shire Hall

Gloucester

Thursday 7th August 2025

Dear Jo,

I am writing to congratulate you on behalf of Gloucestershire Constabulary on your recent Ofsted inspection of your Children's Services. This is a tremendous achievement and a complete acknowledgement of the work that Ann and your wider leadership team have done to drive through improvements for children in Gloucestershire.

I know that my chief officer group, led by our ACC for Crime, Rich Ocone, are absolutely clear that working with and supporting you in keeping children safe is a top priority for Gloucestershire Constabulary. I am reassured that you and I have already met as Lead Safeguarding Partners to outline the key areas in which we will work together, and I am supportive of our joint plans for the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Clearly, from our perspective it is vital that policing, alongside the local authority and health service fully discharge our joint statutory safeguarding duties and you have our full chief officer group support.

There are a couple of areas I thought it may be worth reinforcing as we move forward.

**Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) and MASH**

Firstly, I am aware that Rich will continue to work with Ann in overseeing the detail of evolving multi agency safeguarding arrangements and will continue to work with Ann and partners to make sure these are successful. We are keen to help shape these, and I know Rich and Ann will update us accordingly. We can also keep close in our CEO roles so we can create the most effective and coordinated response to child protection concerns, with improved communication and information sharing and putting children's needs and interests at the heart of our joint MASA. From our

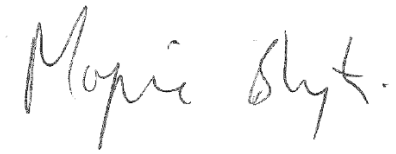
perspective our one MASH enables one front door for our respective workforce to ensure the right assessment, identification of risk and support for children requiring intervention or protection happens swiftly and robustly- we are keen to maintain one MASH to ensure consistency and coordination across the partnership, and swift assessments to respond to all children in need/requiring protection. I know that as you and colleagues work through your plans for local government and devolution you will be considering different options for the local authority. From a policing perspective, as PCC Chris Nelson and I reinforced when we met you and Cllr Lisa Spivey, we much prefer the positioning of one unitary authority so we can maintain and improve our coordination of vital capability, such as the MASH. Moreover, as we increase our analysis of our joint responses for children at risk of CSEA, criminal exploitation, going missing and the ever-increasing harm of online threat, we know that a focus on coordination, pooling of resources, identification of specialist capability and careful and swift risk assessment will be key. We are keen to ensure that we are not in a position where we dilute our current MASH capability but build on it together as a crucial front door to a range of services across the County, including police investigation and resource where required.

Secondly, we are really keen to ensure that our front-line workforce continues to receive the latest training and CPD on the threats facing children in our County. I am pleased that we have identified the joint training day on CSEA in February 2026 and we are also keen to develop our approach to responding to online harm, perhaps working with wider colleagues in CT policing and wider law enforcement. I know there are early meetings to take this forward already.

Finally, we will be disseminating our improvements since our national child protection inspection undertaken in December 2024 – we are pleased that we are making progress and would be keen to share this with you over the next month.

I look forward to working with you,

Kind regards,



**Maggie Blyth, KPM MA, BA (Hons)**
**255558**
**T/Chief Constable**
Gloucestershire Constabulary
Police Headquarters | No. 1 Waterwells | Quedgeley | GL2 2AN
Office – 01452 752313
www.gloucestershire.police.uk | X page | Facebook page

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

Response from Business Groups

**For the kind attention of David Owen, Director of Economy and Environment, GCC**

**Ref: Responses from the Construction and Infrastructure Business Group on the Local Government Re-organisation and Devolution plans.**

**Date: 4th August 2025**

**LGR – Have you a preferred model?**

- Our preference is the Single County Unitary Option.
- This should help to enable and create planned and managed strategic, sustainable growth and social regeneration throughout the county.
- It should ensure a whole county approach which does not disadvantage businesses in rural areas or urban hubs that continue to need long term investment and regeneration solutions
- This option meets the Government's size criteria

**Devolution – Have you a preferred geography?**

- Our preference is for Gloucestershire to be a standalone, single authority.
- If we are required to combine with another authority as part of Devolution, then we consider that South Gloucestershire has more established and relevant links with important business sectors in Gloucestershire including: - Defence, Cyber, Advanced Manufacturing, Creative, Education and Sustainable Energy.

**What are the big economic opportunities from change?**

- Planned strategic and sustainable growth.
- An opportunity to create centralised exemplar departments for key services e.g.
  A Planning / Sustainable Environmental Growth Team. This should be a new team with strong leadership and resources combining: - Planning, Highways (building on their delivery capacity), Planning Legals, mains Services, Water, flooding etc., working around solutions to, and promotion of, a Countywide Strategic Plan for economic regeneration and development (already in its infancy). This could be an exemplar department providing a proactive, quality and effective service across the whole of the county in a balanced, joined up and integrated manner.
- A Utilities Czar could be a new role focusing on coordination and cooperation between all parties over challenging needs and requirements of development and infrastructure, helping to minimise log jams and delays across the county. This would also help to avoid strategic, countywide, economic planning needs being affected by individual district priorities and boundaries e.g. J10 and Cyber Park.It is accepted that to create such a department and

service will require new investment in new professional skills and resources, however, the benefits are anticipated to be considerable in assisting sustainable growth and regeneration for Gloucestershire.

- It is hoped that the anticipated savings being promoted in the LGR take into account the investment required to create the best countywide service departments as the one broadly outlined above.

**What are the economic threats from change?**

- It is anticipated that there will be job losses (especially at senior level) to achieve LGR.
- In the short term there is likely to be delay and disruption seen in services, however, it is anticipated that these issues will be outweighed by the long-term benefits.
- Lack of investment in the right personnel and resources in the detailed planning, establishment and management of new operational service structures will impact on the effective change and value of LGR. This is essential for their success.
- Risk of reduction in Government funding to the county following savings promoted in LGR.

Response from Cheltenham Business Improvement District

**From:** Fran Inman
**Date:** Thursday, 7 August 2025 at 11:16
**To:** OWEN, David
**Subject:** Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

Good morning David,

Please see below how devolution and local government reorganisation could provide both pros and cons for Cheltenham Business Improvement District:

**Key Threats to the BID from Devolution**

- Loss of local voice: A larger devolved authority may centralise decisions, weakening Cheltenham's influence.
- Funding competition: Risk of resources being directed to bigger centres.
- Reduced business engagement: Complexity and distance from decision-making may disengage levy payers.
- Policy misalignment: Devolved priorities may not reflect Cheltenham's business needs or placemaking ambitions.

**Opportunities for Cheltenham**

- Access to greater funding: For transport, regeneration, and skills development.
- Stronger strategic voice: If BIDs are embedded in governance structures as a key stakeholder, we can influence regional economic strategy.
- Joined-up planning: Opportunity to align infrastructure, town centre growth, and skills strategies.
- Cheltenham as a hub: A chance to position Cheltenham as a key economic and cultural centre within a devolved geography.

Cheltenham BID does not take a position on the political decision of whether devolution or LGR should happen. However, if change does occur, we believe the voice of Cheltenham's businesses must be represented, local decision-making should be protected, and opportunities for investment in our town centre should be maximised.

Always happy to discuss further.

Best wishes,
Fran

**Francesca Inman**

**Chief Executive**

Response from Diocese of Gloucester

The Rt Revd Rachel Treweek
Lord Bishop of
Gloucester & Anglican
Bishop for HM Prisons
The Bishop's
Office 2 College Green,
Gloucester, GL1 2LR
bgloucester@glosdioc.org.uk
Tel: 01452 835511

+RG/AODP
29 July 2025

Siobhan Farmer
Director of Public Health
Gloucestershire County Council
Shire Hall
Westgate
Street
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

Dear Siobhan

**Reflections following our recent meeting on Local Government Reform**

Thank you again for meeting with the Bishop's Staff Team on 17 July 2025 to explore the implications of the proposed Local Government Reform for Gloucestershire. We appreciated the opportunity to contribute to your thinking at this formative stage and to reflect together on both the risks and opportunities for our communities.
As you noted, the shift to a unitary authority model raises complex questions of identity, representation, and place.

Our discussion focused heavily on the importance of identity. Gloucestershire as a whole lacks a single, cohesive identity. Many communities are orientated more towards external centres - Bristol, Birmingham, London, and even Wales—than towards a unifying county centre. This is reflected in regional media coverage, patterns of travel, and informal networks. Interestingly, many communities feel as if they are 'on the edge' (e.g. bordering Oxford, Wales etc).

As a diocese (covering an area from just south of Stratford upon Avon to just north of Bristol-the old ceremonial county) we have two Archdeaconries (Gloucester and Cheltenham), each with a number of what we call deaneries (clusters of parishes). The Gloucester deaneries are Gloucester City, Stroud, Forest, Wotton and Severn Vale; and the Cheltenham deaneries are Cheltenham, North Cotswolds, Tewkesbury and Winchcombe, and Cirencester.

About 10 years ago we did an analysis of the social context, and Benjamin Preece Smith (Diocesan Secretary) would be very willing to share that with you. One of the things we observed is three key areas in the county: Forest, Vale and Hill. Neither Cheltenham or Gloucester are big enough as single entities and are quite insular settlements. In Gloucestershire, a number of settlements are quite old, and several of the market towns act as hubs for the villages and surrounding areas e.g. Northleach/Moreton-in-Marsh,

Stow and Chipping Campden.

Each of the 42 dioceses in the church of England are grouped into regions. This diocese is formally in the SW region but we have removed ourselves to the West Midlands region as we have far more in common with Worcestershire and Herefordshire (not least regarding events such as the Three Counties Show and the Three Choirs Festival). We are curious about how connections with these counties are being considered in proposals.

Gloucestershire is actually relatively small compared to many large cities and counties, and we are concerned that the discussion is around dividing what is already small into something even smaller. What does this mean in terms of critical mass for the University, our schools etc? Dividing the county into east and west could weaken rather than strengthen local governance and complicate partnerships—particularly in areas such as education and health, where scale and consistency matter.

When we appoint new clergy to the diocese we always talk about the diocese as being large enough to be well-resourced and small enough that we know each other. In all of your discussions, we would want to keep an emphasis on relationship, which is something that is not emphasised enough in political thinking, new housing, governance and policies etc. As Christians, we believe that relationship is at the heart of what it means to be human and to be made in the image of God, and we believe that people of different faiths and of no faith would recognise the fact that, in the UK, we have diminished the importance of relationship across so much of our society. We would want you to be asking questions about relationship and community. Thus, we strongly support your emphasis on neighbourhood-level engagement and the creation of place-based structures that reflect where people actually live and relate. This is what we endeavour to live as a diocese, encouraging local community engagement.

We were encouraged to hear that any neighbourhood model will be co-designed and that consultation will inform how boundaries are drawn. We would welcome the opportunity to support that work and would be glad to contribute parish and deanery mapping to help build a fuller picture of local networks.

In all of this, there are also questions about social identity. There is undoubtedly much greater diversity in Gloucestershire than some people wish to acknowledge, not least regarding social background and racial diversity. In areas which are often characterised as middle-class and affluent, there are many pockets of hardship, and much greater inequality than many people want to recognise. I also believe we have to be asking the hard questions about why young people choose not to come back to Gloucestershire once they have left home.

Finally, it was good to acknowledge that, in all these discussions, we are certainly not saying that the structures we currently have work really well. Some district councils are performing better than others, and we note that authority and influence are pretty poor in other areas. For example, we would certainly want to acknowledge that the city centre in Gloucester has changed hugely, and no one seems to have a grip on owning it or bringing about change.

Having said that, we did also comment on the fact that Gloucestershire punches above its weight when it comes to charities, voluntary organisations and the third sector. How will proposed changes affect the activity of civil society?

Finally, we were glad to note the commitment to continued engagement and consultation.

Thank you again for your time and partnership. Please do keep us informed as the process develops - we would be very glad to remain part of the conversation.

Yours sincerely.



Copy to:

Benjamin Preece-Smith (Diocesan Secretary)

Lucy Taylor (Head of Diocesan Comms & Engagement & Deputy Diocesan Secretary)

gloucester.anglican.org
01452 835511 bgloucester@glosdioc.org.uk
@BishGloucester /Diocese.of.Gloucester Diocese of Gloucester
Bishop's Office | 2 College Green | Gloucester | GL1 2LR

Registered in England: 162165. Registered Office: Gloucester Diocesan Board of Finance, Church House, College Green, Gloucester, GL1 2LY. Registered Charity Number: 251234.

Response from Gloucestershire Further Education Colleges

Campus, Llanthony Rd
Gloucester GL2 5JQ
*0345 155 2020*

29th July 2025

To whom it may concern

**Response from the Gloucestershire Further Education Colleges to Unitary Authority Proposals for Gloucestershire**

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discussion around local government reform in Gloucestershire. Further education (FE) colleges play a central role in delivering technical and professional education, improving social mobility, and addressing the region's skills needs. Whilst we will ultimately work proactively with whichever model is adopted, we strongly favour the creation of a single all-county unitary authority. This model offers the most coherent, equitable and strategic approach to supporting learners, employers, and the county's economic development.

We believe that option has the following advantages:

- Strategic Alignment Across the County - A single authority enables a joined-up approach to economic development, transport, housing, and education -all of which are essential to integrated skills planning.
- Simplified Relationships - Colleges currently operate county-wide, working with multiple stakeholders and systems. A single point of engagement would reduce duplication, streamline planning, and improve accountability.
- Efficient Commissioning and Funding - Fragmentation risks are likely to increase commissioning costs, with more overhead and bureaucracy -meaning less funding reaches the learner. A single authority offers economies of scale and consistent commissioning decisions.
- Equitable and Impact-Led Resource Allocation - A county-wide authority is better positioned to allocate capital and revenue funding where it delivers the greatest impact for learners and employers, not simply within rigid administrative boundaries.
- Unified Voice in Devolution and Investment - A single authority would be a stronger and more coherent partner in any future devolution deals or combined authority arrangements. This is essential to secure fair access to devolved budgets and influence key strategic decisions.

Whether through an East/West division or a "Greater Gloucester" configuration, we have significant concerns about the impact of splitting Gloucestershire into two unitary authorities. Some of us already have experience or working across multiple local

government areas and the attendant administrative and strategic consequences which include:

- Multiple EHCP and Transition Pathways - Working with multiple local authorities risks increasing inconsistent approaches to EHCPs, transition planning, SEND funding, and placement decisions - adding complexity and creating inequity for vulnerable learners.
- Diverging Priorities and Governance - having to align to multiple sets of political priorities, governance structures, and reporting processes. This reduces clarity for the communities we serve and adds pressure to strategic and operational planning.
- Fragmented Transport, Careers and Support Services - Inconsistent approaches to transport policy, travel subsidies, and wraparound support (e.g. mental health, careers advice) can undermine participation and progression -especially for rural and disadvantaged learners.
- Risk of Geographic Ring-Fencing of Funding - If future funding (including capital) becomes restricted to specific local authority areas, this creates distortions in investment decisions and reduces the ability to deliver provision where it is most needed - especially where college catchments span boundaries.
- Devolution Misalignment - There is a risk that different parts of Gloucestershire could become aligned to different combined authorities or mayoral areas. This would fragment influence, reduce coherence, and complicate FE's ability to engage with regional priorities.

In conclusion, based on our experience and the operational realities of FE delivery, we believe that the single all-county unitary model represents the best option; and have reservations about any structure that splits the county and introduces duplication, inconsistency, or competition for resources.

We look forward to engaging further as proposals develop.
Signed on behalf of:

Gloucestershire College, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, Cirencester College, Hartpury College and University, National Star

Response from Hucclecote Parish Council

**HUCCLECOTE PARISH COUNCIL**

Ms Jo Walker Chief
Executive
Gloucestershire County Council Shire
Hall
Westgate Street
Gloucester
GLI 2TJ

13th August 2025

Dear Ms Walker

Hucclecote Parish Council discussed the recent Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) engagement exercise that is being undertaken at its 28 July meeting, and we could not understand why the survey did not clearly ask which of the three current LGR options we preferred.

As we could not state our preference, we felt we had to set out why we strongly support the single countywide unitary option.

- It is likely to result in the most cost effective and efficient delivery of services.
- It will also provide the opportunity for early Community Governance Reviews would enable the uniting of fractured communities to be considered: -
  - (a) The majority of the existing Hucclecote Parish within Tewkesbury and the remainder ofHucclecote currently within the City of Gloucester.
  - (b) The creation of a single parish to cover Coopers Edge, which currently straddles the border between Tewkesbury Borough and Stroud and is split between three parish councils.

It should also be noted that the single unitary option is also supported by the County Councillor for the Brockworth Division, as well as the Borough Councillors for the Churchdown Brookfield and Hucclecote Ward.

We believe the suggested two unitary split of East and West Gloucestershire would permanently re-enforce the current difficult local boundaries for local communities.

We therefore seek your assurance that you will actively advocate for a single unitary council for the county.

Yours sincerely



Gill Blackwell
Chair of Hucclecote Parish Council

CC:
Cllr Lisa Spivey, County Council Leader
Alistair Cunningham. CEO Tewkesbury Borough Council Cllr
Richard Stanley, Tewkesbury Borough Leader
Jon McGinty, MD of Gloucester City Council Jeremy
Hilton, Gloucester City Leader
Alex McIntryre, MP Gloucester
Cameron Thomas, MP Tewkesbury Max
Wilkinson, MP Cheltenham Matt
Bishop, MP Forest of Dean Dr Simon
Opher, MP Stroud
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, MP North Cotswold

Response from Cyber Tech Group
**From:**
**Sent:** 07 August 2025 12:37
**To:** CAMPBELL, Karen
**Cc:** WOODHOUSE, Paul
**Subject:** Re: Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

Hello Karen,

Thank you for the note. Please find my feedback below.

Whilst I do not have a deep understanding of the implications of selecting a single unitary authority, or two unitary authorities, or the Greater Gloucester model, my preferred model would be a single unitary authority. There are ovbious benefits like cost savings and efficiencies, alongside the ability to develop a strong narrative and plan for the whole of Gloucestershire which competes on a national and international level. I am not sure how much I buy into a couple of arguments specifically put forward about the east/west model. Specifically:

1. Whether the average person understands the role of their local councillor (especially the younger population), how often they utilise their local councillor and their MP, and whether a person identifies with their ward, their town/city, or their county. It would be interested to know what the turnout of the population voting in the local elections versus the general election in the 6 authorities, as this would likely show how much of the population would be affected by less localisation.
2. Forest of Dean being put into the clean energy cluster - they have huge advanced manufacturing capability and so would surely align more with the defence and advanced manufacturing organisations in Tewkesbury for example
3. Cotswolds in the secure tech cluster - not sure what capability exists in this authority for this rationale

Regarding devolution, preference seems to be WECA as government has made it clear funding will be funnelled through mayoral authorities, yet there is a slight concern that Gloucestershire's tech cluster will be overshadowed by Bristol and Bath, and the funding they have already received. If mayoral elections could be held for the Herefordshire/Worcestershire option, I would welcome more information on Worcestershire and Herefordshire's key sectors to think about alignment. There is a defence alignment that I am aware of already, for example.

The main economic opportunity I see is funding, and how the accessibility of this funding will be impacted by the option we choose.

The main threat I see is the disparity in the services and the costs associated with them provided by each Council, and how future service provision and associated costs will be calculated, as this is what will impact the average person the most. E.g. Cheltenham and Gloucestershire's licensing fees are more expensive than the other 4 authorities, and Stroud has the highest council tax rate in the county.  I also mentioned above about competing for funding with other established strategic authorities and the places within them.

Thank you,

Member of Cyber Tech Group – Name withheld for security reasons

Response from Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH)

Director for Education
Gloucestershire County Council Shire Hall,

Westgate St
Gloucester GL1 2TG

*Sent by email to Kirsten Harrison cc:*
*Ann James*

16.07.25

Dear Kirsten

Thank you so much for the meeting on Thursday 10.07.25 and for introducing us to the potential change for Gloucestershire.

As Co-Chair of Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH), on behalf of the Executive, I am writing to you in your capacity as Director of Education, to set out our views on this proposal.

We would have waited until the GAPH Executive Meeting in September, which you will attend, however, as you explained in your presentation, you have a meeting on 17th July 2025, with the Chief Executives group and we therefore wanted to make our position clear on this very important issue for Gloucestershire as a whole and in particular the Education sector, for which the District Councils have no jurisdiction, nor responsibility.
The Government Criteria for Change:

- *Establish a single tier for the whole of the county area*
- *The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand shocks (aim for 500k population or more)*
- *High quality public services with specific mention of 'crucial' services (children's, SEND, homelessness)*
- *How devolution will be unlocked*
- *Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment*

As conveyed by the unanimous views of the members of GAPH Executive, with representation from each Partnership, we hold the view that one, single tier, Unitary Authority is the only workable solution for Gloucestershire, with reasons including the following:

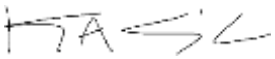
- Children's Services and the Education sector's current working model (countywide) for statutory duties (for example: Admissions, EHCPs and timely access to support for children with SEND, Hospital Education, Social Care) would need to be split in an East/West model, creating potential difference and division over time, due to the further potential different political leadership.
- How would the Designated Schools Grant this be apportioned fairly and equitably, with

schools located as they are geographically in an East/West model?

- The potential costs of splitting the single authority responsibilities of Children's Services-Education into two authorities will lead to a long period of protracted negotiation and uncertainty. You cited Northamptonshire as an example of disaggregation, which, having created two Authorities in 2018, only in August 2024 finally came to agreement over the financial settlement.
- The standard for a Unitary Authority is 500,000. The current county size is 650,000. Creating East and West would make those two Authorities smaller than the proposed standard size, which would making the delivery of public services more challenging and not achieve the same economies of scale that a single Unitary Authority would make, creating higher overall vulnerability to 'shocks'.
- How would the current countywide High Needs debt be apportioned fairly, in a two-tier system?
- Forming two Authorities from one, would create an additional border for the county and result in working an 'out of county' services model, for services which sit within the same postcode.
- The geography of schools means that schools working in Partnerships, Federations and/or in Gloucestershire MATS could find themselves working with two different Authorities, making effective and efficient running of these settings more challenging.

In your meeting with the Chief Executive Group, we are seeking written reassurance that you and Ann James, as our representatives, advocate strongly the view of GAPH and our position that a single county Unitary Authority is the only workable solution to this Government Strategy.

Yours sincerely,



Kerry Cunningham
Co-Chair of GAPH and Executive Headteacher of The Longlevens Primary Federation

Response from GRCC

## Formal Feedback from GRCC
## Local Government Reorganisation County Options

There is an overwhelming need for the whole process of Local Government Reorganisation to be properly managed due to the risk of becoming a major distraction, take longer to implement, and cost significantly more to achieve meaningful rationalisation.

GRCC has a role in supporting Parish and Town Councils, whose concern is that this first tier of government will get either bypassed or forgotten or, worse still, be required to take on, possibly by default, delivery of local services without the wherewithal, especially financial, to ensure continued, viable service delivery.

The concept of Local Neighbourhoods, with populations of between 20- 50,000 is an interesting one, possibly comparable with the old Rural District Councils. However, there are currently major questions which remain unanswered:

- How would the Local Neighbourhoods be configured?
- Where would the local alignments be set?
- What responsibilities and powers would they have?
- What relationships would they have with the upper tier?

Within these higher population configurations, smaller communities, particularly those situated on the periphery of the county, perceive a risk of being subsumed into larger clusters with which they perhaps share neither natural connections nor established relationships. More concerning still is the fear of being entirely overlooked. Such communities frequently express apprehension that their perspectives will be marginalised, leaving them with limited or no opportunity to have their voices acknowledged or meaningfully heard

GRCC is in a position to support local communities in the transition to new models of local government and enable them to step in to help provide local services. Most of these services are currently delivered by District Councils which may otherwise struggle, for example: management of allotments, playing fields and open spaces; maintenance of highway verges; management of public toilets etc.

It is noticeable that there is no GCC cabinet member with a specific remit / portfolio for rural. Gloucestershire is the 33rd most rural authority in terms of its geographic area. It is in the top 20% of authorities in terms of rurality, and 87.5% of its area is classified as rural, therefore a specific rural focus would be beneficial. We would of course be happy to support this work as rural specialists.

A question that needs to be answered also is whether Devolution would come with a recalculation of funding for Gloucestershire.

## Options Appraisal

**Single Unitary Authority**

A single unitary authority meets government criteria in terms of size, will be more cost effective, and will eliminate the confusion of the current fragmented county and district council system.

It also preserves 'Brand Gloucestershire' – a clear identity which is stronger with all constituent towns and parishes taken together, speaking with one voice on a regional and national level. 'Brand Gloucestershire' is more marketable as a single countywide authority. It would provide a strong, cohesive entity which would play its full part in the operation of any upper tier Strategic Authority, irrespective of whether Gloucestershire is combined with WECA or with Herefordshire / Worcestershire.

The single unitary option will also provide an opportunity to create strong community hubs to address local matters, supporting small communities.

The single unitary option makes eminent sense and is the only option which would achieve the Government's stated objectives, with the following benefits:

- With a population of circa 652,000 it would meet the Government's aspiration for Councils to have a population of over 500,000. One unitary authority would be a considerable size, but would mirror the county's current footprint.
- The current three tier authority model is outdated and creates dissention between the differing tiers, especially over planning, waste management, etc., as well as causing confusion for communities as to 'who does what'. The single unitary is simpler, saving the most amount of money, and communities already know this governance model.
- It has the potential to achieve significant operational and financial savings by:
    - removing duplication of service delivery, e.g., planning, waste collection / disposal, etc.;
    - rationalising property, particularly office accommodation;
    - securing economy of scale benefits generally
- It has the potential to:
    - strengthen the County's voice at national and regional levels;
    - achieve effective strategic alliances with Health, Police, Highways;
    - provide more attractive career pathways for staff to progress, which will in turn help recruitment and retention;
    - enable proper countywide strategic thinking and planning to take place, especially in terms of:
        - land use disposition;
        - new housing allocations;

  - proper forward planning;
  - development of creative economic models to enhance growth and employment;
  - flood management
- It removes confusion in the minds of the general public and could provide opportunities to establish genuine 'One Stop Shop' Local Service Delivery points around the county
- From the perspective of the rural communities we serve and smaller VCS organisations and groups we support, there is a real fear around loss of voice and loss of funding to support the most vulnerable

**East and West Option**

The only real benefit is the improvement on the current seven district and county council arrangement for most of the reasons set out above, albeit to a lesser extent due to there still being two councils operating within the geographic county area instead of one. It would also allow communities to keep a local identity, and not feel as if they are being swallowed up by the county.

If this option were to be pursued there would be an overwhelming case for not aligning it around the current District Council configuration because this would perpetuate, indeed exacerbate current boundary anomalies and tensions. Much of this is currently being played out in the case being made by Gloucester City Council to create a Greater Gloucester to overcome largely historical inconsistencies created in 1974 when Tewkesbury Borough Council in particular was established.

The major disadvantage of the two-council split model is that it could lead to the disaggregation of services currently delivered on a countywide basis by Gloucestershire County Council, such as Social Care, Education, Fire and Rescue, Highways Management, Libraries, County Farms, etc., into two separate organisations. It raises concerns around consistency and quality of care provision, such as mental health and social care services, where Gloucestershire County Council has taken on responsibility for more of these services from Gloucestershire Health and Care Trust.

More boundaries add complexity for support and service delivery, contracting may be become a logistical nightmare, and ultimately it could result in fragmented and inequitable service provision across the county. This split of services into two organisations could be avoided by joint board or lead authority models being put into place, but this would largely defeat the object of adopting this option in the first place. This model would also exacerbate cross-border issues, especially in health provision, cause confusion for communities, and cause a wealth divide.

Overall, adoption of this model would be a major missed opportunity to create an organisation with identity and presence, and many of the benefits of a single council option would be significantly diluted or dissipated.

**General Issues**

## Affordable Housing delivery

Local Government Reorganisation offers both potential benefits and drawbacks in terms of affordable housing delivery. While the pros include greater clarity for residents, potentially more efficient and cost-effective service delivery due to larger scale, and easier strategic decision making, these must be balanced against a list of cons that might involve a key potential loss of local responsiveness, difficulties in achieving projected savings, and challenges in boundary alignment with functional economic areas.

Rural areas already face significant challenges in delivering affordable housing due to a combination of factors including: high house and land prices; area designation; relatively low wages and limited development opportunities. These issues are exacerbated by factors like second homes, short-term lets and restrictive planning policies.

Differing policies within the districts in terms of planning and allocation policies are also an issue. When we add that loss of “localness and clarity” that is essential in the delivery of truly affordable homes to those challenges, the difficulties faced by those in dire housing need in rural Gloucestershire become insurmountable. We have started to witness areas within rural Gloucestershire that are becoming gated, dying communities with unbalanced demographics, where socioeconomic development is stagnant. The reduction in the number of Local Registered Providers is becoming a real issue as more and more merge, with a significant and detrimental effect on the delivery of small numbers of homes in rural villages. However, Rural Affordable Housing is finally being recognised as a significant and important topic for everyone. It is about much more than just building a house; it is actually the foundation of everything else in our society.

Affordable housing must become a KPI of every major sector, be they Public or Private, and this is especially true in rural areas such as Gloucestershire. Affordable Rural Housing delivery is crucial for a thriving economy and society, impacting heavily upon various industries and communities as well as public sector bodies such as health and education. This means that policies and initiatives, including Local Government Reorganisation, must consider the housing needs of rural regions. In the refresh of the Leadership Gloucestershire group, GRCC feels decision makers should seriously consider a place for planning. Having this level of expertise available to the group would enable efficient countywide strategic planning to take place in terms of housing, land use, and the economy.

As LGR emerges in Gloucestershire it is vital that there is a uniform and consistent approach from all sectors at all times. The more boundaries and borders there are, the more difficulties and costs faced by sectors such as Health, Education and the Police, and the delivery of Rural Affordable Housing becomes even more challenging. This at a time when all sectors need to be able to work coherently and seamlessly together in order to deliver sustainable, quality services that can also work together, forming strong partnerships.

One Health Authority, one Education Authority, one Police and Emergency Authority, one Planning Authority, and one Rural Affordable Housing organisation could mean faster, more efficient partnership-based delivery of affordable housing. Lack of affordable housing affects all

areas including economic growth, social equity, health and wellbeing, education, hospitality and retail.

In conclusion, as a neutral, independent Voluntary Sector organisation and rural specialist whose role is to represent and serve the communities of Gloucestershire, we hope to have provided a balanced and constructive view/opinion of both options based on over a century of understanding and knowledge of the county, along with our multi-level connections and reach into those communities.

**August 2025**

Response from GDOC (Gloucestershire's GP provider organisation)

Hi Alex,

We tested this with our GP Collaborative Summit today, comprising all of our Gloucestershire GP practices and Primary Care Networks. There was a clear majority decision from our practices, which has informed the response that I'm pleased to provide below:

Gloucestershire General Practice Collaborative, on behalf of our general practice providers across Gloucestershire, welcome the opportunity to comment on proposals for future local government structures in our county. Our primary objective in providing this feedback is ensuring that the health and care system best supports the delivery of high-quality, sustainable and integrated care for our population and the patients we serve on a daily basis.

We believe that a **single unitary authority for Gloucestershire** would bring clear benefits compared to establishing two smaller unitary authorities:

1. **Clearer Alignment with NHS Structures**
   - Gloucestershire is a clearly defined 'place' within the new Gloucestershire and BNSSG Integrated Care Board (ICB). Furthermore, our primary care structures are also aligned to our Gloucestershire footprint, such as our GP Collaborative, our Local Medical Committee (LMC) and our Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC). A single unitary authority would align with this geography, avoiding the duplication and fragmentation of relationships that two authorities would inevitably create.
   - This alignment would streamline joint planning for population health, prevention, and service delivery.

2. **Simplified Partnership Working**
   - General practice is engaging in system-level programmes, through our GP Collaborative, our Primary Care Networks, our Integrated Locality Partnerships and our ICB. Having one local government partner makes collaboration more straightforward, saving time and resources.
   - A two-unitary model would double the number of political, officer, and governance forums practices would need to engage with, stretching already limited leadership capacity in primary care.

3. **Consistency for Patients, Communities and Neighbourhoods**
   - A single authority provides residents with a more consistent offer for public health, social care and other services that directly affect health and wellbeing.
   - In contrast, a two-unitary model risks divergence of policy and provision, leading to inequities between communities and confusion for patients, potential boundaries in our

recognised primary care networks and neighbourhoods and inequalities being exacerbated by two-unitary authorities with potentially quite divergent economic positions.

4. **Efficiency and Value for Money**
   - From a health system perspective, the fewer the boundaries, the less duplication in commissioning, contracting, and monitoring arrangements. This efficiency ultimately releases more resource for front-line services.
   - At a time when both the NHS and local government face severe financial pressures, avoiding duplication is essential.

5. **Stronger Strategic Voice**
   - A single Gloucestershire authority would be a more robust and influential partner when working with NHS England, regional bodies, and government departments on health and care issues.
   - It would reduce the risk of competing priorities or fragmented lobbying across different councils.

**Conclusion**

Gloucestershire General Practice Collaborative strongly favours a single unitary authority for the county. This model is most compatible with the way health services are organised now and also with the future plans for organisation, best supports effective partnership working, and minimises duplication. Most importantly, it provides the clearest and fairest route to improving outcomes for patients, communities and neighbourhoods across Gloucestershire.

With best wishes,

Steve

**Steve Rudd MBA** | Associate Director of Strategy and Transformation and Gloucestershire GP Collaborative Management Lead | G DOC LTD | Quayside House, Quay Street, Gloucester, GL1 2TZ | Mobile: 07795 685090 | Email: stephen.rudd@nhs.net



G DOC LTD

Registered Office: Quayside House, Quay Street, Gloucester GL1 2TZ

Registered in England and Wales, CRN 08230041

Response from Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB)

NHS Gloucestershire
Shire Hall
Westgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

PA. tara.carr@nhs.net

2nd October 2025

Jo Walker
Chief Executive
Gloucestershire County Council
Shire Hall
Westgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

**(sent via email)**

Dear Jo

**Local Government Reorganisation**

Following the ICB Board seminar agenda item on Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution that Sarah Scott led I am writing to give the feedback on behalf of the ICB to the three options presented. The strong preference from the ICB is for the Single County Unitary option. The key points that we felt supported this view were as follows:

- Having developed social services at a whole Gloucestershire level we think it would be a backward step to move to two social work teams for the county. This would increase complexity for those working in our NHS services, to have two sets of processes and teams to engage with to ensure the flow of people through our care.
- There is also significant risk that we have a higher concentration of people with complex needs living in the West of the County because as commissioners of services that have been driving to achieve best value for the whole county we have physically placed certain care settings where property prices are lower (in the West of the County). This is a risk that in an East/West split of unitary authorities that there will be an imbalance of responsibility for high need groups that will cause unforeseen consequences and exacerbate inequalities.
- The PWC financial option analysis shows a clear advantage to having a single unitary authority from a financial perspective and in a period when all public services are under considerable pressure to deliver best value to our population we feel this is an important consideration.
- We recognise that we need to work closely with you to ensure we continue to shift our care models to meet the changing needs of our population. This is best done in neighbourhoods and we feel the option described as Greater Gloucester may disturb some of those natural communities and the good strong working that we have developed in our localities.

Becky Parish has shared evidence with Siobhan and Sarah from previous public engagement exercises which shows little difference in what is important to people from their public services.

I hope this response is helpful as part of the business case development and I am happy to discuss this further at our next 1:1 if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Truelove

**Sarah Truelove**
**Chief Executive Officer**
**NHS Gloucestershire**

cc: Shane Devlin
Jane Cummings

# Appendix 5: Detailed Options Analysis

This appendix provides additional detailed commentary assessing a **Single Unitary Authority (1UA)** and **Two Unitary Authorities (2UA - East and West)**, against the nine criteria agreed for this business case.

## Detailed analysis of **single unitary (1UA) model** against criteria

| Criteria | Sub-Criteria | Alignment Summary | RAG |
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| 1. Sensible single tier of local government | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned. | Under a 1UA model, the current councils would be replaced by a single authority (albeit legally GCC would be a 'continuing authority').<br><br>This would remove structural duplication and create one point of democratic and operational accountability for all services across Gloucestershire.<br><br>• **Removes two-tier complexity** – Seven existing councils (one county, six districts) would be replaced by one organisation delivering all functions<br>• **Simplifies resident experience** – Residents would contact one council for all local services, reducing confusion and referral between tiers.<br>• **Consolidates statutory roles** – All key statutory officers would sit within a single executive team, streamlining leadership and governance.<br>• **Enables consistent locality governance** – The Place Model for Gloucestershire proposes establishing Neighbourhood Partnerships in every part of the county. A single council can embed this consistently across all areas, regardless of historic district structure.<br>• **Supports whole-system working** – Joined-up delivery becomes easier when strategic and local functions sit within one structure.<br>• **Meets MHCLG expectations** – The model delivers a complete single-tier structure for the area, as defined by government policy. | G |

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| | B) Sensible economic breakdown: with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities. | The 1UA model allows financial variation across Gloucestershire to be managed within a single council. This enables redistribution between areas, protects against localised risk, and supports a unified approach to tax and budget strategy.<br><br>• **Enables pooled resources** - Council tax, business rates, and government funding can be allocated based on need across the whole county.<br>• **Supports financial equity** – A single UA can help drive more equitable growth across the county as a whole balancing any disparities that might exist in productivity and growth across individual areas at the moment (e.g. Business Growth in the East is 1.10% v/s -1.15% in the West).<br>• **Simplifies council tax alignment** - Aligning current tax levels has reduced political and legal complexity under one council.<br>• **Increases fiscal stability**– A larger tax base and merged reserves lower the risk of localised budget pressures and increases the ability to effectively manage Local Authority Debt (£819 for countywide v/s £674 in the East and £948 in the West).<br>• **Allows single financial strategy** – One Medium-term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and capital programme can be used to balance investment and risk county-wide, including place-based regeneration and neighbourhood infrastructure. | G |
| | C) Sensible geographic breakdown: which will help increase housing supply and meet local needs. | The 1UA model keeps Gloucestershire's existing administrative and strategic footprint intact. This aligns with current health, community safety, transport, and economic delivery boundaries, reducing disruption and supporting long-term coordination.<br><br>• **Alignment with existing partner geographies** – The ICB, Police, Fire and NHS all operate on a countywide footprint, reducing need for renegotiation or duplication e.g. in terms of engagement activities.<br>• **Maximise the Council's influence with the ICB -** Given the proposed changes with ICBs looking to take on more local authority areas, retaining a single UA across the county will enable Gloucestershire to retain a strong voice. | G |

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| | | • **Avoids the creation of administrative internal borders** – A 1UA structure removes the risk of current countywide services or geographies being split (e.g. Children's admissions, SEND pathways, acute hospital discharge pathways etc).<br>• **Supports more strategic spatial planning** – The model enables Local Plans, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the Gloucestershire Infrastructure Strategy to be aligned across the county. This would ensure strategic projects such as The Forum project in Gloucester City and the Berkeley Site low carbon energy park in the West are planned in a coordinated way, alongside shared housing and infrastructure corridors that link Gloucester, Cheltenham, and Tewkesbury<br>• **Simplifies strategic countywide structures that already exist** – There are already numerous examples of successful countywide partnerships across all seven councils including Climate Leadership Gloucestershire; Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP); Gloucestershire Strategic Housing Partnership etc. These partnerships enable strategic countywide coordination and leadership for things like housing priorities, rough sleeping, cross cutting climate issues etc. A 1UA model makes this even simpler to drive with a single council.<br>• **Strategic management of homelessness and housing land supply**- A single council could be better positioned to take a more joined up approach to homelessness and housing supply countywide, which could reduce variation in housing capacity and support in meeting the increasing demand and complexity particularly in temporary accommodation across the county. This would allow strategic allocation of sites, directing development to areas with greater capacity while managing demand hotspots. Consistent policy could be applied to meet the countywide shortfall against the five-year supply target (East has 4.97 years and West has 3.83 years, with a countywide shortfall of 4.37 years). | |
| 2. Right-sized local government | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless | The 1UA option:<br>• **Meets statutory benchmark** – The combined population of ~659,000 is above the MHCLG target of 500,000 or more. | **G** |

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| | specific scenarios make this unreasonable) | • **Supports strategic scale** – This population size enables the council to manage key statutory functions (e.g. ASC, education, planning) with scale and consistency.<br>• **Aligns with successful precedent** – The population aligns closely with other approved unitaries (e.g. North Yorkshire, Cornwall, Buckinghamshire). | |
| | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers | By consolidating governance, systems, and staffing, the 1UA model offers significant opportunities to reduce duplication and generate savings over time.<br><br>• **Delivery of potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£21.1m per annum.**<br>• **Reduces duplication** – Only one set of ICT systems, governance structures, and senior statutory roles e.g. one Director of Adults Social Care Services (DASS), one Director of Public Health (DPH) etc.<br>• **Streamlines service delivery** – A single operating model for each service (e.g. One revs and bens team and set of policies and not seven) avoids overlapping teams and inconsistent standards or support offers for residents across the county.<br>• **Contracting economies of scale** – Significant benefits from aggregation of contracts (particularly noting bringing together Line of Business system contracts for service areas etc). In addition to this, increased economies of scale and procurement leverage of procuring a single contract (as opposed to six smaller ones) for specialist services e.g. cyber, contaminated land, asbestos etc. | G |
| | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand | The 1UA model offers stronger resilience, especially in high-cost and high-risk areas like ASC and CSC. In addition to this, through aggregation of some fairly small and stretched teams, there is increased resilience in areas where there are already significant workforce recruitment and retention challenges and scarce professional expertise and capacity. | G |

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| | financial shocks | • **Enablers better management of significant imbalances in demand across the county –** In particular, within ASC, there is significantly higher demand and cost for working age adults (specifically for supported living) between the East and West of the county. A single UA can deploy resources (incl. finances and staffing) more flexibly to service this imbalance in demand.<br>• **Increased workforce resilience for highly qualified and specialist service professionals –** Skills sets which are already highly scarce (with national shortages) e.g. environmental health officers within public health, planners, social workers benefit from being in single organisation to enable pooling of expertise, support succession planning and reducing the risk of exacerbating workforce challenges through duplicating or splitting staff across multiple organisations (or creating competition between authorities for the same staff).<br>• **Frontline workforce flexibility –** A single UA can flexibly deploy front line staff incl. casual staff across the county to support delivery e.g. Library staff currently working across multiple libraries or even the Registrars team maintaining a single pool of c.80 casual celebrants who are deployed flexibly to deliver weddings and ceremonies across the county.<br>• **Supports statutory resilience** – A single set of statutory roles reduces recruitment pressure and minimises significant additional ongoing costs of senior roles.<br>• **Protects Place Model delivery** – Central support functions (finance, HR, data) are key to enabling locality-level delivery across Gloucestershire.<br>• **Strong support resilience for front-line services –** Core services such as fire and rescue rely on local authority support services and financial support e.g. HR, legal, finance etc to support delivery. A single larger UA is likely to offer strong financial resilience and create less administrative burden of apportioning out support costs etc.<br>• **Decreased senior management capacity –** Due to the aggregation of senior management roles, the 1UA model could potentially have a reduced capacity at senior levels to sustain financial shocks | |

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| | *D) Manageable transition costs* | A single authority model allows for less structural duplication and avoids the cost and complexity of standing up two separate organisations, through reduced disaggregation<br><br>• **Requires creation of only one new authority and legal structure, minimising transition costs** - estimated to be ~£21.3m. *Assumption based on assuming a continuing authority being in place.*<br>• **Simplifies legal setup** – Only one constitution, shadow authority, electoral review, consultation and governance framework would need to be designed, approved and run.<br>• **Reduces portfolio and programme duplication** – A single implementation portfolio required to manage the transition and implementation.<br>• **Lower ICT migration and integration costs –** Currently shared countywide systems such as Liquid Logic (for ASC) would not need to be disaggregated or duplicated. In addition to this, data and systems migration could be managed on a service by service once (as opposed to multiple sets of systems migrations activities for each service). Lastly, one single website can be developed for the new council.<br>• **Minimises duplication of senior roles** – One executive team avoids the need to recruit and fund parallel statutory leadership posts which can be significantly costly.<br>• **Reduces duplication of county input –** Current county council stakeholders can be a part of a single implementation portfolio and would not need to spend additional time in multiple meetings, governance forums, working groups (i.e. county council stakeholders would need to be involved in all conversations if there were multiple UAs being created given disaggregation implications).<br>• **Reduced risk of disruption to traded services –** Reduced risk of disrupting effective traded services that operate on a countywide footprint particularly in relation to services provided to schools. | G |

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| 3. High quality, sustainable services | *A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation* | The 1UA model would preserve current integrated delivery structures in areas like social care, education, and public health. A single unitary within Gloucestershire, if designed with strong local engagement in mind, offers a more stable platform for inclusive, locally responsive governance. Colleagues currently operate countywide, working with multiple stakeholders and systems. A single point of engagement would reduce duplication and improve accountability.<br><br>• **Preserves current service integration** – Existing countywide delivery in areas such as transport, ASC, CSC, SEND, and safeguarding would remain intact, avoiding risk to safeguarding, statutory thresholds, and pathway coordination.<br>• **Supports end-to-end planning** – Joined-up pathways for prevention, care, education, and housing can be planned across one structure (particularly important for high-risk residents who cross multiple services).<br>• **Enables minimum disruption to significant transformation and improvement journeys that are ongoing** – e.g. there are significant multi-year transformation programmes planned in ASC which could continue with minimum disruption under a 1UA scenario.<br>• **Minimal disruption to multi-agency partnership arrangement** – Only one set of safeguarding boards, ICB pathways, youth justice panels, and place-based health partnerships are required, making service collaboration easier and more effective.<br>• **Resilience through scale and leadership continuity -** Professional Service Leads consistently highlight that larger authorities reduce risk during transition by retaining experienced senior leadership teams and service delivery infrastructure.<br>• **Challenges of delivering services across diverse geographies -** The 1UA model would require the integration of two urban centres (Cheltenham and Gloucester) and expansion of capabilities to meet the rural needs across the county. This could complicate existing operating models and ways of working and risking inconsistencies in access and quality that could endure into the future. | G |

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| | | • **Increased aggregation risk** – A 1UA model would require aggregation of six district-specific services into one collective service which is likely to be significantly complex e.g. aligning six different council tax support schemes etc. | |
| | *B) Opportunity for public service reform including where this will lead to improved value for money* | The 1UA model enables a unified transformation strategy and consistent investment in digital tools, analytics, automation, workforce planning, and shared infrastructure, all of which are already underway through the transformation initiatives and emerging Place Model design.<br>• **Creates a single platform for change** – Transformation programmes in ICT, workforce, data, and estates can be delivered countywide.<br>• **Enables shared innovation** – AI, automation, and digital case management tools can be designed once and used everywhere.<br>• **Supports cultural alignment** – One council avoids divergence in practice or priorities, allowing consistent reform over time.<br>• **Improves analytical capacity** – Shared data infrastructure can support predictive and population-level service planning, particularly linking to public sector partners like Police and NHS – this is key to continuing to drive a focus moving away from eligibility to focus on prevention and early intervention (i.e. not waiting for the crisis to happen first).<br>• **Backed by service insight** – Service leads across ICT, libraries, revenues and benefits, asset management, housing and homelessness etc consistently stated that a 1UA model would remove duplication in systems and governance, strengthen programme alignment, and enable investment to scale across the county.<br>• **Improved strategic influence and collaboration with partners –** A single larger UA is likely to have more influence and scale to negotiate with local and national partners incl. Educational institutions, DWP, ICB etc to drive stronger system-wide leadership and delivery of improved shared outcomes locally. | G |

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| | | • **Increased scale and financial resilience to innovate –** A single larger UA is likely to have access to large amounts of resources (workforce, finances, connections with others) to innovate, fail fast and learn. This is critical to driving improvement and reform.<br>• **Better value for money** – In services such as ASC, CSC, public health and commissioning, the scale of a 1UA model could provide better value for money through economies of scale and single strong voice in the market.<br>• **Creation of a single trusted front door for residents and partners** – A 1UA model can retain a simple, universal, trusted front door for residents to simplify their experience but also drive efficiencies in contact and delivery. | |
| | *C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk of negative impact on, crucial services* | A single authority can manage variation in service demand and outcomes across the geography by redistributing resources and targeting investment based on need. This supports equity in access and outcomes, especially for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public protection services including for public safety.<br><br>• **Enables flexible resource allocation** – Investment can be targeted where demand is highest (e.g. higher ASC and CSC spend in the West) can be managed effectively.<br>• **Improves consistency** – A single authority can maintain common standards and expectations for service access across the county, with flexibility built in at the point of delivery.<br>• **Supports data-led prioritisation** – Systemwide data enables identification of emerging needs across urban and rural areas and supports early intervention strategies that can be locally delivered.<br>• **No need for disaggregation of critical countywide services delivered to the most vulnerable in society** - Service leads across CSC, education, public health, and commissioning warned that two unitary authority models would pose risks of disaggregating safeguarding, school admissions, EHCP timeliness, statutory performance oversight etc.<br>• **Reduces postcode variation** – Residents in different areas would experience equal levels of service and support which drives fair and equal access for all. | G |

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| | | • **Protects Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) and MASH –** Minimum disruption to the single front door to make sure the right assessment, identification of risk and support can be provided to children at most risk who need to be protected. In line with engagement with stakeholders from the Police, *"a 1UA provides the best opportunity to continue to maintain and improve coordination of this vital MASH capability with a focus on driving consistency, pooling of resources and alignment"* between the Police and Local Authority workforce.<br>• **No borders created between the county** – A countywide model makes it easier to coordinate placements for education or social care to be considered across a bigger geography without the need to negotiate potential 'out of county' placements if administrative boundaries were to be created.<br>• **Addresses homelessness strategically** – A single housing and commissioning function can plan across high-demand urban areas (e.g. Gloucester and Cheltenham) and rural areas, ensuring consistent prevention and support offers. | |
| 4. Meets local needs | *A) Meets local needs and is informed by local views* | While formal public consultation has not yet taken place, this options analysis has been informed by engagement undertaken with the public through surveys and in-person events, officers from service areas and partners across the county (including county council, district councils and other partners including Police, VCSFE, health etc). Many countywide partners, including further education, health, VCFSE, Constabulary and the Diocese, voiced strong support for a single voice and shared strategic frameworks to maintain coherence across Gloucestershire. The EQIA analysis that has been conducted also indicates that a single council could strengthen consistency in engagement with groups with protected characteristics (e.g. disabled residents, ethnic minority communities) by creating one countywide approach to inclusive communications and accessible consultation materials, reducing risk of variation in how voices are heard across areas.<br><br>• **Reflects strategic partner input** - The 1UA structure aligns with preferences expressed by the NHS, Police, and some economic partners for a single interface, highlighting that a single accountable authority would reduce duplication and improve clarity for service users. | **A** |

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| | | • **Backed by some VCFSE organisations** – Some VCFSE representatives who have been engaged emphasised that a single UA would make partnership working and funding engagement "simpler and more consistent," reducing the duplication they currently face when working across multiple districts.<br>• **Supported by some of the county's local business networks** – Feedback from business representatives, including the Federation of Small Businesses, highlighted the benefit of "one clear voice" for economic development, inward investment, and regulatory services, making Gloucestershire easier to promote to investors and government.<br>• **Based on current delivery structures** - The model builds on the existing approach to ASC, CSC, public health, transport - all delivered at county scale.<br>• **Enables future local engagement** - Under a 1UA model, the council would have capacity to design and invest in community-level consultation structures.<br>• **Capacity to combine strategic oversight with local delivery-** Services such as HTST, EHCP delivery, and ASC benefit from being managed by a single larger UA which has the scale to sufficiently manage and resource but with the ability to flexibly deploy resources locally.<br>• **Places local voice at the centre** - The Place Model workstream (co-led by GCC and partners including OPCC, VCS Alliance, and ICB) has designed mechanisms for neighbourhood engagement within a single authority.<br>• **Service-led locality feedback** – Discussions across ASC, CSC, libraries, ICT and education consistently supported a single authority with locally delivered services. Officers favoured retaining local footprints for operational delivery, noting this was already how people experience services.<br>• **Risk of reduced local visibility if locality model is not prioritised** – Several stakeholders, including parish councils and VCSFE representatives, expressed concern that without sustained investment in neighbourhood governance, a single UA could appear more distant from communities, particularly in rural areas such as the North Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean, where access to decision-makers is already seen as limited. |

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| | *B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural and historic importance* | The 1UA Model has been designed to protect and celebrate the many places of Gloucestershire. 267 parish councils currently cover the majority of the county and our Neighbourhood Partnership proposals seek to decentralise services and give greater voice to communities of place, interest and identity.<br><br>• **Local identities –** There could be concerns that a single UA could dilute the distinct cultural, social and economic identities of Gloucestershire's two key urban centres (Gloucester and Cheltenham) which therefore may not gain local support. However, this can be mitigated as noted below.<br>• **Civic identity retained** – Town and parish councils, mayoralties, and ceremonial roles would remain in place. For Gloucester a parish (city council) would be created, and similarly for Cheltenham, a parish (town council) would be created. These new parishes would serve to strengthen the identity and significant cultural and historic value of each city/town within Gloucestershire<br>• **Allows for place-based branding** – Services can retain local naming, visual identity, and signage to reinforce place association, a priority raised in the Diocese and VCFSE stakeholder engagement responses.<br>• **Reflects community affinity** – Feedback from planning, libraries and safeguarding services emphasised that residents associate more strongly with place-based identities than with institutional structures, making it essential to maintain visible local identity alongside a single governance tier.<br>• **Neighbourhood Partnership proposals will make the new council closer to the places people know.** – The model will create a coherent offer for populations of 30k-50k, bringing the council and decision making closer to residents<br>• **Supports visibility of place** – The new authority can retain ward and locality names to reflect place-based identity across the county.<br>• **Builds on community infrastructure** – Areas like the Forest, Stroud, and the Cotswolds already have strong place-based partnerships in place. The 1UA model enables these current strengths to be built on with a more powerful place-based emphasis and approach. | **A** |

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| | | • **Builds on current area-based practice** – e.g. ASC and CSC already hold case review forums and safeguarding panels at area level, often aligned to the current districts. This culture of place-based accountability would continue to be retained and formalised under the single authority.<br>• **Successful precedents exist** – Unitaries such as Buckinghamshire and North Yorkshire have adopted area boards and neighbourhood forums to maintain local visibility, improve outcomes and encourage community participation. | |
| | *C) Addresses local concerns* | The 1UA model enables county-wide service planning while allowing targeted investment in places with higher levels of need. This supports consistency of offer while maintaining flexibility to respond to local variation.<br><br>• **Could be perceived as overcentralisation –** A single larger UA could be perceived by some stakeholders and residents as moving services further away from people and creating less understanding and tailoring of services to meet local needs. However, this can be mitigated with robust locality governance and retaining operational delivery close to people (as is the case already e.g. with locality based social work teams etc).<br>• **Supports differentiated planning** – Strategic services (e.g. ASC, education) can be commissioned based on local demand and vulnerability indicators.<br>• **Addresses inequality** – The model enables planning across areas with different outcomes (e.g. West: 16,609 children in low-income families per 100k vs East: 12,274). The 1UA model maintains the ability to respond strategically while allowing delivery to reflect place.<br>• **Place-sensitive commissioning already in use** – Commissioners in ASC and Education noted that funding allocations already account for variation in deprivation, demand and access (e.g. funding per capita is higher in the West for ASC and in the East for transport access). A 1UA model protects this flexibility while enabling oversight of equity countywide<br>• **Supports coherent infrastructure and regeneration investment** – Officers stressed the value of having one capital planning and housing function able to target investment into high-need areas (e.g. | **A** |

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| | | brownfield regeneration in the West; affordability and access issues in the East), rather than splitting strategic capacity across two smaller councils. EQIA findings highlight current East–West disparities in transport access for disabled and older residents, and a 1UA model enables these to be addressed in a single transport accessibility strategy linked to Local Transport Plans. | |
| 5. Supports devolution arrangements | *A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution* | The 1UA model simplifies engagement with Whitehall and regional partners.<br>• **Streamlined governance** – A single authority avoids internal fragmentation, simplifies representation, and strengthens Gloucestershire's strategic negotiating position. A single council gives partners a single door in for strategic collaboration and funding opportunities.<br>• **Improves visibility and scale** - A bigger footprint and unified leadership increase Gloucestershire's credibility and profile in national negotiations.<br>• **Compatible with existing regional structures** – Gloucestershire currently aligns with the South West for funding and some aligned service delivery (e.g. South West Ambulance Service) and also shares ties with the West Midlands (e.g. through economic corridors and shared events). A single council can better preserve overlapping relationships and flex across both without splintering Gloucestershire's strategic position or regional partnerships.<br>• **Improved clarity in negotiations** – Members and senior officers highlighted that a single unitary would allow Gloucestershire to present itself with clarity in devolution negotiations, and avoid unnecessary complexity in areas like housing, infrastructure and skills.<br>• **Attractive investment platform** – A single council is better positioned to attract investment in growth sectors like advanced manufacturing, cyber, and clean energy, which operate across county boundaries. These areas require joined-up strategic leadership and investment.<br>• **Improving transport connectivity -** There are already plans in place across the county to improve transport connectivity. Devolution offers opportunities to build on this and connect Gloucestershire | G |

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| | | with other economic corridors enabling further regional collaboration and enabling residents to access further opportunities. | |
| | *B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority* | Under a 1UA model, Gloucestershire would join any future Combined Authority or Strategic Authority as a single partner, with a population of ~659,000. This contributes meaningfully toward the 1.5 million minimum benchmark used in current legislation and policy design for deeper devolution.<br>• **Compatible with multiple strategic groupings to meet minimum population thresholds by and large –** With one voice, Gloucestershire can engage in potential Combined Authorities including:<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + West of England Combined Authority (WECA) Core: 1.6m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + WECA (incl. North Somerset): 1.81m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire: 1.45m (falls a little short of the 1.5m threshold).<br>  ○ Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire + Swindon: 1.63m<br>• However, concerns were noted around the relative size of a single Gloucestershire Unitary Authority in comparison with other partners in a Combined Authority. For example, in the case of a WECA option, Gloucestershire would be the largest partner in WECA, with a population of c. 659,276, compared to Bristol's c.472,400, South Gloucestershire's c.290,400 and Bath and North East Somerset's c.193,400 (population figures based on ONS 2021 census). This could potentially make a single unitary less appealing for other partners. | G |
| 6. Local engagement and empowerment | *A) Enables stronger community engagement* | The 1UA model removes local district councils but can introduce new forms of local representation and democratic engagement. Its success in this area would depend on strong designs and investment in locality arrangements. Some partners expressed concern that community engagement in a 1UA model must be deliberately designed, with one noting: 'if you don't build in real localism, people will feel even further away". | G |

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| | | • **Could be perceived to be further away from communities –** A larger authority may be perceived by some stakeholders to be moving further away from communities with a much larger and more diverse geography to consider.<br>• **Requires active design** – The model does not automatically strengthen participation; new structures would need to be developed (a process already initiated through the Neighbourhood Area Partnerships proposed by the Place Model programme).<br>• **Supports consistent frameworks** – A single council can create countywide standards for local structures including Neighbourhood Area Partnerships.<br>• **Avoids duplication of democratic processes** – One tier of governance reduces overlap and potential confusion over responsibilities (a key concern in feedback from the VCFSE sector and the Diocese).<br>• **Can be designed to enable inclusive local representation** – Governance can be shaped to reflect towns, parishes, and historic communities across Gloucestershire.<br>• **Rooted in ongoing local work** – The Neighbourhood Partnership model, co-designed by GCC, OPCC, the ICB, and the VCS Alliance, is already testing place-based forums that bring residents, councillors and service teams together to shape local priorities.<br>• **Allows for a strengthening of capacity to support engagement** - The 1UA delivers the highest overall savings of options being considered (c.£21.1m annual net savings). In turn, this may allow for its Neighbourhood Partnership proposals to be given greater financial support and expert officer capacity. | |

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| | *B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment* | The 1UA model allows the council to embed neighbourhood governance into its core structure, particularly through the development of Neighbourhood Partnerships and Locality Hubs. It can formalise new models of area-based working and build on existing parish and community networks. There are also projected to be greater financial benefits from a 1UA model (noted above), which can support investment in place-based working and visible local governance across the county.<br><br>• **Facilitates locality working** – Existing family hubs, community wellbeing teams, and parish clusters can be aligned to formal locality areas, ensuring operational delivery remains close to communities.<br>• **Enables shared design** – Area committees (formal sub-committees of a local authority that operate at a more local, geographical level) or Neighbourhood Partnership can be co-designed with communities and elected members. The Place Model being worked on already in Gloucestershire explicitly sets out a roadmap for co-production.<br>• **Formalises locality governance** – Proposals are being co-designed with partners including OPCC, ICB and VCS Alliance, with clear plans for shared decision-making at place level.<br>• **Supports consistent service access** – Local service offers can be standardised, targeted and resourced across the county.<br>• **Backed by services and partners** – Service professionals including CSC, planning, and ASC leads stressed the importance of retaining area-based decision-making capacity, noting that local visibility matters for legitimacy.<br>• **Raises the visibility and role of local councils and VCFSE organisations**: The creation of a Civil Society Covenant and a Local Councils charter elevate the role of vital local and hyperlocal organisations<br>• **Protects equity of access** – A single council can strive to ensure that every locality, rural or urban, has the same opportunity to develop Neighbourhood Partnerships and access resources. However, this may sometimes be harder to achieve on such a big footprint. | G |

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| | | • **Reduces risk of divergence** – Feedback from ICT, Audit and Planning services highlighted that neighbourhood working is best enabled by shared systems, standardised training, and joint commissioning, which is possible under a 1UA model.<br>• **Builds on existing models** – Several services (e.g. ASC, children's services, housing) already operate with area-based or district-level coordination. For example, in CSC, local safeguarding hubs, and area panels are already delivering place-based oversight.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit** – By removing layers of government people feel as though the unitary is far removed from their local issues which can decrease engagement. | |
| 7. Environmental and climate protection | A) Ensures the new authority/authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans. | The 1UA model offers scale and continuity in environmental governance. It enables strategic investment, consistent targets, and stronger institutional leadership on net zero, nature recovery, and flood resilience while safeguarding key partnerships and plans.<br><br>• **Preserves existing plans and partnerships** – Gloucestershire's Climate Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Climate Leadership Gloucestershire and Strategic Flood Risk Management approach are all designed countywide and can continue seamlessly under 1UA.<br>• **Enables scale of investment** – Environmental budgets, procurement, and staffing can be centrally coordinated, with local delivery shaped through Neighbourhood Partnerships.<br>• **Avoids duplication of leadership** – A single structure prevents gaps or overlaps in environmental governance.<br>• **Aligns with existing officer capacity** – Current small specialist teams in areas such as flood risk and climate strategy can be consolidated.<br>• **Enables neighbourhood engagement** – Through the Place Model, the new authority can embed environmental priorities into Neighbourhood Partnership plans, empowering communities to lead on climate actions suited to local needs. | G |

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| | | • **Bolster the role of the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) -** Pooled resources between county and districts, and the ability to direct those resources according to need across the whole county would maximise the resources we do have (i.e. whether based on the location of consenting and enforcement cases, schemes, planning consultations or individual flooding events). In addition to this, a single authority would have single ownership of Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (Levels 1and2) and could also drive a more coordinated approach to identification and delivery of flood alleviation schemes and associated bids to national funding | |
| | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB). | The 1UA model supports joined-up spatial planning and stewardship across protected landscapes. It maintains geographic continuity and ensures consistent protections across jurisdictional boundaries.<br>• **Avoids splitting landscape governance** – Natural assets such as the River Severn catchment, Cotswolds escarpment, and Forest woodlands would remain under one set of policy and delivery arrangements.<br>• **Supports integrated land-use planning** – The Local Plan and planning policy can incorporate rural, urban, and protected areas under one authority. Officers confirmed that issues like nutrient neutrality need consistent policy and joint delivery at county level.<br>• **Retains current plans for Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)** – Developed at a county level over the past three years and to be delivered by upper tier / unitary authorities.<br>• **Retains current infrastructure for biodiversity net gain (BNG)** – Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund (GNCF) is a not-for-profit body supported by all seven LAs to trade BNG development units within Gloucestershire<br>• **Preserves cross-boundary programmes** – Flood schemes, biodiversity corridors, and green infrastructure plans are easier to deliver through one capital plan and Local Plan framework.<br>• **Allows local tailoring within one system** – Local protections (e.g. Cotswold design codes, Forest regeneration priorities) can be embedded in area-specific planning and delivery through the Place Model. | G |

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| | | • **Supports rural stewardship through locality governance** – Parish partnerships and community networks, particularly in the Forest and Cotswolds, can be empowered through Neighbourhood Partnerships to influence local environmental strategy. | |
| | c) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. "Fairer Greener Forest", Climate Emergency responses). | The 1UA model provides the governance platform to protect, expand and align Gloucestershire's district-led climate initiatives. It strengthens monitoring and accountability while enabling communities to drive action locally.<br><br>• **Does not erase local ambitions** – Protects locally developed climate action - Programmes such as "Fairer Greener Forest," Stroud CAN, and Cheltenham's net zero route map which can continue with local leadership but benefit from countywide funding, systems, and legal support.<br>• **Allows integration of district priorities** – The new authority can build a single climate plan that draws on existing strategies. reducing duplication and aligning priorities without weakening local ownership.<br>• **Supports accountability** – A single scrutiny framework allows monitoring of commitments made at both county and locality level.<br>• **Enables targeted support –** Rural off-gas areas, high-deprivation urban communities, and at-risk flood zones can be prioritised in capital investment using a shared dataset and single capital plan.<br>• **Backed by partners** – Stakeholders, including public health, VCFSE and environmental partners, emphasised that 1UA would simplify joint action on climate and support more joined-up community participation. | G |

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| 8. Civic engagement and participative democracy | *A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy.* | The 1UA model creates the scale and reach to invest in countywide civic engagement, while retaining flexibility for local communities to shape how they participate. It provides the infrastructure to support both digital and in-person engagement through the Place Model.<br><br>• **Supports digital and in-person tools** – Investment in consultation platforms, community budgets, and resident panels can be made at county scale, supported by the central functions of the new council<br>• **Embedded in service design** – Housing, planning, transport, ASC and CSC services are already designing resident input into locality plans and Local Development Frameworks. A 1UA allows this to continue without duplication.<br>• **Protects equal access to voice** – A single model of civic engagement ensures that all areas, including rural parishes and urban neighbourhoods, can participate on equal terms.<br>• **Supports community leadership** – Officers emphasised that strong place-based leadership is already being built through co-design pilots in the Forest and Cheltenham, and that a single authority enables these structures to scale.<br>• **Anchored in Gloucestershire's tradition of community partnership** – The VCFSE sector and local clergy highlighted the need to maintain grassroots decision-making. The 1UA model can help to make sure the local voice can be protected and funded within a single, countywide democratic framework.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit -** Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. | **A** |

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| 9. Inclusive growth and equity | *A) Ability to tackle disparities in wealth setting up one unitary authority or two unitary authorities.* | The 1UA model allows the council to address local disparities across the county through joined-up economic, transport, and skills planning with the ability to redistribute funding and focus support on areas of need. A single structure would be well-placed to support equitable development and reduce strategic risk.<br><br>• **Enables countywide planning** – Economic development, employment, and regeneration can be designed to benefit the full geography, not just high-growth areas.<br>• **Targets investment to areas of need** – Indicators show clear differences between areas (e.g. GDHI: £26,149 in East vs £21,191 in West, and job density is 1.01 and 0.82 respectively) that can be addressed through unified policy and without governance friction. The West also has higher deprivation scores (IMD 17.16 vs 12.71 in the East) and carries 60% of the county's children in low-income households - factors that a single authority can address through pooled resources, targeted regeneration, and shared preventative service funding.<br>• **Reduces risk of postcode inequality** – A single structure avoids divergence in access to services or funding between two separate councils.<br>• **Improves delivery of levelling up goals** – National funding (e.g. LUF, SPF, Homes England) can be more effectively coordinated through a single accountable body, improving Gloucestershire's attractiveness as an investment partner.<br>• **Supports area-based targeting** – Through Neighbourhood Partnerships, the council can ensure each area has a local regeneration plan focused on its specific barriers to growth and access. | G |

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| | *B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration.* | The 1UA model allows for pooled budgets and shared commissioning strategies that prioritise support for those most in need. Vulnerability and deprivation can be addressed without artificial boundaries between areas.<br>• **Supports consistent targeting** – Shared datasets and analytics platforms allow services to target support to where indicators show the greatest unmet need (e.g. West Glos: 16,609 children in low-income families per 100k vs 12,274 in East).<br>• **Enables flexible, place-based intervention** – Services such as ASC, housing, and CSC already work with local partners (e.g. Family Hubs, VCFSE, schools) to deliver support through local forums, which would be retained and enhanced under 1UA.<br>• **Simplifies cross-cutting delivery** – Services such as mental health, substance misuse, and housing need require coordinated input across teams. A 1UA allows wraparound offers to be planned centrally and delivered locally.<br>• **Retains current safeguarding structures** – Countywide safeguarding boards, early help pathways, and integrated commissioning would remain intact, avoiding disaggregation risk.<br>• **Builds from neighbourhood action plans** – The Place Model already includes a neighbourhood planning model for co-produced regeneration strategies, which can be aligned to countywide outcomes under a single council. | G |
| | *C) Ensures that financial sustainability is not achieved at the expense of service levels.* | A 1UA model enables savings and efficiencies through consolidation - not service withdrawal. It allows services to be protected by reforming back-office structures, harmonising systems, and pooling reserves, particularly important in high-cost statutory functions like ASC and CSC.<br>• **Improves efficiency through strategic consolidation** – Consolidation savings can be achieved through shared platforms, aligned contracts, and joint infrastructure investment, as confirmed through extensive engagement with both upper and lower tier service professionals. | A |

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| | | • **Supports strategic commissioning and market shaping** – A single commissioning function can set consistent pricing, improve leverage with providers, and reduce fragmentation in markets such as ASC or education placements.<br>• **Enables financial flexibility and cross-subsidy** – Shared MTFS, pooled reserves and countywide income allow high-cost services in one locality to be sustained without placing disproportionate strain on that area's council tax base.<br>• **Reduces service fragmentation risk** – Disaggregation of statutory services like SEND and CSC was seen by officers as high-risk under 2UA. The 1UA model removes that risk entirely.<br>• **Supports long-term value** – Investment in digital, prevention, early help and neighbourhood working can be delivered once, reducing cost over time without cutting access or quality.<br>• **Reinvestment in frontline service delivery** – Most of the savings noted by service professionals are across back-office functions (and not directly from already overstretched front line teams). These savings can be reinvested back in front line delivery and interventions focussing on prevention and early intervention to drive improved outcomes.<br>• **Countywide Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit projected to reach ~£234m by Vesting Day (1 April 2028).** If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks.<br>• **Impact of the Fair Funding Review** – This also remains unknown at this time presenting further financial uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. | |



## Detailed analysis of **east/west two unitaries (2UA)** model against criterion

| Criteria | Sub-Criteria | Alignment Summary | RAG |
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| 1. Sensible single tier of local government | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned. | The 2UA model fully removes two-tier governance by creating two all-purpose councils. While this simplifies governance within each new authority, it introduces an internal boundary that cuts across several existing countywide systems and partnerships.<br>• **Removes two-tier structure** – Both county and district councils would be replaced by two new single-tier organisations which meets the overall criteria.<br>• **Simplifies local service access** – Residents would interact with only one council for all services within their local area.<br>• **Establishes clear internal governance** – Each authority would hold its own statutory roles and make decisions independently. | G |
| | B) Sensible economic breakdown: with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities | The 2UA model creates two financially independent authorities. While their tax bases are broadly similar at the point of transition, underlying income, need, and reserve disparities mean each council would have to manage its own risk, cost pressures, and investment strategies.<br>• **Creates separate tax bases and MTFSs** – The East and West would operate independent financial strategies, with no shared reserves or risk-pooling between councils.<br>• **Similar tax base across both areas** - The 2024 tax-base (Band D equivalents after council tax support) for two-unitary authorities model, shows a tax base in the West of 49% compared to 51% in the East [62].<br>• **Potential fiscal disparities** – Local Authority Debt is much higher in the West (£948) compared to the East (£674) and there is also a higher household benefit claimant rate (17.87% in the West compared to 13.79% in the East). These pressures would need to be | A |

[62] Council Tax Receipts, 23/24, MHCLG

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| | | managed by each individual authority with limited ability to create more fiscal resilience overall e.g. through pooled reserves etc.<br>• **Increased potential exposure for West** – Higher service costs particularly for ASC where spend per resident is £629 in West vs £405 in East. This is likely to put a significantly higher pressure on the West council given the majority of a unitary authority budget is attributed to ASC spend.<br>• **Opportunities to drive economic growth based on the unique strengths of each authority –** Opportunities to drive a coherent narrative within each authority for their sector specialisms (Clean Energy in the West and Technology in the East). This will support in creating more job opportunities, upskilling young people and attracting inward investment to kickstart economic growth across both UA areas. | |
| | C) Sensible geographic breakdown: which will help increase housing supply and meet local needs | The proposed East/West boundary reflects historic district groupings but introduces a new internal division across some shared service areas and travel-to-work zones. While this may support visibility and identity at a local level, it creates complexity in coordinating planning, housing, transport, and environmental strategy, all of which currently operate at county scale.<br>• **Builds on existing urban centres in the county –** Gloucestershire has two significant urban centres (Cheltenham and Gloucester) and the proposed East / West 2UA model aligns with these. In addition to this, the 2UA model is based on familiar district boundaries which will continue to enable the retention of unique local identities. This could also be helpful in designing place-based governance.<br>• **Reduces alignment with partners -** The Police, Fire and Rescue, ICB, Education partners all largely operate on a countywide footprint currently and the creation of 2UAs would mean partners likely need to engage with two different organisations which is inefficient and can also drive reduced influence for each of the respective UAs. | **A** |

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| | | • **Each UA can retain its own housing and HRA –** There are currently two councils in Gloucestershire with their own housing stock (c.5,000 homes each) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA): Stroud and Cheltenham. In the proposed 2UA model, there would be minimum disruption or change required to this arrangement given one of these is in the West and one in the East.<br>• **Challenges around private housing market** - Average house prices illustrate that the private housing market faces greater challenges in the West, where values are lower [63] (e.g. Gloucester £225,000; Forest of Dean £291,000) compared to the East (e.g. Cotswolds £419,000; Cheltenham £324,000), reducing profit margins and making it less likely that the private sector will deliver sufficient supply without public intervention.<br>• **Variations in housing supply** –Homelessness is higher in the West compared to the East [64] (0.21% in the West and 0.11% in the East) with housing land supply following the opposite trajectory (lower in the West at 3.83 vs 4.97 in the East). This could result in more demand for housing in the West with less supply to meet this efficiently within the new UA borders.<br>• **Risks inconsistency in spatial planning** – Without a shared framework, the East and West could pursue divergent housing policies, development standards, and regeneration priorities, which could make Gloucestershire less coherent in the eyes of investors and government.<br>• **Fragmentation of strategic housing functions and engagement -** Fragmentation of delivery partnerships and engagement / negotiations with housing associations, developers, and Homes England, increasing the risk of inconsistency in policy, pipeline delivery, and tenant standards across East and West Gloucestershire. | |

[63] House Prices, 2025, ONS
[64] Homelessness, 2024, ONS

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| 2. Right-sized local government | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless specific scenarios make this unreasonable) | Under the 2UA model, each authority would have a population above the 300,000 minimum threshold, but below the 500,000 MHCLG guideline. The East would serve ~310,641 people and the West ~348,635.<br><br>• **Meets the viability threshold** – Both authorities exceed 300,000 population, in line with recent two-unitary models (e.g. Cheshire East/West).<br>• **Falls short of MHCLG guidance** – Neither authority reaches the preferred 500,000+ benchmark for strategic scale but this could enable each UA to target their resources and focus on manageable population sizes and geographies (noting both the East and West would each have a densely populated metropolitan area with surrounding rural areas).<br>• **Comparable to successful precedent** – East (~310k) and West (~349k) align with other approved two-unitary areas such as Cheshire East/West, Dorset, and Somerset, which have demonstrated operational viability.<br>• **Aligns with precedent** – Dorset and Cheshire provide examples of approved two-UA models operating at similar population sizes. | **A** |
| | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers | The 2UA model can continue to offer some efficiencies within each authority, but also introduces duplication of systems, statutory posts, and governance. Gloucestershire also has some good examples of shared working across existing councils which can continue to be built on under a 2UA model (where beneficial and appropriate to do so).<br><br>• **Creates duplication for county wide services** – County-wide infrastructure would likely need to be split or duplicated e.g. in relation to governance structures; statutory roles e.g. two Director of Children's Services (DCSs), DASSs etc; Upper tier service systems used by adults and children's services etc. This will reduce the overall net savings achievable in a | **A** |

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| | | 2UA scenario (potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£10.7m per annum under a 2UA model).<br>• **Reduces potential economies of scale** – Whilst there remain continued opportunities to jointly commission specialist services e.g. cyber between the two authorities, it is possible that over time strategic contracts would be negotiated separately within each authority e.g. for children's and adults. This is likely to result in less market influence and a potential risk of suppliers 'playing both authorities against each other'. | |
| | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand financial shocks | Each new authority would need to independently build and sustain specialist teams and leadership capacity. Smaller scale may reduce resilience, particularly in hard-to-recruit areas such as social care.<br>• **Supports competitive positioning** – Each council can engage in targeted regional partnerships (e.g. East with WECA, West with Midlands Engine) to maximise sectoral strengths and funding opportunities.<br>• **Continued opportunities to share services in a targeted way to drive efficiencies and improve outcomes -** A 2UA model can continue to build on the strong foundation of shared services and wholly owned companies in Gloucestershire already (e.g. Ubico for waste management, Publica for transactional services, One Legal, Audit and Counterfraud etc). However, this can be done in a targeted way to enable the 2UAs to operate independently where tailored approaches are required to serve their populations but come together to achieve scale where it drives more value and increases resilience / capacity e.g. continuing to operate waste collection via Ubico to reduce costs, offer improved scale and a more consistent offer to residents.<br>• **Overall tax base similar across both UAs –** There is not likely to be significant variations in total council tax receipts between both UAs. | **A** |

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| | | • **Increased senior officer capacity** – In a 2UA model, both authorities may have to recruit for identical senior officer roles, allowing for greater capacity in senior leadership.<br>• **Could result in a significant financial burden for the West authority –** Given the significant imbalance in demand and cost between the East and West for ASC (e.g. £405 spend per resident in East v/s £629 in West), there could be a significant risk around Ordinary Residence implications which could create a financial challenge for the West authority.<br>• **Reduced workforce resilience -**Smaller teams are more exposed to capacity pressures and recruitment risk, especially in specialist roles. Service leads flagged risks in safeguarding, SEND, commissioning, and public health with concerns that "we'll each be half as strong".<br>• **Limits financial flexibility in hardship** – Without pooled reserves or a shared workforce, each council would need to absorb shocks (e.g. market failure, inflation) independently which does reduce overall financial resilience for both statutory and non-statutory services.<br>• **Additional overheads / administrative burden for shared services –** Where services are retained as shared, there is likely to be additional costs of managing governance, performance, budgetary allocations, potential disputes etc.<br>• **Potential budget deficits for the West on day one -** Current financial analysis indicates that the East council in a 2UA scenario would be established with a day one General Fund surplus of ~ £21.9m. Whilst a West council would be established with a day one General Fund deficit of ~ £21.9m. This assumes the full delivery of unidentified savings required by all seven councils between now and Vesting Day (1 April 2028) and does not fully account for the impact of the Fair Funding Review (subject to further detail from government). | |
| | D) Manageable transition costs | Transitioning to two authorities would involve higher implementation costs and programme complexity compared to a single authority (currently estimated at ~ £29.0m). This means potentially | **A** |

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| | | higher legal, staffing, ICT, and governance setup costs than a single-authority model, alongside increased programme complexity and coordination risk.<br><br>• **Requires two sets of transition and implementation governance** – Two constitutions, two electoral reviews, two consultations, two shadow authorities, and dual branding would be required.<br>• **Lowered aggregation risk -** A 2UA model would require aggregation of three district-specific services into one collective service per region, resulting in reduced administrative and transitional risks for aggregated services.<br>• **Disaggregation of systems and contracts** – High-risk, high-cost systems like Liquidlogic, Capita One, SAP, and GIS platforms would need to be split or reprocured, which are flagged as major risks and costs from discussions with service leads across ASC, ICT, and education.<br>• **Increased implementation portfolio staffing costs -** Two separate transition and implementation portfolio teams are likely to be set up (noting close working between the two in some areas). This is likely to result in additional internal and external costs particularly in areas such as programme management, Legal and governance support, IT support etc.<br>• **Prolonged implementation timelines -** Shadow arrangements, TUPE consultations, contract revisions, and legacy system exit timelines could vary between East and West.<br>• **Additional ongoing costs of additional shared services arrangements** - Any new shared services arrangements (e.g. potential considerations around coroners, registrars, archives etc) would require formal governance and charging frameworks to operate across both councils which are likely to add increased ongoing running costs and effort to delivery.<br>• **Costs to key services –** Essential services such as ASC and CSC require the appointment of statutory senior roles. These positions are mandated by law and therefore represent unavoidable costs that will be incurred by both councils. | |

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| 3. High quality, sustainable services | A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | The 2UA model would require the disaggregation of services that are currently delivered at county scale. This may increase the risk of fragmentation and inconsistency, especially where delivery depends on cross-county governance or shared systems. Delivery challenges have also been noted by stakeholders from the VCFSE sector particularly given increased duplication, fragmented commissioning, and reduced ability to coordinate delivery at scale.<br><br>• **Aligns delivery to distinct area profiles** – East could design services around its rural access needs, building on the Cotswolds' established community transport networks and the Tewkesbury Garden Communities. West could integrate regeneration and safeguarding priorities for Gloucester and the Forest of Dean.<br>• **Strengthens local partnerships** – Smaller geographies make it easier to work intensively with anchor institutions such as the University of Gloucestershire in the West and RAU (Royal Agricultural University) Cirencester in the East, embedding them into local economic and education strategies<br>• **Potential disruption to countywide transformation pipelines** – Significant multi-year transformation and digital programmes, largely at county level, already underway would likely need to be paused and rescoped for each authority – This could slow down improvements to service delivery.<br>• **Requires disaggregation of critical countywide services** – ASC, CSC, education, SEND, public health, emergency planning, transport would each need to be split out in a 2UA scenario (or at a minimum with some form of shared arrangements in place to enable delivery across two sovereign organisations). Given the statutory responsibilities associated with these services and the legislative requirements and governance, it is most likely services would need to be fully disaggregated to maintain clarity in accountability and enable long-term service stability. While this is possible, it is noted it will be extremely complex for example issues regarding ordinary residence (i.e. who pays for the cost of delivery) in social care as well as the disparity of need across the two unitary authorities. | **A** |

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| | | • **Requires the creation of a standalone Fire and Rescue Authority -** Under the provisions in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, fire and rescue will need to move to non-local authority governance, financial and service arrangement (i.e. the creation of an independent Fire and Rescue Authority), which will incur additional costs and may increase risk to sustainable service provision.<br>• **Reduces potential operational flexibility for transport and highways services** - Operational flexibility may be reduced if contractors are restricted to specific UA boundaries, limiting the ability to respond efficiently to local issues.<br>• **Introduces governance complexity** – Safeguarding, Legal, and Commissioning leads confirmed that multi-agency boards would need to be split or restructured, adding complexity to ICB engagement and joint delivery with NHS and Police.<br>• **Could lead to variation** – Differences in resources, priorities or capacity could lead to divergence in how services are delivered across the two areas with residents close to boundaries experiencing variations in provision.<br>• **Disaggregation introduces risk of fragmentation** – Education, ASC and public health services warned that users moving between East and West may face different systems, policies, and access routes.<br>• **Challenges for cross-border services** – School trusts, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), and regional partnerships may have to deal with two education strategies, SEND policies, and admissions frameworks, which was flagged by GAPH and FE as significant risks to consistency and collaboration.<br>• **Place-based delivery becomes harder to coordinate** – With two sovereign councils, divergence in how neighbourhood models are resourced and prioritised becomes more likely.<br>• **Lack of a unified capital programme** - Service leads across strategic finance, ASC, and planning emphasised the importance of a unified capital programme that allows resources to flow toward the county's most deprived areas, including Gloucester, Cheltenham, and the Forest, without needing to negotiate priorities between councils. | |

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| | | • **Examples of inter-authority collaboration** - Gloucestershire already operates several shared service models, including Ubico, One Legal, Publica, and shared audit arrangements. These demonstrate that inter-authority collaboration is possible and has worked successfully in Gloucestershire. *However, it is important to note that professional service leads emphasised that disaggregating countywide statutory functions such as ASC, CSC, and public health would be significantly more complex than these current arrangements given the significant cost, legal and care implications associated with them.* | |
| | B) Opportunity for public service reform including where this will lead to improved value for money | Each new authority would be responsible for designing and funding its own service transformation agenda. While local flexibility may increase, fragmentation of platforms and investment plans may limit the pace and scale of change.<br>• **Enables local flexibility** – each council can shape its own digital investment, reform priorities, and neighbourhood model in line with community needs and political ambition, alongside being agile and flexible enough to implement<br>• **Focused investment in area-specific reforms** – The East could prioritise digital health outreach and rural connectivity upgrades, and the West could channel regeneration funds into brownfield redevelopment and city-centre renewal in Gloucester, as identified in local growth plans.<br>• **Reduces scale for innovation** – Smaller transformation budgets and teams may limit ability to adopt digital and analytics tools at pace.<br>• **Increases technology fragmentation** – Without aligned procurement, the two authorities may implement incompatible systems (e.g. finance, social care case management, HR), reducing future interoperability and driving long-term inefficiency. | **A** |

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| | | • **Undermines shared learning and replication** – Innovation tested in one council may not scale to the other, limiting transferability of successful models and requiring duplicated discovery work and investment. | |
| | C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk to negative impact on crucial services | Separate authorities could create inconsistency in design and delivery of crucial services.<br><br>• **Risk to homelessness prevention** – Housing and homelessness services flagged that disaggregating commissioning and housing capital programmes could make it harder to manage countywide pressures, especially with differing homelessness rates in both regions (0.21% in the West and 0.11% in the East)<br>• **Public safety governance** – Disaggregating safeguarding structures would require new MASA boards and potentially separate Police partnership frameworks. Senior Police stakeholders stressed that this could weaken consistency of response in child protection and community safety.<br>• **Disrupts end-to-end service planning** – Care pathways, school placement systems, early help, and transition into adult services are all currently managed across one system, and disaggregation would complicate coordination and risk continuity. In addition to this, splitting services like admissions, EHCPs and SEND into East/West would create division over time and risk undermining delivery.<br>• **Disruption to hospital discharge and integrated care pathways** - This is an area of concern for service professionals, particularly as Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, located in the West, serves as the county's central acute site. The countywide discharge-to-assess (D2A) model, which provides short-term bedded care for assessment (Pathway 2), often leads to placements that become individuals' long-term homes. Introducing a requirement to source placements based on the boundaries of two separate unitary authorities, depending on ordinary residence, could reduce placement options and delay discharge processes. | **A** |

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| | | • **Ordinary residence implications for ASC -** The challenge around 'Ordinary Residence' is not only operationally / financially complex but impacts the most vulnerable residents if there are implications in terms of moving people across the county specifically those with long-standing placements.<br>• **May increase outcome variation** – Differing financial starting points, access to reserves, and workforce size could affect ability to maintain parity of service quality. In addition to this, divergent policies on exclusions, admissions, and SEND support could result in inequity between areas.<br>• **Inequitable access for vulnerable residents** - Splitting education commissioning and admissions could lead to inequitable access to the county's 14 specialist schools, especially for children with rare needs.<br>• **Disruption to home to school transport (HTST)** - due to disaggregated placement decisions and geography, particularly availability of drivers, fleet, and routes to special schools.<br>• **Requires robust governance and assurance** – Without shared framework; monitoring, escalation, and intervention pathways may vary - which service leads warned could expose gaps in statutory performance (e.g. SEND timeliness, EHCP outcomes).<br>• **Creates complexity for regional partners** – Public health, education, and safeguarding professionals expressed concern about splitting countywide responsibilities and the need to co-manage performance across two legal bodies.<br>• **Increase in out of county placements** – The creation of 2UAs would create an additional border for the county and result in working an 'out of county' services model, for services which sit within the same postcode. | |
| 4. Meets local needs | A) Meets local needs and is | The 2UA model aims to reflect established localities, with an East/West split broadly aligned to existing district boundaries. This may support a stronger sense of local identity and enable more | **A** |

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| | informed by local views | localised leadership and governance. However, some stakeholders raised concerns that splitting into two authorities would risk 'fragmenting already fragile cross-county partnerships' and pull focus away from place-wide strategies for education, health, and climate.<br><br>• **Localities do not always follow district lines** - Some communities span the proposed boundary or rely on countywide services and networks. The 2UA model risks weakening connections between these areas. Alongside this, Education, safeguarding and housing teams noted that many communities rely on shared infrastructure and networks. A 2UA model risks creating artificial barriers around lived geography.<br>• **Supported by some local voices –** Stakeholders in Cheltenham and some parish councils suggested that smaller units may improve visibility and local responsiveness.<br>• **Risk of undermining cross-county place design** – The Place Model assumes consistent Neighbourhood Partnerships and locality governance. Splitting delivery governance may result in inconsistent coverage or investment.<br>• **Some community feedback highlighted risks around marginalising communities** – The Diocese and parts of the VCFSE sector expressed concern that splitting Gloucestershire would further marginalise communities already on the edge, especially in rural transition zones like the Severn Vale and North Cotswolds.<br>• **Some resident feedback highlighted concerns around creating a divide** - Concerns were consistently noted by some residents (who responded to a survey issued out by all Gloucestershire councils in July 2025) around fairness, division, and efficiency – with particular references to "creating a rich side and a poor side of the county". | |
| | B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural | The 2UA model allows each new council to retain visible place identity, which may strengthen civic pride. It supports branding and ceremonial continuity, but only if local governance and engagement are properly resourced and consistent. | **A** |

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| | and historic importance | • **Aligns to known geographies** – District geographies in the East and West already support local branding, parish engagement, and heritage-based governance.<br>• **Reflects distinct demographic and community profiles** – EQIA work suggests the East UA combines a more diverse urban centre (Cheltenham) with older rural areas (Cotswold, Tewkesbury), while the West UA combines Gloucester's higher ethnic diversity with older rural communities (Forest of Dean, parts of Stroud). This supports locally tailored equalities frameworks across both UAs.<br>• **Enables place-led branding** – East could emphasise its international tourism offer around the Cotswolds, Regency Cheltenham, and cultural festivals; West could promote the Forest of Dean's green heritage and industrial legacy and Gloucester's historic docklands regeneration as part of its identity.<br>• **May enhance local connection** – Smaller organisations may allow residents to feel more seen, particularly in distinct areas like the Forest, Cotswolds, and Stroud Valleys.<br>• **Strengthens local heritage partnerships** – Smaller authorities could work more intensively with heritage bodies, e.g. Gloucester Cathedral Chapter in the West and Cotswold Conservation Board in the East, to protect and showcase local assets.<br>• **Not a guarantee of civic strength** – As several service leads noted, "having smaller boundaries doesn't automatically deliver stronger community governance." Success depends on local design and sustained political investment.<br>• **Civic identity retained** – Town and parish councils, mayoralties, and ceremonial roles would remain in place. For Gloucester a parish (city council) would be created, and for Cheltenham, options would be considered for parishing unparished areas of the town. These new parishes would serve to strengthen the identity and significant cultural and historic value of each city/town within Gloucestershire<br>• **Supports continuity of place names** - Councils can adopt names, branding, and narratives rooted in local geography and history. | |

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| | | • **Inconsistent rollout of locality models** – Without a shared vision or resourcing strategy, Neighbourhood Partnerships and area boards may develop unevenly between the two councils, risking postcode variation in access to voice and influence.<br>• **Risk from divergence in civic promotion -** Without coordinated messaging, the two councils could present different external identities for Gloucestershire, weakening the countywide brand.<br>• **Heavy focus on the two urban centres** - Findings from local engagement with residents in July 2025 highlighted that it could be difficult to create local identities for each unitary that do not revolve around the largest towns which would exclude other areas. | |
| | C) Addresses local concerns | The 2UA model could also increase inconsistency in service design and delivery unless shared frameworks are agreed.<br><br>• **Enables localised service design -** West Gloucestershire could focus on tackling urban deprivation and higher ASC/CSC demand, drawing on targeted regeneration in Gloucester and the Forest of Dean. The East could prioritise rural access needs, while maximising the economic impact of Cheltenham's Golden Valley Development and related secure tech sector, alongside the Cotswolds' tourism and agri-tech industries<br>• **Magnifies financial and capacity disparities** – Demographic and Economic data shows that the West has higher ASC costs, higher household benefits claimant rates, higher homelessness, lower income, and higher deprivation. This may create potential challenges for the West Authority in terms of financial resilience and the ability to meet local needs effectively.<br>• **Opportunities for joint working will remain across the 2UAs** – Employment zones, housing markets, transport corridors, and flood risk do not respect the East-West divide. For example, major commuting flows link Cheltenham, Gloucester, and Tewkesbury across the | **A** |

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| | | proposed boundary; the Golden Valley tech corridor and proposed Severn Edge energy project both require countywide planning to maximise investment potential. | |
| 5. Supports devolution arrangements | A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution | In a 2UA structure, each new council would be the accountable body for its own area so there would not be a single Gloucestershire voice in national negotiations for devolution.<br><br>• **Scope for tailored devolution asks** – Two councils could negotiate complementary but distinct devolution priorities, enabling the East to focus on innovation and cyber skills linked to The Innovation Village at Royal Agricultural University Development, while the West prioritises clean energy investment and infrastructure for the Berkeley Site.<br>• **Potential to broaden regional alliances** – East could strengthen alignment with WECA and Oxfordshire for tech and high-value manufacturing; West could align with Worcestershire/Herefordshire or the West Midlands to secure agri-tech, tourism, and industrial regeneration funding.<br>• **Could increase coordination demands** – The two councils may need to join up on priorities, funding bids, and delivery models for housing, transport, skills, and climate programmes to drive increased influence and negotiating power.<br>• **Adds negotiation complexity** – Government may seek assurance that the two councils can act with unity on countywide matters. Stakeholder feedback from FE colleges and the VCFSE sector emphasised that clarity of leadership is essential to secure confidence from Whitehall.<br>• **Risks divergence in place vision** – Without a shared countywide strategy, the two councils could set different priorities for Neighbourhood Partnerships, local regeneration, and climate action, weakening a consistent Gloucestershire offer in negotiations.<br>• **Feedback from Economic Development and Planning**: Service leaders in economic development and planning warned that without joint frameworks for infrastructure, skills, and housing, the county's competitive edge could be diluted in a crowded regional market. | **A** |

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| | | • **May require dual representation** – Combined Authorities like WECA or Oxfordshire may need to engage with two Gloucestershire councils, complicating governance and coordination.<br>• **Place delivery risks** – Without countywide oversight, devolved funding for Neighbourhood Partnerships could be designed and resourced differently between East and West, creating variation in local empowerment models. | |
| | B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | Under a 2UA model, Gloucestershire would be split into two councils, East and West, with populations of ~310,000 and ~349,000. There is a chance that each of the two UAs may join a different strategic authority if there is political divergence which has implications for scale and coherence.<br><br>• **Still meets 1.5m minimum if coordinate groupings** – If both councils join different groupings (e.g. East joins WECA; West aligns with West Midlands), the full benefits of scale could be lost, and we could fall short of the minimum thresholds, but if they coordinate with each other then the minimum thresholds can be met<br>• **Worcestershire and Herefordshire group** - Two smaller Gloucestershire authorities would cause concerns around meeting the minimum 1.5m benchmark in all potential combined authority scenarios e.g. Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a combined population of c.806,000 so if only of the one Gloucestershire authorities was to form a combined authority with these two areas, this would fall short of the minimum 1.5 million threshold (at a max, it would be c.1.2m).<br>• **Flexibility in regional partnerships** – By joining different Combined Authorities, each council could target the most relevant funding streams and policy platforms for its local economy, increasing the total range of investment opportunities for Gloucestershire.<br>• **More comparable relative size with partner authorities -** In terms of relative size of two smaller Gloucestershire authorities compared with potential partners, this may be more | G |

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| | | palatable. The populations of c.300,000-350,000 for Gloucestershire would not be significantly higher than potential partners particularly in the case of a WECA option. | |
| 6. Local engagement and empowerment | A) Enables stronger community engagement | By reducing the size of each council to ~310k (East) and ~349k (West), the 2UA model could allow councillors and officers to work more closely with their local communities. Some stakeholders believe this scale feels more approachable than a single countywide body. However, the quality of engagement would depend on how each council designs, resources, and sustains its locality governance model.<br><br>• **Smaller footprint may improve visibility** – Members and officers could be more locally embedded, with shorter travel distances and potentially closer relationships to communities.<br>• **Allows more localised decision-making** – Committee structures and warding arrangements can be designed to reflect local culture, population density, and settlement patterns in each area.<br>• **Service leads stressed importance of design** – ASC, CSC, and housing officers emphasised that engagement structures need dedicated staffing, budget, and authority to work effectively, with size alone not guaranteeing impact.<br>• **Improved councillor–resident connection** – Smaller populations and geographies make it easier for members to be directly accessible, as already seen in district-level ward surgeries in Stroud, Cotswold, and Cheltenham.<br>• **Potential to embed local culture in governance** – Allows warding and committee structures to reflect distinctive settlement patterns, e.g. rural parish clusters in the Cotswolds or ward-based representation in Gloucester.<br>• **Risk of inconsistency** – Each authority may take a different approach to engagement, leading to uneven governance strength across the county. | G |

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| | | • **Maintaining partner coherence is harder** – VCFSE and parish representatives warned that cross-county organisations may face duplication in engagement, consultation, and partnership work. | |
| | B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment | Each authority would be responsible for designing and maintaining its own locality governance offer in a way that aligns with its geography, culture, and service profile. This could create opportunities for innovation but risks fragmentation if frameworks are not aligned. There is strong support around an emphasis on neighbourhood-level engagement and the creation of place-based structures that reflect where people live. Feedback suggested that two smaller councils might 'create stronger local ties,' but this would depend heavily on capacity and willingness to devolve power within each.<br><br>• **Allows place-based design** – Each council could shape governance in dialogue with parish and town councils, community groups, and residents to reflect local traditions and priorities.<br>• **May reflect civic identity more closely** – The West could prioritise structures for strong rural parish engagement in the Forest and Stroud Valleys, while the East could focus on urban–rural connectivity in Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Cotswolds.<br>• **Scope to pilot local decision-making** – Smaller councils could trial devolved budgets for specific localities, mirroring models in Buckinghamshire and Dorset, but adapted to Gloucestershire contexts.<br>• **Encourages innovation in community partnerships** – Each authority could adapt the Neighbourhood Partnership principles to local capacity and needs, enabling diversity in engagement while keeping community leadership central.<br>• **Risk of fragmentation in place delivery** – The Place Model envisions consistent Neighbourhood Partnerships across Gloucestershire. Under 2UA, these could evolve differently in each council, leading to unequal investment or capability. | G |

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| | | • **Risk of duplication or gaps** – Where partnerships (e.g. safeguarding boards, housing associations, climate forums) span the East–West boundary, separate locality models could create administrative complexity and reduce efficiency.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit** – By removing layers of government, some residents may feel as though the unitary is far removed from their local issues which can decrease engagement. | |
| 7. Environmental and climate protection | A) Ensures the new authority/authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans. | The 2UA model could potentially mean splitting existing specialist teams, strategies, and funding streams, creating a higher risk of inconsistency and duplication.<br><br>• **Could still retain strategic Climate Leadership Gloucestershire –** This already operates across seven councils currently and could continue to provide an overarching collaboration mechanism between the two UAs to strategically coordinate some activities where scale offers improved outcomes / efficiencies.<br>• **Requires duplication of plans and delivery** – Each council may produce separate climate and nature plans, scrutiny arrangements, and reporting cycles, increasing administrative cost.<br>• **Risks weaker investment leverage -** Countywide funding bids (e.g. for nature recovery, flood defence, EV charging infrastructure) may lose scale and competitiveness if submitted separately.<br>• **Feedback from Flood Risk and Planning leads** – Officers stressed that some climate and flood issues are inherently cross-boundary and require shared governance to avoid duplication or gaps.<br>• **Neighbourhood Partnerships could diverge** – Without a shared approach, local environmental action plans could vary in scope, resourcing, and ambition between East and West. | G |

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| | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB). | The 2UA model is still likely to require cross-boundary coordination for shared natural systems.<br>• **Aligns to clear geographic distinctions** – East: Cotswolds AONB, river catchments, rural agricultural land; West: Forest of Dean, Severn Estuary, urban-rural interface.<br>• **Still requires joint governance for shared assets** – River catchments, wildlife corridors, and flood plains cross the proposed boundary would need shared planning and investment to remain effective.<br>• **Service leads warned of coordination risk** – Planning and environmental health officers flagged that without aligned design codes and infrastructure plans, developers and land managers could face conflicting requirements in different parts of the county. | G |
| | C) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. "Fairer Greener Forest", Climate Emergency responses). | Each authority would be able to maintain and expand current district-led climate commitments, but with differing capacities and investment potential depending on their starting points.<br>• **Allows continuity of local plans** – Existing commitments like “Fairer Greener Forest,” Stroud’s climate strategy, and Cheltenham’s climate targets could be retained and developed.<br>• **Maintains political accountability** – Climate and environmental decisions would remain close to elected members and communities, which some stakeholders believe would encourage stronger local ownership.<br>• **Requires alignment where appropriate** – Shared goals such as emissions reduction, transport decarbonisation, and biodiversity corridors would still need coordinated policy to prevent gaps or duplication. This is particularly relevant to countywide assets like the proposed Severn Edge project, which spans clean hydrogen, nuclear, and synthetic aviation fuel production, and contributes directly to Gloucestershire’s net zero targets. This is | G |

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| | | something that could be coordinated by a strategic countywide forum (building on the existing Climate Leadership Gloucestershire principles). | |
| 8. Civic engagement and participative democracy | A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy. | Both authorities would be able to develop civic engagement strategies suited to their geographies and communities. The smaller scale may enable closer relationships between councils and residents, but investment and commitment will vary depending on resources and leadership.<br>• **May feel more accessible to residents** - Councils serving 310k–350k residents may be seen as more approachable, with shorter decision chains and closer member–resident relationships.<br>• **Risk of unequal investment** - Financial or political priorities may lead to different levels of civic participation infrastructure.<br>• **Requires long-term commitment** - Strong participative democracy relies on consistent leadership and culture, not just structural change.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit -** Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. | **A** |
| 9. Inclusive growth and equity | A) Ability to tackle disparities in wealth setting up one unitary authority or two unitary authorities. | The 2UA model would allow each council to focus on its own economic geography and priorities, which may improve local targeting of interventions. However, without a shared tax base or pooled reserves, there is no direct mechanism to redistribute resources between East and West, meaning inequalities may persist or grow over time without intervention. | **A** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | • **Greater ability to focus on local economic drivers** – East could align its growth strategy to maximise Cheltenham's festival economy, and Cotswolds tourism; West could drive regeneration of Gloucester's city centre redevelopment, and Forest of Dean industrial renewal.<br>• **Limits redistribution capacity** – Income and demand would need to be managed independently, reducing ability to manage known variations and inequalities across the East and West.<br>• **Service leads voiced concern** – Finance, ASC, and CSC officers warned that over time, the West could face greater difficulty sustaining service quality and investment without a countywide balancing mechanism. Demographic projections show the West has higher deprivation levels and demand pressures. This has implications for long-term financial sustainability, preventative care, and integration with NHS partners.<br>• **Neighbourhood regeneration may diverge** – The Place Model's ambition for consistent Neighbourhood Partnerships could be undermined if each council invests at different levels in deprived areas.<br>• **Risk of splitting resources** - EQIA analysis shows that economic challenges are different in each part of the county and can affect groups protected under equalities law. In the West, young people face higher unemployment. In the East, there is less access to apprenticeships and training, which can particularly impact young people and disabled residents. A 2UA model could target these local issues more directly, but splitting resources may make it harder to run countywide programmes to reduce these gaps. | |
| | B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration. | The scale of need, particularly in the West, may place more pressure on local finances and delivery unless partnership structures or funding mechanisms are established. There is a risk that different parts of Gloucestershire could become aligned to different combined authorities fragmenting influence and complicating engagement with regional priorities. | G |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | • **Closer integration with local VCFSE networks** – Smaller councils could embed local community organisations (e.g. GL Communities in the West, Cotswold Friends in the East) directly into regeneration planning, improving reach and trust<br>• **Exposes resource gaps** – The West's higher need may not be matched by local income, making it harder to fund regeneration and preventative work without external support.<br>• **Requires robust local commissioning** – Each council would need strong capability to identify, fund, and measure interventions, which was a challenge raised in ASC and housing disaggregation discussions with service professionals, where market capacity varies significantly between East and West. | |
| | C) Ensures that financial sustainability is not achieved at the expense of service levels. | With two independent MTFSs, each council would control its financial decisions, giving flexibility to align budgets with local priorities. However, without shared reserves or risk pooling, cost pressures in high-demand services could lead to service reduction, particularly in the West.<br>• **Enables local control over budgets** – Each authority can shape its own financial strategy to align with its values and priorities.<br>• **Enables targeted financial planning** – East could direct reserves toward rural health access; West could prioritise safeguarding and early intervention in high-need urban areas.<br>• **Potential to attract different funding streams** – Separate authorities could pursue distinct grant opportunities, widening the overall pool of external investment brought into Gloucestershire.<br>• **Increases pressure on high-cost services** – The West, with higher ASC and CSC spend per resident, may face difficult decisions if cost pressures outpace funding.<br>• **Creates risk of service variation** – One council may be able to protect frontline services more easily than the other. | **A** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | • **Could require trade-offs** – Without pooled reserves or cross-council subsidy, service levels may be more exposed to short-medium- and long-term budget constraints.<br>• **High Needs funding uncertainty** – Stakeholders raised concerns about how Gloucestershire's current countywide High Needs deficit would be apportioned fairly, warning that uneven settlement could undermine education support in one area.<br>• **Countywide Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit projected to reach ~£234m by vesting day (1 April 2028).** If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks.<br>• **Impact of the Fair Funding Review -** This also remains unknown at this time presenting further financial uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. | |

# Appendix 6: Proposed Service Delivery Models

## Scope of services considered

### Corporate services

- Digital & ICT
- Asset Management & Property
- Strategic Finance
- Pension Fund
- Insurance & Counter Fraud
- HR
- Transactional Services incl. Payroll, AP / AR
- Legal Services (Incl. One Legal)
- Democratic Services & Elections
- Communications
- Transformation
- Planning, Performance & Insight (Data)
- Information Governance
- Customer Management

### Front-line upper tier services (only county council services currently)

- Public Health
- Adult Social Care
- Children's & Education
- Transport & Highways
- Archives
- Fire & Rescue
- Trading Standards
- Coroners
- Libraries
- Registrars
- Employment and Skills

### Front-line lower tier services OR both (only districts OR both county and districts currently)

- Public Protection
- Emergency Planning
- Revenue & Benefits
- Housing Strategy, Maintenance & Homelessness
- Leisure & Culture
- Economy & Sustainability (incl. Tourism & Visitor Economy)
- Planning & Building Control
- Development & Regeneration
- Waste & Environmental Services
- Parking
- Cemetery and Crematoria

## Defining the key parameters used

| | High | Medium | Low |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Change Required** - Transformation or alignment needed to realise the benefit. | **Fundamental redesign of team structure, roles, and processes; introduction of new systems or services; significant cultural change.** | **Moderate restructuring, role changes, or process improvements; some new tools or systems introduced.** | **Minor adjustments to workflows or responsibilities; no structural or system-wide changes.** |
| **One - off Costs** - The upfront investment required to implement the change | **Over £1,000,000 – Includes major IT systems, infrastructure, consultancy, or large-scale training programmes.** | **£500,000–£1,000,000 – Includes moderate system upgrades, recruitment drives, or targeted training.** | **Under £500,000 – Includes minor equipment, short-term consultancy, or small-scale training.** |
| **Recurring Cost** - Ongoing annual expenses to maintain or operate the new arrangement. | **Over £500,000 annually – Ongoing staffing, licensing, or service delivery costs.** | **£250,000–£500,000 annually – Include staffing, subscriptions, or maintenance.** | **Under £250,000 annually – Minimal ongoing costs such as software licences or admin support.** |
| **Aggregation Benefits** - The benefits of aggregating services based on both financial and non financial benefits | **Strong efficiencies and strategic gains from combining services; consistent delivery and reduced duplication.** | **Some coordination and savings achieved, but benefits are limited** | **Minimal improvement realised through aggregation** |

## Corporate Services

# Corporate Services | Summary (1 of 3)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Digital & ICT** | Different delivery models across the Councils.<br><br>County / Tewkesbury / Glos City / Stroud - In-House<br><br>Cotswold / Forest of Dean / Chelt - Publica | **In-house digital service within the new unitary council**<br>*(Noting that some specialist functions e.g. cyber security, hardware and software, may still be outsourced).* | **High** | **High** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Asset Management & Property** | **All councils currently deliver property and asset services largely in-house.**<br>*However, there are external consultants and framework partners utilised for specialist services by councils.*<br>*Note services previously delivered by Publica were brought in house with the exception of one health and safety advisor.* | **Hybrid:** The new unitary council retains strategic and compliance functions in-house with external framework consultants for specialist skills e.g. valuations.<br>Note: This excludes commercial property | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Pensions** | **Operated and administered in-house via the Gloucestershire Pension Fund within GCC for all councils in Glos** | **Remains operated in-house in the new UA**<br><br>The new unitary council takes on the role of the administering authority via the Gloucestershire Pension Fund | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Low** |
| No discussions so far | **Strategic Finance** | **In House** | **Single in-house team** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Insurance & Counterfraud**<br><br>***CFEU***<br>***ARA***<br>***SWAP – South West Audit Partnership*** | | **Single in- house team** with traded services<br>Note: bring corporate fraud together | | | | |

# **Corporate Services** | Summary (2 of 3)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers Template | **Democratic Services** | **In-House across all councils** | **Single in-house function** with local delivery teams. Also combined Democratic services and elections teams into one team. | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **High** |
| | **Elections** | **In-House across all councils** | **Single in-house function** with local delivery teams. Also combined Democratic services and elections teams into one team. | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **High** |
| No discussions so far | **Legal Services**<br><br>**Incl. One Legal** | **Mixed –** One Legal between 4 councils, quasi shared service between 2 councils and in-house for county | *One Legal service in house with traded services* | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Comms** | **In house** | **Single in-house team** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **HR** | | **Single in-house team** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Transactional Services incl. Payroll, AP / AR** | | **Single in-house team with traded services** | | | | |

# **Corporate Services** | Summary (3 of 3)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| No discussions so far | **Planning, Performance & Insight (Data)** | **In house** | **Single in-house team** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Information Governance** | **In house** | **Single in-house team** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Transformation** | **In house** | **Single in-house team** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Customer Management** | In house | **Single in-house team** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Internal audit** | **Tewkesbury** – In-House<br><br>**Cheltenham, Cotswold and Forest of Dean** – South West Audit Partnership (SWAP)<br><br>**Gloucestershire County** – In-house service which is also provided to Gloucester City Council and Stroud. | **Delivery model to be determined following an options analysis of the different options.** | | | | |

## Front-line upper tier services

# Front-Line Upper Tier Services | Summary (1 of 2)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Public Health** | **In-House management & advisory with a range of commissioned services** | **In-House management & advisory with a range of commissioned services** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Adult Social Care** | ASC is **delivered in-house by GCC**, and the care market is managed centrally, with countywide contracts and provider relationships | **A single in-house ASC service** under the new unitary authority, retaining the current DASS structure and statutory responsibilities, with all delivery, commissioning, and safeguarding functions managed centrally and delivered locally | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Childrens** | **Mixed Delivery Models**<br><br>The service is managed overall in-house but there are also a number of elements of the service commissioned out e.g. Family and Youth Hub development | **Overall Children's Services are managed in house** but continue to commission specific areas as needed | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| | **Education** | **In-house**<br><br>*Note: Cross-authority music service* | **A single in-house education service** retained within the new unitary authority | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Medium** |

# Front-Line Upper Tier Services | Summary (2 of 2)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Archives** | **In-house** | **Remains In - house** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **N/A** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Transport & Highways** | **In-House**<br>With outsourced service delivery | In-House with outsourced delivery | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Low** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Fire & Rescue** | **In-House -** GCC currently holds the governance and service responsibilities. | **Remains In-House -** Supported by Unitary Council (not a county council) | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **N/A** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Trading Standards** | **In-House** | **Remains In-House -** Supported by Unitary Council (not a county council) | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **N/A** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Coroners** | **In-House** | **Remains In-House** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **N/A** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Libraries** | **In-House** | **Remains In-House** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Low** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Registrars** | **In-House** | **Remains In-House** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **N/A** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Employment and Skills** | **In-House** | **A single in-house Employment and Skills team is established within the new unitary council** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **N/A** |

Front-line lower tier services OR both (only districts OR both county and districts currently)

# Front-Line Lower Tier Services | Summary (1 of 4)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Public Protection** | **Mixed.** Most services are delivered in-house by district councils though Publica provides services for Forest of Dean and Cotswold with some local differences. There are also some services (in some councils) contracted out e.g. stray dogs, contaminated land. | **Single In-House Countywide Service**<br><br>(Noting that some specialist or very low volume functions e.g. stray dogs may still be outsourced). | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Discussed under Public Protection | **Emergency Planning**<br>*Discussed briefly under Public Protection but was not a detailed discussion – Ratings therefore may need to be refined* | **In-House across all councils currently** | **Single in-house team** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Low** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Revenue & Benefits** | **In-House**<br>Cotswold and FoD via Publica | **Single In-House Countywide Service**<br>Unlikely to be in place for day 1 but this would be the longer-term aspiration. | **High** | **High** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Joint Officers Template | **Cemetery and Crematoria** | **In – House** across all 7 councils | **Single in-house delivery team** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Housing Strategy, Maintenance & Homelessness** | Mixed - All councils have some elements in-house but note:<br>Stroud and Chelt have in-house DLOs and their own housing stock.<br>FoD and Cotswold have shared housing staff in Publica (shared with West Oxfordshire too)<br>Glos City host the Strategic Housing Partnership which is countywide across all 7 councils.<br>All councils commission some services externally | **Hybrid Model –** Merge 2 HRA's, have a single head, delivery by east and west teams. | **High** | **High** | N/A | **High** |

# Front-Line Lower Tier Services | Summary (2 of 4)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Economy & Sustainability -** *Climate & Sustainability* | In-House teams in each council but there is also a county-wide Climate Leadership Gloucestershire Team managed by Glos City.<br>o be updated on 31.07.25 | **In-House Strategic Climate Function** *with local delivery of specific projects as required* | **High** | **Medium** | N/A | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Economy & Sustainability -** *Economic Development* | All councils have in-house ED capabilities noting variations in terms of scope of services, structures and extent of partnership working | **Single Strategic Economic Development Function with Local Delivery Presence** | **High** | **Medium** | N/A | **High** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Economy & Sustainability -** *Tourism & Visitor Economy* | All Councils have small in-house local tourism teams but they are all also part of (and put varying amounts of funding towards) the Cotswolds Plus Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). | **Single Visitor Economy Function with Local Place Marketing**<br><br>*Not yet been determined if the strategic element would be in-house or as a separate organisation* | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Leisure** | Stroud - **In-House model**<br><br>**5 of the 6 councils outsource provision** *(3 to Freedom Leisure; CBC to the Chelt Trust and Tewkesbury to Places Leisure)* | **Harmonisation of current contractual positions over time to move to a sustainable and aligned model** | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Culture & Heritage** | **Mixed**<br>A number of councils have this in-house; Cotswold outsource running of museum to Freedom Leisure; A lot of partnership working e.g. Glos City have a strategic partnership with Gloucester Culture Trust | **Codesigned future delivery models with the sector and communities with a consideration of future implications related to devolution** | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen |

# Front-Line Lower Tier Services | Summary (3 of 4)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Planning & Building Control** | **Planning:**<br>In-house | **Single in-house planning service with central strategic functions and area-based DM teams for local planning permission.** | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |
| | | **Building Control:**<br>**Mixed -** Some in-house and some with shared arrangements e.g. - Gloucester City and Stroud partnership / Cheltenham and Tewkesbury | **Single in-house countywide service with local delivery teams and central coordination for compliance.** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Development & Regeneration** | In house | **Single in-house team** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Joint Officers Template | **Parking** | **Mixed.** Most services are delivered in-house by district councils though Publica provides services for Forest of Dean and Cotswold with some local differences. .<br><br>All enforcement activities at GCC are outsourced | **Mixed:**<br>In-house management and notice processing.<br>Outsourced physical enforcement.<br>Consolidate charging policies including EV charging | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |

# Front-Line Lower Tier Services | Summary (4 of 4)

| | | | 1UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Waste & Environmental Services (Incl. Ubico)** | **Waste Disposal and HRCs: Mixed Delivery -** Through in house teams and contractors such as Ubico and FCC (Javelin Park) | **Disposal**: In-House Strategic Service, and Disposal Authority Role for the new UA<br><br>**HRCs:** Ubico continue to manage HRC Operations | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **High** |
| | | **Waste Collection: Delivered via Ubico** | **Remains delivered by Ubico** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Low –** *Consistency and standardisation* |
| | | **Environmental Services - Mixed Delivery -** in house team with some elements contracted out, some delivered by Ubico e.g. tree planting | **Single in house team** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |

# Appendix 7: Equalities Impact Assessment (1UA)

The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty which states that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act
2. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
3. Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

This document demonstrates how the Council is meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty by setting out the findings of an equality analysis that has been undertaken in relation to a proposed change to assess whether it has a disproportionate impact on people who share a protected characteristic. The Council's Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process covers additional groups not 'protected' by section149 of the Equality Act 2010, including care leavers and care experienced adults.

**Background**

| | |
|---|---|
| Title of the proposed change being assessed i.e. the policy, service or other development | Local Government Reorganisation |

| Describe the purpose of the proposed change and the intended outcomes |
|---|
| This Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been developed to support the consideration of proposals to restructure local government in Gloucestershire, assessing both the single unitary authority (1UA) and two unitary authorities (East / West) (2UA) options.<br><br>This document focuses on the 1UA option only, the proposed makeup of which would comprise the whole of Gloucestershire and is based on the footprint of Gloucestershire County Council: |

*Table 8: Structure and 2023 Population of Option 1*[65]

| Gloucestershire Option | |
|---|---|
| **Cheltenham** | 120,255 |
| **Cotswold** | 91,490 |
| **Forest of Dean** | 89,104 |
| **Gloucester** | 134,991 |
| **Stroud** | 124,540 |

[6565] Mid 2023 Population Estimates, ONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Tewkesbury** | 98,896 |
| **Gloucestershire Total** | 659,276 |

The purpose of this assessment is to understand and evaluate the potential impacts of these changes on all service users and council staff with protected characteristics.

The reorganisation of local government is a significant change that could affect how services are delivered, how decisions are made, and how residents engage with their local councils.

This assessment aims to:

- Identify any potential positive or negative impacts on service users with protected characteristics
- Consider how these impacts might differ between the one-unitary and two-unitary models
- Highlight opportunities to promote equality and mitigate any adverse effects

It is intended for this EqIA to be a live document, updated as proposals are refined and further engagement with stakeholders takes place. Additionally, after a decision has been made by Government on the chosen model for Gloucestershire, to inform implementation.

| Who is affected by the proposals? | |
|---|---|
| Service users: | Yes |
| Wider community: | Yes |
| Workforce: | Yes |
| Other (please specify): | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Decision to be taken and decision maker | The decision under consideration is whether the local government structure in Gloucestershire is replaced by either:<br>• A single unitary authority; or<br>• Two unitary authorities (East / West)<br><br>This decision will significantly impact how local services are delivered, how residents engage with local government, and how resources are allocated across the county.<br><br>Although the ultimate decision will be made by Government, councils in Gloucestershire are able |

| | |
|---|---|
| | to make a local decision on their preferred model to present to Government. |

**Information and Data Collection**

Summarise how you have collected the information and data required to assess the current situation (section 3.1 below) and the potential or actual impact of the proposed change (section 3.2 below) on those who share the protected characteristics and the additional groups (e.g. survey of services users, running community focus groups, analysing service usage data, engaging with staff networks). The actual information and data should be set out in Appendix 1 (Service Users) and Appendix 2 (district & county staff in Gloucestershire).

If there are any gaps, include an action in section 4 to fill these. This does not mean that you cannot complete the equality impact assessment, but you need to follow-up the action and revisit as part of the monitoring and review arrangements set out in section 5.

| Stakeholders | Engagement and Consultation | Other Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Service Users / Wider Community | Workshops with services across the county council and district councils to understand the risks and opportunities associated with aggregation and disaggregation of each service.<br><br>A public local engagement process has also been undertaken across Gloucestershire, designed and delivered by an independent, external engagement company - Cratus.<br><br>The engagement process includes an online survey with both structured and open-ended questions, a dedicated microsite, 12 in-person events (two per district), and two online webinars. A total of 3,112 survey responses were received. | Outputs of disaggregation / aggregation service workshops.<br><br>Cratus engagement report. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Workforce | A workforce pulse survey has been undertaken across all councils.<br><br>Top line outputs from the survey are:<br>• 86% of staff understand what LGR might mean in Gloucestershire<br>• 82% of staff understand what devolution might mean for Gloucestershire<br>• 63% understand the difference between LGR and devolution<br>• 75% of staff think messages are being well communicated<br>• Email and staff briefings are the most popular ways staff like to hear messages about LGR/devo<br>• 46% of staff don't feel confident their views will be listened to<br>• 78% feel confident to ask questions<br>• 69% have felt no impact on morale<br>• 78% feel supported by leadership and management<br>• 90% feel they can discuss with their line manager | Staff engagement outputs from the pulse survey on LGR and Devolution across the seven councils in Gloucestershire |
| Partners | To support the wider local engagement being delivered across Gloucestershire to inform the development of LGR proposals, Gloucestershire County Council's (GCC) senior leadership conducted meetings with key stakeholders, with whom they had | LGR Stakeholder Engagement report |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | established relationships, across June – August 2025.<br>The meetings addressed the following, with some stakeholders choosing to provide further feedback via email or letter:<br>• Update stakeholders on how LGR Full Proposals and Devolution discussions are progressing in Gloucestershire.<br>• Update stakeholders on the LGR policy position of GCC's new Cabinet to be agnostic and evidence-led in considering both a one unitary and two unitary model.<br>• Provide information on the timetable and key processes underway.<br>• Understand more about how LGR / Devolution could impact specific stakeholders / organisations, what is important to them in relation to this topic and address any concerns or issues for them.<br>• Gauge interest in further collaboration and engagement (as appropriate).<br><br>Stakeholders engaged includes:<br>• Various members of the business community<br>• Gloucestershire Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)<br>• Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC)<br>• The Bishop of Gloucester, joined by senior Clergy including Deans of the Diocese.<br>• Gloucestershire's schools associations<br>• Gloucestershire College<br>• Hartpury University<br>• National Star College<br>• SG & Stroud College<br>• Bromford Housing<br>• Adults Collaborative Board<br>• Gloucestershire Care Providers Association | |
| Other | | |



**Equality Assessment**

Indicate the impact on each group and explain how you have reached your conclusions (i.e. through analysis of the information and data that was collected through the engagement, consultation and other sources / methods that were set out in section 2).

Consider sub-categories (e.g. different kinds of disabilities) and how the groups are interconnected (e.g. young women) resulting in particular needs or types of disadvantage and discrimination (sometimes known as intersectional or combined discrimination).

*The Proposed Change*

Summarise your assessment of the likely or actual impact of the proposed change on each of the groups. If an action is required, this should be recorded in Section 4.

| Service Users | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Protected Characteristics / Additional Groups | Positive Impact | Neutral Impact | Negative Impact | Not Sure | Summary of Impact | Action Required (Y/N)? |
| Age | | | | X | Gloucestershire has an ageing population. Demographics are projecting a dependency ratio of 0.69 by 2047. An increase from 0.65 in 2022. Under a 1UA arrangement the impact on demands to council services would remain unchanged.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Detailed summary of Impact | Potential disproportionate impact:<br>• There is potential for impact to services, dependant on the ways of working and delivery model that is agreed under the new authority. Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to review | | | | | |

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| | impacts to services such as: SEND, early years, education, children's specialist placements, some public health services, e.g. public health nursing, sexual health<br>Potential positive proportionate impact<br>• Potential for positive impacts on early help services (though greater in 1UA than 2UA) as separated functions would be brought together in a unitary arrangement.<br>• Under 1UA, working as clusters under a locality model would bring benefits to schools and bring potential benefits to service users by an improved service delivery.<br>• Planning implications for new schools could improve under 1UA option. Where these decisions are currently taken in district councils, meaning that decisions should be made collaboratively for the county to ensure new schools are developed in the best location depending on the needs of the local geographical area. Therefore, bringing a positive impact to groups of school age. | | | | | |
| Disability | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Sex | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Race | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA. | Y |

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| | | | | | Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | |
| Gender reassignment | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Pregnancy & maternity | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Religion and/or belief | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |

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| Sexual orientation | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Marriage & civil partnership | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Armed Forces community | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Carers | | | | X | Parent-carer forums and networks are already established as county-wide.<br>There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA. | Y |

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| | | | | | Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | |
| Care leavers / care experienced adults | X | | | | It is considered that would be a positive impact under a 1UA model where it is thought that there is scope for enhanced working relationships with key partners, therefore positively impacting service users.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users and workforce. | Y |
| Detailed Summary of Impact | • Under a 1UA arrangement there is more potential for improved relationships, working practices and processes for those teams who provide accommodation and support for care leavers and care experienced adults | | | | | |
| Digital exclusion | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users and workforce. | Y |
| Geography, for example, urban and rural areas | | X | | | There is potential for a balanced / neutral impact under a 1UA model, with mitigants needing to be considered for the potential negative impacts. | Y |

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| | | | | | Where the disproportionate impacts can be mitigated through an appropriate delivery model, such as a locality model.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users and workforce. | |

Potential disproportionate impact:

- There is concern that local representation, location of service delivery, and local knowledge could be lost. However. as part of implementation planning, further analysis will be undertaken to ensure appropriate mitigants are considered. For example: planning, delivery of adult social care services, licensing decisions etc.

Potential positive proportionate impact:

- It is likely that there will be minimum risk to service continuity and provision in this option. This in turn means that there is potentially a lower risk of disruption or significant changes in access or provision for the most vulnerable residents across Gloucestershire.
- Commissioning services on a countywide footprint (under 1UA) with additional locality provision aligned with population needs, is more likely to create the economies of scale required to maintain breadth of service delivery across urban and rural areas and avoid differential access or provision.
- Under the existing two-tier structure, services can be concentrated on the county's urban centres, with a lack of knowledge about practicalities and difficulties of delivery in more rural and isolated communities, who have more limited access to services. A 1UA or 2UA arrangement will provide opportunity for shared knowledge and expertise to improve service delivery and access across these communities.
- Planning implications for new schools could improve under 1UA option. Where these decisions are currently taken in district councils, meaning that decisions could be made collaboratively for the county to ensure new schools are developed in the best location depending on the needs of the local geographical area.
- A single council offers critical mass to support rural service delivery, including exploring micro-enterprises and technology-enabled care for hard-to-reach populations.

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| • Opportunities arising through unitarisation for integrating current functions of districts; housing, planning, environmental health with countywide public health functions to address wider determinants of population health at scale. | | | | | | |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | | | | X | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Vulnerable groups of society | | X | | | There are potential opportunities for improvements when services are aggregated under a 1UA.<br><br>Opportunity through 1UA to improve co-ordination of support for inclusion health groups who may touch on multiple services, notably health and housing, through the integration of district and county functions. Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |

| Council Workforce | | | | | | | |
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| Moving to a One Unitary Authority (1UA) will bring big changes to how we work and how teams are set up. Further assessment is needed to understand how these changes will affect different groups of staff across services. | | | | | | | |
| Protected Characteristics / Additional Groups | | Positive Impact | Neutral Impact | Negative Impact | Not Sure | Summary of Impact | Action Required (Y/N)? |
| Age | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• As the biggest age demographic for staff falls within the 45-59 age range, consideration will need to be given to this group<br>• When jobs are reorganised or changed, there's a risk that older people might be treated unfairly in hiring.<br>• There's a risk that HR policies and practices might not be consistent across councils that will be making up the new authority<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• As roles change and teams are reorganised, younger staff might have more opportunities for promotion. | Y |

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| | | | | | | • The new council could create policies that support staff of all ages, including training and flexible retirement options.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed, there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Disability | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff with disabilities might be more affected by changes in location, especially if transport or building access isn't properly planned.<br>• When the new council is created, there may be delays or gaps in providing workplace adjustments (like special equipment, flexible hours, or software) during team or office moves.<br>• Changes to how people work or being moved to a new employer (TUPE) may disproportionately affect staff with mental health needs or neurodiverse conditions. | Y |

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| | | | | | | Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new council has a chance to build accessible workplaces, systems, and flexible working options from the start.<br>• This is an opportunity for the councils to harmonise policies and create strong inclusion policies for the new council, leading to better support and visibility for staff with hidden disabilities or mental health conditions.<br>• As part of implementation, efforts will be made to make sure staff policies around workplace adjustments are in place and that workspaces are accessible. However, the exact impact may vary between services, and a more detailed review will be needed.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | Page 437 |
| Sex | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration: | |

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| | | | | | | As with other personal characteristics, the impact of changes will vary depending on the makeup of each team. However, changes that affect frontline staff and team leaders are likely to affect women more, where they make up a large part of these roles. It will be important to consider this when planning any potential staff restructures linked to LGR.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There's a higher risk of women being affected unfairly, as they make up over 70% of the workforce. Consideration should be given when affecting any contractual changes to ensure individuals are not disproportionately affected due to sex.<br>• There is a risk that new pay structures do not provide equity for those of any sex.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new council could use this to improve gender balance, especially in leadership, management, and technical roles.<br>• The opportunity to ensure there is an equal pay policy and structure<br>• As implementation plans are agreed, there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs. | |

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| | | | | | | • As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent and further consideration will be needed as part of implementation planning.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Race | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Like with other personal characteristics, the impact of changes will vary depending on the makeup of each team or service. However, there is risk that staff from ethnic minority backgrounds are impacted:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Communication could be harder during the transition for staff who don't speak English as their first language.<br>• There's a risk that anti-racism work or equality efforts might lose focus if priorities shift.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The changes could be an opportunity to improve how staff are included and | |

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| | | | | | | supported, by reviewing engagement policies to better reflect the local community.<br>• This is an opportunity for the councils to harmonise policies and create strong inclusion policies for the new council that improve how staff are included and supported.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Gender reassignment | | | | | X | There is no data available on staff who declare that they are going through or have gone through gender reassignment. Consideration will be needed to ensure there are no disproportionate impacts on staff with this characteristic.<br><br>Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts: | |

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| | | | | | | • There's a risk that HR policies and practices might not be consistent across councils that will be making up the new authority. For example, how names and pronouns are recorded, dress codes, or access to support. Some councils may have different policies that will need to be aligned during the TUPE process.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• Setting up the new council is a chance to improve support for trans staff. This should include better training, updated policies on gender identity, and more inclusive facilities.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | Page 441 |
| Pregnancy & maternity | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff on maternity leave during the transition might feel concern about job | |

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| | | | | | | security, changes in their manager, or changes to their role.<br>• Through this process, working hours or locations might change. This could be difficult for pregnant staff or new mothers, especially if it's different from what they agreed before going on maternity leave.<br>• There is a risk that HR policies and practices are not consistent across councils that will be making up the new authority. There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br>• As the new council is set up, there could be problems with managing leave, pay, or flexible working during the change.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• With service redesign, the new council might be able to plan their workforce in a more local and flexible way.<br>• This could lead to better support for returning to work, more flexible working options, and improved arrangements for staff with caring responsibilities.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs – such as physical space for breastfeeding | Page 442 |

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| | | | | | | Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Religion and/or belief | | | | | X | Like with other personal characteristics, the impact will vary depending on the makeup of each team. Consideration will be needed to ensure there are no disproportionate impacts on staff with this characteristic.<br><br>Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There is a risk that religious needs might be missed during potential office moves or when new policies are created. For example, staff may need prayer rooms or multi-faith spaces if they're asked to work in a new location.<br>• There is a risk that HR policies and practices are not consistent across councils that will be making up the unitary authority. There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• Any changes to office spaces as part of creating the new councils should be a | |

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| | | | | | | chance to design more inclusive workplaces. This might include multi-faith rooms, culturally appropriate food options, or more flexible leave policies.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Sexual orientation | | | | | X | Like with other personal characteristics, staff don't have to share their sexual orientation, so data is limited on this characteristic.<br><br>Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There's a risk that existing LGBTQ+ support networks or allies could be lost if teams are split up or moved.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new councils should show strong support for LGBTQ+ inclusion from the start | |

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| | | | | | | by creating new networks, policies, and support systems for LGBTQ+ staff.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups, such as LGBTQ+ groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Marriage & civil partnership | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent and further consideration will be needed as part of implementation planning.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs. | |

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| | | | | | | Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Armed Forces community | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts: There is a risk that HR Polices and practices are not consistent across councils that will be making up the unitary authority. There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | Page 446 |
| Carers | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration: | |

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| | | | | | | As with other personal circumstances, consideration will be needed to ensure there are no disproportionate impacts on staff with this characteristic. Including options for leave and flexible or hybrid working.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff who care for others may feel additional pressures if they're worried about job security or increased workloads.<br>• There is potential for loss of informal support, like understanding managers or flexible arrangements, during team changes.<br>• Moving to a new work location, if required, could mean longer travel times and higher costs, making it harder to manage their caring duties.<br>• There is a risk that HR policies and practices are not consistent across the councils that will be making up the unitary authority. There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new council could use this opportunity to improve support for carers by creating fair and consistent policies. For example, carers' leave and flexible working, across all areas. | |

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| | | | | | | • As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Care leavers / care experienced adults | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |

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| Digital exclusion | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Geography, for example, urban and rural areas | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected. | |

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| | | | | | | As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>Some general points for consideration are:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff on lower incomes may struggle more with potential changes if moving to a new location, longer travel, or job uncertainty.<br>• If there are redundancies or changes in pay, those already financially stretched could be disproportionately affected. However, based on the experiences of | |

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| | | | | | | other local authorities who have already gone through this process, redundancies have been minimal and mostly limited to senior leadership roles (such as Chief Executives, Directors etc).<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The reorganisation and TUPE process should be used to reduce inequalities, for example, by improving access to training, career progression, or digital tools.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed, there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | Page 451 |
| Vulnerable groups of society | | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to | |

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| | | | | | | ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |

**Action Plan**

Set out the key actions that will be undertaken, following the equality assessment in section 3, to further maximise the positive impact or mitigate the negative impact of the proposal on the protected characteristics and additional groups prior to implementation (any negative consequences should be eliminated, minimised or counter-balanced by other measures):

| Identified Potential or Actual Impact | Recommended Action(s) | Owner | Target Completion Date |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users and workforce. | As part of implementation planning, each LGR programme will need to complete an EqIA to consider the impact of proposed changes to service delivery and ways of working on those with protected characteristics and inform decision making. | Programme Managers | Nov ’25 - Aug ‘26 |
| Depending on the implementation plan chosen, there is potential for equalities impact on workforce with protected characteristics. Mostly likely to be Geography and disability, should any change in working location be needed. | People & Culture workstream to ensure all workforce risks are mitigated against through policy. | People & Culture LGR Workstream | Nov ’25 – Apr ‘28 |



**Monitoring and Review**

Public bodies must have regard to the aims of the duty not only when a policy, service or development is being created and decided upon, but also when it is implemented and at regular intervals thereafter. The Equality Duty is a continuing duty.

| | |
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| Lead officer(s): | Gareth Edmundson, Chief Executive – Cheltenham Borough Council<br>Jane Portman, Chief Executive, Cotswold District Council<br>Nigel Brinn, Chief Executive, Forest of Dean District Council<br>Jon McGinty, Managing Director, Gloucester City Council<br>Jo Walker, Chief Executive – Gloucestershire County Council<br>Kathy O’Leary, Chief Executive – Stroud District Council<br>Alistair Cunningham, Chief Executive – Tewkesbury Borough Council |

*Part 1 – Initial arrangements (up to around six months following implementation)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Date of the post implementation review: | October 2028 |
| Approach to measuring the impact of the change to enable a comparison between the anticipated impact (as set out in section 3) with the actual impact:<br>▪ What mechanisms will be used?<br>▪ How will service users / the wider community / GCC staff and other stakeholders be involved? | Review on implementation to be completed by each LGR Programme as agreed under finalised implementation plans. Each programme will need an individual EqIA to ensure there is consideration of equalities and ownership of actions throughout the process. |

*Part 2 – Ongoing arrangements (from around six months onwards)*

| | |
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| Frequency of monitoring and review: | Ongoing monitoring via individual LGR programmes. |
| What mechanisms will be used?<br><br>How will service users / the wider community / GCC staff and other stakeholders be involved? | Via individual programme EqIAs. |

## Appendix 1: Service User Data and Information

Details of service users affected by the proposed activity:

| Groups | Service User Data and Information |
|---|---|
| Age | Dependency ratios are a measure that indicate the level of support that needs to be provided by the working age (16-64) population to the younger and older population, people aged 0-15 or 65+. A low dependency ratio indicates that there is a sufficient ratio of the working-age population to the dependent population. In contrast, a high dependency ratio indicates there may be more financial burden on the working population to support the dependent population.<br><br>The West has a higher overall population than the East, it has a slightly lower proportion of those aged 65 and over, which are likely to require more targeted support.<br>*Table 5: Age distribution of the mid 2023 Population, by the proposed unitaries*[1] |

| | Gloucestershire | | East | | West | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| **Total Population** | 659,276 | 100.0% | 310,641 | 100.0% | 348,635 | 100.0% |
| **0-16** | 115,485 | 17.5% | 53,920 | 17.4% | 61,565 | 17.7% |
| **16-64** | 398,322 | 60.4% | 186,241 | 60.0% | 212,081 | 60.8% |
| **65+** | 145,469 | 22.1% | 70,480 | 22.7% | 74,989 | 21.5% |

Table 8 shows the projected dependency in 2047. The East area is projected to have a greater dependency ratio than the West and Gloucestershire as a whole. For every 100 people the East will be supporting around 5 more dependents than the West, which could translate to higher demands on council services, and more people who are not in the workforce than those who are working, potentially constraining growth in the local economy.

*Table 8: Projected dependency ratio, 2047, by the proposed unitaries*[2]

| | |
|---|---|
| | |

| | Dependency ratio |
|---|---|
| **Gloucestershire** | 0.69 |
| **East** | 0.72 |
| **West** | 0.67 |

Figure 2 looks at the projected population across the three areas in more detail, breaking it down by sex and 5 year age band. Across all areas the largest 5 year cohort is those aged 55-59. All areas have a similar age profile, although the West area has a higher proportion of those aged 35-59, and a lower proportion of older people than other areas.

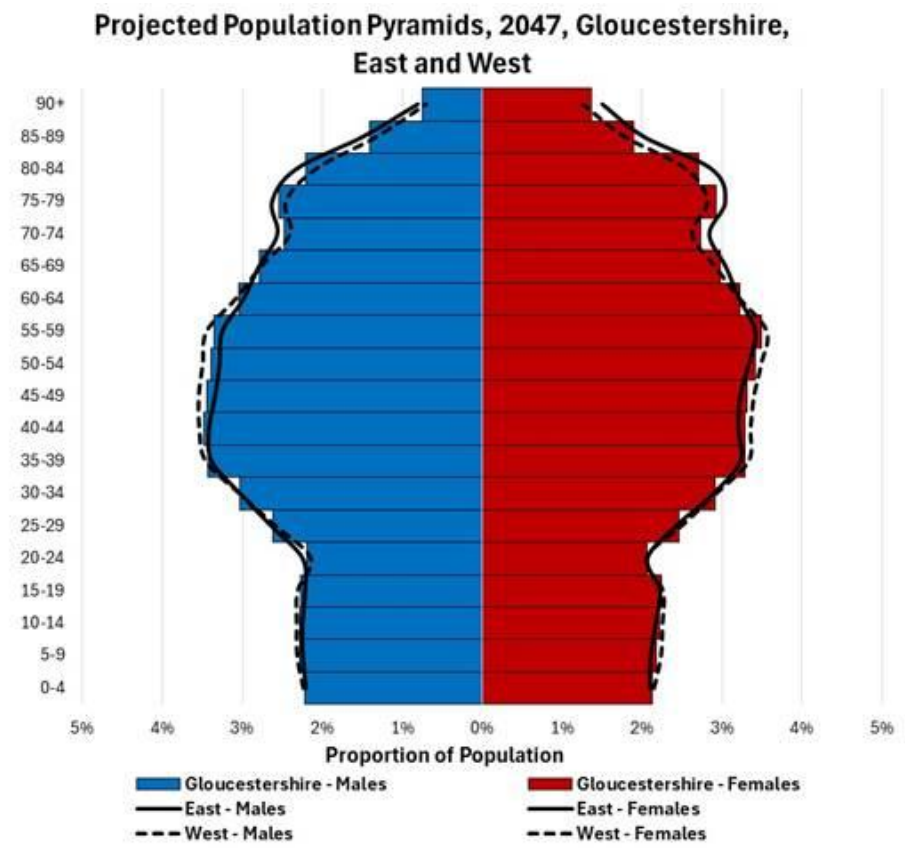



*Figure 2: Projected Population Pyramids, 2047, Gloucestershire, East and West*[3]

Adult Social Care

The information below shows a break down of the Adult Social Care case cohort by age groups, Gloucestershire, East and West areas and the component districts.

Table 9 shows the caseload for age groups over 75 are the highest across all areas. The West area has greater overall demand than the East.

*Table 9: Adult Social Care Service Users by age, Gloucestershire, East and West, as at 31st March 2025 (DRAFT)*[4] [5]

**East Unitary**

| | Under 18 | 18 - 24 | 25 - 34 | 35 - 44 | 45 - 54 | 55 - 64 | 65 - 74 | 75 - 84 | 85+ | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham | 0 | 56 | 80 | 99 | 81 | 167 | 165 | 319 | 328 | 1271 |
| Cotswold | 0 | 16 | 25 | 22 | 28 | 69 | 99 | 217 | 307 | 770 |
| Tewkesbury | 0 | 40 | 57 | 44 | 44 | 119 | 99 | 203 | 239 | 836 |
| | **0** | **112** | **162** | **165** | **153** | **355** | **363** | **739** | **874** | **2877** |

**West Unitary**

| | Under 18 | 18 - 24 | 25 - 34 | 35 - 44 | 45 - 54 | 55 - 64 | 65 - 74 | 75 - 84 | 85+ | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucester | <5 | 159 | 190 | 156 | 179 | 302 | 220 | 371 | 333 | 1865 |
| Stroud | <5 | 82 | 101 | 79 | 87 | 187 | 164 | 294 | 340 | 1313 |
| Forest of Dean | 0 | 65 | 87 | 72 | 73 | 157 | 156 | 257 | 278 | 1113 |
| | **0** | **306** | **378** | **307** | **339** | **646** | **540** | **922** | **951** | **4291** |

**Countywide**

| | Under 18 | 18 - 24 | 25 - 34 | 35 - 44 | 45 - 54 | 55 - 64 | 65 - 74 | 75 - 84 | 85+ | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham | | 56 | 80 | 99 | 81 | 167 | 165 | 319 | 328 | 1271 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cotswold | | 16 | 25 | 22 | 28 | 69 | 99 | 217 | 307 | 770 |
| Tewkesbury | | 40 | 57 | 44 | 44 | 119 | 99 | 203 | 239 | 836 |
| Gloucester | <5 | 159 | 190 | 156 | 179 | 302 | 220 | 371 | 333 | 1865 |
| Stroud | <5 | 82 | 101 | 79 | 87 | 187 | 164 | 294 | 340 | 1313 |
| Forest of Dean | | 65 | 87 | 72 | 73 | 157 | 156 | 257 | 278 | 1113 |
| Out of County or Unknown | <5 | 18 | 24 | 50 | 54 | 60 | 42 | 55 | 49 | 349 |
| **Grand Total** | **7** | **425** | **559** | **512** | **533** | **1042** | **939** | **1710** | **1871** | **7433** |

Vulnerable Children

The information below shows a break down of the vulnerable children across Gloucestershire, East and West areas and the component districts.

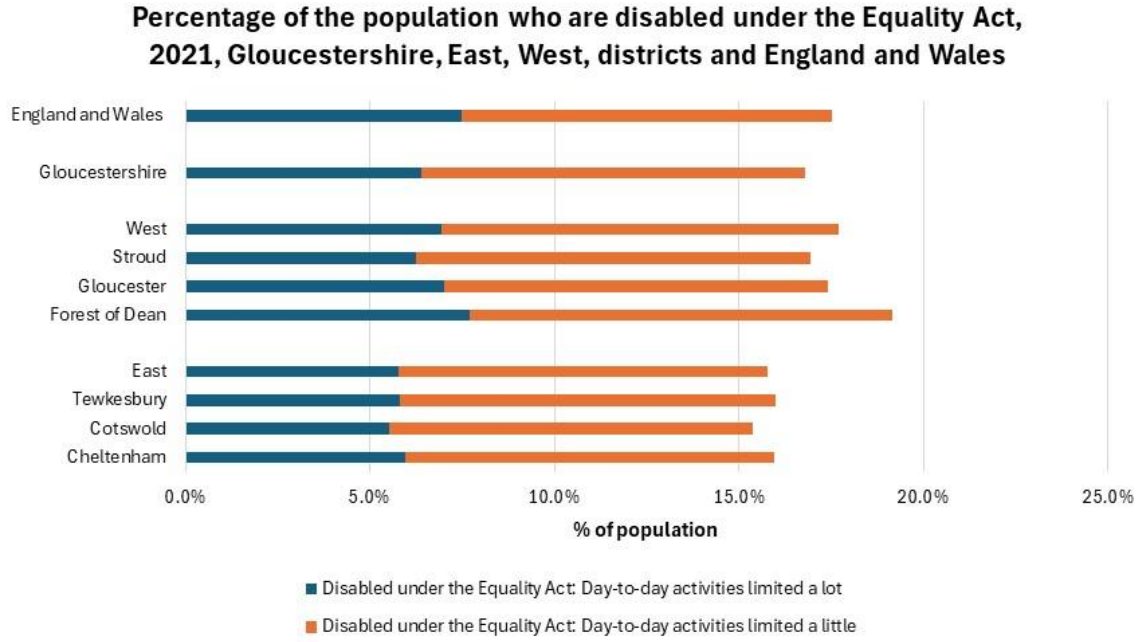
The West has a higher population of children than the East. The West also has a higher level of child safeguarding activity, and a greater rate of children subject to Education, Health and Care Plans.

*Table 10: Service demand for children's services as at 09/07/2025*[6]

| | Population aged 17 and under (MYE 2023) | All open referrals/cases[7] | | CiN / CP / CIC[8] | | CYP with EHCP[9] [10] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Area** | ***Number*** | ***Number*** | ***%*** | ***Number*** | ***%*** | ***Number*** | ***%*** |
| **Cheltenham** | 23,777 | 662 | 2.80% | 333 | 1.40% | 1,106 | 4.70% |
| **Cotswolds** | 16,623 | 419 | 2.50% | 270 | 1.60% | 733 | 4.40% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 20,515 | 575 | 2.80% | 346 | 1.70% | 1,235 | 6.00% |
| **East** | 60,915 | 1,656 | 2.70% | 949 | 1.60% | 3,074 | 5.00% |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Forest of Dean** | 16,192 | 460 | 2.80% | 301 | 1.90% | 867 | 5.40% |
| **Gloucester** | 29,192 | 1,196 | 4.10% | 617 | 2.10% | 1,708 | 5.90% |
| **Stroud** | 24,173 | 596 | 2.50% | 308 | 1.30% | 1,294 | 5.40% |
| **West** | 69,557 | 2,252 | 3.20% | 1,226 | 1.80% | 3,869 | 5.60% |
| | | | | | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | 130,472 | 3,908 | 3.00% | 2,175 | 1.70% | 6,943 | 5.30% |

[1] Mid 2023 Population Estimate, ONS
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] DAIT, GCC
[5] The tables are based on our Client Level Dataset (CLD), representing a distinct count of individuals by age and postcode at the point of service commencement. Please be aware that the CLD is currently undergoing a comprehensive review and enhancement process, which may lead to future refinements in the data. All service types are included in this snapshot—this encompasses Health, Fully-Funded, Part-Funded, and selected Self-Funded services. No services have been excluded.
[6] DAIT, GCC
[7] Figures refer to all open Social Care referrals, as of 09/07/2025. Address information refers to Home Address as of 09/07/2025. Totals may not add up to 100% as either address information not being recorded or child residing outside of Gloucestershire at that time.
[8] Of the above children, those who were either subject to a CiN plan, CP plan or were a Child in Care, as of 09/07/2025
[9] Figures include children and young people aged 0-25 with an EHCP maintained by the LA and are a snapshot as at 09/07/2025. Based on the child / young person's home postcode.

| | |
|---|---|
| | [10] * EHCP runs from 0 to 25, but the majority of plans are for under-18's, so the same population (0 to 17) is used for the % for consistency |
| Disability | In 2021, 16.8% of Gloucestershire residents were classified as having a disability under the Equality Act. Looking at the East and West areas, the West area has the highest proportion of residents with a disability (17.7%) exceeding the figure for the county as a whole and the national average. The East area has the lowest proportion of residents with a disability (15.8%) below the county and national average.<br>  <br> |

Sex

According to the 2023 population estimates, 51.1% of Surrey's population is female. This is in line with the national average. The East and West areas are also broadly similar to the national and county average with 51.2% and 51.0% of the population being female respectively.

*Table 13: Sex breakdown of the mid 2023 Population, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[1]

| | Number | | | Percentages | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female |
| **Cheltenham** | 59,011 | 61,244 | 120,255 | 49.1% | 50.9% |
| **Cotswold** | 43,963 | 47,527 | 91,490 | 48.1% | 51.9% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 43,698 | 45,406 | 89,104 | 49.0% | 51.0% |
| **East** | **146,672** | **154,177** | **300,849** | **48.8%** | **51.2%** |
| | | | | | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 66,984 | 68,007 | 134,991 | 49.6% | 50.4% |
| **Gloucester** | 60,868 | 63,672 | 124,540 | 48.9% | 51.1% |
| **Stroud** | 47,832 | 51,064 | 98,896 | 48.4% | 51.6% |
| **West** | **175,684** | **182,743** | **358,427** | **49.0%** | **51.0%** |
| | | | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | **322,356** | **336,920** | **659,276** | **48.9%** | **51.1%** |
| | | | | | |
| **England and Wales** | 29,835,992 | 31,018,735 | 60,854,727 | 49.0% | 51.0% |

As age increases, females outnumber males by an increasing margin. In Gloucestershire in 2023, 52.8% of people aged 65-84 were female, whilst for people aged 85+ the difference was more marked with females accounting for

61.4% of the total population; this difference is observed across the East and West areas as well as at a national level.

*Table 14: Sex and breakdown of the mid 2023 Population, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[2]

| | | | | | | | | | 0-15 | | 16-64 | | 65-84 | | 85+ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| **East** | 50.6% | 49.4% | 49.1% | 50.9% | 46.8% | 53.2% | 38.3% | 61.7% | | | | | | | | |
| **West** | | | | | | | | | 50.9% | 49.1% | 49.7% | 50.3% | 47.6% | 52.4% | 38.8% | 61.2% |
| **Gloucestershire** | | | | | | | | | 50.8% | 49.2% | 49.4% | 50.6% | 47.2% | 52.8% | 38.6% | 61.4% |
| **England and Wales** | | | | | | | | | 51.2% | 48.8% | 49.3% | 50.7% | 47.1% | 52.9% | 38.1% | 61.9% |

[1] Mid 2023 Population Estimates, ONS

[2] *Ibid.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Race | The Equality Act states that race includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins. The government refers to ethnicity and not race; this is because surveys usually ask people for their ethnicity and not their race, and using consistent terms helps people to understand the data.<br>In Gloucestershire 87.7% of residents identified as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British, which was considerably higher than the national average of 74.4%. The East and West have a similar proportion of |

| | |
|---|---|
| | residents who identified as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British to Gloucestershire with 88.1% and 87.4% respectively.<br><br>White Other accounts for the second largest proportion of residents in Gloucestershire, East and West. In Gloucestershire 5.3% of residents fall into this category, lower than the national average of 7.3%. In the East area 5.9% of residents are classified as White Other, slightly higher than the Gloucestershire figure but lower than the national figure, while in the West area 4.8% of residents fall into this category, higher than the Gloucestershire and national figure.<br><br>The Asian, Asian British and Asian Welsh category made up the largest percentage of the non-White Gloucestershire, East and West population and represented 2.9% of Gloucestershire residents, lower than the national average of 9.3%. The East and West areas have a similar proportion of Asian, Asian British and Asian Welsh as Gloucestershire as 2.6% and 3.1% respectively.<br><br>There are minimal differences in the proportion of Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African residents and Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups across Gloucestershire, East and West areas. |

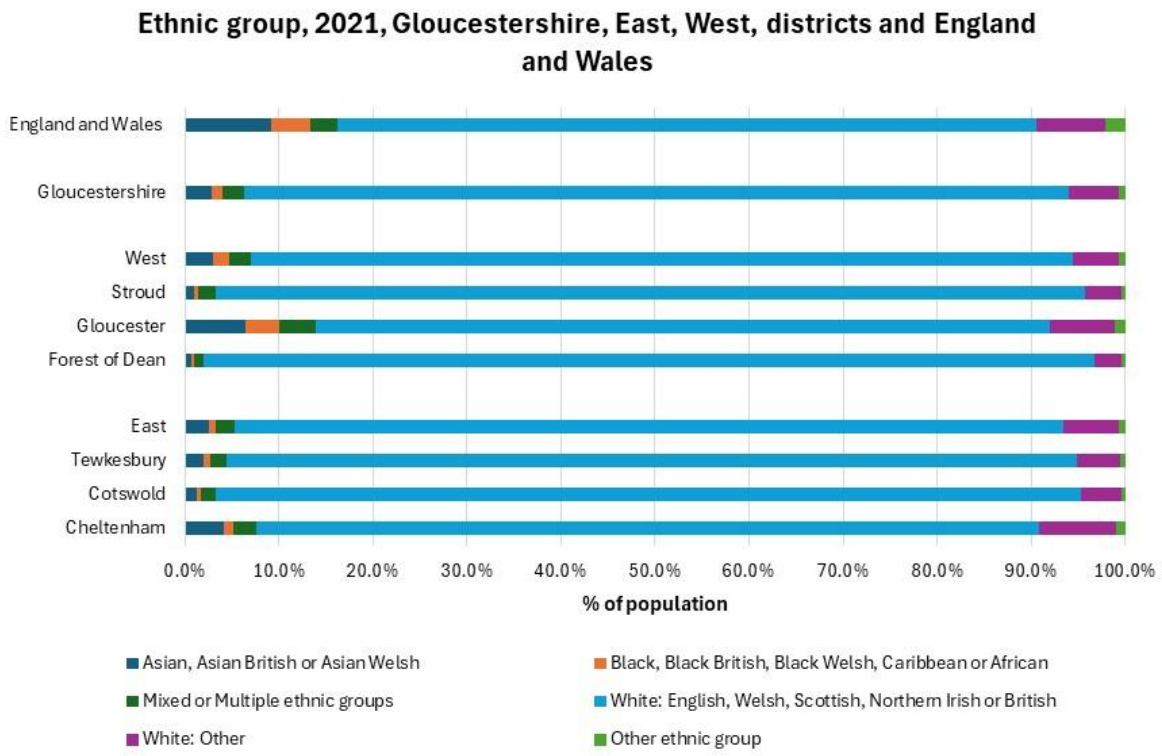
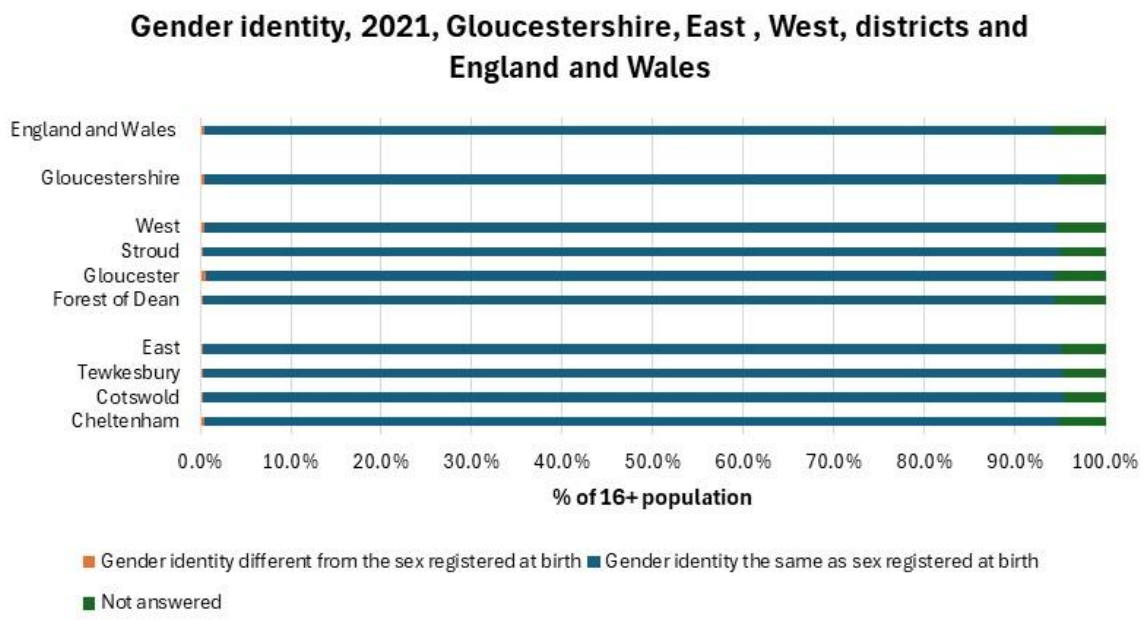



*Figure 6: Ethnic group, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[66]

| | |
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| Gender reassignment | The Census 2021 has provided the first set of official data on gender identity in England and Wales. In the 2021 Census there was a new question around gender identity, asking 'is your gender the same as the sex you were registered at birth?'. The question referred to a person's sense of their own gender. It was directed only at people |

[66] 2021 Census, ONS

| | |
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| | aged 16 and over, and answers were voluntary. However, as of November 2024, the Census 2021 data on gender identity no longer hold the accredited official statistics designation and have been reclassified as official statistics in development.<br><br>ONS states: There are some patterns in the data that are consistent with, but do not conclusively demonstrate, some respondents not interpreting the question as intended; given other sources of uncertainty, not least the impact of question non-response, we cannot say with certainty whether the census estimates are more likely to be an overestimate or an underestimate of the total number of trans people aged over 16 years in England and Wales.<br><br>Census estimates on gender identity are, however, broadly consistent with the best available comparator of the GP Patient Survey and international comparators.<br><br>Overall, 94.8% of residents in Gloucestershire aged 16 and over answered the question. Of these, almost 2,200 people (0.4%) regarded their gender identity to be different from the sex registered at birth. The East and West areas also saw 0.4% of their population stating their gender identity was different from the sex registered at birth. However, in the East 95.1% of residents answered the question this was slightly higher than the 94.5% in the West. |

| | |
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| |  <br>*Figure 7: Gender identity, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[67] |
| Pregnancy & maternity | There were 5,839 live births in Gloucestershire in 2023, this equates to a crude fertility rate of 8.9 live births per 1,000 people of all ages. This was lower than the national average of 9.7 live births per 1,000 people of all ages. Looking at the East and West areas, the highest crude birth rate was in the West (9.1), which exceeded the county average but was lower than the national average. The East had a crude birth rate of 8.6 live births per 1,000 people, this was lower than the county and national average. Crude birth rates are affected by the demographic |

[67] *Ibid.*

make-up of an area. Gloucestershire's relatively older population means it has proportionally less women of childbearing age than England, which may explain its lower crude birth rate.

*Table 9: Crude birth rates, 2023*[68]

| | Live births | Total Population | Crude Birth Rate per 1,000 population |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cheltenham** | 1,009 | 120,255 | 8.4 |
| **Cotswold** | 657 | 91,490 | 7.2 |
| **Tewkesbury** | 1,001 | 98,896 | 10.1 |
| **East** | **2,667** | **310,641** | **8.6** |
| | | | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 709 | 89,104 | 8.0 |
| **Gloucester** | 1,448 | 134,991 | 10.7 |
| **Stroud** | 1,015 | 124,540 | 8.1 |
| **West** | **3,172** | **348,635** | **9.1** |
| | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | **5,839** | **659,276** | **8.9** |
| | | | |
| **England and Wales** | 591,072 | 60,854,727 | 9.7 |

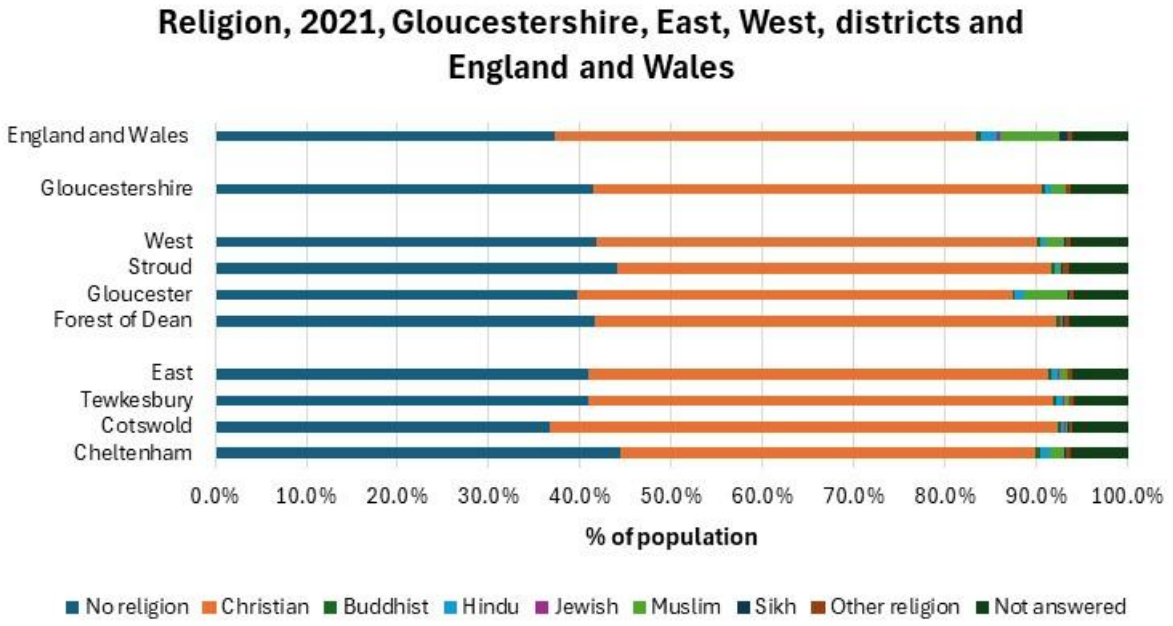
The limitation of crude birth rates is that it doesn't account for the age and sex structure of the population. General Fertility Rates account for this by expressing live births per 1,000 females aged 15-64, this adjusts for women of childbearing age in an area. A higher general fertility rate (GFR) means that, on average, more children are being born to women of reproductive age. The General Fertility Rate in Gloucestershire stands at 50.4 live births per

[68] Live births in England and Wales, ONS

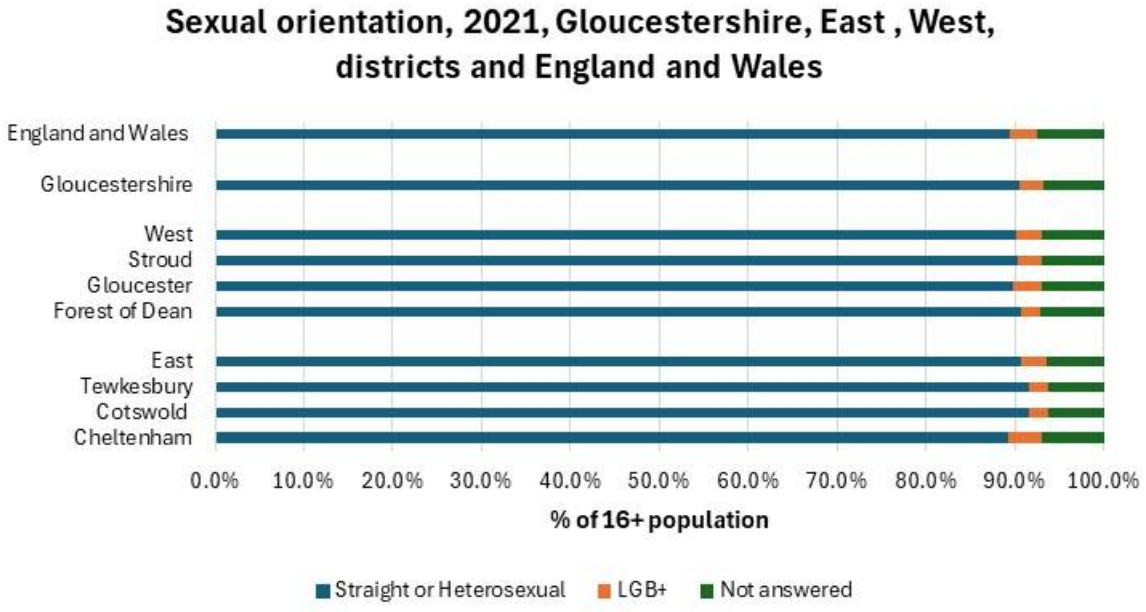
<table>
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<td>1,000 females aged 15-44, which is slightly higher than the national average. Looking at the East and West areas, the highest general fertility rate was in the West (51.9), which exceeded the county average but was lower than the national average. The East had a general fertility rate of 48.8 live births per 1,000 females aged 15-44, this was lower than the county and national average.<br>Table 10: General Fertility Rates, 2023[69]
<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Live births</th><th>15-44 year old female population</th><th>General Fertility Rate per 1,000 population</th></tr>
<tr><td>Cheltenham</td><td>1,009</td><td>23,432</td><td>43.1</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cotswold</td><td>657</td><td>13,724</td><td>47.9</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tewkesbury</td><td>1,001</td><td>17,525</td><td>57.1</td></tr>
<tr><td>East</td><td>2,667</td><td>54,681</td><td>48.8</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Forest of Dean</td><td>709</td><td>14,206</td><td>49.9</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucester</td><td>1,448</td><td>26,915</td><td>53.8</td></tr>
<tr><td>Stroud</td><td>1,015</td><td>19,969</td><td>50.8</td></tr>
<tr><td>West</td><td>3,172</td><td>61,090</td><td>51.9</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucestershire</td><td>5,839</td><td>115,771</td><td>50.4</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>England and Wales</td><td>591,072</td><td>11,879,690</td><td>49.8</td></tr>
</table>
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and/or belief</td>
<td>The 2021 Census asked about religion, but this question was voluntary and ‘no religion’ was a common answer, a proportion of people also chose not to answer the question.</td>
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</table>

[69] Live births in England and Wales, ONS

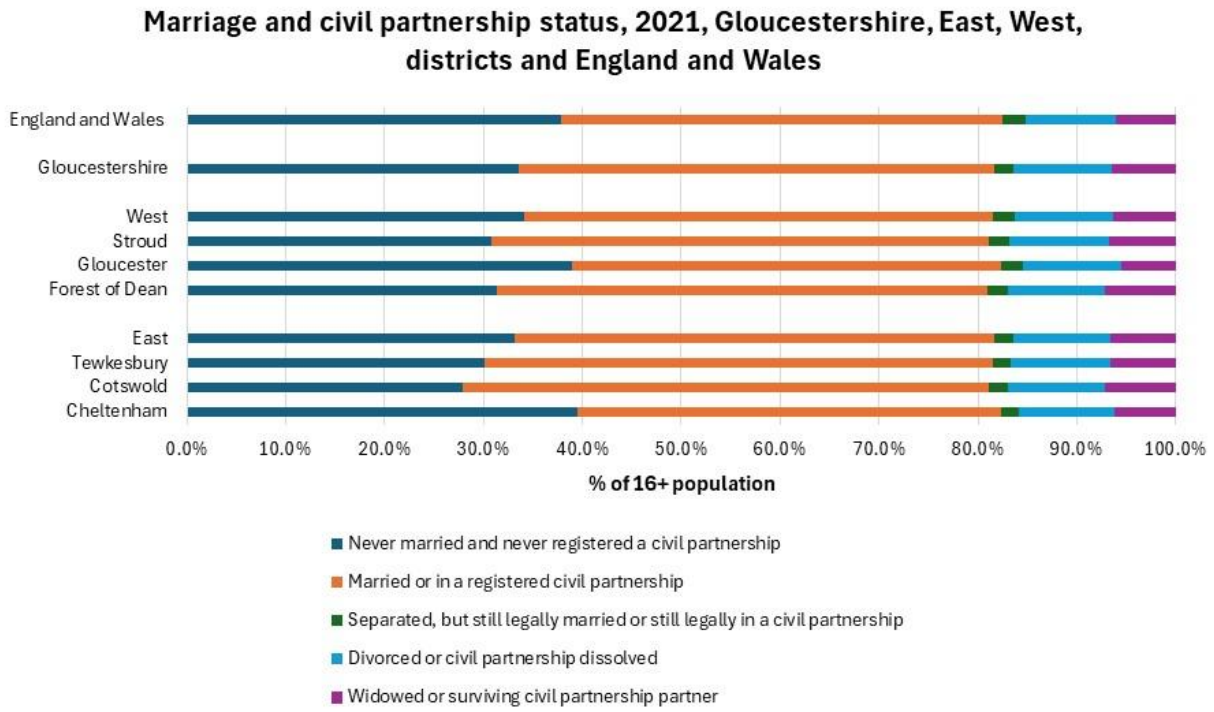
| | |
|---|---|
| | According to the 2021 Census, 49.2% of residents in Gloucestershire were Christian, making it the most common religion, the proportion of residents selecting this religion was higher than the national average (46.2%). The East and West have a broadly similar proportion of residents who identified as Christian to Gloucestershire with figures of 50.2% and 48.3% respectively.<br><br>No religion accounts for the second largest proportion of residents in Gloucestershire, East and West. In Gloucestershire 41.4% of residents fall into this category, higher than the national average of 37.2%. In the East area 41.0% of residents are classified as having no religion, slightly lower than the Gloucestershire figure but higher than the national figure, while in the West area 41.7% of residents fall into this category, higher than the Gloucestershire and national figure.<br><br>Islam was the second most common religion in Gloucestershire, East and West Areas, Muslims represented 1.4% of Gloucestershire residents considerably below the national average of 6.5%. In the East area 0.8% of residents are classified as Muslim, slightly lower than the Gloucestershire figure and considerably lower than the national figure, while in the West area 2.0% of residents fall into this category, higher than the Gloucestershire figure but lower than the national figure. |

| | |
|---|---|
| |  <br>*Figure 8: Religion, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[70] |
| Sexual orientation | As with gender identity, the Census 2021 has provided the first set of official data on sexual orientation in England and Wales. In the 2021 Census there was a new question around sexual orientation, asking 'which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?', and providing a list of options. It was directed only at people aged 16 and over, and answers were voluntary. Overall, 93.2% of residents in Gloucestershire aged 16 and over answered the question. The majority of people who answered described their sexual orientation as 'straight or heterosexual', at 90.4% of the population. This is slightly higher than the national average of 89.4%. In the East area 90.6% of |

[70] *Ibid.*

| | |
|---|---|
| | residents described their sexual orientation as 'straight or heterosexual', marginally higher than the county average and the figure for the West (90.2%).<br>  <br><br>*Figure 9: Sexual orientation, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[71] |
| Marriage & civil partnership | *Figure 10* shows the breakdown of the 16+ population by marriage and civil partnership status. There are minimal differences between Gloucestershire, the East and West areas. The East area has a slightly lower proportion of people who have never married and never registered a civil partnership (33.1%) than the West (34.1%) with the county sitting in the middle of the two areas (33.6%). Conversely the West area has a slightly lower proportion of |

[71] *Ibid.*

| | |
|---|---|
| | people who have married or are in a registered civil partnership (47.5%) than the East (48.6%) with the county again sitting in the middle (48.0%).<br>  <br><br>*Figure 10: Marriage and civil partnership status, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[72] |
| Armed Forces community | Local authorities, national government, businesses, local authorities, charities and the public have committed to support the Armed Forces community through the Armed Forces Covenant. It was adopted in 2011 and articulated |

[72] *Ibid.*

the principles of no disadvantage and special consideration; that no current or former member of the armed forces, or their families, should be at a disadvantage compared to other residents in the provision of public and commercial services. This was followed by the Armed Forces Act 2021 introduced a new requirement for some public bodies, including the NHS and local authorities, to pay due regard to the principles of the Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education.

The information captured relates to armed forces veterans rather than current personnel and was captured by the 2021 Census. In 2021 there were there 27,418 people who had previously served in the UK armed forces resident in Gloucestershire. This equates to 5.2% of the 16+ population. The proportion of armed forces veterans was higher in Gloucestershire than it was across England and Wales (3.8%). The East has a slightly higher proportion of armed forces veterans (5.4%) than the West (4.9%) and the county as a whole, but the difference is minimal.

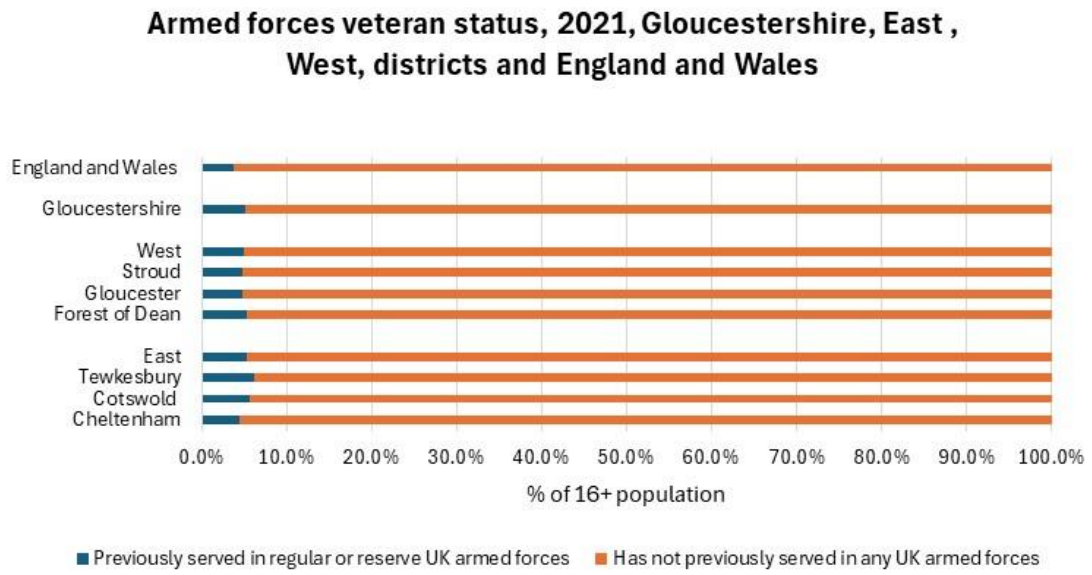


*Figure 11: Armed Forces Veteran Status, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[73]

## Carers

This information is based on self-reported caring status according to the 2021 Census, this means figures will be different from sources which look at registered carers.

In 2021, there were 51,862 people aged 5+ providing unpaid care in Gloucestershire, this is equivalent to 8.5% of the population. In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of the population in England and Wales (8.9%) said they provided unpaid care. In the East area 8.0% of residents aged 5+ provided unpaid care higher slightly higher than the county average and the figure of 8.9% seen when looking at the West area. There are minimal differences observed in the levels of care provided by the East, West and Gloucestershire total.

*Table 11: Residents aged 5+ by caring status, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[74]

| | Percentage of 5 + Population | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Provides no unpaid care** | **Proved some unpaid care** | **Provides 19 hours or less unpaid care a week** | **Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week** | **Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week** |
| **Cheltenham** | 92.6% | 7.4% | 4.2% | 1.3% | 1.9% |
| **Cotswold** | 91.9% | 8.1% | 4.7% | 1.2% | 2.2% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 91.5% | 8.5% | 4.7% | 1.4% | 2.4% |
| **East** | **92.0%** | **8.0%** | **4.5%** | **1.3%** | **2.1%** |
| | | | | | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 90.3% | 9.7% | 5.1% | 1.7% | 2.9% |
| **Gloucester** | 91.6% | 8.4% | 4.2% | 1.8% | 2.4% |
| **Stroud** | 91.1% | 8.9% | 5.3% | 1.4% | 2.2% |

[73] 2021 Census, ONS
[74] *Ibid.*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **West** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.8%** | **1.7%** | **2.4%** |
| | | | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | **91.5%** | **8.5%** | **4.7%** | **1.5%** | **2.3%** |
| | | | | | |
| **England and Wales** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.3%** | **1.8%** | **2.7%** |

Care leavers / care experienced adults

This information is based on self-reported caring status according to the 2021 Census, this means figures will be different from sources which look at registered carers.

In 2021, there were 51,862 people aged 5+ providing unpaid care in Gloucestershire, this is equivalent to 8.5% of the population. In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of the population in England and Wales (8.9%) said they provided unpaid care. In the East area 8.0% of residents aged 5+ provided

unpaid care higher slightly higher than the county average and the figure of 8.9% seen when looking at the West area. There are minimal differences observed in the levels of care provided by the East, West and Gloucestershire total.

Percentage of 5 + Population Provides no unpaid care Proved some unpaid care Provides 19 hours or less unpaid care a week Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week

| | Percentage of 5 + Population | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Provides no unpaid care** | **Proved some unpaid care** | **Provides 19 hours or less unpaid care a week** | **Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week** | **Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week** |
| **Cheltenham** | 92.6% | 7.4% | 4.2% | 1.3% | 1.9% |
| **Cotswold** | 91.9% | 8.1% | 4.7% | 1.2% | 2.2% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 91.5% | 8.5% | 4.7% | 1.4% | 2.4% |
| **East** | **92.0%** | **8.0%** | **4.5%** | **1.3%** | **2.1%** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | **Forest of Dean** | 90.3% | 9.7% | 5.1% | 1.7% | 2.9% |
| | **Gloucester** | 91.6% | 8.4% | 4.2% | 1.8% | 2.4% |
| | **Stroud** | 91.1% | 8.9% | 5.3% | 1.4% | 2.2% |
| | **West** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.8%** | **1.7%** | **2.4%** |
| | | | | | | |
| | **Gloucestershire** | **91.5%** | **8.5%** | **4.7%** | **1.5%** | **2.3%** |
| | | | | | | |
| | **England and Wales** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.3%** | **1.8%** | **2.7%** |

**Digital exclusion**

Very little information is collected about this group. The latest information taken from the Participation Survey is at district level and covers the period from May 2023 to March 2024. The results show that in Gloucestershire an estimated 95.6% of respondents have used the internet either at home or elsewhere which is higher than England average of 92.7%. The West area (94.4%) has a lower rate than the East (96.8%) and the county average, but still exceeds the national average.

*Table 12: Percentage of respondents aged 16 and over who have used the internet either at home or anywhere else, Gloucestershire, East and West, districts and England, 2023-2024*[75]

| | **Percentage of 16+ Population** |
|---|---|
| **Cheltenham** | 96.9% |
| **Cotswold** | 94.4% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 95.8% |
| **East** | **96.8%** |
| | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 91.3% |

[75] Participation Survey, DCMS

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>
<table>
<tr><td>Gloucester</td><td>92.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Stroud</td><td>95.9%</td></tr>
<tr><td>West</td><td>94.4%</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucestershire</td><td>95.6%</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>England</td><td>92.7%</td></tr>
</table>
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Geography, for example, urban and rural areas</td><td>This includes specific areas and rural/urban geographies and how this can make it difficult for some people to access the services they need.<br><br>The 2021 Rural-Urban Classification (RUC) is a statistical classification system used to categorise geographies based on the form and characteristics of the settlements present within them. It aims to provide a consistent and standardised method for classifying areas as Rural or Urban, based on address density, physical settlement form, population size, and relative accessibility.<br><br>Gloucestershire has a significantly higher proportion of its population living in rural areas than the national average (17.5%). The East area has a higher proportion of its residents living in rural areas (32.6%) than the West (26.2%) and the county average.</td></tr>
</table>

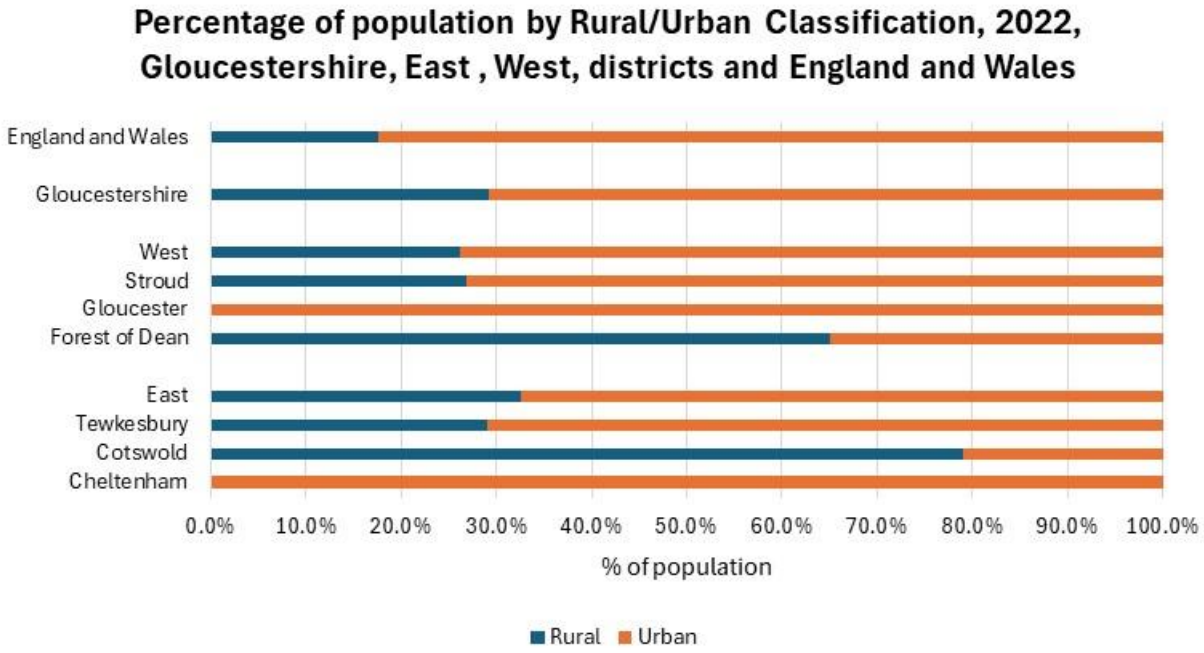
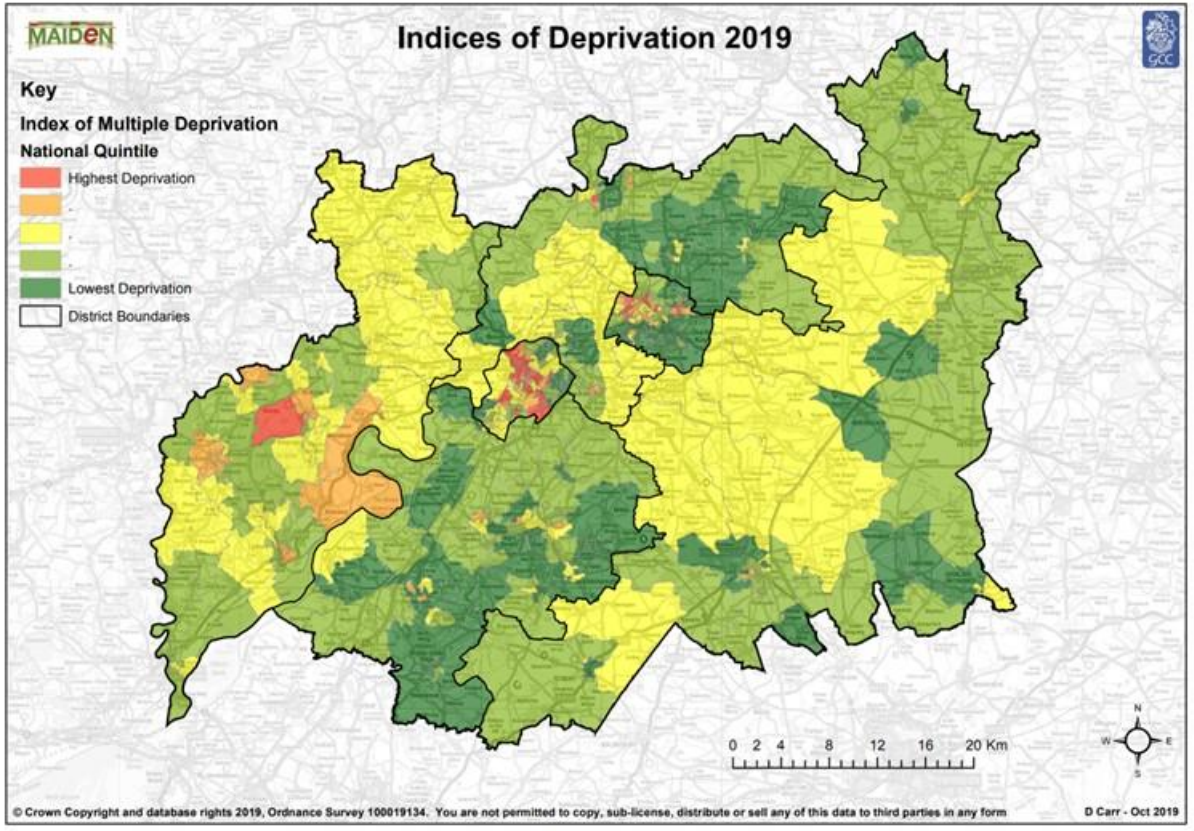



*Figure 12: Percentage of population by Rural/Urban Classification, 2022, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[76]

| | |
|---|---|
| Socio-economic disadvantage | The main measure for this is the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. In general, Gloucestershire is not a very deprived county, ranking 126 out of 151 (where 1 is the most deprived) county and unitary authorities, putting it in the least deprived 20% of authorities across England.<br>At district level, even the most deprived districts in the county (Gloucester City, and Forest of Dean) are amongst the middle 20% of districts for deprivation out of 317 English authorities. Tewkesbury, Cotswold, and Stroud |

[76] Rural Urban Classification, 2021 and 2022 Mid Year Estimates, ONS

districts are in the least deprived 20% of districts nationally. Cheltenham is in the second least deprived 20% of districts nationally. However, there are pockets of deprivation, 31 out of 373 small areas in Gloucestershire are amongst the 20% most deprived in England with 7.9% residents of Gloucestershire living in these areas[77].




[77] Indices of Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG

*Figure 13: Indices of Deprivation, 2019*[78]

*Figure 14* shows the proportion of the population in each deprivation quintile for Gloucestershire the East and West area. The West area has a higher proportion of residents living in the most deprived 20% nationally (10.9%) than the East (4.5%) and the county as a whole (7.9%)

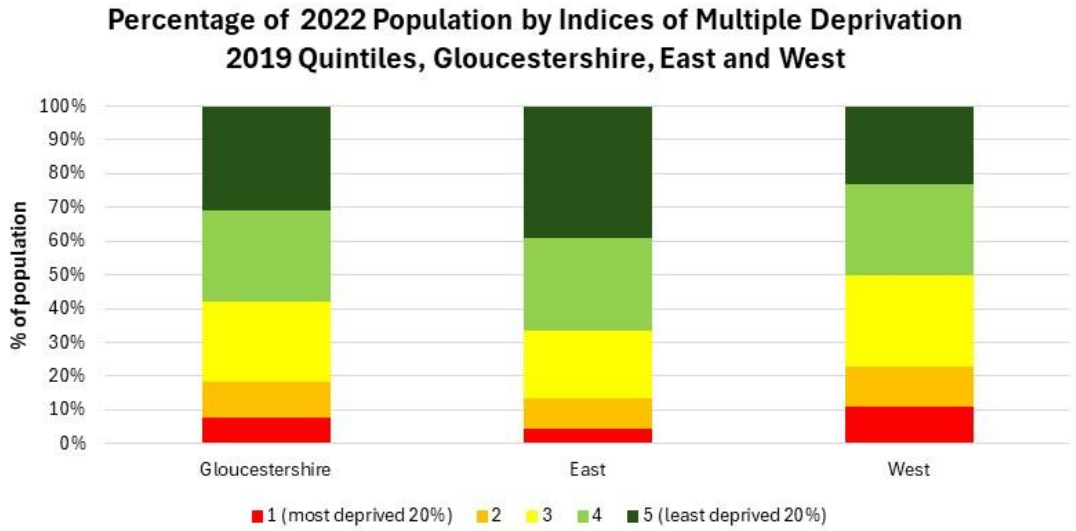



*Figure 14: Percentage of 2022 population by Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 Quintiles, Gloucestershire, East and West*[79]

[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Indices of Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG and Mid 2022 Population Estimates, ONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Vulnerable groups of society | No specific data held on this characteristic. Where vulnerable groups are addressed through other characteristics. |

**Appendix 2: Council Staff Data and Information**

Details of staff affected by the proposed activity:

| Groups | Workforce Data and Information |
|---|---|

Age

The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils.

| Organisation | Snapshot date | Headcount / FTE | Age profile | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | 45–54 largest (32.4%) | GCC-EDI-2024 |
| Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | 50–59 largest group | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | 50–59 largest group | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica. Data provided represents 127 individuals. | 50–59 largest group (36.2%) | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return. Data | 50+ largest group (43.8%) | FODDC-Publica-2024 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | provided represents 112 individuals. | | |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | 56+ largest group (26.1%) | GC-EDI-2022 |

**Disability**

The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils.

| Organisation | Snapshot date | Headcount / FTE | Disability | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | 4.80% | GCC-EDI-2024 |
| Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | 5.0% | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | 10.1% | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | 1.57% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | 2.36% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | 6.1% | GC-EDI-2022 |

**Sex**

| Organisation | Snapshot date | Headcount / FTE | Gender split | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | 70.1% F / 29.9% M | GCC-EDI-2024 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | 58.6% F / 41.4% M | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| | Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | 52.9% F / 47.1% M | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| | Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | 70.4% F / 29.6% M | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| | Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | 70.87% F/ 29.13% M | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | 65.18% F/ 34.82% M | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | 60.9% F / 39.1% M | GC-EDI-2022 |

Race

The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils.

| Organisation | Snapshot date | Headcount / FTE | Ethnicity | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | White British 86.6%; DEC 7.5% | GCC-EDI-2024 |
| Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | 89.7% White British | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | 210 White British; 11 Other; 17 Unknown | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | White - British: 29.92% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | White – British: 36.61% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | White 70.5%; Unstated 21.5%; BME 8.0% | GC-EDI-2022 |
| Gender reassignment | No data is publicly available regarding gender reassignment for any of the councils. | | | | |
| Marriage & civil partnership | The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils. | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <table><tr><th>Organisation</th><th>Snapshot date</th><th>Headcount / FTE</th><th>Marriage & Civil Partnership</th><th>Source</th></tr><tr><td>Gloucestershire County Council</td><td>1 Jul 2024</td><td>4,369 (excl. schools)</td><td>Divorced/Dissolved Civil Partnership 5.8%; Married/Civil 48.2%; Separated 2.4%; Single/Never Married 35.3%; Widowed 0.6%; Prefer not to say 7.7%</td><td>GCC-EDI-2024</td></tr><tr><td>Stroud District Council</td><td>Apr 2022</td><td>379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual</td><td>—</td><td>SDC-Workforce-2022</td></tr><tr><td>Cheltenham Borough Council</td><td>Mar 2023</td><td>238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual</td><td>—</td><td>CBC-Workforce-2023</td></tr><tr><td>Tewkesbury Borough Council</td><td>31 Mar 2022</td><td>216</td><td>—</td><td>TBC-GPG-2022</td></tr><tr><td>Cotswold District Council</td><td>2024</td><td>Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica</td><td>Married: (7.56% Single: 14.17% Divorced: 3.94% Living with Partner: 0.79% Widowed: 0.79%</td><td>CDC-Publica-2024</td></tr><tr><td>Forest of Dean District Council</td><td>2024</td><td>Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return</td><td>Married: 16.07% Single: 6.25% Divorced: 0.89%</td><td>FODDC-Publica-2024</td></tr><tr><td>Gloucester City Council</td><td>2022</td><td>261</td><td>-</td><td>GC-EDI-2022</td></tr></table> |
| Pregnancy & maternity | No data is publicly available regarding Pregnancy & Maternity for any of the councils. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Religion and/or belief | The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils. |

| Organisation | Snapshot date | Headcount / FTE | Religion | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | Buddhist 2.1%; Christian 32.2%; Hindu 0.0%; Jewish 0.0%; Muslim 3.4%; None 52.1%; Other 4.1%; Sikh 0.7%; Prefer not to say 5.5% | GCC-EDI-2024 |
| Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | — | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | — | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | No religious belief: 20.47%<br>Christian: 3.94%<br>Some other religion or belief: 0.79%<br>Prefer not to say: 74.80% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | Christian: 2.68%<br>No religious belief: 1.79%<br>Prefer not to say: 0.89%<br>Protestant: 0.89%<br>Blank / Not Provided: 93.75% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | - | GC-EDI-2022 |

<table>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils.
<table>
<tr><th>Organisation</th><th>Snapshot date</th><th>Headcount / FTE</th><th>Sexual orientation</th><th>Source</th></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucestershire County Council</td><td>1 Jul 2024</td><td>4,369 (excl. schools)</td><td>Bi-sexual 2.6%; Gay/Lesbian 2.1%; Heterosexual/Straight 86.0%; Prefer not to say 9.4%</td><td>GCC-EDI-2024</td></tr>
<tr><td>Stroud District Council</td><td>Apr 2022</td><td>379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual</td><td>—</td><td>SDC-Workforce-2022</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cheltenham Borough Council</td><td>Mar 2023</td><td>238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual</td><td>—</td><td>CBC-Workforce-2023</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tewkesbury Borough Council</td><td>31 Mar 2022</td><td>216</td><td>—</td><td>TBC-GPG-2022</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cotswold District Council</td><td>2024</td><td>Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica</td><td>Heterosexual: 32.28%<br>Not stated: 2.36%<br>Bisexual: 0.79%<br>Blank / Not Provided: 66.93%</td><td>CDC-Publica-2024</td></tr>
<tr><td>Forest of Dean District Council</td><td>2024</td><td>Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return</td><td>Heterosexual: 41.07%<br>Blank / Not Provided: 58.93%</td><td>FODDC-Publica-2024</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucester City Council</td><td>2022</td><td>261</td><td>-</td><td>GC-EDI-2022</td></tr>
</table>
</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces community</td>
<td>No data is publicly available regarding the Armed Forces Community for any of the councils.</td>
</tr>
</table>

| | |
|---|---|
| Carers | No data is publicly available regarding Carers for any of the councils. |
| Care leavers / care experienced adults | No data is publicly available regarding Care leavers / care experienced adults for any of the councils. |
| Digital exclusion | No data is publicly available regarding Digital exclusion for any of the councils. |
| Geography, for example, urban and rural areas | No data is publicly available regarding Geography of the workforce for any of the councils. |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | No data is publicly available regarding Socio-economic disadvantage of the workforce for any of the councils. |
| Vulnerable groups of society | No data is publicly available regarding Vulnerable groups of society disadvantage of the workforce for any of the councils |
| References used for Staffing Data | GCC-EDI-2024: Gloucestershire County Council – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Report 2024/25<br>https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2126661/edi-report2024_workforce_final_.pdf<br><br>SDC-Workforce-2022: Stroud District Council – Workforce Statistics (April 2022)<br>https://www.stroud.gov.uk/media/2103085/workforce-statistics-2022.pdf<br><br>CBC-Workforce-2023: Cheltenham Borough Council – Workforce Statistics (March 2023)<br>https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/downloads/file/6208/workforce-statistics-march-2023 |

| | |
|---|---|
| | TBC-GPG-2022: Tewkesbury Borough Council – Gender Pay Gap Report 2022<br>https://www.tewkesbury.gov.uk/media/fzxhofgv/gender-pay-gap-report-2022-final.docx.pdf<br><br>CDC-Publica-2024: Cotswold District Council – Council spending / staffing details (Publica model)<br>https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/about-the-council/transparency-and-open-data/council/spending/<br><br>FODDC-Publica-2024: Forest of Dean District Council – News release (July 2024)<br>https://news.fdean.gov.uk/news/local-authorities-to-consider-moving-forward-with-plans-to-take-greater-control-of-council-services<br><br>GC-EDI-2022: Gloucester City Council Workforce Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Report (Sept 2022)<br>https://www.gloucester.gov.uk/media/4m3p0bpy/city-workforce-equality-diversity-inclusion-report-final-2022.pdf<br><br>LGA-GPG-2025: Local Government Association – The gender pay gap in English local authorities 2024/25<br>https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/gender-pay-gap-english-local-authorities-20242 |

# Local Government Reorganisation in Gloucestershire

## Two Unitary Authority (2UA) Full Proposal

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## Executive Summary

Gloucestershire is poised for a bold transformation in local governance. This proposal recommends replacing the current two-tier system of county, district, borough, and city councils with a **Two-Unitary Model (2UA)** as follows:

- **East** - comprising the districts of Cheltenham, Cotswold, and Tewkesbury (population 310k)
- **West** - comprising the districts of Gloucester, Forest of Dean, and Stroud (population 349k)

At this stage, the two new unitary councils are referred to as 'East' and 'West' for clarity. Names for each authority will be agreed as part of the reorganisation process.

The 2UA model will streamline decision-making, reduce duplication, and unlock significant financial and operational efficiencies - while strengthening local identity and empowering communities through innovative **Neighbourhood Partnerships**.

**This reorganisation is not just structural, it's strategic**. It aligns with Ministerial criteria for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and positions Gloucestershire as a national leader in regional devolution, ready to shape the future of public service delivery.

## Economic and Demographic Context

- Gloucestershire's economy generated **£22.1bn GVA** in 2023, with strengths in **advanced manufacturing, cyber, aerospace, and agri-tech**
- **The population is projected to grow by 17.6% by 2047**, with a sharp rise in residents aged 65+
- Pressing challenges include **housing affordability**, **rural isolation**, and **climate resilience.**

## Our Vision and Ambition

We're building on what makes Gloucestershire great to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, bold ideas, and opportunities for everyone. LGR is the enabling change that allows us to meet these challenges and deliver a ***smarter, fairer, and greener Gloucestershire***. Our six key ambitions that give life to this commitment are:

1. **Driving breakthrough innovation for national resilience**

2. **Harnessing digital to tackle inequality, improve services, and drive innovation**
3. **Empowering communities through co-design and local decision-making**
4. **Putting wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery at the heart of growth**
5. **Unlocking talent, skills, and housing for inclusive growth**
6. **Using data to transform transport and public services**

These ambitions are designed to unlock Gloucestershire's full potential and deliver tangible benefits for residents.

## The 2UA Financial Case

| **Potential day one financial position (c. 1st April 2028)** | **East UA** | **West UA** |
|---|---|---|
| Total income | £410.5m | £440.9m |
| Total expenditure | £388.6m | £462.8m |
| Net position | **£21.9m (surplus)** | **-£21.9m (deficit)** |
| Total revenue implication of Fire & Rescue (i.e. additional pressures for the new UA) | -£1.35m | -£1.45m |
| Net position (incl. impact of Standalone Fire & Rescue Authority) | **£20.5m (surplus)** | **-£23.3m (deficit)** |
| **Reorganisation Costs and Benefits** | **East UA** | **West UA** |
| Gross annual reorganisation savings | £8.6m | £10.3m |
| Ongoing annual disaggregation costs | £3.7m | £4.4m |
| Net annual savings | £4.9m | £5.9m |
| One-off transition costs | -£13.2m | -£15.8m |
| One-off Fire and Rescue disaggregation costs | £0.5m | £0.6m |
| Total one-off transition costs | -£13.7m | -£16.4m |
| Payback period | 4.9 years | 4.9 Years |
| Cumulative net saving after 5 years | £0.5m | £0.5m |
| Cumulative net saving after 10 years | £26.3m | £28.5m |

| Transformation benefits | East UA | West UA |
|---|---|---|
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Base** | £7.4m | £8.8m |
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Stretch** | £12.0m | £14.4m |

## Governance, Democracy, and Place

- **110 councillors** for Gloucestershire (52 in the West, 48 in the East)
- A unified electoral cycle and **streamlined decision-making**
- Strong locality working via **Neighbourhood Partnerships** (7-12 neighbourhoods within each authority, 20k–50k population each)
- **Trusted, innovative partnerships** with Town and Parish Councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sectors.

## Digital, Data, and Technology (DDaT)

- A **digitally enabled council** with inclusive, responsive services
- Investment in **AI**, **predictive analytics**, and **cloud platforms**
- Focus on **digital inclusion** and robust infrastructure.

## Built together, backed by evidence

Our proposals have been developed by **all Gloucestershire councils working together** in setting the vision, using a common evidence-base, and working within a single financial model and option appraisal process.

Our **public and stakeholder engagement has enriched and improved our proposals**. We are committed to delivering better outcomes for and with local people and making **LGR the platform for a better Gloucestershire.**

Both the single unitary (1UA) and two unitary (2UA) proposals have been developed using a common evidence base, shared data sources, and consistent analytical methods. As a result, there are significant similarities across both proposals.

In addition to the geographic footprints, key differences between the 1UA and 2UA proposals are highlighted within the shared options analysis and the respective financial cases.

## Introduction and Context

**Gloucestershire isn't like anywhere else in the UK.**

From postcard-perfect Cotswold villages to codebreaking at GCHQ and the roar of the Shed at Gloucester Rugby, this is a county where history fuels a thriving present. Our culture, economy, and identity are deeply rooted yet rapidly evolving.

We're not defined by a single centre. Gloucestershire is a proud network of city, towns, villages, and rural communities, each with its own pulse. Cheltenham leads in innovation, Stroud bursts with creativity, the Forest of Dean harnesses natural assets, Tewkesbury drives manufacturing, Gloucester powers civic life, and the Cotswolds are shaping the future of sustainable energy.

Our diverse places have built a rich patchwork of industries, cultures, and stories. And now, with a bold vision for the future, a single tier of local government could unlock even more. A devolved Gloucestershire would be decentralised, interconnected, and resilient - ready to turn its unique strengths into shared success.




This document sets out the case for change for a new model of local government in Gloucestershire – a model that will enable us to build on what makes Gloucestershire great, to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, fresh ideas, and opportunities for everyone.

## About Gloucestershire

**Gloucestershire sits at the northern edge of the South West - perfectly placed and powerfully connected.** It borders three unitary authorities - South Gloucestershire, Swindon, and Wiltshire - and links to Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Monmouthshire. Sitting to the north of the M4 / M5 crossroads, with the M5 weaving northwards through the county, Gloucestershire links north and south, east and west, and connects several major UK cities Cardiff, Bristol, Birmingham, Oxford, and London. The River Severn winds through the county's core, shaping both landscape and life.

Though 87.5% of the county is rural, **over 70% of residents live in urban areas**[1]. Cheltenham and Gloucester are the beating hearts of business, education, culture, and commerce, supported by a network of vibrant market towns that fuel local economies and serve rural communities.

- The population of Gloucestershire is currently 659,276[2]
- Gloucestershire spans 265,253 hectares[3]
- We are proud to have two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean
- Gloucestershire also has 12 National Nature Reserves and some 120 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within its borders
- According to the 2011 Census, 83.1% of Gloucestershire residents also work in the county[4].

## Population Change

**Gloucestershire is growing, and fast.** Between 2014 and 2024, the county's population has risen by 7.8%, outpacing the national average of 5.9%. But growth hasn't been even. Districts like Tewkesbury are booming, with a staggering 16.6% population increase, ranking in the top 10% of fastest-growing local authorities six times since 2014[5].

At the same time, **Gloucestershire is ageing.** People aged 65+ make up 22.1% of the population, well above the national average of 18.8%. In rural areas like the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean, that figure climbs above 25%. The county also has fewer children and working-age adults than the national average.
Gloucester and Cheltenham have the highest proportions of young people within

[1] Rural Urban Classification 2021
[2] Mid 2023 Population Estimates, ONS
[3] SAM 2023, ONS Area to Mean High Water Excluding Area of Inland Water (Land Area) (AREALHECT)
[4] 2011 Census, ONS
[5] Mid Year Population Estimate. ONS

the county, reflecting their urban character and the presence of educational institutions.[6]

Looking ahead, the population is projected to grow by **113,929 people by 2047** - a 17.6% increase, far above the 12.7% forecast for England and Wales. Tewkesbury and Stroud are set for even greater projected growth of 29.6% and 22.2% respectively, driven by more available land for development. Cheltenham, by contrast, is expected to see the smallest rise at 10.1%[7].

## Economy

**Gloucestershire's natural beauty is both a challenge and a magnet.** With AONBs covering large parts of the county, development can be constrained, but this same environmental quality makes the county a magnet for talent, investment, and tourism.

**The economy is strong, diverse, and resilient.** In 2023, Gloucestershire's economy generated £22.1 billion in GVA - 12.8% of the South West's output and 1% of the UK total[8]. It's a county where quality of life meets business opportunity.

Gloucestershire offers a powerful mix: **a skilled workforce, strong connectivity, available land, and a high-quality environment.** That's why it's home to major players like GE Aviation, Safran, Renishaw, EDF Energy, Ecotricity, Unilever-Walls and St. James's Place, alongside a thriving ecosystem of entrepreneurs and innovators.

With deep roots in defence and aerospace, the county remains a manufacturing powerhouse, especially in advanced engineering. It's also a national centre for cyber and intelligence, anchored by GCHQ, the National Cyber Security Centre, and a growing cyber business park.

Despite its specialisms, **Gloucestershire's economy is diverse and balanced.** In 2023, the top employment sectors were wholesale and retail (14.8%), health and social care (13.8%), and manufacturing (10.6%)[9] - a mix that supports stability and adaptability.

## Challenges Facing Gloucestershire

**But Gloucestershire isn't without its challenges.** Demographic change, widening inequalities, pockets of deprivation, environmental pressures, and rural isolation all pose serious hurdles to inclusive, sustainable growth.

[6] Mid Year Population Estimate. ONS
[7] 2022 based Subnational Population Projections, ONS
[8] Regional gross value added (balanced) per head and income components, ONS
[9] BRES, ONS

## Demographic Change

**Gloucestershire's population is ageing, and faster than the national average.** By 2047, the number of residents aged 65+ is projected to surge by 43.4% (compared to 38.6% nationally), making up over a quarter (26.8%) of the county's population. Tewkesbury is set to see the sharpest rise at 54%, while even the lowest increase - 32.4% in the Forest of Dean - is significant[10].

At the same time, the working-age population (18-64) is barely growing, and the number of children and young people is expected to decline. This shift is reshaping the county's social and economic landscape.

**More people are living with disabilities and long-term conditions across all age groups.** There's also a rise in single-person households with limited family support, and a growing number of children with special educational needs (SEN) since 2015, all adding pressure to already stretched health and social care services.

By 2047, Gloucestershire's **dependency ratio** (the number of dependents per 100 working-age people) is projected to rise from 65 to 70[11]. That means fewer people supporting more, placing increasing strain on services, budgets, and the local economy.

**The challenge is clear:** how do we continue delivering high-quality care and support while maintaining a healthy, productive economy in the face of rapid demographic change?

## Inequalities and Deprivation

**Gloucestershire performs well overall, but averages hide deep inequalities.** While county-wide outcomes often exceed regional and national benchmarks, they mask stark local disparities. 12 neighbourhoods across Gloucester, Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Forest of Dean (home to a combined 3.2% of the county's population) rank among the **10% most deprived in England[12]**.

Some communities face even greater barriers to inclusion and opportunity, including **rough sleepers, non-white and non-English speaking residents, traveller communities, and asylum seekers**. For these groups, access to healthcare, education, and skills development is often harder, and outcomes are worse.

[10] 2022 based Sub-national Population Projections, ONS
[11] 2022 based Sub-national Population Projections, ONS
[12] Indices of Deprivation 2019

## Access to Housing

**Housing in Gloucestershire is expensive, and getting on the property ladder is tough.** In 2025, the average home cost **8.6 times the median salary**, higher than the national average (7.5) and just above the South West average (8.5). But this affordability varies widely: in Gloucester, the ratio is 7.3 and, in the Cotswolds, it soars to 13.8.

With mortgage lenders typically capping loans at 4.5 times income, many residents are priced out, forced into unsuitable housing, or pushed out of the county altogether. This makes it harder to attract and retain young people, key workers, and future talent[13].

Despite these pressures, housing supply has grown. Between 2019 and 2024, the number of dwellings in Gloucestershire rose by **5.2%**, outpacing both the regional (4.6%) and national (4.7%) averages[14].

**Yet unlocking further housing and growth remains a major challenge.** Much of Gloucestershire doesn't have a five-year housing supply, increasing the likelihood of speculative planning applications, misalignment with local priorities, and unsustainable growth. Planning constraints, infrastructure limitations, and the need to protect Gloucestershire's natural and historic environment all create friction. Balancing growth with sustainability, affordability, and community needs will be critical to the county's future.

Recent updates to the National Planning Policy Framework and the anticipated Planning and Infrastructure Bill promise a step change in housing delivery. The Bill will introduce a statutory Spatial Development Strategy, giving Gloucestershire a powerful new tool to shape future growth. Combined with the streamlining of the planning system via unitarisation, this could unlock significant sustainable development across the county. We must seize this opportunity, while being conscious of possible environmental and democratic risks.

## Rural Isolation

**Gloucestershire's rural charm is one of its greatest strengths, but also one of its biggest challenges.** With 87.5% of the county classed as rural and nearly 30% of residents living in these areas, access to essential services isn't always easy[15]. Nearly **one in five people** live in areas ranked among the **20% most deprived in England** in terms of Barriers to Housing and Services[16].

[13] Median House Prices to Median Workplace Earnings, ONS
[14] Live tables on dwelling stock, MHCLG
[15] Rural/Urban Classification, 2022, ONS
[16] Indices of Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG

Travel times to key services - whether by public transport, car, or active travel - are longer than both regional and national averages[17]. And while high-speed broadband now reaches almost every address, **digital exclusion persists**: 4.4% of residents didn't use the internet at all between May 2023 and March 2024. In rural areas, where public internet access points can be over 45 minutes away by bus, those without a car face real digital isolation[18].

**The challenge is clear:** we must ensure Gloucestershire's most vulnerable and isolated residents stay connected - to services, to support, and to opportunity.

## Climate Change and Flooding

**Gloucestershire is making strides on sustainability, but the climate crisis is accelerating.** Despite strong progress by county and district councils in cutting emissions and embedding greener practices, the risks to our communities, infrastructure, and economy are growing.

**Climate Leadership Gloucestershire** has been established as a strategic partnership of public sector bodies - including local councils, the NHS, police, and academic institutions - to coordinate and lead the county's response to the climate and ecological emergency.

**Extreme weather is becoming more frequent and more severe.** Gloucestershire is impacted by severe flooding, droughts, and heatwaves. A growing risk of wildfires has also been highlighted by agencies including the Forestry Commission, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

Flooding remains one of Gloucestershire's biggest climate threats. The devastating 2007 floods damaged around 5,000 homes and 500 businesses, leaving 135,000 people without water for two weeks. Even less intense events in 2012 and 2013 caused widespread disruption. But the impact goes far beyond damaged buildings. **Flooding hits lives, livelihoods, and mental health, especially for the most vulnerable.** That's why climate resilience must be front and centre in our housing strategy and growth plans.

## The Current Model of Local Government in Gloucestershire

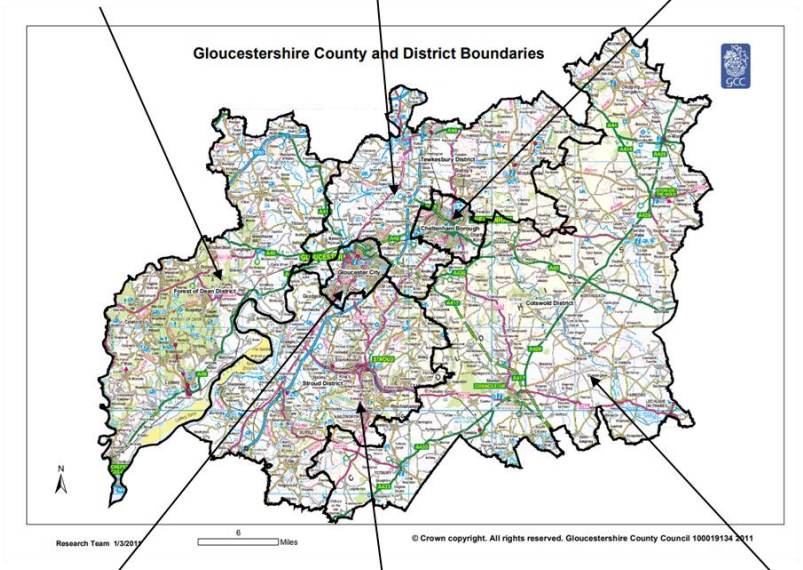
**Gloucestershire operates under a two-tier system**: a single county council alongside five district and borough councils and one city council. Most of the county is also covered by a network of **267 parish and town councils**, adding a third layer of local governance in most areas.

[17] Journey Time Statistics 2019, DfT
[18] Participation Survey, DCMS

**Forest of Dean District**
**Administrative centre:** Coleford
**Population:** 89,104
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£10,413,000

**Tewkesbury Borough**
**Administrative centre:** Tewkesbury
**Population:** 98,896
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£7,884,000

**Cheltenham Borough**
**Administrative centre:** Cheltenham
**Population:** 120,255
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£18,698,000




**Gloucester City**
**Administrative centre**: Gloucester
**Population**: 134,991
**Net Revenue Expenditure**:
£17,543,000

**Stroud District**
**Administrative centre:** Stroud
**Population:** 124,540
**Net Revenue Expenditure::**
£21,176,000

**Cotswold District**
**Administrative centre:** Cirencester
**Population:** 91,490
**Net Revenue Expenditure:**
£16,028,000

## Political Landscape

With each council on a different electoral cycle, Gloucestershire holds local elections every year, creating a constantly shifting political landscape.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham Borough Council | Leader and Cabinet model | Liberal Democrat majority administration |
| Cotswold District Council | Leader and Cabinet model | Liberal Democrat majority administration |
| Forest of Dean District Council | Leader and Cabinet model | No overall control; Green minority administration |
| Gloucester City Council | Leader and Cabinet model | No overall control; Liberal Democrat minority administration |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Stroud District Council | Committee system | No overall control; Green minority administration |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | Committee system | No overall control; Liberal Democrat minority administration |
| Gloucestershire County Council | Leader and Cabinet model | No overall control; Liberal Democrat minority administration |

Table 1: Current political control across Gloucestershire

**Gloucestershire's seven councils have 295 councillors, 37 of whom serve at both county and district/borough levels.** In many areas, overlapping ward boundaries mean residents can be represented by up to **four different councillors**: one at the county level and three at the district or borough level. This layered system can create complexity in local representation and decision-making.

| **Number of councillors** | **Gloucester City** | **Cheltenham Borough** | **Tewkesbury Borough** | **Stroud District** | **Cotswold District** | **Forest of Dean District** | **Gloucestershire County Council** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Liberal Democrats* | 17 | 36 | 16 | 2 | 21 | 1 | 27 |
| *Labour / Labour and Co-operative* | 7 | | | 18 | | 4 | 1 |
| *Conservative* | 11 | | 9 | 6 | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| *Green* | | 3 | 4 | 24 | 2 | 15 | 9 |
| *Independents / Other* | 4 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 1 |
| *Reform* | | | 1 | | | 2 | 11 |

Table 2: Current political make up of Gloucestershire's councils

## Partnerships and Joint Working

**Gloucestershire thrives on strong partnerships within the county and beyond.** We have a proven track record of coming together to tackle big

challenges, and unitarisation offers a powerful opportunity to build on that foundation, strengthening collaboration and delivering even greater impact.

## Statutory Partners

**Gloucestershire's public sector is unusually coterminous.** A single police constabulary and one police and crime commissioner serve the entire county. The county council also acts as the fire and rescue authority, with Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service fully integrated. While the county is currently served by a single NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB), this arrangement is set to evolve with the formation of a new cluster alongside Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) ICB, marking a shift in how integrated care is coordinated across the South West region.

Some smaller units of delivery, such as primary care networks, fit within current district boundaries. There are three universities, the largest of which is the University of Gloucestershire, and over 300 schools.

**Reducing the current two-tier system of seven principal councils to two unitary councils for Gloucestershire would provide a simplified local government structure for public services alignment.**

## Joint Working

Gloucestershire already has a strong foundation for joint working, backed by a range of formal and informal governance arrangements**.** These reflect the close ties between different parts of the county and a shared commitment to collaboration.

Key structures include:

- **Leadership Gloucestershire:** a strategic alliance of senior public sector leaders - spanning councils, health, police, and key agencies - providing unified direction on cross-cutting issues to benefit communities countywide.
- **Gloucestershire City Region Board**: a joint committee of all seven councils, driving a shared vision for strategic growth and economic success, and championing Gloucestershire with partners, such as the Western Gateway Partnership, to attract further investment and growth.
- **Joint Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee:** a joint scrutiny committee which holds the Gloucestershire City Region Board to account - reviewing decisions, tracking the impact of economic investments, and shaping future growth priorities.
- **Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and a Health and Wellbeing Integrated Care Partnership (ICP):** the HWB leads strategic coordination across health, social care, and public health services, bringing together leaders to tackle health inequalities and improve population wellbeing. The ICP develops and delivers the five-year integrated care strategy to improve

health and care outcomes, aligning efforts across partners to reduce disparities and improve access and experience.

- **Strategic Local Plan**: when finalised, this will shape future housing and employment growth across three local planning authority areas.
- **Climate Leadership Gloucestershire**: an innovative public sector partnership of councils, NHS, police and academia institutions, developing solutions to tackle the climate emergency.
- **Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool:** Gloucestershire boosts local growth by pooling business rates to keep more revenue circulating within the county.
- Other informal arrangements exist to enable joint working on other areas of shared responsibility, e.g. **Gloucestershire Resources and Waste Partnership**, **Gloucestershire Strategic Migration Partnership**, **Gloucestershire Housing Partnership**, and the **Gloucestershire Children and Young People's Coalition**.

Beyond formal governance, collaboration is also embedded in service delivery:

- **Ubico**: a local authority-owned company delivering a range of environmental services across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire, including waste, recycling, and street cleansing.
- **Publica**: a shared services partnership owned by Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Cheltenham, and West Oxfordshire councils. The councils work together through Publica to share skills and resources, including services such as ICT, customer services, benefits administration, housing, and car park enforcement.
- **Shared services**: various arrangements between different groups of councils for sharing back-office services, such as internal audit and risk (ARA) and legal services (One Legal).
- **Co-located services**: the Public Services Centre in Tewkesbury brings together the county council, borough council, police, health services, and the voluntary sector to provide a single access point for customers, pioneering the first Jobcentre Plus co-location in a local authority building.

These partnerships show what's possible but also highlight existing complexity. A more streamlined governance model could build on this strong collaborative culture, reducing duplication, and unlocking even greater impact for Gloucestershire's communities.

## Economic Partnerships

**Strong economic partnerships are the backbone of Gloucestershire's success - and devolution can take them even further.**

Gloucestershire's Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), GFirst, established in 2011, has played a key role in uniting business, public, and voluntary sectors to secure government funding and drive job creation. Its **Strategic Economic Plan** (SEP) has supported business growth and skills development and maximised the county's strategic location along the motorway corridor. In 2024, its functions transitioned to the county council, marking a new chapter with the creation of the **Gloucestershire City Region Board**.

Gloucestershire is actively shaping a bold, county-wide vision for inclusive and sustainable prosperity through the development of a **Local Growth Plan (LGP)**.

Although not mandated as for mayoral authorities, Gloucestershire's public sector leaders are stepping up with a LGP that reflects a **shared ambition to unlock the county's full economic potential and improve life for everyone who lives here**. Co-created by all local authorities and shaped through extensive collaboration with businesses, education providers, the voluntary sector, and local communities, the LGP sets out a clear, compelling roadmap for long-term growth and resilience.

By aligning with national frameworks, the plan positions **Gloucestershire as a key contributor to the UK's economic and social missions**, ready to attract investment and drive innovation.

Across the county, **district councils are leading bold, community-driven innovation**, including:

- **Cheltenham**: partnered with Hub8 by Plexal to launch the **MX Innovation Centre**, a workspace for the local tech community.
- **Cotswold:** rolled out a **low-income family tracker** to target support for households in financial difficulty.
- **Forest of Dean**: Forest of Dean District Council, the Centre for Sustainable Energy, and local resident-led group Forest Community Energy have partnered to roll out the AURORA project in the area. This project, supported by several European universities, **promotes energy saving** awareness through inspiring events, a carbon tracker app, and community-owned solar panels.
- **Gloucester:** acknowledged by Nesta and others as sector-leading in asset-based community development, including the establishment of an innovative community development organisation.
- **Stroud:** introduced a **crowdfunding platform** to empower community-led projects and access a share of funding from the council.
- **Tewkesbury**: the **Growth Hub** offers fully funded business support in partnership with the borough council.

**A unitary model would supercharge this local innovation, strengthening place-based leadership, aligning economic strategy, and making it easier to deliver joined-up, community-focused growth.**

## VCFSE Partnerships

**Gloucestershire's voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, powered by over 4,000 organisations, is vibrant and vital.** At its heart is the **Gloucestershire VCS Alliance**, the independent voice that informs, strengthens, and develops the sector. The alliance promotes equal partnerships between VCSE (voluntary, community, and social enterprise) groups and the public and private sectors, supporting VCSE groups and organisations to become more sustainable.

**The Know Your Patch (KYP) networks**, launched in 2018, are another standout success. Led by local VCSE organisations in each district, they bring together community groups, service providers, and public sector partners around a shared belief: **strong, connected communities are the foundation of resilient lives**.

# The Strategic Case (Vision & Ambition)

## Local Government Reorganisation Enabling **a Smarter, Fairer, Greener Gloucestershire**

**Local government reorganisation (LGR) gives Gloucestershire the chance to deliver more for its residents and to play a stronger role – together - in supporting national priorities.** Current structures can be complex and duplicative, making it harder to deliver the best outcomes for our residents and to join up decisions across planning, housing, transport, health, skills, and the environment. **Reorganisation offers the opportunity to simplify accountability and cut duplication, offering our residents greater clarity and improved services.**

This change is what makes our ambitions deliverable. Breakthrough innovation can be scaled when investment, land use and regulation are aligned. Digital inclusion can be advanced when infrastructure, skills, and social support are considered together. Communities can have a stronger role when co-design is embedded consistently across local services. Wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery can be treated as interconnected priorities rather than separate silos. Talent and skills can be directly linked to affordable homes and clear career pathways. Underpinning this is how data can be used effectively across the system to improve services, strengthen transport connectivity, and prevent people from falling through the cracks of a widely dispersed county.

Gloucestershire brings major strengths; we have a world-class economy rich in both heritage and future innovation, outstanding natural capital, and a collaborative civic culture. We also face challenges: 19% of our residents live in the lowest national quintile for access to housing and services, our population has distinct and diverse needs, and opportunities are unevenly shared. LGR is the enabling change that allows us to meet these challenges and deliver a ***smarter, fairer and greener Gloucestershire***. Our six ambitions set out how:

- **Driving breakthrough innovation for national resilience**: harnessing Gloucestershire's industrial and research strengths to create resilience-focused solutions in cyber, aerospace, agri-tech, advanced manufacturing, and natural capital.
- **Harnessing digital to tackle inequality, improve services, and drive innovation**: ensuring every resident has the skills, connectivity, and confidence to access services, education, training, and work.
- **Empowering communities through co-design and local decision-making:** giving residents a stronger role in shaping services, with tools and partnerships that make delivery more responsive to local needs.

- **Putting wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery at the heart of growth:** treating health, affordable homes, and environmental recovery as the foundations of prosperity.
- **Unlocking talent, skills, and housing for inclusive growth:** linking education and training pathways directly to housing and careers that help people stay and thrive in Gloucestershire.
- **Using data to transform transport and public services:** creating trusted, joined-up intelligence to improve safeguarding, support early and anticipatory intervention, and deliver more effective integrated transport.

Our Vision: **We're building on what makes Gloucestershire great to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, bold ideas, and opportunities for everyone.**

## Our Six Ambitions for Gloucestershire

### Ambition 1: Driving breakthrough innovation for national resilience

Gloucestershire will build on its established strengths in cyber, aerospace, defence, agri-tech, and advanced manufacturing to become a national leader in resilience-led innovation. We will draw on pioneering anchors such as GCHQ, Golden Valley[19] and the proposed Severn Edge project[20] along with our agricultural research centres at Hartpury University[21] and the Royal Agricultural University[22]. By fostering clusters of excellence and supporting research and development (R&D), the county will generate high-value jobs, attract private and public investment, and contribute solutions in areas such as energy security, sustainable food systems, secure supply chains, and the restoration of natural capital. With the upcoming Western Forest[23], alongside our ambition that the Forest of Dean achieves biosphere status[24], we can work at scale on innovation in land management, biodiversity recovery, and climate adaptation.

**With our landscapes working alongside our technological advancements, we can ensure that Gloucestershire's resilience is rooted in both its environment and its economy.** LGR will strengthen this by removing fragmentation across planning, investment, and regulation, allowing innovation to move from pilots and single clusters to an at-scale resilient economy. This

[19] www.goldenvalleyuk.com
[20] https://western-gateway.co.uk/news-and-blogs/news/severn-edge-sites-potential-home-new-smr-technology/
[21] www.hartpury.ac.uk
[22] www.rau.ac.uk
[23] www.nationalforest.org
[24] www.fdean.gov.uk/planning-and-building/biosphere

integration means that innovation breakthroughs in our resilience led sectors are both developed here but deployed consistently, ensuring benefits are felt not only by residents and businesses in Gloucestershire, but the whole of the UK.

Example benefits:

- **A start-up in Cheltenham's Golden Valley innovation district collaborates with local universities and industry partners to develop new cyber-security tools.** With LGR removing fragmentation across investment and regulation, the start-up can scale faster, attract national contracts, and create high-value local jobs - further anchoring Cheltenham's role in responding to the UK's cyber resilience requirements.
- **A farmer in the Cotswolds adopts new agri-tech tools developed in county innovation hubs.** By using soil sensors and precision irrigation, they improve soil health and resilience to climate change while reducing water and fertiliser use and costs. This not only strengthens the farm's long-term viability but also contributes to Gloucestershire's national reputation in sustainable food systems.
- **A small manufacturer in Tewkesbury trials AI-driven production planning in a regulatory sandbox, enabled by LGR.** The new system helps them cut waste, lower emissions, and respond more flexibly to supply chain pressures. Located near Ministry of Defence and defence sector supply chains, the firm boosts competitiveness and secures new contracts in low-carbon defence and aerospace markets. This demonstrates how resilience-led innovation can be scaled across advance manufacturing - the sector responsible for Gloucestershire's largest Gross Value Added (GVA) - while connecting with other resilience led sectors, both locally and nationally.
- **A STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) student in Stroud takes part in placements within Gloucestershire's clean energy sector, working directly on projects linked to the Severn Edge site.** They gain hands-on experience that secures their future career within their own community, while local employers benefit from a pipeline of home-grown talent that supports the county's transition to net zero and enhances the energy security of the UK.

## Ambition 2: Harnessing digital to tackle inequality, improve services, and drive innovation

Digital inclusion remains inconsistent across Gloucestershire. Digital access is no longer optional – it is essential in ensuring opportunity and engagement with services. Residents, especially those living in rural areas, can suffer limited access to employment opportunities, education, or care, further exacerbating the hidden

poverty in the county. Building on projects such as the county-wide DigiHubs[25], based in GP surgeries and community centres, **Gloucestershire will ensure that every community has the infrastructure, connectivity, and skills to benefit from the world that digital offers.**

By tackling digital exclusion, we can ensure that residents who struggle to access services, training, or employment are not left behind. LGR offers the opportunity to align responsibility for infrastructure and respond to diverse demand across a complex geography, ensuring digital investment benefits are shared fairly across all communities. This also means all can match the pace of our most advanced future-facing sectors, as we offer support for those at risk of being left behind, so that innovation moves forward inclusively. Improved digital confidence will empower residents to participate fully in their communities, access vital support, and offer increased visibility of opportunity. **Digital innovation will drive the sustainable growth agenda, creating jobs and wealth for the county.**

Example benefits:

- **An older adult in Deerhurst, a rural village in Tewkesbury, manages chronic conditions from home using virtual healthcare tools.** Through secure video consultations and remote monitoring, they reduce hospital visits. LGR can enable this by aligning NHS and council investment in digital infrastructure, so rural areas have the same access to connectivity and digital services as urban centres.
- **A young person in Coleford, a market town in the Forest of Dean, accesses digital skills bootcamps**, gaining confidence and new opportunities in cyber, coding, and creative industries.
- **Carers can use predictive care tools to anticipate needs, freeing time to focus on personal interaction.** By receiving alerts when the person they support may need intervention, they are less reliant on emergency services and more able to plan ahead. This is only possible when health and social care data are brought together, made easier by LGR through creating a single system for sharing data securely and consistently.
- **One of Gloucestershire's many micro businesses uses digital tools to reach new customers and improve their service capability**, e.g. through online ordering or remote collaboration with suppliers. With coordinated county-wide investment in digital connectivity, even the smallest firms in rural areas can compete in wider markets, driving inclusive economic growth.

[25] Delivery of Digi-hubs | Gloucestershire County Council

## Ambition 3: Empowering communities through co-design and local decision-making

LGR offers Gloucestershire the opportunity to expand co-design across the county by strengthening the role of the VCFSE sector in service design and delivery. **By giving communities real influence over budgets, priorities, and data, services will be more inclusive, locally responsive, and sustainable.**

Gloucestershire has already demonstrated how effective this approach can be: carers have shaped new support pathways through the Carers Hub[26], and the Gloucestershire Gateway Trust[27] has reinvested profits from the M5 services into projects in Gloucester and Stroud that tackle poverty and improve skills. Local groups in Stroud[28] and the Forest of Dean[29] have influenced health and wellbeing initiatives through community hubs.

With 19% of our population living in the lowest national 20% for access to housing and services[30], empowering communities to shape services based on their local needs is critical to both equity and prevention. Neighbourhood Partnerships are just one example of how LGR could provide a clear framework for convening services with residents – they would sit alongside a wider set of tools to ensure community voices are embedded in decision-making. This approach is founded on building trust and ensuring outcomes are shaped not only by those closest to the challenges, but those experiencing them.

Example benefits:

- **Local residents, councillors, and health practitioners in a Neighbourhood Partnership work together to reduce social isolation in Newent, a Forest of Dean market town.** By combining professional expertise with insights from local people, the Partnership develops community-led activities and accessible support. LGR enables this by aligning funding and decision-making, so neighbourhood priorities can be resourced and embedded within wider service planning.
- **A young carer in Cheltenham is able to provide input into the development of a digital tool with schools and youth services to balance education and caring responsibilities.** The tool provides tailored reminders, wellbeing check-ups and links to local peer support groups. Because LGR enables education, health and social care data to be better connected, the young carer's lived experience regarding the previous systems' lack of navigability are reflected. This makes services easier to

[26] https://gloucestershirecarershub.co.uk
[27] https://gloucestershiregatewaytrust.org.uk
[28] https://cscic.org/programmes/community-hubs/
[29] www.inclusiongloucestershire.co.uk/engagement/community-hubs/
[30] Accessibility - Transport | Inform Gloucestershire

find and use, ensuring their needs are met quickly without having to repeat their story to multiple service providers.

- **A community group in Gloucester collaborates with health providers to design culturally sensitive wellbeing services, improving uptake and trust.** By co-creating mental health support, for example, that recognises diverse cultural practices, more residents feel confident seeking help. LGR supports this by embedding the VCFSE sector within local decision-making frameworks, ensuring community voices are heard alongside statutory providers.
- **Families co-produce services in a local family hub in Tetbury, a Cotswold market town, which provides a family-friendly space.** Parents can take part in shaping early years support, parenting programmes, and wellbeing provision while their children are supported in a safe environment. This is possible because LGR brings together children's services, public health, and community development under one coordinated approach, so family hubs can act as genuine centres for co-creation and prevention.

### Ambition 4: Putting wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery at the heart of growth

**Wellbeing – with housing and nature recovery at its roots – will be a guiding principle in all policy and investment decisions.** From affordable homes and transport to skills and public health, growth plans will be designed to reduce inequalities, improve access to green and blue spaces, and boost Gloucestershire's natural capital. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity, improving land use, and supporting nature-based solutions will strengthen resilience against climate change and create healthier environments for future generations.

Gloucestershire's natural assets also underpin a strong visitor economy. By linking tourism with wellbeing and nature recovery, communities benefit from thriving local businesses while ensuring green spaces remain accessible for residents. Aligning local priorities with Integrated Care System (ICS) prevention goals and CORE20PLUS5[31] frameworks targeting the most deprived 20% of the population (as well as groups experiencing worse-than-average outcomes), will help narrow health and wellbeing gaps across the county.

LGR would make this ambition deliverable by enabling a clear line of accountability across health, housing, and the environment. This coordinated approach can act to turn investment and service delivery into better outcomes for residents. This integration will allow decisions about new housing, green infrastructure, and public services to be planned together - ensuring that residents

[31] www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/national-healthcare-inequalities-improvement-programme/core20plus5/

have both the secure homes and healthy environments they need. In Stroud, community-led housing and green infrastructure projects have already shown how affordable homes and access to nature can be developed hand-in-hand. With devolved powers, these approaches could be embedded and scaled county-wide, linking wellbeing, housing, and nature recovery as the foundation for genuinely inclusive growth.

Example benefits:

- **In the Forest of Dean, a community-led housing scheme integrates affordable homes with woodland management and local energy generation.** Residents not only gain secure housing but also benefit from reduced fuel bills, shared green spaces, and volunteering opportunities that strengthen community ties. This model reflects the Forest's long tradition of working with its natural assets and could be replicated across Gloucestershire, where LGR enables housing, environment, and community to be planned together.
- **A family in Northleach, a Cotswold market town, regularly uses redesigned green spaces that combine play areas, biodiversity planting, and community facilities.** These spaces give children safe places to play and create opportunities for families to meet neighbours, take part in local activities, and benefit from cleaner air. With wellbeing and social connection at their core, such spaces help reduce isolation and improve health outcomes across generations.
- **A disabled resident in Minchinhampton, a semi-rural town, moves into newly built affordable housing designed with accessibility and sustainability at its core.** The home is energy-efficient, reducing bills, and is linked to inclusive transport and nearby green infrastructure, such as sensory trails and accessible walking routes. This combination gives the resident greater independence, reduces their reliance on more intensive services, and enhances their quality of life. By ensuring housing is planned together with transport and green spaces, these wellbeing outcomes become part of everyday provision rather than specialist exceptions.
- **A landowner in South Cerney, a Cotswold village, participates in a countywide nature recovery scheme that restores habitats, improves flood resilience, and generates long-term natural capital value.** By adopting regenerative practices and working in partnership with local authorities and communities, they help protect biodiversity while strengthening the resilience of nearby housing and infrastructure. Crucially, this in turn enhances residents' wellbeing through multi-faceted environmental improvements that contribute to healthier, more secure day-to-day lives. The wellbeing gains are felt both immediately – through safer,

greener environments – as well as in the longer term, as communities experience less disruption and stress from climate-related risks.

### Ambition 5: Unlocking talent, skills, and housing for inclusive growth

Gloucestershire will be able to establish a countywide skills and careers pathway to support lifelong learning and inclusive economic growth. By linking education providers, industry, and employers, residents of all ages and backgrounds will have access to training, apprenticeships, and reskilling opportunities. Tourism and hospitality provide major entry routes into work for young people and career changers. In aligning training pathways with this sector, LGR can help us ensure residents can build stable futures in one of Gloucestershire's most significant industries. Affordable and secure housing will be central to this ambition, providing the stability people need to seize learning opportunities and grow with the confidence that comes from a safe, stable home.

LGR would enable this ambition by aligning housing, skills, and economic development within the same framework. Currently, responsibilities are spread across multiple agencies, making it more difficult to ensure that new homes are built where they connect to training opportunities and local employment. **Gloucestershire can create a coordinated system where homes, learning hubs, and jobs are planned together.** There are strong examples to build on. In Gloucester, the University of Gloucestershire's City Campus Development is bringing new teaching and community space into the heart of the city, while the Forwards Employment Service[32] shows how employers, colleges, and community groups can collaborate to support residents into sustainable work. With LGR, these successes can be scaled across the county, **ensuring that talent is not only retained but is skilled to face the future, knowing their own is secure.**

Example benefits:

- **A Year 12 student in Highnam explores immersive career pathways at a local skills hub**, linking them to mentors in future-focused industries, such as cyber security, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and engineering. These hubs make it easier for young people to see a future in Gloucestershire, rather than having to move away to build a career. In Gloucester, the University of Gloucestershire's new City Campus development strengthens this offer by providing teaching and community space in the heart of the city, connected to wider affordable housing and employment initiatives. Together, these projects make it easier for young people to see a future in the county rather than moving away. With LGR, this integrated approach to housing, education, and employment can be

[32] www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/disabilities/forwards-employment-service/

scaled across Gloucestershire, ensuring that all students - including those in rural areas - can access the same opportunities.

- **A mid-career learner in Winchcombe, a market town in Tewkesbury, retrains in low-carbon construction through flexible programmes**, improving their earning potential while supporting the transition to clean energy. Thanks to housing, public transport, and skills being planned together, they can study locally without facing long commutes or the insecurity of poor-quality rental housing. With stability at home, they are free to focus on building new skills and contributing to Gloucestershire's net zero economy.
- **A young mother in Cheltenham accesses a tailored learning pathway in sustainable construction and materials innovation**, supported by a family-friendly environment and counselling services at a local Family Hub. Over time, she develops expertise and becomes a mentor to others - showing how inclusive pathways strengthen both individual resilience and community cohesion. LGR makes this possible by coordinating housing, skills, and wraparound services under one framework – removing barriers so talent can both flourish and contribute.
- **A young family in Stroud secures affordable housing linked to training opportunities,** allowing them to pursue new careers without instability. Freed from the instability of high housing costs, they can take up retraining and new jobs without the stress of insecure tenancies or long journeys. This stability directly supports wellbeing and ensures Gloucestershire retains and grows its talent base by linking housing delivery with economic inclusion.

### Ambition 6: Using data to transform transport and public services

LGR offers Gloucestershire the chance to bring together fragmented data from across multiple authorities and agencies. With devolved powers, this can be turned into usable intelligence that supports earlier intervention and ensures no one is left behind. This separation makes it harder to spot risks early or to design services that reflect real needs. Reorganisation would provide a framework for data use, allowing us to introduce a trusted, secure data infrastructure that can enable services to anticipate needs, respond in real time, and act preventatively.

Linking education, health, housing, transport, and social care data could improve safeguarding measures, reduce waiting times, and ensure fair provision across urban and rural areas. Open data initiatives and live mobility platforms will offer improved journey options, reduce congestion, and promote more sustainable travel choices.

The Robin demand-responsive bus service[33] shows how transport data can connect rural residents to jobs and services, but integration with housing and employment data would make it far more effective. Family hubs can link education, health, and social care data to improve safeguarding and ensure families access support at the right time. Flood management schemes in the Severn Vale already rely on environmental data to protect communities in real time. With LGR, these initiatives could be joined together, scaled across the county and embedded into **a trusted, secure data infrastructure that works for every resident.**

Example benefits:

- **Residents in flood-prone areas receive early warnings through live data platforms.** By combining real-time river levels with local emergency planning, households are given practical, trusted alerts that improve safety, reduce disruption, and protect lives. With devolved powers, these systems could be scaled across Gloucestershire to cover multiple risks, from flooding in the Severn Vale to wildfire risk in the Cotswolds.
- **A commuter in Frampton on Severn, a rural village in Stroud, uses a transport app with real-time data, reducing journey times and supporting sustainable travel.** Backed by devolved powers, the system can ensure affordable fares, reliable rural coverage, and accessible journey options. This also allows councils to use data on passenger demand and road conditions to prioritise road maintenance.
- **At a family hub in Gloucester, a family sits down with staff and views a joined-up record that brings together information from school and health services.** It shows that their child has had a recent dip in attendance and that the parents have both reported stress to their GP. The family are able to identify that they need extra learning support and access to parenting advice before the situation requires a more acute response. The hub uses the data infrastructure to coordinate the right support quickly, reducing pressure on the family and preventing escalation.
- **Farmers can access county-wide soil moisture and yield-forecasting data that helps them to adapt to dry weather conditions and protect arable production.** By bringing agricultural, environmental, and water data together under one system, it fills a current evidence gap and allows farmers to take preventative steps, boosting Gloucestershire's food security and the wider country's resilience to the impacts of climate change.

## Ambition in Action: Towards a Resilience-led Economy

The Golden Valley Development (GVD) is a nationally significant innovation powerhouse, **recognised by government as driving the UK's cyber and**

[33] www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/transport/the-robin/

**secure technology ambitions.** By bringing together industry, academia, and the public sector, GVD is advancing national security and resilience - supporting the UK's mission to embed resilience in critical supply chains infrastructure.

Anchoring Gloucestershire at the heart of the UK's resilience economy, and creating a ripple effect of prosperity across the South West and the nation, the GVD will support supply chains, jobs, and long-term competitiveness.

To unlock its full potential and deliver lasting benefits for local communities and the nation, **we are seeking Designated Area (DA) status for the GVD** - enabling Gloucestershire to retain 100% of business rates growth generated in this area, worth around £385.6m over the designation period. **This locally retained investment will accelerate infrastructure, boost investment, and drive a virtuous cycle of prosperity across the county and beyond.**

DA status means more funding for local infrastructure, skills, and public services - supporting our vision and ambitions for Gloucestershire. Nationally, it will help power UK growth, strengthen resilience, and spark prosperity and innovation across the country.

## Summary

We have a bold vision for Gloucestershire - rooted in our heritage and driven by our innovation, shaped by the ambitions of our people, and designed to make every community ***smarter, greener, and fairer***. Through our six ambitions we have shown how services, places, and opportunities can be reimagined to meet the needs of today while preparing for tomorrow.

To bring this vision to life, we have developed a number of personas (see Appendix 1) that illustrate what our ambitions would mean in practice for residents and communities across Gloucestershire. These personas help ground our strategy in real experiences, making clear the tangible benefits of transformation.

The opportunities before us are clear: breakthrough innovation, inclusive digital access, thriving talent pipelines, stronger communities, wellbeing-focused growth, and data-enabled services. **Together they show how Gloucestershire can lead nationally and transform lives locally.**

We know what we need to do. LGR gives us the means to do it through simplifying structures, aligning priorities, and enabling decisions that connect ambition with delivery. With the right reform, Gloucestershire can bring its economic, social, and natural strengths together to create a future where every resident has the chance to succeed.

LGR will allow us to continue **building on what makes Gloucestershire great to create a sustainable place with thriving communities, bold ideas, and opportunities for everyone.**

# Future Devolution

LGR is an opportunity for Gloucestershire to reach its full strategic potential, locally and nationally. **As England moves towards wider regional governance, Gloucestershire is well-placed and eager to contribute.**

## Our Economic Distinctiveness

**Gloucestershire is notably resilient to economic shocks**[34]. It has significant strengths in advanced manufacturing and engineering and food security innovation (a combined 23.7% GVA)[35] and is exceptional in the high-growth sectors that utilise emerging technologies[36]. **Our strongest sectors align closely with the priority sectors of the 2025 Industrial Strategy**. Gloucestershire's strong industrial roots in aerospace and engineering, combined with innovation driven by GCHQ, help it **outperform neighbouring areas in productivity, new business creation, and entrepreneurship**. We also host a skilled population, supported by strong universities, colleges, and research networks that have proactively reached out into regional networks.

Inherent to Gloucestershire is our natural capital. From the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean to the Severn Vale, Gloucestershire's landscapes give us the space and resources to lead on the challenges of the 21st century. As part of the Severn Estuary corridor, we can offer clean energy, sustainable food, water management, and climate adaptation. **Few places can match the combination of industrial heritage, high tech growth, and natural assets that define Gloucestershire's offer.**

Gloucestershire blends its landscapes, cultures, and economy into a unique identity that draws on west country heritage and lifestyle to inform future thinking. From the invention of the jet engine to pioneering hydrogen flights at Cotswold Airport[37]; from the Wheatstone Bridge to the Golden Valley; from being home to the invention of the lawnmower to hosting one of the deepest water research sites in the world in Tidenham[38], **our economy is a major asset for regional and national partners in the devolution context.**

Devolution is the key to realising this potential. With greater funding flexibility, joined-up services, and empowered local decision-making, **Gloucestershire can play its full role as a regional engine of growth at the crossroads of the South West, the Midlands, the South East, and Wales.**

[34] Economic Strategy Evidence base
[35] Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry, ONS
[36] Gloucestershire's Economic Strategy 2024–2034 Summary
[37] ZeroAvia completes initial Dornier 228 flight test campaign - Pilot
[38] DEEP - Engineering Wonder

## Our Potential Devolution Partners

**Gloucestershire is actively exploring three strategic partnerships** to the north, south, and east[39]. Of these, we found each offer unique opportunities to accelerate growth and influence:

- West of England Combined Authority (WECA)
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Swindon and Oxford

## Our Devolution Option Analysis

**A range of metrics were assessed against economic, legislative, cultural, and implementation criteria** to identify which partnership could deliver the greatest impact in line with national devolution goals.

### Option 1: West of England Combined Authority (WECA)

**Geography and Governance**

- Existing combined authority with metro mayor which is fully compliant with the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill 2025 and December 2024 Devolution White Paper.
- Combined population (Gloucestershire + WECA *with North Somerset* rises above the minimum 1.5 million threshold guidance for strategic authority formation).

**Strategic Authority Alignment**

- Highest degree of alignment across the English Devolution Bill's seven statutory areas of competence, particularly health and care integration, transport and infrastructure, economic development, environment, and public safety.
- Pre-existing governance, transport corridors, NHS integration, and multi-agency delivery capacity provide a rapid implementation route.

**Economic Geography Alignment**

- Strong alignment in advanced manufacturing, digital/cyber, green technologies, and creative industries.
- Strong worker migration pattern across the borders.
- Potential to position Gloucestershire as an agri-tech leader within a wider innovation economy, offsetting WECA's urban focus.
- Gloucestershire may become a junior partner in the highest growth R&D sectors without a clearly defined role in bringing forward its strengths (e.g. agri-tech).

WECA holds the path to the most immediately deliverable option and offers the broadest alignment with national reform priorities, strongest sector alignment, and the fastest route to full strategic authority status.

[39] Not an exhaustive list – three options were selected according to the shared length of boundary with Gloucestershire and consideration of whether agreements had been made for bordering counties to join alternative partners.

### Option 2: Swindon and Oxfordshire

**Geography and Governance**

- No current combined authority membership so would require LGR and mayoral combined authority formation.
- Joint population threshold met with 1.6 million combined.

**Strategic Authority Alignment**

- High capability in economic development, skills, and net zero, but weaker in health, care, and integrated public service reform.
- Existing regional partnerships are largely informal or nascent.

**Economic Alignment**

- Significant longer-term potential in R&D partnerships (AI, life sciences, clean tech).
- Synergy in advanced manufacturing and cyber, but less alignment with agri-tech and rural economy; greater focus on life sciences than securing emerging technologies in the innovation sectors.
- Lower short-term economic integration due to weaker commuting links and business interdependencies.

Swindon and Oxfordshire offer strong innovation potential for the long term but would be slower to establish full statutory competencies with less immediate integration in health and rural sectors.

### Option 3: Herefordshire and Worcestershire

**Geography and Governance**

- No current combined authority and therefore would require LGR and mayoral combined authority formation.
- Population slightly below the threshold so may require additional partners or special consideration.

**Strategic and Policy Alignment**

- Medium alignment across statutory competencies with strengths in environment, rural transport, and agri-tech, but limited in digital innovation and large-scale economic growth.
- Less alignment with national reform agenda’s focus on integrated care and high-growth sectors.

**Economic Alignment**

- Closest match in current rural economic strengths and historical cultural context.
- Gloucestershire would likely lead on scale and innovation, but partners offer limited capacity in high-growth digital and tech sectors.

## Options Analysis Summary

**1. West of England Combined Authority (WECA)**

- **Why:** Existing governance, metro mayor, statutory compliance, strong sectoral fit (advanced manufacturing, cyber, green tech), and clear commuting / economic flows; existing regional partnerships across arts, culture, health, and the broadest range of services of all options; similar urban / rural profile, reflecting shared challenges in housing and transport planning.
- **Risk:** Gloucestershire risks becoming a junior partner unless it defines a distinctive role (e.g. agri-tech leader completing a 'whole of tech' future economy).
- WECA provides the high-growth innovation engine, Gloucestershire complements the ecosystem with agri-tech and natural capital.

**2. Herefordshire and Worcestershire**

- **Why:** Close match in rural economy, heritage, and agri-tech; natural cultural legacy fit; scope for Gloucestershire to play a leading role in innovation and scaling up; slightly under population threshold, but culturally congruent and offers Gloucestershire leadership space.
- **Risk:** Limited digital / tech capacity in partners and weaker alignment with national reform priorities.
- Rooted in shared rural economy and heritage, with Gloucestershire as a natural partner to inject innovation and scale.

**3. Swindon and Oxfordshire**

- **Why:** Strong in R&D, life sciences, AI, and clean tech; good synergies in advanced manufacturing and cyber, but requires completely new governance; has weaker cultural alignment, and less short-term integration with Gloucestershire's rural and health economies.
- **Risk:** Longer-time horizon to deliver; innovation is research-led and urban, less aligned with Gloucestershire's wider economic identity; very few established regional partnerships.
- Offers long-term potential in global-facing R&D and science but less immediate and less place-congruent.

Gloucestershire has the assets and ambition to contribute strongly within any of the potential partnerships. WECA provides the most immediately deliverable and policy-aligned option, while the Herefordshire and Worcestershire option offers an alternative in which Gloucestershire could play a leading role. The partnership with Swindon and Oxfordshire remains a credible longer-term prospect, particularly for research-led collaboration, but is less immediately aligned to Gloucestershire's wider economic and governance priorities.

## Gloucestershire's Aims for Devolution

**Through LGR and further devolution, Gloucestershire can unlock the tools to drive a high-growth, resilience-focused economy and smarter services for residents.**

Devolution would allow Gloucestershire to:

- **Power growth through innovation:** using devolved economic powers to create the Severn Resilience Corridor, bringing together cyber, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, and clean energy. This will attract major private investment, generate high-value jobs, and cement Gloucestershire's role as a national growth engine.
- **Strengthen resilience for the 21st century:** with greater control over housing, health, skills, and transport, Gloucestershire can deliver joined-up solutions for climate resilience, energy security, and sustainable food systems.
- **Put data to work for residents:** a county-wide data platform, anchored in Golden Valley's cyber infrastructure could integrate transport, housing, health, and utilities in real time. This will reduce duplication, cut costs, and provide residents with more personalised, responsive services, from flood alerts to smart mobility and integrated healthcare.

## Summary

Gloucestershire's strengths in advanced manufacturing, securing emerging technologies, agri-tech, and clean energy, combined with our strategic location and cultural identity, position us as a valuable partner in building a balanced and high-growth regional economy. To achieve this potential, we are now seeking active cooperation from Government and regional partners.

| | WECA | Herefordshire and Worcestershire | Swindon and Oxfordshire |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Governance and Deliverability** | • Existing combined authority with metro mayor<br>• Fully compliant with Devolution Bill<br>• Immediate path to strategic authority. | • Would require new mayoral combined authority<br>• Population below threshold, may need extra partners. | • Would require new mayoral combined authority<br>• Threshold met but no existing structures. |
| **Strategic Alignment** | • Highest alignment across all statutory areas: health / care integration, transport, economic development, | • Medium alignment: strong in environment, rural transport, and agri-tech; weaker in digital and national reform priorities. | • Strong in economic development, skills, and net zero; weaker in health and integrated public services. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | environment, and public safety. | | |
| **Economic Synergy** | • Strong overlaps: advanced manufacturing, cyber, green tech, and creative industries<br>• Clear commuter flows<br>• Gloucestershire could specialise in agri-tech. | • Strongest rural economy and cultural fit<br>• Gloucestershire likely to lead innovation<br>• Partners weaker in high-growth sectors. | • High R&D and research potential: AI, life sciences, and clean tech<br>• Lower commuting / business interdependencies<br>• Less rural alignment. |
| **Risks** | • Gloucestershire may be junior partner in innovation without defined agri-tech/natural capital role. | • Weak tech / digital sector capacity<br>• Weaker alignment with national reform. | • Long time horizon<br>• Urban R&D focus less congruent with Gloucestershire's broader identity<br>• Weak regional partnerships. |
| **Overall Takeaway** | • Most deliverable, innovation engine, culturally and economically aligned. | • Strong cultural / rural fit<br>• Gloucestershire can lead<br>• Weaker on growth / reform. | • Long-term R&D potential<br>• Least deliverable in short term<br>• Weaker identity fit. |

Table 3: Strategic partnerships options analysis summary table

## Options Analysis

Our options analysis is an objective assessment of the reorganisation options being explored for Gloucestershire[40]. Each option has been assessed using ministerial criteria, supplemented by local criteria – drawing on a range of both qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered throughout this proposal's development. Additionally, challenge and consensus sessions were held with council leaders and chief executives from across the seven councils.

This analysis provides some key considerations which should inform any overall conclusions. However, in the interests of objectivity and respect for the democratic process, the analysis does not provide a concluding recommendation of a preferred option.

The options analysis presented in this proposal mirrors that submitted for the single unitary authority option.

All the analysis undertaken in this options analysis is subject to the policy decisions of whichever new authority / authorities are established as a result of LGR in Gloucestershire. This analysis is also contingent on the outcome of the national Fair Funding Review, which remains uncertain at this stage.

This analysis assumes there are no modifications to the boundary between East and West Gloucestershire. Should boundary modifications arise, the underpinning evidence – particularly the financial case and RAG ratings – would need to be revisited.

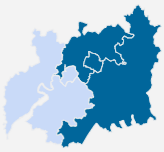
| Option | Description | Geography | | Population |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Option 1: Single Unitary Authority (1UA)** | **One new council delivering all local government services across Gloucestershire.** |  | Based on current **Gloucestershire County Council** boundary | **~ 659,276** |
| **Option 2: Two Unitary Authorities (2UA – East and West)** | **Two new councils: one for East Gloucestershire, one for West Gloucestershire. Each delivers all services within its area.** |  | **East:** currently **Cheltenham, Cotswold and Tewkesbury** districts | **~310,641** |
| | | | **West:** currently **Gloucester, Stroud and Forest of Dean** districts | **~348,635** |

Table 4: Options analysis summary table

[40] Not including 'Greater Gloucester/Gloucester Unitary' which has not been subject to a shared process of development

## Demographic and Economic Context

The following tables present a side-by-side comparison of key demographic, financial, and economic indicators for Gloucestershire as well as East and West Gloucestershire.

### Population and Ageing Trends

This table provides an overview of demographic patterns across Gloucestershire and East, and West, focusing on population size and age-related growth to inform future service planning and statutory obligations.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population (2024)** | **~659,276** | ~310,641 | ~ 348,635 | The West has a larger population, which may affect baseline service volumes and statutory responsibilities. |
| **Growth in 65+ population (2026–2030)**[41] | **+2.32%** | +2.39% | +2.26% | Gloucestershire overall faces a challenge in relation to a population ageing faster than national averages, raising considerations around potential future supply for long-term care. |
| **Growth in 0-19 population** | **Declining** | Neutral | Declining | The West may see declining demand pressures on school places in the future. |

Table 5: Demographic comparison

### Financial Resilience and Income Base

This table compares financial indicators across the regions, offering insight into household income levels and the fiscal position of each area, to assess long-term financial sustainability.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gross disposable household** | £23,527 | £26,149 | £21,191 | Residents in the East have higher disposable income. |

[41] Population projections, 2022, ONS

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **income per capita**[42] | | | | |
| **Council debt per capita (2023/24)**[43] | £819 | £674 | £948 | The West would be created with a higher per-resident council debt burden*, potentially impacting its financial sustainability. **General fund not Housing Revenue Account (HRA)* |
| **Net assets per individual**[44] | £1,454 | £1,810 | £1,137 | The East would hold significantly more assets per resident, offering greater long-term financial flexibility. |

Table 6: Financial indicators comparison

## Service Demand and Social Vulnerability

This table highlights variations in social care spending and indicators of vulnerability, helping to identify areas with greater baseline need and potential service demand.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Adult social care spend per resident**[45] | £522 | £405 | £629 | Adult social care spend per resident would be significantly higher in the West. |
| **Children's social care spend per resident**[46] | £142 | £129 | £156 | Children's social care spend per resident would be higher in the West. |
| **Children in low-income families (per 100k)**[47] | 14,594 | 12,274 | 16,609 | The West has a much higher rate of child poverty, potentially requiring it to provide more targeted early help and support. |

[42] GDHI Per Capita, 2022/2023, Nomis
[43] LA Debt per capita, 2023/2024, GOV.UK
[44] Net Assets Per Capita, 2023/2024, District Councils
[45] ASC Spend per resident, 2024, Newton
[46] CSC spend per resident, 2025, Newton
[47] Children in Low Income Families per 100k, 23/24, DWP

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Household benefit claim rate**[48] | 15.82% | 13.8% | 17.9% | The West has a larger proportion of residents reliant on benefits, potentially indicating higher baseline need. |
| **Deprivation index score (higher = worse)**[49] | 15.1 | 12.7 | 17.2 | Deprivation is significantly higher in the West, potentially driving greater demand on multiple services. |

Table 7: Social care spending and indicators of vulnerability comparison

## Economic Activity and Infrastructure

This table examines differences in employment, productivity and digital infrastructure, providing context for economic performance and access to opportunity.

| Measure | Glos. | East | West | Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Job density (jobs per working-age person)**[50] | 0.9 | 1.0 | 0.8 | The East has a more active labour market, potentially creating better access to employment and economic mobility. |
| **Gross value added**[51] | £39.0 | £41.9 | £35.7 | Productivity is higher in the East, potentially reflecting a stronger economic base. |
| **Business growth rate**[52] | -0.1 | +1.1% | –1.2% | The East has seen modest growth in its business base, while the West has experienced decline; this is likely to be localised to the Forest of Dean. |
| **5G availability (% area covered)**[53] | 68.0% | 58.1% | 83.0% | The West outperforms the East in mobile coverage, |

[48] Household benefit claim rate, 23/24, GOV.UK
[49] Deprivation, 19/20, MHCLG
[50] Job Density, 23/25, ONS
[51] GVA per hour worked, 22/23, ONS
[52] Business Growth (%), 23/24, ONS
[53] % of High Digital Connectivity, 24/25, OFCOM

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | reflecting the larger rural footprint in the East. |

Table 8: Employment and productivity comparison

### Implications for Reorganisation

The baseline differences between East and West highlight demographic and economic imbalances that will shape the financial operating environment for either council that would be created in a two unitary authority scenario:

- A **single unitary authority (1UA) scenario** would need to manage these variations internally, redistributing resources and planning across areas with different levels of income, need, and growth.
- A **two unitary authority (2UA) scenario** would crystallise the variations between East and West, requiring each council to plan for its own financial and service challenges from Vesting Day, with a smaller scale of internal pooling of risk.

## Criteria Analysed

This analysis is structured around nine criteria; these include six statutory criteria issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG), and three additional criteria that reflect Gloucestershire's local priorities and values (criteria 7-9).

Each criterion has been broken down into sub-criteria to allow structured assessment across both models. We have assessed how 1UA and 2UA would potentially perform at the point of implementation and over time.

**Only those elements of the published ministerial criteria which are relevant to a RAG (red, amber, green) rating and comparative analysis in Gloucestershire are included in the tables below. In most cases we have summarised the full text of the criteria.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **KEY** | **MHCLG criteria** | |
| | **Gloucestershire-specific criteria** | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Sensible single tier of local government**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model removes two-tier governance, creates a coherent single-tier structure, | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned |
| | | B) Sensible economic breakdown, with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | and reflects a logical financial and spatial footprint. | C) Sensible geographic breakdown, which will help increase housing supply and meet local needs |
| 2 | **Right-sized local government**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model is large and resilient enough to deliver effective government. It considers population size, potential for efficiency, organisational capacity, and the complexity of transition. | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless specific local factors make this unreasonable) |
| | | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers |
| | | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand financial shocks |
| | | D) Manageable transition costs |
| 3 | **High quality, sustainable services**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model supports effective, long-term service delivery. It considers integration, transformation potential, and the ability to improve outcomes in complex, high-need areas. | A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation |
| | | B) Opportunity for public service reform including where this will lead to improved value for money |
| | | C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk of negative impact on, crucial services |
| 4 | **Meets local needs**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model responds to the needs, identities, and priorities of local communities. It considers civic identity, community variation, and responsiveness to engagement. | A) Meets local needs and is informed by local views |
| | | B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural, and historic importance |
| | | C) Addresses local concerns |
| 5 | **Supports devolution arrangements**<br><br>This criterion tests whether the model supports Gloucestershire's ability to unlock devolution powers and funding, and whether it creates a strategic authority footprint with appropriate population scale, coherence, and alignment to regional structures | A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution |
| | | B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority |
| 6 | **Local engagement and empowerment** | A) Enables stronger community engagement |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | This criterion assesses whether the model can support stronger local democracy and provide practical tools for neighbourhood-level decision-making. | B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment |
| 7 | **Environmental and climate protection**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model strengthens the council's ability to lead on climate and environmental goals. | A) Ensures the new authority / authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans |
| | | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB) |
| | | C) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. Fairer Greener Forest, Climate Emergency responses) |
| 8 | **Civic engagement and participative democracy**<br>This criterion assesses whether the model provides meaningful democratic representation at community level. | A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy |
| 9 | **Inclusive growth and equity**<br><br>This criterion assesses whether the model enables inclusive economic development, supports vulnerable residents, and maintains service levels while pursuing financial sustainability. | A) Tackles disparities in wealth, employment, and service access |
| | | B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration |
| | | C) Ensures that financial sustainability is not achieved at the expense of service levels |

Each option has been consistently assessed against these nine criteria. RAG ratings have been used to summarise alignment and are supported by detailed commentary.

## Scoring Method

To support comparison between the two options, this analysis uses a structured **Red–Amber–Green (RAG) rating system**.

The RAG system provides a simple, visual way to understand how well each option aligns with each criterion and sub-criterion.

| Rating | Meaning |
|---|---|
| G | Meets the criteria |
| A | Partially meets the criteria / could meet the criteria, with mitigations |

| | |
|---|---|
| R | Does not meet the criteria |

- Ratings are applied to each **sub-criterion.**
- No weighting is applied; all criteria are treated equally.
- Each rating is accompanied by narrative commentary, drawing on qualitative and quantitative evidence, if available

## Evidence Base

This analysis applies a structured, consistent approach to assess how well each reorganisation model aligns with the nine agreed criteria.

The analysis draws on a wide evidence base, as outlined below, bringing together quantitative analysis, professional insight, and stakeholder perspectives. Evidence has been applied consistently across both models to support an impartial and transparent comparison.

### Phase 1 options analysis (completed as part of the interim plan submission in March 2025)

- Developed the original RAG scoring framework used in this analysis.
- Set out the early comparison of structural options based on feasibility, financial scale, and policy alignment.
- Established baseline assumptions around governance design, service footprint, and transition cost implications.
- Informed the scoring approach and structure of commentary.

### Demographic and Economic Analysis

- Provided a detailed comparison between the proposed East and West Gloucestershire councils, across:
    - Population trends and age profiles.
    - Financial resilience (e.g. council tax base, gross disposable household income (GDHI), debt levels).
    - Demand for adult and children's social care.
    - Deprivation, employment, and digital access.
    - Economic activity and infrastructure.
- Highlights the different starting points for each authority under a 2UA model, and the internal variation that a 1UA model would need to manage.
- Forms the main statistical evidence base used throughout this options analysis.

### Service-level disaggregation and aggregation discussions

- Provided detailed, operational insights from service leads across core upper and lower tier services including (but not limited to): adults, children's and education, transport, revenues and benefits, housing, leisure, and parking.
- Considered issues including:
    - Shared systems and data platforms (e.g. Liquidlogic, Capita, Uniform).
    - Workforce and statutory leadership duplication.
    - Locality delivery and place-based presence.
    - Contracting, service level agreements (SLAs), and external provider arrangements.
    - Gloucestershire-specific practical and technical issues

### Stakeholder engagement feedback

- Reflective of responses from partners involved in local services and governance.
- Provided insight into perceptions of:
    - Strategic leadership.
    - Democratic representation and identity.
    - Integration of housing, care, and place-based services.
- Helped assess both models against criteria related to public engagement, identity, and local responsiveness.

## Overall Summary of Options Analysis

### Summary of Option 1: Single Unitary Authority (1UA)

This option would replace the current two-tier council system with one single council for all of Gloucestershire's ~659,000 residents. This is a size that's been successful in other areas like North Yorkshire and meets government guidelines. Having one council means **decisions can be made more quickly and clearly** and **the county can speak with one voice** when it comes to funding, transport, and big projects.

A 1UA maximises opportunities to retain existing county-wide systems and services (like core service case management systems), which **minimises the cost and disruption associated with splitting things up and any potential duplication.** This is especially important for services like adults' social care (ASC), children's (CSC) social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and safeguarding, where **keeping teams and systems together helps protect and maximise service continuity for the most vulnerable people across the county.**

Local services would still be shaped around communities, in line with the proposed locality arrangements for Gloucestershire. This includes local partnerships and

boards, budgets that are managed locally, and retaining local identity through ward names, events, and branding.

There are differences between the east and west of the county, e.g. in income levels, spending on ASC, and levels of deprivation. With 1UA, **financial resources are pooled and can be shared and targeted where they're needed most** - increasing overall financial resilience (noting there are still unknowns around the dedicated schools grant deficit and fair funding which impact all LGR options being considered).

The main risk is around ensuring that local voices are heard from the start – this can be managed by setting up strong local governance early on.

### Summary of Option 2: Two Unitary Authorities (2UA)

The 2UA model **prioritises local visibility, civic identity, and flexibility** by creating two councils based on existing district clusters: East (~310k) and West (~348k). Smaller footprints (in comparison with a 1UA) may make members and officers seem more accessible, which some stakeholders, especially parish councils, may see as a strength.

However, the model introduces significant **duplication and disaggregation challenges**. Systems like Liquidlogic, SAP, and Capita One would need to be split or reprocured; safeguarding boards, SEND services, and commissioning frameworks would require parallel governance. Service leads warned this could increase cost, slow transformation, and risk divergence in quality or access. The Fire and Rescue Service in a 2UA model would be legally required to disaggregate from local authority structures and finances, creating additional cost and risk.

The West's higher demand (particularly in relation to social care services) and lower income could constrain its investment capacity without sustained external funding and there may be concerns around longer-term financial sustainability for the West UA (with current estimates projecting a c.£21.9m deficit on day one).

Like the 1UA, local services would still be shaped around communities, in line with the proposed locality arrangements. This includes local partnerships and boards, budgets that are managed locally, and keeping local identity through ward names, events, and branding.

### Comparative (RAG) scoring summary by **main criteria**

| Criteria | 1UA | 2UA |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Sensible single tier of** | • Creates a single tier of local government. | • Creates a single tier of local government. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **local government** | • Enables pooled resources and redistribution to address potential imbalances countywide, e.g. in homelessness and housing supply.<br>• Aligns with existing partner boundaries. | • Similar tax bases across both UAs but potential fiscal disparities in LA debt (£ per capita (23/24) of £948 in West compared to £674 in East) and service cost (ASC spend per resident of £405 in East vs £629 in West). |
| **2. Right-sized local government** | • Exceeds MHCLG expected population threshold of 500,000 (1UA population is ~659,000).<br>• Economies of scale across a single larger UA.<br>• Improved capacity and resilience (financial and workforce).<br>• Lower transition costs (one-off costs ~£21.3 million). | • Meets viability threshold of 300k but below 500k (East: ~315,349, West: ~354,031).<br>• Reduced duplication across lower tier services; duplication of upper tier services.<br>• Opportunities to put in place targeted shared service arrangements.<br>• Higher transition costs (with two programmes, one-off cost ~£30.1 million). |
| **3. High quality, sustainable services** | • Maintains integrated ASC, CSC, and public health.<br>• Innovation opportunities at scale.<br>• Protects multi-agency safeguarding and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements. | • May fragment countywide services which could cause challenges with quality and cost of service delivery e.g. ASC, CSC, public health etc.<br>• Fire and rescue will need to move to a non-local authority governance, financial, and service arrangement (i.e. the creation of an independent fire and rescue authority), which will incur additional costs (estimated to be c.£2.8m net total additional pressure for year one) and may increase risk of sustainable service provision. |
| **4. Meets local needs** | • Local stakeholder support for retaining single voice and shared infrastructure.<br>• Concerns around merging distinct local identities.<br>• Perception of overcentralisation, which can be | • Builds on existing district boundaries.<br>• Retains a sense of place identity for the two largest urban centres (Cheltenham and Gloucester) but could risk alienating other more rural areas. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | managed with continued place-based delivery. | • Risks financial imbalance in West which could compromise ability to meet local needs. |
| **5. Supports devolution arrangements** | • Simplifies engagement with partners.<br>• Increased scale and negotiating influence.<br>• Meets 1.5m Combined Authority (CA) population benchmarks. | • Allows tailored devolution asks.<br>• Each UA could join different CAs.<br>• Some scenarios risk falling below 1.5m population benchmark. |
| **6. Local engagement and empowerment** | • Can deliver countywide engagement structures.<br>• Embeds neighbourhood partnerships consistently.<br>• Needs deliberate design to avoid remoteness. | • Smaller footprints could improve councillor visibility.<br>• As for 1UA, effective engagement depends on deliberate design. |
| **7. Environmental and climate protection** | • Countywide environmental plans, but with the ability to still retain tailored, local strategies where needed.<br>• Unified stewardship of landscapes.<br>• Scales up local climate initiatives. | • Ability to still retain tailored, local strategies where needed.<br>• Retain joint governance for shared assets. |
| **8. Civic engagement and participative democracy** | • Scales up digital tools and participatory decision-making countywide.<br>• Risk of democratic deficit. | • Two smaller councils could feel more accessible, with closer member-resident link in comparison with a 1UA.<br>• Risk of democratic deficit. |
| **9. Inclusive growth and equity** | • Increased countywide resilience to drive growth and equity.<br>• Unified regeneration.<br>• Consolidation savings can be reinvested back into front line service delivery. | • Potential risk or difficult decisions needed in the West if current demand and cost trajectories for ASC continue. |

## Summary of Options Appraisal Against Criteria and Sub-Criteria

This section sets out a summary view of the options appraisal against the six MHCLG criteria and three additional local context criteria and sub-crtieria; with ratings in RAG format providing a simple, visual way to understand how well each

option aligns with each criterion and sub-criterion. A more detailed description against each sub-criteria can be found in Appendix 5: Detailed Options Analysis.

When assessing each option against the MHCLG criteria, we note that the potential impact of the government's fair funding review remains unknown. This creates a degree of uncertainty for both options, as future funding allocations could materially affect relative financial sustainability and capacity. As a result, no definitive assessment of fair funding implications has been included within the criteria analysis for either the 1UA or 2UA option.

This options analysis has been prepared based on the current Gloucestershire boundaries. No boundary changes have been proposed or modelled at this stage. Any suggested boundary modification could significantly alter population totals and financial profiles, which in turn would affect assessment against several criteria and may change the RAG ratings presented.

Comparative (RAG) Scoring Summary by **Main Criteria and Sub-Criteria**

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Sensible single tier of local government** | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned | **G** | • Removes two-tier structure and creates one accountable body. | **G** | • Removes two-tier structure and creates two accountable bodies in a single tier. |
| | B) Sensible economic breakdown, with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities | **G** | • Allows pooled resources and supports appropriate redistribution from East to West. | **A** | • 2024 tax base (band D equivalents after council tax support) suggest similar tax bases across both authorities (49% in the West and 51% in the East) with clear sectoral priorities to drive economic growth within each UA.<br>• However, there are potential fiscal disparities in LA debt (£ per capita (23/24) of £948 in West compared to £674 in East) and service costs, particularly in ASC (spend per resident of £405 in the East vs £629 in the West). |
| | C) Sensible geographic breakdown, which will help increase housing | **G** | • Aligns with existing partner geographies e.g. NHS, ICB, police etc and enables strategic planning to address disparities in housing needs and land supply across different parts of the county (five-year housing supply | **A** | • Misalignment of boundaries with key partners incl. the ICB, police, and fire and rescue.<br>• Variations in homelessness (higher in the West at 0.21% vs 0.11% in the East) and |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | supply and meet local needs | | target is 4.97 years for East and 3.83 years for West, with a countywide shortfall of 4.37 years). | | housing land supply (lower in the West at 3.83 vs 4.97 in East). This could result in more demand for housing in the West with less supply to meet this efficiently within the new UA borders.<br>• Average house prices illustrate that the private housing market faces greater challenges in the West, where values are lower (e.g. Gloucester £225,000; Forest of Dean £291,000) compared to the East (e.g. Cotswolds £419,000; Cheltenham £324,000), reducing profit margins and making it less likely that the private sector will deliver sufficient supply without public intervention. |
| **2. Right-sized local government** | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless specific local factors make this unreasonable) | **G** | • Serves ~659,000 people, meeting MHCLG's expected population threshold of 500,000. | **A** | • Both councils exceed 300,000 (minimum viability threshold is met) but fall below the MHCLG preferred 500,000 (East: ~315,349, West: ~354,031). |
| | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers | **G** | • Opportunities for economies of scale e.g. across smaller specialist contracts for services such as cyber and asbestos and | **A** | • Reduced duplication of lower tier services and improved coordination between areas such as transport, housing, and regeneration. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | increased market influence to enable market management.<br>• Delivery of potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£21.1m per annum. | | • However, duplication of countywide service infrastructure e.g. two statutory officers for CSC, two core systems for CSC etc will add in additional costs.<br>• Delivery of potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£10.7m per annum (split as ~ £4.9m for the East, and ~ £5.8m for the West). |
| | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand financial shocks | **G** | • Enables pooling of specialist professional resource to allow for flexible deployment across the county.<br>• Improves financial resilience to manage imbalances in demand and cost between different areas in the county.<br>• Services like ASC and CSC are preserved in their current state with senior capacity maintained and increased workforce resilience.<br>• Current financial analysis indicates that a 1UA for Gloucestershire would be established with a balanced budget on day one. This assumes the full delivery of unidentified savings required by all seven councils between now and vesting day (1 | **A** | • Opportunities to continue operating shared service arrangements in a targeted way to drive efficiencies and provide an increased number of senior officers, potentially resulting in increased capacity.<br>• However, potential significant financial burdens for the West in relation to ASC (around the demand and cost of working age adult placements).<br>• Current financial analysis indicates that the East council in a 2UA scenario would be established with a day one general fund surplus of ~ £21.9m. Whilst a West council would be established with a day one general fund deficit of ~ £21.9m. This assumes the full delivery of unidentified |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | April 2028) and does not fully account for the impact of the fair funding review (subject to further detail from government). | | savings required by all seven councils between now and vesting day (1 April 2028) and does not fully account for the impact of the fair funding review (subject to further detail from government). |
| | D) Manageable transition costs | **G** | • Requires creation of only one new authority and legal structure, minimising transition costs - estimated to be ~£21.3m. (Based on the assumption of a continuing authority).<br>• This includes lower costs of systems migration e.g. no need to split out or duplicate existing countywide systems such as Liquidlogic; lower costs of statutory senior officer roles as only one set of roles is required; lower costs of setting up two separate implementation portfolios to manage transition etc. | **A** | • Higher transition costs as governance and activities would need to be undertaken twice – currently estimated at ~ £30.1m.<br>• Specific examples of additional costs incurred include the recruitment of two sets of statutory officer roles, the increased costs of disaggregation of core county wide services and systems, the costs of setting up two shadow authority structures. |
| **3. High quality, sustainable services** | A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | **G** | • Preserves current integrated delivery in ASC, CSC, transport, and public health.<br>• Also results in minimal disruption to current multi-agency partnership arrangements.<br>• There may be challenges in delivering quality services across such a diverse | **A** | • Opportunities to potentially strengthen local partnerships with organisations within each area.<br>• Services that require aggregation will have a simpler journey as East / West will each aggregate from three districts into one. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | geography, but continued strong locality working can help to mitigate this.<br>• This involves the aggregation of six councils into 1UA, which is likely to be complex and costly e.g. alignment of different policies etc. | | • However, a 2UA will result in the likely disaggregation of core countywide services including ASC, CSC, education, transport, public health, trading standards, and libraries which could result in financial viability considerations (e.g. in ASC given the imbalance in demand and cost) as well as variations in service delivery and offer (e.g. in relation to public health services).<br>• Under the provisions in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, fire and rescue will need to move to non-local authority governance, financial, and service arrangement (i.e. the creation of an independent fire and rescue authority), which will incur additional net costs (estimated to be c.£2.8m additional pressures on day one for the new councils) and may increase risk to sustainable service provision. |
| | B) Opportunity for public service reform, including instances where this will lead to | **G** | • A larger organisation will have increased scale, resilience, and influence in working with local and national partners, driving longer-term improvements including the creation of a single trusted front door for | **A** | • Enables each council to innovate locally and make targeted investments in line with local priorities with greater agility and easier implementation, but at a potentially |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | improved value for money | | residents, a single data platform to drive prevention and early intervention, and the ability to innovate at scale quickly.<br>• For example, in areas like health and social care, a single larger organisation is likely to have a stronger voice and influence as part of the ICB in comparison with smaller organisations. | | reduced scale compared to countywide delivery. |
| | C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk to, negative impact on crucial services | **G** | • Allows flexible resource allocation across the county, directing investment to areas of highest demand such as ASC and CSC in the West.<br>• Consistent service standards for countywide functions.<br>• Preserves MASH arrangements and avoids artificial borders that could disrupt education and care placements. | **A** | • Disaggregating core services such as education, SEND, admissions, and safeguarding systems risks disrupting end-to-end care pathways, hospital discharge, and home-to-school transport. |
| **4. Meets local needs** | A) Meets local needs and is informed by local views | **A** | • Findings from local engagement undertaken with Gloucestershire residents in July 2025 indicated that 205 out of 225 residents (who had a view on local government structures) preferred a 1UA for Gloucestershire. | **A** | • Findings from local engagement undertaken with Gloucestershire residents indicated that 14 out of 225 residents (who had a view on local government structures) preferred a 2UA model. However, concerns were raised in broader qualitative |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Parts of the county's strategic partner base (NHS, police, business networks) and the VCFSE emphasised that a single accountable body could also simplify engagement and reduce duplication across multiple districts. However, some parish councils and VCFSE groups raised concerns that this needs to be supported by robust locality governance so that a 1UA does not feel more distant, especially in rural areas.<br>• The 1UA model reflects existing countywide delivery of ASC, CSC, public health and transport, noting that service leads supported retaining local operational footprints even under this arrangement. | | commentary around fairness, division, and efficiency, with references to "creating a rich side and a poor side of the county".<br>• Concerns were raised around large urban centres within each unitary dominating focus and resources, potentially leading to rural areas receiving a lower standard of service.<br>• Risks include fragmentation where communities span boundaries or rely on countywide networks (e.g. education, safeguarding, housing).<br>• Parts of the VCFSE warned that splitting the county may marginalise rural transition areas such as the Severn Vale and North Cotswolds. |
| | B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural and historic importance | **A** | • Civic identity kept through 267 parish councils, new city / town councils for Gloucester and Cheltenham, and use of local names and branding.<br>• Neighbourhood partnerships (30k–50k population) bring decision-making closer to communities and build on existing local networks. | **A** | • Aligns with current district geographies.<br>• Equalities impact assessment (EqIA) analysis shows differing community profiles: East combines Cheltenham's urban diversity with older rural areas, while West combines Gloucester's ethnic diversity with rural Forest of Dean and Stroud communities. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Area-based practice in ASC / CSC and precedents from other unitaries show local visibility can be maintained under a 1UA model.<br>• Local engagement with residents raised concerns that a unitary authority may not recognise the individual places that have their own unique identity. For example, residents spoken to at the Coleford Music Festival wanted to maintain the identity of the Forest of Dean as a unique place. | | • However, several stakeholders noted that smaller authorities don't necessarily directly correlate with improved community engagement – the underlying structures and design are crucial to success.<br>• Findings from local engagement with residents also highlighted that it could be difficult to create local identities for each unitary that do not revolve around the largest towns which would exclude other areas. |
| | C) Addresses local concerns | **A** | • Risk of overcentralisation can be mitigated by strong locality governance and retaining local delivery (e.g. social work teams).<br>• A 1UA enables countywide planning to address inequalities (e.g. child poverty, which is higher in West) while flexibly allocating resources by place.<br>• Unified capital and housing functions allow targeted investment in local priorities, such as brownfield regeneration in the West and transport access in the East. | **A** | • The West faces greater cost pressures due to higher deprivation (indices of deprivation - East: 12.71, West: 17.16); higher ASC costs per resident (East: £405, West: £629); and higher claimant rates (East: 13.79%, West: 17.87%).<br>• Cross-boundary issues (e.g. housing, transport, tech corridors, flood risk) require joint working, limiting full localisation.<br>• Unified capital and housing functions allow targeted investment in local priorities, from brownfield regeneration in the West to transport access in the East. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5. Supports devolution arrangements** | A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution | **G** | • Gives Gloucestershire a single, unified voice in national negotiations.<br>• Streamlined governance and one point of entry improve clarity for partners and enhance the county's profile when securing investment and funding.<br>• Unified leadership supports countywide priorities such as housing, infrastructure, skills, and transport, while preserving links to both the South West and West Midlands regional partnerships. | **A** | • No single voice for Gloucestershire overall which could weaken influence in negotiations but there may be improved opportunities for each authority to tailor devolution asks based on distinct priorities. However, there is limited evidence to support this. |
| | B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | **G** | • Population sizes for potential combined authority options being considered for Gloucestershire just about meet the minimum 1.5m benchmark set by government as illustrated by the combined population estimates below:<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + WECA Core: 1.6m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + WECA (incl. North Somerset): 1.81m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire: 1.45m (falls a little short of the 1.5m threshold). | **G** | • Opportunities for each UA to join potentially different combined authorities due to potential political divergence.<br>• Two smaller Gloucestershire authorities would cause concerns around meeting the minimum 1.5m benchmark in all potential combined authority scenarios, e.g. Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a combined population of c.806,000 so if only one of the Gloucestershire authorities was to form a combined authority with these two areas, this would fall short of the minimum |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ○ Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire + Swindon: 1.63m<br>• However, concerns were noted around the relative size of a single Gloucestershire unitary authority in comparison with other partners in a combined authority. For example, in the case of a WECA option, Gloucestershire would be the largest partner in WECA, with a population of c. 659,276, compared to Bristol's c.472,400, South Gloucestershire's c.290,400 and Bath and North East Somerset's c.193,400 (population figures based on ONS 2021 census). This could potentially make a single unitary less appealing for other partners. | | 1.5 million threshold (at a maximum, it would be c.1.2m).<br>• In terms of relative size of two smaller Gloucestershire authorities compared with potential partners, this may be more palatable. The populations of c.300,000-350,000 for Gloucestershire would not be significantly higher than potential partners, particularly in the case of a WECA option. |
| **6. Local engagement and empowerment** | A) Enables stronger community engagement | **G** | • A 1UA removes districts but can create countywide frameworks for neighbourhood partnerships, reducing duplication and clarifying responsibilities.<br>• Effective engagement depends on deliberate design; partners stressed the need to "build in real localism" to avoid perceptions of distance. | **G** | • Smaller footprints could improve councillor visibility and allow warding and committees to reflect local settlement patterns.<br>• Effective engagement depends on deliberate design; partners stressed the need to "build in real localism" to avoid perceptions of distance. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • The 1UA model generates the largest potential reorganisation savings (c.£21.1m annual net savings), creating capacity to invest in local forums co-designed with partners including the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), ICB, and the VCS Alliance. | | • Service leads stressed that effective engagement depends on design, resources, and authority, not size alone. |
| | B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment | **G** | • A 1UA can formalise locality governance through neighbourhood partnerships and area committees, co-designed with communities and partners – noting it may be difficult on such a large footprint (OPCC, ICB, VCS Alliance).<br>• Existing hubs and parish clusters can be aligned to locality areas, ensuring services like ASC, CSC, and planning remain close to residents, while using shared systems and standards countywide.<br>• Concerns have been raised that removing levels of government risks democratic deficit. | **G** | • A 2UA can formalise locality governance through neighbourhood partnerships and area committees, co-designed with communities and partners – noting it may be difficult on such a large footprint (OPCC, ICB, VCS Alliance).<br>• Concerns have been raised that removing levels of government risks democratic deficit. |
| **7. Environmen** | A) Ensures the new authority has / | **G** | • Countywide plans and partnerships on climate, nature recovery, and flood risk (e.g. | **G** | • Strategic collaboration could continue through Climate Leadership |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| tal and climate protection | authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans | | Climate Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) role) continue seamlessly under a 1UA.<br>• Scale enables coordinated budgets, specialist teams, and single ownership of assessments and bids, strengthening capacity for investment and delivery.<br>• Neighbourhood partnerships embed environmental priorities locally, supporting community-led climate and nature actions. | | Gloucestershire, but duplication of plans and scrutiny would add cost.<br>• Requires countywide coordination on cross-boundary issues (which can continue to build on the success of partnerships such as Climate Leadership Gloucestershire).<br>• The smaller scale of two unitary authorities should not have an adverse impact on the effectiveness. |
| | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB). | **G** | • Maintains single local plan, LNRS, and biodiversity net gain framework, avoiding fragmented policies across natural assets and landscapes.<br>• Supports countywide coordination of infrastructure, flood schemes, and biodiversity corridors while retaining local tailoring through the proposed locality arrangements.<br>• Provides consistent planning approach on issues like nutrient neutrality, with parish and community networks shaping local priorities. | **G** | • Local initiatives such as Cheltenham's Net Zero Plan and Fairer Greener Forest could be advanced under separate leadership. |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | C) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. "Fairer Greener Forest", Climate Emergency responses). | **G** | • Local climate programmes (e.g. Fairer Greener Forest, Stroud Climate Action Network (CAN), Cheltenham net zero) can continue with countywide support, funding and systems.<br>• A 1UA enables one climate plan, shared datasets, and a single scrutiny framework to align priorities and track delivery.<br>• Some partners highlighted through engagement that 1UA simplifies collaboration, supporting targeted investment in rural, urban, and flood-risk communities. | **G** | • Two councils could retain and develop existing local climate plans, keeping accountability close to members and communities.<br>• Local ownership may strengthen engagement, but alignment is needed on countywide priorities like emissions, transport decarbonisation, and biodiversity. |
| **8. Civic engagement and participative democracy** | A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy | **A** | • Countywide engagement tools and resident panels can be delivered at scale, avoiding duplication across districts.<br>• A single framework protects equal access to participation for both rural parishes and urban neighbourhoods.<br>• Builds on local co-design pilots and VCFSE partnerships, enabling grassroots leadership within a countywide democratic structure. | **A** | • Both authorities would be able to develop civic engagement strategies suited to their geographies and communities.<br>• Smaller councils could feel more accessible to residents, with closer member–resident links.<br>• Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. | | represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. |
| **9. Inclusive growth and equity** | A) Ability to tackle disparities in wealth setting up one unitary authority or two unitary authorities | **G** | • A 1UA enables countywide planning and pooled resources to tackle disparities, targeting regeneration in areas with lower GDHI, job density, and higher deprivation (notably in the West).<br>• Avoids postcode inequality by ensuring consistent access to services and funding across the county.<br>• Strengthens Gloucestershire's case for levelling up and national investment by presenting one accountable body. | **A** | • Lack of countywide redistribution may leave the West struggling with higher deprivation (East: 12.71, West: 17.16) and demand pressures (e.g. ASC costs per resident East: £405, West: £629 and Adults with no qualifications East: 13,375 per 100,000, West: 16,169 per 100,000).<br>• Risks include divergence in neighbourhood regeneration and reduced ability to deliver countywide programmes to close equalities gaps. |
| | B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration | **G** | • Shared datasets enable consistent targeting of unmet need (e.g. higher child poverty rates in the West).<br>• Countywide safeguarding boards and integrated commissioning are retained, while services continue to deliver locally | **G** | • The West may face difficulty funding high-need regeneration without redistribution, exposing resource and commissioning gaps. However, funding may become more readily available to the West as their relative deprivation would no longer be |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | | 2UA (East / West) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | through hubs, schools, and VCSFE partners.<br>• A 1UA simplifies cross-cutting delivery (e.g. mental health, housing, substance misuse) and links neighbourhood action plans to countywide priorities. | | hidden by the averages of the West and East combined. |
| | C) Ability to balance financial sustainability with service levels | **A** | • Consolidation of contracts, systems, and infrastructure delivers savings in back-office functions, allowing reinvestment in frontline and preventative services.<br>• A single commissioning function strengthens market position in areas such as ASC and SEND, reducing fragmentation and securing better value.<br>• Countywide reserves and income provide flexibility to sustain high-cost services and manage financial risk across the whole area.<br>• Countywide dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficit projected to reach ~£234m by vesting day (1 April 2028). If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks. | **A** | • Each authority would have its own independent medium term financial strategy (MTFS) and budgets which can be aligned with local service priorities.<br>• The West faces higher ASC demand and costs (ASC costs per resident East: £405, West: £629) and CSC costs (CSC costs per resident East: £129, West: £156), creating greater budget pressure without access to countywide reserves or subsidy.<br>• Countywide DSG deficit projected to reach ~£234m by vesting day (1 April 2028). If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks.<br>• The impact of the fair funding is currently unknown, presenting further financial |

| Criterion | Sub-criterion | 1UA | 2UA (East / West) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | • The impact of the fair funding review is currently, presenting further financial uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. | uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. |

# The New Councils: Future Operating Model

LGR is a chance to reshape how councils in Gloucestershire work. To deliver better, more sustainable services and tackle inequalities, **clear and consistent future operating models (FOM) are essential.**

This section outlines how the new councils could engage with residents, collaborate with partners, and operate internally. While the final model will be decided by future council leaders, this proposal offers **a framework to support long-term resilience, local decision-making, and community-focused service delivery.**

## Our Opportunity to Modernise

Gloucestershire is in a unique position – ready to harness its strengths whilst fundamentally transforming to address some its challenges, ultimately improving outcomes and delivery of high-quality services for all residents, businesses, and staff.

Through LGR, the new councils can take advantage of:

- **Simplified access to services making it easier for residents to get the help they need** without having to be passed between councils.
- **A strategic approach to prevention and integration** across social care, public health, environmental health, leisure, housing, and other services. Given Gloucestershire's higher than average ageing population, this approach is key to future demand management and financial sustainability.
- **Opportunities to partner with local organisations.** Gloucestershire already has great foundations to build on – like our place-based family and youth hubs across the county and the Ow Bist Community Hub[54] in Cinderford. Ow Bist is a great example due to its co-designed ethos; the community named the building and shaped its offer, which blends council, health, and VCFSE services.
- Accelerated opportunities for transformation enabled by **shared intelligence and predictive analytics**. Housing and homelessness are an example of how a more integrated operating model can enable more evidence-driven and predictive responses for vulnerable people.
- **Fresh impetus for broader public service reform across Gloucestershire** to address service modernisation, integration, prevention, and demand pressures**.**

[54] www.fvaf.org.uk/owbist

## Our Design Principles

We've set out clear design principles to guide every decision behind our FOMs:

- **Values-led:** everything we do will be rooted in clear values and led by outcomes – **doing the right thing for the people of Gloucestershire.**

- **People at the heart:** we're here for all our people, businesses, and communities – everyone is equally valued. We design with people, not for the, **building relationships rooted in listening, trust, transparency, and inclusivity.** Our ambition is to create places and services that actively support wellbeing and happiness, helping everyone to thrive.

- **Locality-focused:** our commitment to localities means **real place-based working, genuine co-production, and enabling community-led delivery.** One size won't fit all, and we will support different places in different ways.

- **Online by default and accessible for all:** our strategic 'online by default' culture maximises the impact of technology, simplifying and automating our processes, with alternative provision where it is desired or needed, so that **nobody is left behind**. And as we innovate, we stay mindful of the environmental and ethical impact of our digital choices.

- **Collective ownership:** we'll drive collective ownership throughout the new councils with a **'one-team ethos'**. This empowers service leads, managers, and staff to make smart, local decisions and adapt quickly to what our communities need most.

- **Partnerships with purpose:** our **partnership working will be purposeful** to make a positive difference to our communities and achieve shared goals. Every delivery model is shaped by what works best for each place, not by a one-size-fits-all approach.

- **Intelligence led decision-making:** We will harness evidence to spot things early, be proactive, influence strategy, and drive meaningful change - using data and insights to improve service delivery and ways of working.

- **A great place to work:** we'll value, train, and care for an agile and resilient workforces, building clear career pathways and enabling development of specialist service experts, multi-skilled individuals, and those that want to move between service areas. We champion **a diverse and inclusive workforces that reflects our communities**, promoting equality, equity, and belonging for all.

## Key Components of Our FOMs

With our design principles as our foundation, we're clear about what this means in practice.

**Two-way engagement and a first point of contact for residents, businesses, and the community**

Each unitary authority could have its own in-house engagement capability but with consistent features:

- Fostering participation and co-creation with neighbourhoods and other communities to encourage genuine partnership working and empowerment; exploring investment in community assets, libraries, and outreach to support place-based access and digital inclusion.
- Wherever possible, ensuring that services feel consistent and connected, powered by shared customer data, especially for those with complex or multiple needs.
- Blending digital self-service and effective triage (enabled by AI, including voice and chat automation) to free up our people to provide higher value, personal services.
- Utilising resident and community demand data and insights to feed neighbourhood and community support, commissioning, and corporate planning, which will allow the councils to use data to drive decisions and improvements.

**Bringing together frontline and place-based service delivery for residents, businesses, and communities**

There may be some common service delivery features and principles adopted by each authority including:

- High-risk, regulated, and a range of other services are likely to stay in-house (or potentially even be brought in house) to protect quality, value, and flexibility.
- A workforce that blends specialist staff, who understand the technical nuance and risks of frontline services, with flexible, multi-skilled staff, who can provide challenge and strong leadership.
- Visible and responsive services in local areas through place-based forums and outreach which adapts to diverse populations and cultural needs.

- A seamless flow of contact, triage, and resolution into operational teams – with clear service standards and safeguarded pathways for urgent or high-risk cases.

**Commissioning in-house specialist capabilities associated with services the councils acquire externally**

Each unitary authority could have its own in-house commissioning capability which can commission based on local market conditions and demand / supply in each area. The councils would also seek to:

- Strategic commissioning capabilities to link insight, market knowledge, service needs, and outcomes (aligned to the corporate strategy and community needs).
- Lead with intelligence – using demand, neighbourhoods, and supply insights to drive every decision so that they are outcomes-focused and needs-based.
- Joint working with partners built on trust and shared goals (not necessarily always full-service integration), enabled by strong governance and clear exit strategies.
- An ethos of continuous review and improvement, making sure services remain resident-focused and outcome-driven, encouraging maximum value for money.

*Note: An initial view of potential delivery models for core service areas (i.e. commissioned, shared services, in-house), is set out in Appendix 6: Proposed Service Delivery Models (noting that ultimately the final decisions on these will be for the new authorities).*

**Strategic enablement: driving the councils' strategic direction, transformation agenda, and operational excellence**

Each unitary authority will need its own strategic enablement capabilities to lead direction, retain decision-making sovereignty, and deliver on its political and strategic priorities. These teams will help drive:

- Coordination of corporate strategy, transformation, and financial performance to ensure alignment and accountability across the council.
- A robust business partnering model turning strategy into action. Central teams will manage systems, standards, and high-volume transactions, with business partners embedded within or alongside directorates.

- Insight and performance information will flow both ways between services and strategic leadership, enabling real-time learning, smarter resource use, and targeted interventions.
- Investment in the right tools, skills, and culture, pairing data with human judgement and local context to ensure decisions are ethical, inclusive, and effective.
- Outcome-driven performance management – using insight to monitor progress, drive change, and enable services to reach their full potential for residents.

## Shared Services Between East and West Gloucestershire

**Gloucestershire already leads the way in shared services**, delivering consistent, efficient, and cost-effective solutions like waste collection and environmental management across up to eight councils. Where scale, specialist expertise, or infrastructure matter, collaboration just makes sense.

For most children's and adults' social care functions, it is essential that each authority delivers its own services, led by dedicated professionals who know their communities best and are empowered to make decisions locally. High-quality, safe support for vulnerable children and adults depends on clear lines of accountability and strong local leadership - an approach adopted by the vast majority of councils across England because it delivers results. The new authorities may wish to explore shared service models in areas such as:

- **Archives:** splitting physical and digital collections would be costly, disruptive, and face significant legal challenges, with no benefit to residents. A single, shared archive service protects access, quality, and value.
- **Coroners:** Gloucestershire's coroner area boundary is already set by the Ministry of Justice under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Keeping a countywide service avoids unnecessary boundary changes and preserves specialist expertise.
- **Registrars:** a shared approach is key to financial resilience, especially with demand varying so widely across the county. Pooling resources ensures a sustainable, high-quality service for all.
- **Waste and environmental services:** the Ubico model already successfully delivers for seven councils. Expanding this shared service across two new authorities will drive even greater efficiency, without compromising on delivery.

## Gloucestershire's Shared Waste Services

Ubico Ltd is Gloucestershire's shared environmental powerhouse. delivering frontline services for eight councils, comprising all seven in the county as well as West Oxfordshire. Teckal-compliant and council-owned, Ubico has set the standard since 2011/12 for cost-effective, flexible alternatives to outsourcing.

From waste and recycling collections to street cleansing, fly-tip response, grounds maintenance, fleet management, and even cemetery care, Ubico covers it all. Every service is tailored to local priorities but delivered with the consistency and efficiency only a shared model can offer.

Despite being in a shared service arrangement, each service is tailored to local policies and priorities set by the individual councils across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

There have been a range of benefits to all councils, including:

- **Cost efficiency** through centralised senior management, support services, fleet management and procurement
- **Consistent, high-quality service delivery** with flexibility for local policy differences
- **Back-office savings** and simplified contract management
- **Operational resilience**, with cross-council support and standardisation
- **Centralised expertise** in environmental service provision, fleet management and maintenance, environmental compliance, service change and innovation, and programme management.

## The New Councils: Workforce

The workforce approach builds directly on the strategic ambitions proposed in the FOMs. The new councils' FOMs provide an opportunity to reimagine what it means to work for our councils and to invest in continuing to develop **a diverse, valued, and multi-skilled workforce that represents, and is best placed to service, Gloucestershire's residents and communities.**

By reshaping how we attract, develop, and empower staff, we unlock **greater mobility, clearer career pathways, and the chance to embed a culture of innovation and continuous improvement** across services.

### Gloucestershire's Workforce Challenges

**Our workforce is talented and dedicated**, but we're not immune to the pressures facing local government. LGR is our chance to tackle these challenges head-on and build a workforce that's resilient, inclusive, and future-ready.

- **Recruitment and retention**: stability is impacted by competition for talent, especially in social care, education, and technical roles. To attract and keep the best, we need to offer more than just a job. Flexible working is increasingly expected, and career pathways could better reflect diverse progression routes.
- **Diversity and representation:** there are gaps in workforce diversity, with underrepresentation in some roles and areas. Promoting Gloucestershire's strengths more widely can help attract a broader range of talent.
- **Wellbeing and change fatigue:** staff are under pressure, particularly in middle management and specialist roles. A stronger focus on wellbeing and open communication can help build cultures that embrace change and support growth, ready for what comes next.
- **Skills for the future:** rapid technological change means we must invest in digital and data skills across all roles. Updating job structures and expanding access to learning will help build confident, adaptable workforces ready to lead transformation.

### Unlocking New Opportunities for Our Workforce

LGR provides a unique moment to reshape how our councils engage, support, and develop their workforce. By aligning people strategies with the broader transformation agenda, we can unlock new potential and build future-ready organisations.

Through LGR the councils can:

- **Reset organisational culture** by embedding inclusive values, energising teams, and empowering staff to shape services. This fresh start unites colleagues through adoption of new behaviours, attracts new talent, and

creates real ownership and pride, across every corner of Gloucestershire. By putting wellbeing and resilience at the centre, we'll tackle change fatigue and build workforces that are more connected, motivated, and driven by a shared mission.

- **Strengthen recruitment and retention** by reducing internal competition for talent, enabling more flexible resource sharing, and creating clearer pathways for retraining and upskilling. Structural changes, such as refining spans of control and smarter job design, can improve efficiency and clarity - especially important in high-demand areas like social care, education, planning, and technical services. LGR will allows the councils to become more attractive employers, offering rewarding careers and development opportunities.

- **Build skills and capability** by investing in digital literacy, data competence, and shared training – raising standards and opening-up new career routes. We'll close skills gaps in areas like AI, development operations, data analysis, and data engineering, competing with the private sector and positioning the councils as forward-thinking employers, ready to meet future challenges with confidence. And by sharing these skills with wider partners and the community, we'll boost employment prospects and deliver real social value.

- **Support diverse career pathways** by recognising the value of both specialists and generalists and creating structures that reward horizontal and vertical progression equally. Through investing in specialist skills – like commissioning, contract management, market shaping, and quality assurance – we'll help staff feel more valued for their unique strengths and open up fulfilling career journeys within each organisation.

- **Promote workforce diversity and representation** by setting the standard for an inclusive workplace. Addressing persistent gaps in representation and removing cultural and structural barriers in recruitment and progression, we'll build workforces that better reflects the communities they serve and where everyone can thrive.

## Gloucestershire's Workforce Priorities

Through collaboration across all seven councils, we've identified opportunities to shape workforces that can deliver on Gloucestershire's bold vision and ambitions:

| |
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| 1. **Create a 'fresh start' for the new organisational cultures, marking the opportunity to reset organisational identity and behaviours following reform, creating more inclusive and energising environments.** |
| LGR offers a valuable opportunity to reset organisational cultures. It's a chance to reaffirm shared values, refresh our identities, and foster more dynamic, inclusive workplaces. By moving beyond legacy behaviours and empowering staff to shape the new cultures, we'll boost morale, strengthen engagement, and inspire pride in each council's future. |
| 2. **Accelerate digital confidence and capability: Reflects the commitment to equip staff with digital skills and tools.** |
| We're embedding digital, data and technology (DDaT) at the core of the new councils, backed by real investment in upskilling our people so that they have the tools and support they need to thrive. By expanding graduate schemes and digital apprenticeships, we'll build workforces that are digitally confident, ready to innovate, and equipped to deliver modern, responsive public services. |
| 3. **Design inclusive career pathways, reflecting the commitment to support both specialist and generalist progression by creating flexible, transparent career routes that value diverse skills and aspirations.** |
| We're committed to clear, flexible career pathways that let both specialists and generalists thrive, without being pushed into unsuitable management roles. Current structures often lack the flexibility to support dual career tracks, which can limit the development of specialist expertise. By valuing every route equally, supporting career exploration, and being transparent about role expectations, we unlock talent at every level. And for regulated professions, such as S151 officers, we'll keep the depth and accreditation that excellence requires. |
| 4. **Championing diversity of thought and inclusive behaviours, highlighting the importance of embedding equity and inclusion in recruitment, leadership, and everyday practice.** |
| LGR is our platform to embed inclusive practices and celebrate diversity of thought at every level. We're tackling underrepresentation head-on, making sure all staff feel seen, heard, and valued. Our priorities include inclusive recruitment, diverse leadership pipelines, and open dialogue across teams. By championing different |

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| perspectives and lived experiences, we'll strengthen decision-making, build community trust, and create workforces that truly reflect the population they serve. |
| **5. Building leadership capability – referring to the qualities, skills, and support needed for leaders to guide teams effectively through change and deliver high-quality services.** |
| Strong leadership is key to navigating change and delivering high-quality services. LGR creates valuable opportunities to grow leadership at every level. Through shared training, mentoring, and clear development pathways, the councils can support leadership growth while defining the qualities needed for the future. By investing in our leaders, we'll boost confidence, enhance engagement, and equip managers to lead with clarity, empathy, and purpose – amplifying the strengths already thriving across our teams. |
| **6. Creating anchor institutions for the wellbeing of our communities** |
| The 2021 Gloucestershire Director of Public Health's annual report "Sources of Strength"[55] described how 'anchor organisations' can support community health and wellbeing and help tackle inequalities in their places. Anchor organisations like the new unitary councils will take direct action in areas like employment policies, procurement, buildings, the environment, and place-shaping – leveraging our assets and influence for local benefit. As two of Gloucestershire's largest employers, we'll lead by example. |
| **7. Supporting staff who may not continue in the new unitary councils** |
| LGR is also about looking after our people. For those not transitioning into new roles within the new organisations, we'll offer tailored support – including CV writing, interview preparation, and access to redeployment resources – so that everyone feels respected, empowered, and ready for their next step. This compassionate approach values individual contributions and helps maintain positive organisational cultures throughout the change. |

[55] www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/nb5dugc1/dph-report-2021-sources-of-strength.pdf

# The New Councils: Digital, Data, and Technology

## Designing Digitally-Enabled Organisations for Gloucestershire

Since the announcement of LGR, we've worked with the Local Government Association (LGA) and other councils who've already navigated this process to understand the realistic opportunities and learn from their experiences in Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) transformation. This collaborative approach has enabled us to identify opportunities, challenges, and best practices, ensuring that our DDaT aspirations are informed by real-world experience and aligned with the government's digital blueprint[56].

**Putting residents and communities first is at the core of our DDaT approach.** We're designing digital services that work for everyone – whatever their age, ability, or access to technology. While we're investing in DDaT to improve outcomes and experiences, we recognise that not everyone can or wants to access services online. We'll continue to offer alternative ways to get support and information, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Our DDaT vision is to **transform the experience of local public services**, designing organisations that are truly fit for the digital age: innovative, efficient, and built to meet the expectations and needs of our local people, communities, and staff.

By bringing together county and district services across two unitaries, we can simplify and standardise services, so every resident enjoys a consistently good experience – no matter where they live or what service they use. This means **easier access, less confusion, and no need to repeat information or navigate multiple systems.** It allows us to focus resources where they are needed most, respond quickly, and deliver joined-up, reliable support. Ultimately, we're building councils that are more efficient, more responsive, and better able to meet the needs of our communities.

## What Do We Mean by Digital, Data, and Technology?

**Digital:** we're creating an empowered and user-centred culture – investing in the right skills and tools to deliver seamless, end-to-end online services that people choose to use because they're simple and effective.

**Data:** we'll use data strategically and ethically to drive smarter decisions and deliver personalised support. At the heart of our data use will be secure and ethical data sharing, improving interoperability across systems, and using insights to redesign services around real need.

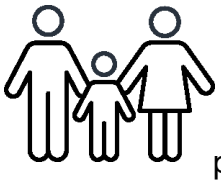
[56] www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-blueprint-for-modern-digital-government

**Technology:** our approach is robust, secure, and flexible – from cloud and low-code to open-source tools and responsible use of AI. We'll deliver resilient, scalable systems that support innovation and work together effortlessly, so every experience feels joined-up and intuitive.

## What Difference Will Designing Digitally Enabled Organisations Make?



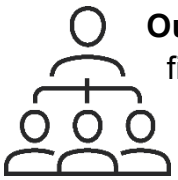
**Our residents and businesses** across Gloucestershire will access services that are consistent, proactive, accessible, and responsive – joined-up across the councils and their partners. By using data smartly (where it makes sense to rather than 'just because'), we'll deliver the right support at the right time, cutting out repetition and confusion. Whether its online, by phone, via email, or face-to-face, everyone gets the same reliable service. And because digital exclusion is real, we're committed to making sure that everyone – regardless of how they choose to engage – can access the support and services they need.



**Our communities** will have more opportunities than ever to shape services and share their views. Digital platforms will make it easier to access data, share views, respond to consultations, and work in partnership with us – building fairness, trust, and real empowerment. This means communities are enabled to respond to local issues themselves, as well as target support and resources where they are needed most, strengthening local resilience.



**Our staff** will have the right tools and connected systems, working in cultures that champions learning and collaboration. Routine tasks will be automated, freeing up time for complex work and collaboration within and outside the organisations. We'll trust our staff to experiment, adapt, and grow, supporting them every step of the way to build new skills.



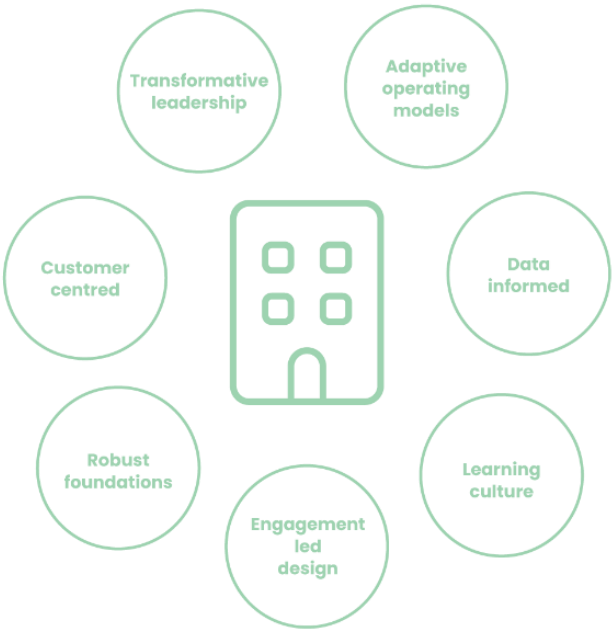
**Our leadership** will have real-time, high-quality insights at their fingertips, enabling confident, informed decisions. With LGR unlocking joined-up data, we'll see across systems, anticipate future needs, and target resources where they'll have the greatest impact.

**Our new unitary authorities** will be better equipped to manage demand, streamline processes, and evolve services in innovative ways. By harnessing digital and data capabilities, we'll break away from traditional models of local government service delivery, enabling more targeted support and adaptive operating models. We're committed to becoming employers of choice: attracting and retaining talented people by fostering modern, inclusive, purpose-driven workplaces where staff feel empowered to make a real difference.

**Our partners** will benefit from shared platforms, ethically aligned data, and collaborative delivery, making it easier to work across organisational boundaries. We'll reduce duplication, remove barriers, and create seamless experiences for people using services across different agencies.

## Strategic Components of Our Approach

DDaT sits at the heart of Gloucestershire's transformation. We've identified seven key areas that will help us turn our ambition into action – each focused on delivering better outcomes for residents, communities, and businesses.




### Transformative leadership

Our leadership will encourage bold innovation – **challenging the status quo** and championing joined-up services across teams, organisations, and sectors. Leaders will foster a culture where experimentation is encouraged, help remove barriers, and use data to make informed decisions. They'll empower staff to 'build, test, learn', embracing continuous improvement over perfection at the first

iteration. They'll ask the right questions, equip staff with the tools to answer them, and act confidently on what data reveals.

### Adaptive operating model

We'll adopt reusable common components wherever possible, ensuring data portability and a consistent user experience across services.

All services will be online by default (with alternative channels available), underpinned by a single digital process regardless of contact channel. We'll remove unnecessary hand-offs, reduce duplication, and make it simpler and quicker for residents to get what they need. By joining forces with partners across the public and voluntary sectors, we'll deliver a simple and consistent experience across the whole system.

### Data-informed decisions

Traditionally, local government has faced challenges with fragmented datasets – both within and between organisations – making early intervention difficult. LGR offers a real opportunity to break down these silos, joining up services and data to enable earlier intervention, faster responses, and more effective prevention. **Evidence-based decision making and investment in analytics, predictive modelling, and AI will better equip us to anticipate demand and drive continuous improvement.**

Robust data governance is non-negotiable. We'll use information safely, securely, and ethically – joining up across services and with partners when there is consent and clear purpose. Clear principles and accountability will guide how we use AI and data, building trust and delivering value responsibly.

The new unitary authorities will enable the implementation of a joined-up predictive analytics platform across adult and children's services, education, housing, and health. By pooling data that used to be locked in districts and county silos, the system will help identify early warning signs of safeguarding risks – such as school absence, housing instability, or repeat A&E visits – and trigger coordinated interventions when needed. In our MASH, for example, we'll enable real-time data sharing across agencies, standardised data formats and dashboards, predictive analysis to identify risk earlier, standardisation of risk thresholds, and automation of routine processes (e.g. triage and referrals).

### Customer-centred services

Customer experience and our approach to digital must go hand-in-hand.

For each council, our aim is to deliver **intuitive, accessible, and consistently high-quality online services for all residents and customers - putting them at the heart of our service design.** One phone number. One website. An integrated digital front door – incorporating tools like live chat and chatbots for 24/7 availability. With smart digital tools and AI, we'll track progress on cases, keep people updated, and resolve issues faster, freeing up our staff to focus on supporting people with more complex needs.

**We'll build public trust through transparency** – open dashboards showing our performance, reliability, and commitment to high standards. By connecting information across services, we'll build a fuller picture of our communities' needs and respond with care.

**User-centred design and continuous improvement will be our standard.** We will test new services and features with real users, gather feedback, and keep improving, so that what we deliver is always intuitive, accessible, and genuinely useful. This will help us to identify and address issues early, refine our services, and make sure our services work for everyone.

### Learning culture

We're creating cultures where **curiosity is celebrated, change is embraced, and learning never stops.** We'll blend the best of our existing strengths with our appetite for more experimentation, collaboration, and continuous learning.

We'll learn from the best – partnering with national initiatives like the LGA and the Government Digital Service to improve digital consistency across the sector and drawing inspiration from places that have already led the way, like Greater Manchester and Data Mill North. We'll bring together the councils, NHS, universities, technology start-ups, and other partners to pilot bold new ideas and turn innovation into action.

We'll invest in digital skills at every level, including digital apprenticeships, to **build workforces that can deliver and sustain transformation.**

### Listening to our residents and stakeholders

To build online services that are truly inclusive and genuinely responsive to our residents' expectations and needs, we must actively listen to them and recognise the digital exclusion challenges across the county.

Our digital engagement approach will support Gloucestershire's residents and communities to easily provide feedback, join resident panels, and co-design services. Aligned to our proposed locality arrangements, we'll make appropriate data and insights available so that our communities are empowered to shape

solutions to local concerns and issues. By teaming up with partners like the VCSFE and parish councils, we'll boost digital skills and deliver meaningful digital engagement.

We'll use data and digital platforms to tailor engagement by location, interest, or demographics. **Robust feedback loops, co-design practices, and transparency will improve inclusive service delivery and build trust with our residents.**

And we're committed to true accessibility. If digital isn't an option, we'll meet people where they are – by phone, in person, or through trusted local partners.

Regardless of the contact channel, the process and experience must feel consistent, joined up, and fair, **ensuring that no one is left behind in our digital transformation.**

**Robust infrastructure**

The success of the new councils will fundamentally rely on robust and dependable technology foundations. We'll ensure our infrastructures, devices, applications, and data are up-to-date, secure, resilient, and dependable.

We'll move to the cloud-based platforms where it makes sense. But we won't just simply replace legacy systems in the cloud – **we'll seize every chance to transform services, using flexible, open-source solutions to promote transparency, efficiency, and innovation.**

Every investment in our infrastructure will be futureproof: cyber-secure, sustainable, and built to last. We'll set clear design principles to prioritise standardisation and interoperability. Environmental sustainability will be a key consideration, ensuring our technology decisions support the councils' broader climate and carbon reduction commitments.

We'll equip teams with the right digital tools - like low-code platforms - to design, test, and launch new solutions at speed, scale, and lower cost. We'll tackle 'shadow IT' – where tools, apps, or systems are procured without the approval of the central DDaT service – to ensure every technology decision is strategic, centralised, and fully aligned with our DDaT ambitions.

Our DDaT investments must go beyond devices and platforms to include connectivity. While most of Gloucestershire already enjoys superfast broadband, we'll close the gaps, especially in rural and digitally excluded areas. As unitary councils we'll be better placed to coordinate infrastructure investment, work with national programmes, and ensure that all communities, regardless of geography, can benefit from modern, reliable, and inclusive digital services.

## Summary

Designing digitally enabled councils for Gloucestershire isn't just bold, it's essential. **We're laying the foundations for modern, responsive, and inclusive organisations.**

The risk of not embedding a clear digital strategy and robust DDaT foundations from day one is real. Without it, we risk building on fragmented systems, outdated processes, and inconsistent data – driving up costs, slowing progress, and limiting our ability to innovate, collaborate, and meet rising expectations.

Our case studies (Appendix 2) already show how **digital is improving outcomes** across the county, streamlining services, and supporting those who need us most. But the real opportunity lies ahead: working together to deliver consistent, high-quality outcomes for everyone who lives, works, or visits Gloucestershire.

As we move through the phases of LGR, our strategy will balance innovation with stability. We'll embed customer focus from the outset and set a clear roadmap for future transformation.

Ultimately, our DDaT ambitions will enable us to become proactive councils that deliver meaningful outcomes. Our new councils will feel modern, human, and trustworthy - **designed around the people we serve and powered by the best of digital, technology and data insight.**

## The New Councils: Democratic Arrangements

**We're creating two strong, focused councils, each with a clear vision for their area, championing local priorities while working together in Gloucestershire's wider interest.**

**Local members will be strong representatives and true community leaders,** deeply connected to local priorities and aspirations, clearly accountable for services, and powerful convenors who bring people and partners together to deliver real impact.

**Merging the county and district councils into two new unitary authorities** will simplify local government, making it easier for residents to engage with the council, with local members at the heart of that relationship.

While some services will be shared, members on each council will ensure **services are tailored to local needs** and will hold services to account.

Right now, electoral arrangements across seven councils mean that every year sees a council election in at least one part of the county. **This new model brings coherence, clarity, and a stronger voice for every part of Gloucestershire.**

| Council | Number of Councillors | Electoral cycle | Next election |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 55 | All out every 4 years | May 2029 |
| Cheltenham Borough Council | 40 | Elected in halves every 2 years | May 2026<br>May 2028 |
| Cotswold District Council | 34 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Forest of Dean District Council | 38 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Gloucester City Council | 39 | All out every 4 years | May 2028 |
| Stroud District Council | 51 | All out every 4 years | May 2028 |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | 38 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Total | 295 | | |

Table 9: Current electoral arrangements

**Creating two unitary councils will streamline local democracy, reduce councillor numbers, and create a more stable political landscape for Gloucestershire. But this isn't just about efficiency, it's about strengthening local voices.**

We're committed to **enhancing democracy**, not diluting it. Both new councils will be built around a culture that empowers local members to lead, listen, and act on what matters most to their communities.

To ensure **fair and effective representation** from day one, we'll use the existing county council divisions - recently reviewed and electorally balanced - avoiding the disruption of an immediate boundary review. This provides a solid, balanced foundation for local democracy, with electoral equality built in.

The result? **A simpler, stronger, and more accountable system, designed to serve every part of Gloucestershire better.**

To ensure strong local representation and capacity from day one, each ward / division will elect two councillors. Using the existing recently reviewed county council divisions avoids the need for an immediate boundary review. In contrast, current district ward boundaries aren't fit for purpose: unequal elector ratios and inconsistent structures (single-, double-, and triple-member wards) make them unworkable for a modern, unified council.

This approach delivers:

- A West council with 58 members and an East council with 52, a **total reduction of 185 councillors**.
- Elector ratios of 1:4,454 in the West and 1:4,503 in the East, slightly above the average for similar unitary councils, but well within a fair and functional range.

Our councillor-to-elector ratio ensures:

- **Capacity to lead through transition** while staying closely connected to communities.
- **Representation across large, rural divisions** with multiple parishes.
- **Clear democratic accountability from day one**, with councillors who are visible, accessible, and responsive representatives of their communities.

**In time, a boundary review will help streamline representation further** - reducing reliance on two-member divisions and making it even easier for residents to know who represents them.

**Our governance will be built on four core principles:**

- A clear voice for Gloucestershire
- Easier collaboration across the public sector
- Strong transparency and accountability
- Community needs at the heart of every decision.

**We'll deliver strong, responsive governance through clear leadership, local empowerment, and deep community connection.** We'll deliver this through:

- **Bold, visible leadership** from a Leader and Cabinet in each council, driving collaboration and playing a leading role in the future Combined Authority.
- **Engaged, flexible scrutiny** that brings together all political groups - and where needed, external voices - to shape policy and hold decisions to account. We will use creative, constructive approaches to scrutiny, working at both a strategic and a local level to make sure we're meeting the needs of our communities.

- **Proud civic leadership**, preserving the heritage of Gloucester and Cheltenham while elevating their roles at the heart of each new unitary council. The Chair of the council and strong ties with the Lord Lieutenancy will uphold county-wide identity and tradition.
- **Local decision-making power** through area planning committees, handling planning and other place-based matters where local knowledge matters most.
- **Neighbourhood Partnerships** that reflect real communities and local priorities, shaping services, guiding funding, and driving community-led development.
- **A stronger role for Town and Parish Councils**, backed by a jointly owned charter and new opportunities to take on devolved powers, tailored to each council's appetite and capacity.
- **Real opportunities for children and young people** to share their views and help shape the decisions that affect them.
- **A culture of participation**, with co-production and engagement embedded in how we work, reaching every community, including those in non-parished areas.

# The New Councils: Empowering Gloucestershire – Our New Locality Arrangements

Unitarisation provides us with a unique opportunity to **rewire the connections between places, people, and organisations**. Since the English Devolution White Paper was issued, the seven councils in Gloucestershire have worked together to **reimagine our system, with local places at its heart.** The result is a proposal to unlock the strengths in our community organisations, in our diverse places, and above all, in the people of Gloucestershire.

Our council Leaders are united in a desire to shift the extent and quality of community empowerment. We want to take the best of our smaller scale, localised, good practices - delivered by councils and key partners – and scale it up, making it central to how we work as new councils.

## Grounding our approach in evidence

Gloucestershire's seven councils have worked closely with key local associations and organisations to understand what truly empowers communities and to map the strengths of our current system. We've also drawn on insights from over 20 unitary councils with area-based arrangements and conducted a thorough review of national best practice. Our early conclusions were clear: given the scale and diversity of the East and West Gloucestershire councils, **a neighbourhood approach is essential** - for our future accountability, effectiveness, and cohesion.

Among many learning points, the following stand out:

- **Trust and consistency matter:** Too often, new unitary councils have struggled to deliver the locality promises set out in their proposals, risking trust – especially with parishes and the VCFSE sector. Our approach puts **long-term relationships and trust at the heart of everything we do.**
- **A priority for the whole of both new councils:** Neighbourhood arrangements are not an 'add-on'. To deliver prevention, participation, and wellbeing, good practice cannot be confined to a neighbourhood model. **Leadership, culture, and structure must be joined up and laser-focused on empowering communities.**
- **Community development drives real change:** Unitary councils have made strides on using area-based arrangements to act on visible economic and environmental issues, but many have found tackling health, inequalities, and social challenges at the neighbourhood level has been tougher. By **applying resources and focus to community development**, working hand-in-hand with the VCFSE and NHS, we will unlock better outcomes. In our model, the role of public health is central - bridging the priorities and capacities of health and local government systems.
- **Area-based approaches build stronger communities:** The evidence is clear: when councils work across sectors and issues, communities thrive. But a top-down, overly formal approach stifles innovation and inclusivity. We're committed to test-and-learn, and genuine engagement in ways that make sense to people - making sure every resident feels included.

These learning points have been crucial in shaping our model and proposals**.**

## Our current locality models

Neighbourhood approaches are already woven into the fabric of local services, delivered by councils and partners at various geographic scales. As current district boundaries become less relevant, our focus shifts from serving broad populations of 100,000 plus, to local communities of 20,000 - 50,000. **It's about putting people at the centre - organising around natural communities and driving real change where it matters most.**

*The Gloucestershire Place Pyramid*

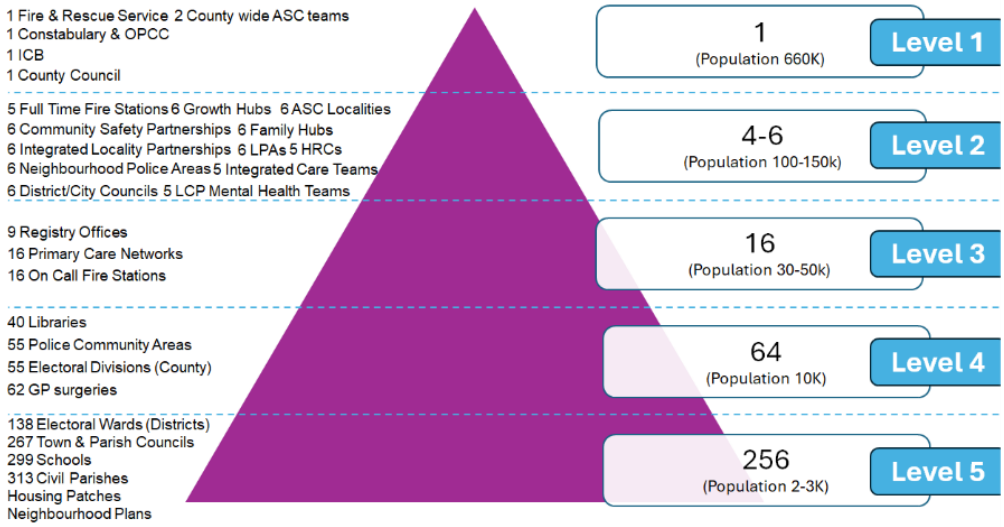



Diagram 1: Gloucestershire's current locality approaches

Across our seven councils and partners, we see a rich diversity of approaches – each driving positive change in its own way:

- **Stroud's community hub approach:** born during the pandemic, but now evolved into a dynamic partnership - bringing together local voluntary organisations, parishes, and housing providers to tackle social isolation and health and wellbeing
- **Integrated Locality Partnerships (ILPs):** led by the NHS, uniting health and other partners at a local level, currently based on district footprints
- The wealth of **community-centred regeneration and economic initiatives**, including the award-winning Gloucester Forum and the Golden Valley development in Cheltenham – proof that **local ambition delivers real results**
- **The Forest of Dean's innovative partnership** between the district council and Forest Voluntary Action Forum has developed a dynamic approach to youth services and more
- The recent successful launch of **Gloucestershire's** Family Hubs and associated Family Hub Networks. Organised in five locations across the county, with an emphasis on wider outreach. Partners include the Gloucestershire Gateway Trust which has developed a neighbourhood and community led approach to supporting children and families

- The area-based **community development approach pioneered in Tewkesbury** and closely tied to the rapid housing and business growth in the area
- Cotswold District Council's active approach in its unique geography supports 115 parish and town councils, with the annual **'Cotswold Parish and Town Summit'** as a showcase for local leadership and collaboration.

**We know that great practice already exists in Gloucestershire – but much of it needs to be scaled up and shared across boundaries.**

## Neighbourhood Partnerships: A new way of engaging and delivering

**We're proposing a new system of Neighbourhood Partnerships**[57]. Each partnership will have the freedom to set its own agenda and priorities, **rooted in what matters to local people.** Their scope is broad by design – giving every place the space to shape its own future. The five key roles each partnership will perform are set out below:

| Core roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships | |
|---|---|
| **Engagement and empowerment** | Each neighbourhood will build on existing great work to get local residents and organisations involved. **Neighbourhoods will be the go-to forum for the council and other agencies to listen, consult, and make sure actions are relevant and responsive to local needs.** |
| **Community development** | Neighbourhoods will be backed by real resources to drive community development. Working with public health, and other expert capacities, community development will play a key role in **tackling inequalities and amplifying the voices of those too often unheard**. Neighbourhoods will work closely with the VCFSE sector to shape and provide this function. |
| **Service access and delivery** | Each neighbourhood will map local services, data, assets, and capacity. **All council services will work together with neighbourhoods**, with many having a visible, accountable presence at the local level. How different services are involved will naturally vary. |
| **Funding and decision-making** | Neighbourhood Partnerships will have a main committee made up of local councillors and non-voting members from local organisations. Neighbourhoods will get **funding and staff resources to deliver** on its priorities. Committees will set their own work programmes, decide how resources are used, and make decisions on local priorities. They'll be accountable to local people, shape council work on the ground, and play a key role in the planning system. |

[57] 'Neighbourhood Partnerships' would fulfil the role of 'Neighbourhood Area Committees' set out in the current Devolution Bill

| Core roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships | |
|---|---|
| **Prevention and Wellbeing** | **Neighbourhood structures aren't a *'nice to have'* – they're essential**. Connected communities achieve better outcomes, from early years and health to democracy and community safety. We'll put data and evidence at the centre of Neighbourhood working, powered by our public health and performance capabilities. Neighbourhoods, whilst setting their own priorities, will have **a duty to focus on prevention in everything they do.** |

Table 10: The core roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships

We've built these core roles by listening to the views and experience of councillors from all seven councils. At a recent all member webinar, councillors ranked the key roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships in order of importance – and the results are clear. Service accountability, residents voice, health and wellbeing, community development, and joined up working between the councils, parishes, and partners all came out on top. This prioritisation will continue to be tested with local people and organisations.




Diagram 2: Results from all member webinar ranking exercise

## The size and shape of our Neighbourhoods

**Neighbourhood size and boundaries won't be drawn in isolation – they'll be shaped by thorough consultation**. Our research suggests each neighbourhood needs to be big enough for the councils and partners to focus resources, but small enough to reflect a natural community. Most will be made up of a main town and its surrounding villages, or a recognisable neighbourhood within a major town or city. We're suggesting populations of 20,000 - 50,000, with options set out within the consultation process. The result will be between seven and 12 Neighbourhood Partnerships for each of East and West Gloucestershire.

We're proposing the current county electoral divisions as the main 'building blocks' of neighbourhoods. But boundaries aren't set in stone - this will form part of the consultation and some adjustments will be needed to better reflect natural communities. Neighbourhood committees will be composed of between four and ten local councillors (depending on size), in addition to co-optees.

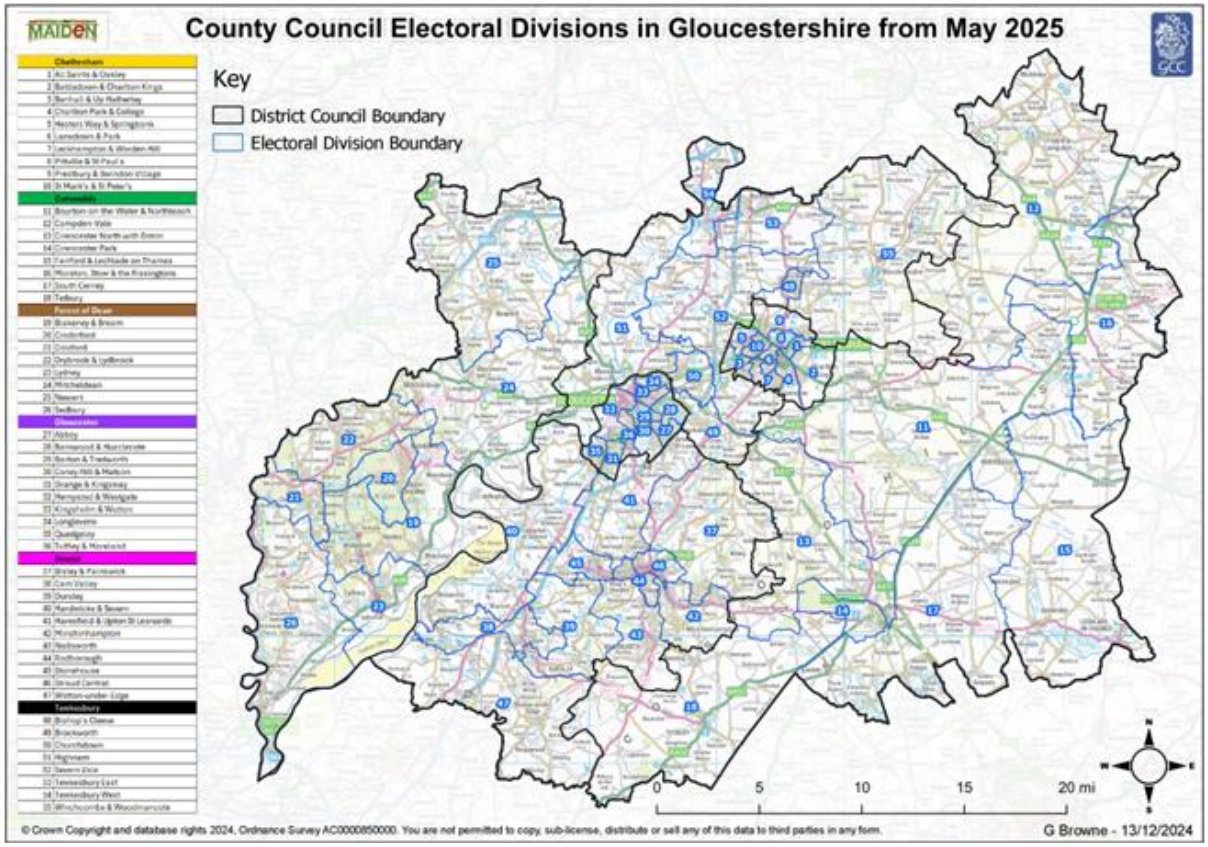



Diagram 3: the current county electoral divisions

## Our adaptive and flexible approach

Not everything the councils do will fit neatly into our structure of Neighbourhood Partnerships. We would expect the shadow authorities to consider area-based Development Control committees on a larger scale than Neighbourhood Partnerships. But **Neighbourhood Partnerships will still play a vital planning role** - acting as consultees in a future *Statement of Community Involvement* and, where it makes sense and is wanted locally, in the development of *Neighbourhood Plans*.

## Investing in Neighbourhoods

**Expert teams will be built around our Neighbourhood Partnerships**:

- **Chair of the Neighbourhood Partnership**: An elected councillor, nominated by councillors in the neighbourhood
- **Neighbourhood Partnership manager**: Together with the chair, this role will form a crucial leadership partnership in making the neighbourhood work successfully
- **Council neighbourhoods teams**: Officers assigned to each neighbourhood. A mix of practically focused managers, town and parish liaison officers, and community development specialists
- **Departmental council officers:** Located in family hubs, housing patches, planning, public health, or social care, these officers will have a strong relationship with neighbourhoods
- **VCFSE:** The VCFSE sector will play a crucial role in the grass roots work for each neighbourhood, some potentially working with the councils in managing and facilitating a whole neighbourhood, or providing expertise in community development
- **Partner organisations:** Health, fire and rescue, police, schools, and registered housing providers will also play a vital part. Over time, we expect to see stronger alignment of partner boundaries with that of our Neighbourhood Partnerships
- **Performance teams**: Data and evidence specialists will be assigned to neighbourhoods to help identify insights and needs, and track progress
- **Public Health:** Professional oversight and support, ensuring neighbourhoods use data, policy, and evidence to maximum effect
- **Director-level officer champions:** Each neighbourhood will be assigned a director-level officer champion to support leadership and delivery
- **Services**: Every external-facing council service will develop a neighbourhood offer, ensuring the approach runs through everything we do
- **Budgets:** We anticipate providing a budget for each neighbourhood to fund projects and activities. We also want neighbourhoods to have real influence on other funding streams, both from council departments such as highways and transport, and as part of central government bids.

Every neighbourhood will have its own context, needs, and ambitions. Whilst all will get a baseline support offer, the new councils, with partners, will focus on addressing inequalities, some of which will be more prominent for particular neighbourhoods.

## Enabling the VCFSE to achieve more

To strengthen our commitment to residents and Gloucestershire's 4,600 VCFSE organisations, **we'll create a Civil Society Covenant with the Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance**. This Covenant, backed by a clear action plan, will set out how local government and the VCFSE will work together for stronger communities. The Covenant could remain a shared project for both new councils, with councillors from both councils joining VCFSE partners on a joint governance body established

over the Shadow Authority period. Alternatively, the new East and West authorities could choose to take this forward separately.

## Making the role of local councillor more effective and accountable

Unitarisation means fewer councillors covering more service areas, bigger geographies, and more electors. **Neighbourhoods provide the crucial local member role with greater structure, capacity, and convening authority.** Neighbourhoods bring partners around the table, helping councillors address issues collectively and with expert support. This joined-up approach reduces duplication and supports meaningful two-way engagement between elected members, residents, and organisations.

## Working with local councils (parishes and towns)

Gloucestershire's 267 parish and town councils are a vital part of our communities – and LGR will have a real impact on them. **Parish and town councils are an essential, vibrant part of our communities**, and we see their development as a vital ingredient in our unitary future. The lesson from elsewhere is that where trust and respect between principal councils and local councils break down, opportunities are missed and outcomes suffer.

We'll work with the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) and the Gloucestershire Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) to **develop a new charter**. A draft will go to the shadow authorities for adoption, setting out clear rights, responsibilities, and governance arrangements to maximise collaboration and two-way communications. **This charter will be the foundation for strong, effective partnership between principal authorities and local councils.**

Neighbourhood Partnership will be a linchpin for locality working - and town and parish councils have a valuable role to play in these structures. The charter process will be developed for all of Gloucestershire, with the respective East and West shadow authorities deciding whether to maintain a joint arrangement or take forward separately.

As the county's major urban areas, we expect **special consideration by the new council will be given to parishing Gloucester and Cheltenham**. Each has major historical and future importance for Gloucestershire, and parishing will help protect their identity and drive momentum. Subject to consultation, we expect community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment to be strengthened by the good governance through parishes that cover most of each urban area. In Gloucester, this could mean a single large parish (city) arrangement, potentially excluding the existing parish of Quedgeley. In Cheltenham, options include a single town council or a federated parish model, combining existing parished and unparished areas. These new arrangements would hold some of the key cultural, civic, and public realm responsibilities, and play a major part in boosting the visitor economy.

Beyond Gloucester and Cheltenham, many parishes are eager to develop their offer. We'll work positively with these parishes to maximise value for local people

and places, keeping value for money in mind**. There will be equal opportunities for larger areas (like Cheltenham and Gloucester) and smaller towns or parishes to take on services and assets.** The new councils will keep a close eye on overall council tax levels, including parish precepts. Any new parishing, or extension of parish responsibilities, will be a matter for the new principal councils to consider and subject to Community Governance Reviews.

**We support recent Ministerial statements that have made clear the differences between parish and neighbourhood roles.** Strong parish arrangements are vital, but they don't replace the need for a neighbourhood offer anywhere in Gloucestershire. We have valuable local capacity in our towns and parishes, and so we see their involvement in neighbourhoods as important. We celebrate the diversity in the parish offers across Gloucestershire as a reflection of what local people want and need in their communities.

## Implementation

**Seven activities will shape our work over the pre-shadow period, and are built into our implementation roadmap:**

1. **Formal consultation on Neighbourhood Partnerships:**

Each council will deliver a **formal consultation on Neighbourhood Partnerships** in the shadow authority period, enabling implementation in Year 1 of the new unitary councils. We'll test our thinking through early engagement in the pre-shadow period. Our engagement and consultation will include:

- Neighbourhood Partnership geographies and boundaries
- Core roles and responsibilities
- Local priorities, services, and needs
- Alignment with partner organisations on approaches and geographies
- How Neighbourhood Partnerships may evolve over time
- The support, capacity, and resources needed to make them work (bearing in mind financial constraints).

2. **Civil Society Covenant:**

During the pre-shadow period, we'll co-design a Civil Society Covenant with the VCSE Alliance and partners, with a draft covenant ready for the shadow authorities to consider and consult on in readiness for Year 1 of the new councils.

3. **Local Councils Charter**

Working with GAPTC and SLCC, we'll develop a draft charter and action plan for the shadow authorities to consult on. The East and West shadow authorities will have the option of progressing the charter with a joint body of councillors and local council representatives, or separately. The seven principal councils will also work together in the pre-shadow period to ensure clear, consistent communications and policies are in place for working with local councils.

4. **Parishing Cheltenham and Gloucester:**

In partnership with Cheltenham Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, and the parish associations, we'll develop a model for how parishing can support the continued **identity, good governance, and regeneration / growth in our major**

**urban areas**. Decisions on the precise form of proposals and consultation process will rest with the new councils.

5. **Service planning:**

We'll consult with all county and district services in the pre-shadow period to shape how they'll work with neighbourhoods - feeding into service planning for the new councils and establishing a clear **'services and assets offer'** for each area.

6. **Policy development:**

A range of **policy development work** will ensure:

- Neighbourhood approaches are supported by good evidence
- Frameworks and models are established for different types of activity (such as community development, project funding, and neighbourhood action plans)
- Robust neighbourhood governance
- Neighbourhood level data and data insight tools are developed

7. **Partner integration:**

We'll work together with all our statutory partners to integrate our proposals with their frameworks and priorities. **Our neighbourhood structure will provide a powerful channel for partners to engage with communities**. We share the excitement and interest in how the NHS 10 Year Plan will translate into action in Gloucestershire, particularly regarding proposals for a 'Neighbourhood Health Service' and its emphasis on prevention. We will continue to work closely with our health partners and others to ensure the local geographies and approaches we use are aligned in the best interests of East and West Gloucestershire's residents.

# The Financial Case for Two Unitary Councils (East/West) for Gloucestershire

**The financial cases for both the 1UA and the 2UA options have been developed together, using the same financial model, assumptions, calculations, and governance.**

Leaders, Chief Executives, and Section 151 officers from across all Gloucestershire councils have worked together to develop, scrutinise, and sign off all key inputs, assumptions, and outputs. This joint approach means both financial cases are robust, transparent, and carry a high level of local assurance.

The financial case for the **2UA proposal** is set out in four stages:

1. **Overall financial case summary**
2. **Day one financial position[58]:** This is the starting baseline in terms of potential income and expenditure that the new councils would inherit
3. **Reorganisation costs and benefits:** The financial impact of the structural changes that are likely as a result of LGR, including:
    a. One-off transition costs e.g. for data and systems migration or implementation management
    b. The ongoing recurring costs resulting from the disaggregation of county council services
    c. Recurring reorganisation savings e.g. in relation to service consolidation
4. **Transformation benefits:** Savings as a result of fundamental changes to ways of working e.g. digitisation, automation, changes to ways of working, investment in prevention, or procurement.

## Overall financial case summary

The table below sets out the key headlines for the 2UA proposal.

| **Potential day one financial position (c. 1st April 2028)** | **East UA** | **West UA** |
|---|---|---|
| Total income | £410.5m | £440.9m |
| Total expenditure | £388.6m | £462.8m |
| Net position | **£21.9m (surplus)** | **-£21.9m (deficit)** |

[58] The analysis takes account of the likely impact of the outcome of the Government's *Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation*. Local assumptions, supported by the latest *Pixel* model available (*Pixel LGR Disaggregation Model August 2025 v1.2*), have been made in relation to Fair Funding. The projected financial positions will therefore need to be updated once national funding allocations are confirmed in the forthcoming Local Government Finance Settlement.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Total revenue implication of Fire & Rescue (i.e. additional pressures for the new UA) | -£1.35m | -£1.45m |
| Net position (incl. impact of Standalone Fire & Rescue Authority) | **£20.5m (surplus)** | **-£23.3m (deficit)** |
| **Reorganisation Costs and Benefits** | **East UA** | **West UA** |
| Gross annual reorganisation savings | £8.6m | £10.3m |
| Ongoing annual disaggregation costs | £3.7m | £4.4m |
| Net annual savings | £4.9m | £5.9m |
| One-off transition costs | -£13.2m | -£15.8m |
| One-off Fire and Rescue disaggregation costs | -£0.5m | -£0.6m |
| Total one-off transition costs | -£13.7m | -£16.4m |
| Payback period | 4.9 years | 4.9 Years |
| Cumulative net saving after 5 years | £0.5m | £0.5m |
| Cumulative net saving after 10 years | £26.3m | £28.5m |
| **Transformation benefits** | **East UA** | **West UA** |
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Base** | £7.4m | £8.8m |
| Recurring annual transformation savings fully delivered by year 5 – **Stretch** | £12.0m | £14.4m |

Table 11: Headlines from 2UA financial case

Note: Values preceded by a '–' symbol indicate a deficit.

## Potential day one financial position (the starting baseline)

On day one, the financial starting points for the proposed East and West authorities would be materially different with the East projecting a £21.9m surplus and the West a £21.9m deficit - a gap driven by higher demand and spend in ASC and CSC in the West.

This position has been prepared on the basis that the seven councils will take any action required to achieve a balanced budget over the period leading to the anticipated Vesting Day of 1 April 2028. The difference in the estimated day one

financial position between the East UA and West UA is a function of differences in income and expenditure, in turn driven principally by variances in social care demand and cost between East and West.

In addition to this, based on discussions with MHCLG and in line with the provisions in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, under a 2UA model, the fire and rescue service (which is currently integrated with the county council) will need to move to non-local authority governance, financial, and service arrangement (i.e. the creation of an independent Fire & Rescue Authority). As a result of this, there are likely to be additional revenue implications for both the East and West authorities which will impact the overall day one position as well (as set out in the table below).

| **Potential day one financial position (c. 1st April 2028)** | **East UA** | **West UA** |
|---|---|---|
| Total income | £410.5m | £440.9m |
| Total expenditure | £388.6m | £462.8m |
| **Net position** | **£21.9m** | **-£21.9m** |
| **Revenue implications of Fire & Rescue** | | |
| *Gross corporate overheads* | *-£0.53m* | *-£0.57m* |
| *Estimated efficiency savings on corporate overheads to be delivered by vesting day* | *£0.14m* | *£0.16m* |
| **Net corporate overheads (e.g. for support services such as fleet, finance etc).** | **-£0.39m** | **-£0.41m** |
| Contribution to capital | -£0.96m | -£1.04m |
| **Total revenue implication of Fire & Rescue (i.e. additional pressures for the new UA)** | **-£1.35m** | **-£1.45m** |
| **Net position (incl. impact of Standalone Fire & Rescue Authority)** (*Net corporate overheads + contribution to capital)* | **£20.5m** | **-£23.3m** |

Table 12: 2UA day one financial position

**Total income:** These figures have been calculated by allocating county-level income (such as grants and retained business rates) alongside district-level council tax base forecasts, ensuring that each geography has an income share reflective of its local tax base. The Fair Funding Review is expected to reduce the overall level of resources for Gloucestershire and therefore, total income projections from 2025 MTFSs have been adjusted downwards at the time of writing. However, these numbers are likely to change further following the 2026/27 Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2025.

**Total expenditure:** This figure consolidates the full range of service responsibilities currently delivered across both county and district councils, including apportioning out the county level expenditure between the proposed East and West geographies (using Newton Europe analysis to apportion ASC and CSC spend, the KM Length split between East and West to apportion total highways spend, and population data to apportion all other county council service area spend).

*Note: The source data for income and expenditure is based on each council's individual MTFS and each council has applied their own local assumptions on how to achieve balanced budgets over the four-year period to 2028/2029 e.g. in relation to how reserves are deployed.*

In addition to the total income and expenditure position, it is also important to consider what the new councils will likely inherit on their respective balance sheets in terms of assets and long-term liabilities:

| Assets and Long-term Liabilities | East UA | West UA |
|---|---|---|
| **Total assets** | £2.1 billion | £2.3 billion |
| Long-term Liabilities (excl. DSG) | £451.7 million | £458.7 million |
| DSG Deficit | £112.2 million | £122.1 million |
| **Total liabilities** | **£563.9 million** | **£580.8 million** |

Table 13: 2UA total assets and long-term liabilities

- **Assets:** Total assets have been apportioned out on the basis of location. These figures reflect the combined current long-term assets with planned capital expenditure through to 2028/29. The portfolio comprises assets such as property, investments, and heritage assets, in addition to Housing Revenue Account assets.
- **Long-term Liabilities:** Long-term liabilities have been allocated out between the East and West based on the proportion of assets in each district as a proxy, and this includes outstanding borrowing. In addition to this, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit of £234.3 million has also been allocated out using the share of Education, Health and Care Plans based on location of schools as a proxy.

The DSG deficit is a material factor in the financial outlook for Gloucestershire. The most recent MTFS projects that the DSG deficit will rise from £76 million at the end of March 2025 to more than £100 million by March 2026. By 2028/29, the cumulative deficit is forecast to exceed £200 million.

At present, the statutory override allows councils to hold DSG deficits “off balance sheet”. However, this override is due to end in March 2028. If no new national policy is introduced, councils across the country would be required to absorb these deficits within their core budgets, creating a significant risk to financial stability.

For Gloucestershire, this means the DSG position must be kept under close review, with the statutory override and national reforms determining the future treatment of the deficit and ongoing cost of service provision.

## Reorganisation costs and benefits

Moving to a unitary model creates costs and benefits which arise directly from consolidating seven councils into two new authorities. The financial analysis brings these costs and benefits together to show the savings that can be achieved, the costs of implementation, and the overall net impact.

**Estimated savings, disaggregation costs and transition costs of LGR in Gloucestershire**

| UA | Annual gross saving | Additional Annual Costs | Net annual saving | One off transition costs | Payback Period | Cumulative net saving after 5 years | Cumulative net saving after 10 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **East** | £8.6m | £3.7m | £4.9m | -£13.7m | 4.9 years | £0.5m | £26.3m |
| **West** | £10.3m | £4.4m | £5.9m | -£16.4m | 4.9 years | £0.5m | £28.5m |

Table 14: Summary of 2UA reorganisation costs and benefits

The 2UA proposal is projected to deliver annual gross savings of £8.6m in the East and £10.3m in the West, with a payback period of 4.9 years (which is required to ‘pay back’ one-off transition costs of £30.1m).

## Savings drivers

Key drivers for savings are as follows:

- **Democratic streamlining –** Through reducing the number of councillors (from 295 to 110 - split as 52 in the East and 58 in the West) and frequency of elections, savings of c.£0.7m per annum can be achieved e.g. from reduced member allowances and election costs.

- **Workforce rationalisation -** Consolidating senior leadership teams and streamlining back office functions such as finance, HR, ICT, and customer contact result in workforce savings (as these are likely to be positions and teams which are duplicated across all seven councils).The financial savings in a 2UA scenario reflect the need to retain two sets of senior leadership and core back office functions for each sovereign organisation.

- **Third party procurement and contract consolidation –** Opportunities to aggregate procurement, renegotiate contract terms, and standardise specifications will reduce cost and complexity. In financial terms, two authorities could be expected to deliver annual third party savings equivalent to approximately 1.2% of their addressable third party spend. Splitting some of the larger contractual arrangements currently in place (particularly across some of the county services including transport, adults and children's services) is likely to be complex and time consuming – estimates from service professionals suggest perhaps up to five years for some of the largest long-term contracts.

- **Property rationalisation -** Currently both county and district councils operate buildings that serve overlapping functions in the same localities. Creating two authorities allows for rationalisation of this estate, with duplicated sites removed and more efficient use made of shared service centres. In financial terms, two authorities could be expected to deliver annual property savings equivalent to approximately 10%.

## One-off Transition Costs

Establishing two new authorities requires significant upfront investment covering the full programme of standing up new governance and operational structures; ICT integration and migration; development of two new legal and constitutional frameworks; public consultation; branding for two new organisations; communications; and programme management. This is estimated to cost c.£30.1m.

| Type of transition cost | Estimated cost (£) |
|---|---|
| Redundancy | 3,646,000.00 |
| External comms, rebranding and implementation | 549,000.00 |
| External transition, design and implementation support costs | 7,000,000.00 |
| Internal programme management | 3,300,000.00 |
| Creating the new council | 1,500,000.00 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Contingency | 8,100,000.00 |
| Organisation closedown | 400,000.00 |
| Public consultation | 412,000.00 |
| ICT costs | 3,500,000.00 |
| Shadow Chief Exec / member costs | 622,200.00 |
| Fire and Rescue disaggregation | 1,100,000 |
| **Total** | **30,129,200** |

Table 15: Estimated transition costs for 2UA

## Additional Annual Costs – Disaggregation of County Services

A 2UA model also introduces ongoing duplication in services and governance that are currently delivered at county level.

Each new authority would require its own statutory leadership team, including Directors of Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Public Health, as well as its own Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer. Safeguarding structures and SEND services would need to be duplicated, with two MASH arrangements, two education services, and two commissioning functions established. This duplication creates recurring additional costs that are not present in the 1UA model (where county services would not need to be split). These are estimated to be at c.£8.1m per annum.

| **Disaggregation cost category** | **Estimated cost (£)** |
|---|---|
| Duplicated senior leadership | 3,442,000 |
| Duplicated county service delivery teams | 4,317,000 |
| Duplicated democratic structure | 355,000 |
| **Total** | **8,114,000** |

Table 16: Estimated disaggregation costs for 2UA

## Transformation benefits

Reorganisation can deliver structural savings, but a greater opportunity lies in the subsequent transformation that can take place. This means using the scale of new authorities to modernise services, redesign ways of working, and create efficiencies beyond what structural change alone can achieve.

Financial analysis has identified five main categories where transformation savings are realistic and quantifiable. For each category, we have tested two scenarios for transformation:

- **Base case:** Assumes cautious delivery of savings in line with past performance across Gloucestershire's councils. The base case is deliberately conservative and ensures that assumptions remain credible and deliverable without requiring major change programmes.
- **Stretch case:** assumes sustained investment in digital and organisational redesign, drawing on best practice from other unitaries. Including a stretch case is important as it demonstrates the potential prize available if early reorganisation savings are reinvested into transformation.

| Category | Base % | Stretch % | Rationale |
|---|---|---|---|
| Front office staff | 6% | 12% | Workforce rationalisation through the structural impact of LGR accounts for savings that can be made through removing duplication. However, potential opportunities through utilising the potential of AI, automation, and channel shift will reduce the demand on customer contact centres. |
| Service delivery staff | 3% | 6% | Transformation can strengthen demand management, early intervention, and integrated pathways particularly in services like adults and children's services. Service redesign and new operating models will also unlock additional opportunities e.g. through digital, process redesign etc. |
| Back office staff | 7% | 9% | Consolidating support functions such as HR, finance, payroll, and ICT enables investment in shared systems and automation. This creates opportunities for streamlined processes and reduces overheads. |
| Third party spend | 2.5% | 3.75% | Unified procurement and contract management can deliver efficiencies by aggregating contracts, renegotiating supplier terms, and redesigning commissioning arrangements. However, savings targets are cautious overall recognising Gloucestershire councils already include procurement savings in their MTFSs, leaving limited headroom. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Income (sales, fees and charges / commercial) | 1.3% | 2.1% | Transformation also includes growth in fees and charges, commercial activity, and investment in economic development. This builds on the county's strengths in advanced manufacturing, cyber, and green technology, and on planned growth initiatives such as the Golden Valley and Severn Edge projects. Overall targets are conservative given volatility and underperformance in past income forecasts. |

Table 17: Estimated transformation savings for 2UA

Transformation savings are not expected to be immediate. They are profiled to phase in gradually as programmes are implemented. The model assumes full delivery by **Year 5,** with the savings per annum expected by this point set out in the table below.

| **Transformation savings** | **Base case** | **Stretch case** |
|---|---|---|
| Savings per annum by Year 5 – East UA | £7.4m | £11.9m |
| Savings per annum by Year 5 – West UA | £8.8m | £14.3m |

Table 18: Total transformation savings in £ terms for 2UA

## Options for funding LGR and enabling transformation

Delivering the 2UA option requires significant upfront investment with estimated transition costs of reorganisation of £29.0m (split out as £13.2m for the East UA and £15.8m for the West UA).

There are several options for funding these costs:

- **Reserves -** Councils hold reserves that are not earmarked that can be applied to one-off expenditure. These provide an immediate source of funding without adding to ongoing revenue pressures.
- **Capitalisation Direction -** Subject to government approval, some costs could be treated as capital rather than revenue. This option, known as capitalisation, has been used in previous reorganisations to reduce pressure on the revenue budget. It applies to costs such as redundancy and ICT integration.
- **Government Support -** Additional funding may also be provided by central government. This could be in the form of transitional grant support, flexibility in financial rules, or early devolution funding. Engagement with the government will be required as proposals are developed.

- **Reinvestment Principle -** Early reorganisation savings can be ring-fenced and reinvested in transformation. This ensures that efficiencies are not absorbed by service pressures but are used to fund programmes in digital, automation, and service redesign. By doing this, initial savings are recycled to create larger recurring benefits in later years.
- **Benefits Compounding -** Investment in transformation compounds over time. For example, reinvesting a portion of early savings into digital customer platforms reduces front office demand, delivering recurring efficiencies by year five. Similar reinvestment in automation and AI can reduce back office and service delivery costs.

## Council Tax Alignment (CTA)

Council tax is a major source of income for any new authority. When seven councils with different council tax rates are merged into two new authorities, these rates must be aligned. The way this is done affects both residents and the financial resilience of the new councils. It is also a fiscal lever that can be used to balance out net operating deficits or provide funding to invest in service improvements or resident priorities.

### Approach to Council Tax Alignment

To inform decision making, detailed modelling has been undertaken to show how different alignment options would affect what residents are required to pay in the future. The modelling uses the 2024 council tax base as the starting point, net of local council tax support, and applies the councils' own projections to forecast growth in the tax base inclusive of the collection rate. Future Band D rates are assumed to increase annually by 4.99% for county and unitary councils and 2.99% for district councils up to Vesting Day in April 2028, consistent with current MHCLG guidance. From Vesting Day onwards, a new unitary authority rate is assumed to increase at 4.99% per year.

The methodology compares projected receipts under alignment with a baseline of what each council would have collected if they continued independently. The difference between these two scenarios represents the additional income gained or foregone through alignment.

**Note: There will be implications for council tax as a result of the fire and rescue service moving out of local authority finance, service, and governance arrangements in the 2UA scenario (i.e. raising of a separate fire precept). At this stage, the impact cannot be modelled precisely and has not been taken into account in the alignment options and impacts set out below.**

## Alignment Options

The analysis models a main scenario using the weighted average where rates align to an average Band D calculated across the county, weighted by the tax base. This is the option chosen in most recent local government reorganisations.

Each option can be implemented in one year or phased over several years, with the statutory maximum alignment period set at seven years. The period over which council tax is aligned is an important decision. A longer alignment period of up to seven years minimises the immediate impacts on residents by phasing changes gradually. However, aligning earlier allows the new authorities to secure additional income more quickly, providing funding for services. Earlier alignment also avoids the perception of unfairness where residents in some areas continue to pay higher rates for longer while receiving the same services.

## Summary of potential impact

Council Tax alignment alters Band D charges across districts because current rates differ. The scale of change depends on which alignment option is chosen and whether this is implemented in one year or phased over several years.

Under the weighted average option for 2UA, impacts differ between East and West. In the East, Band D bills would fall in Cheltenham (£63.41) and rise in Cotswold (£30.80) and Tewkesbury (£35.77).

| **Current District** | **Aligned Band D rate (£)** | **Change in Band D rate (£)** | **% change in Band D Rate** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham | 2,143.98 | -63.41 | -2.87% |
| Cotswold | 2,143.98 | 30.80 | 1.46% |
| Tewkesbury | 2,143.98 | 35.77 | 1.70% |

Table 19: Weighted average council tax alignment in one year in the East UA

In the West, Band D bills would rise slightly in the Forest of Dean (£23.54) and fall in Gloucester (£3.50) and Stroud (£12.85).

| **Current District** | **Aligned Band D rate (£)** | **Change in Band D rate (£)** | **% change in Band D Rate** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucester | 2,198.93 | -3.50 | -0.16% |
| Forest of Dean | 2,198.93 | 23.54 | 1.08% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stroud | 2,198.93 | -12.85 | -0.58% |

Table 20: Weighted average council tax alignment in one year in the West UA

## Engagement to Discover and Improve

Our engagement approach has been shaped by the guidance within the invitation to submit proposals: it's been rooted in genuine discovery and learning, not campaigning for any particular outcome. This focus on open engagement has been enabled by:

- **Unified, option-neutral engagement:** We agreed that both the single unitary and East / West two unitary options would be developed side-by-side, without using the collective engagement activity to campaign or advocate for preferences
- **Strong political leadership:** Gloucestershire's Leaders set the tone – driving a shared engagement plan across councils
- **Clear accountability:** A lead Chief Executive was appointed to oversee all communications and engagement activity
- **Joint working:** Every council played an active role through a joint communications and engagement workstream
- **Prioritised investment:** We prioritised MHCLG LGR funding to support joint engagement activities.

These early actions, underpinned by a clear sense of purpose, enabled us to deliver a wide range of non-partisan engagement activities – each designed to listen, learn, and feed real insights back into the development of our proposals.

### Our key engagement activity

Our joint engagement activity from March 2025 – September 2025 is summarised in the table below:

| Engagement type | Key activities |
|---|---|
| **Public** | • Option-neutral Future Gloucestershire microsite[59] presenting clear, factual information<br>• Online survey, designed to discover values, concerns and ambitions of local people (3,112 completed surveys, including 1,480 open-text responses)<br>• In-person community events, enabling over 500 one-to-one conversations (12 events in total, two in each district)<br>• Two county-wide public webinars<br>• Information leaflets and display banners (used principally at council offices and community events) |

[59] https://futuregloucestershire.org.uk

| Engagement type | Key activities |
|---|---|
| | • Regular social media information updates and paid advertising for wider promotion of the survey. |
| **Stakeholders** | • Over 40 stakeholder interviews (almost all with multiple attendees) encompassing statutory partners, VCFSE organisations, and key businesses and business associations. Interviews focused on issues of importance and concern in relation to LGR and Devolution<br>• A leadership conference was held to develop common ambitions, involving key partners in statutory services, business, and civil society in Gloucestershire. |
| **Place** | • Engagement webinar for VCFSE (hosted by Gloucestershire VCS Alliance) with over 100 attendees<br>• Engagement webinar for Town and Parish Councils hosted by GAPTC with over 100 attendees<br>• Representation on Place Model workstream from NHS (ICB and providers), GAPTC, OPCC, SLCC, and VCS Alliance. |
| **Staff** | • Regular LGR staff communications and briefings<br>• Senior officers from principal councils represented on all LGR workstreams, with different Chief Executives acting to lead and chair<br>• Specialist service officers engaged in structured, cross-council aggregation and disaggregation workshops. |
| **Council members** | • Interactive all-member webinars<br>• FAQs and other written briefings<br>• Bespoke briefing and democratic processes delivered by individual councils. |

| Engagement type | Key activities |
|---|---|
| **MPs**[60] | • Gloucestershire County Council Leader and Chief Executive monthly engagement with Gloucestershire MPs<br>• Other district ad hoc engagement with local MPs |
| **Other** | • In addition to Place (above), workstreams conducted bespoke engagement as relevant. For example, the Vision and Ambition workstream conducted a range of briefings with senior district leaders to develop an understanding of place-based perspectives. |

## Additional reports

The online survey and in-person community events were co-designed and facilitated by an external specialist engagement organisation, *Cratus*. Their independent report can be found in Appendix 3.

The county council-led stakeholder interview exercise was conducted using consistent open questions. A short report detailing the key themes, together with information about the stakeholders engaged, can be found in Appendix 4. Following these interviews, some stakeholders chose to write to the county council offering views. Where appropriate, this correspondence is also appended.

## Our learning and insights

Our learning themes synthesise the responses from a variety of methods and types used. As far as possible, we have avoided significant focus in this proposal on feedback on the relative merits of structural options, since the primary aim of engagement was to discover common concerns and ambitions of local people and organisations. However, some of this data, from the public survey and stakeholder interviews is shown for transparency. It should not be read as representative data on the preferences of the public and partners.

Three big themes have emerged:

1. Belonging in Gloucestershire
2. Service improvement

[60] At a meeting of all Principal Authority Leaders on 09/10/2025 it was agreed that Gloucestershire Councils would collectively engage with all local MPs to understand their preferences and comments in the light of the published proposals. This process will be conducted to develop an objective understanding of MP views to inform both Gloucestershire Councils and Ministers.

3. Vulnerable people and communities

## Theme 1: Belonging in Gloucestershire

Our engagement revealed something powerful: people in Gloucestershire feel a strong sense of belonging - whether that's to a village, an estate, a district, or the county as a whole. Local identity runs deep, and it's clear that "home" means different things to different people.

This insight is crucial. It shows that the new council must enable participation and engagement at every level - recognising and supporting the many overlapping communities that make Gloucestershire unique.

| **Key actions to shape our proposals: Belonging in Gloucestershire (Theme 1)** | |
|---|---|
| **Place Model** | Proposals for our locality arrangements have avoided prematurely drawing 'lines on maps'. We will deliver a carefully designed engagement and consultation process to develop the spatial scale, competency, and differentiation (by Place) of our Neighbourhood Partnerships. This commitment is reflected in our implementation roadmap. |
| **Future Operating Model (FOM)** | The differentiation of Gloucestershire's places is recognised in both the design principles and key features of the Future Operating Model. We have reflected place and identity strongly in engagement, commissioning, and service delivery features. |

## Theme 2: Service Improvement and Efficiency

Our survey captured a wealth of feedback on council services. Most areas scored well, with the majority of residents rating services as 'good' or 'very good'. However, roads, pavements, and streetlights stood out as clear concerns - mirroring national trends, where dissatisfaction with highways is common.

When asked what should shape future council services, 'community' - meaning representation, voice, and engagement - was the top priority. 'Transport' (including public transport, road maintenance, and connectivity) also featured strongly.

Stakeholder interviews reinforced this theme, highlighting the need for simpler, more efficient services and better integration with partners.

The message is clear: while there are specific areas to address, any improvement must be rooted in local context and connectivity - making sure services work for people and places across Gloucestershire.

| Key actions to shape our proposals: Service Improvement and Efficiency (Theme 2) | |
|---|---|
| **Vision and Ambition** | Our vision and ambition includes a specific focus on the use of data to transform transport and wider public services. The feedback we have received on public transport in particular has assisted with shaping this ambition.<br><br>Our vision and ambition also reflects the excitement and energy in the Gloucestershire business community to drive growth. We pay particular attention to the economic opportunities in Gloucestershire, and the desire to use LGR to accelerate our trajectory of breakthrough innovation in economic clusters, such as cyber, clean energy, and agri-tech. |
| **Future Operating Model (FOM)** | Our strategic enablement feature within the FOM is specifically designed to create capacity and capability to drive improvement and transformation. |
| **Place and FOM** | Our neighbourhood model is linked to service delivery within the FOM, with a proposed specification to tailor on a locality basis, addressing some of the feedback about different satisfaction and experience in different parts of Gloucestershire. |
| **Financial Case** | Our financial case shows our desire not simply to reorganise, but to transform. We will reinvest structural and transformation savings into services that people want to see improve. The councils will feel local and responsive but be powered by scale and efficiency for the benefit of everyone. |

## Theme 3: Vulnerable people and communities

A key theme from our engagement with partners was the opportunity for the new council to do more for Gloucestershire's most vulnerable people and communities.

- **Community development and local engagement must be front and centre.**
- **There's real appetite for public sector reform.** From the emerging Neighbourhood Health Service to new powers for neighbourhood working, they see LGR as a chance to join up regeneration, health, and community development - especially where VCFSE organisations are already leading the way.

- **Tackling deep-rooted inequalities is essential.** We know there are sharp divides between urban and rural areas, and that data and lived experience is important to drive local action and smarter service design.

Respondents have made it clear that LGR offers a huge opportunity to address these challenges and opportunities.

| **Key actions to shape our proposals: Vulnerable people and communities (Theme 3)** | |
|---|---|
| **Vision and Ambition** | Our vision makes it clear that we want to use LGR to spark a transformation in community empowerment. We can be closer to communities and people than before, e.g. utilising better and more widely the 'hub' approach to delivering preventive, community-led activity, as well as more tailored services for vulnerable people, families, and communities.<br><br>We are also clear in our vision that we will more consciously link with partners on wellbeing, housing, climate action, and nature recovery – feedback is showing these are connected issues for local people. |
| **Data, Digital and Technology (DDaT)** | Our proposals are clear there are major opportunities to use DDaT to drive better environments, interventions, and services for vulnerable people. We have set out a bold ambition to develop a joined-up predictive analytics platform across adult and children's services, education, housing, and health. |
| **Place** | Our place research has revealed a wealth of current good practice in evidenced-based community development. We have hard-wired into our neighbourhood proposals a focus on community development, supported by data insight, the skills of our public health team, and dedicated staff and other resources. |

## Feedback on structural options

Both the survey and the partnership interviews provided feedback on structural options. This feedback is not based on a statistically reliable sample and it was not the purpose of either exercise. We expect the forthcoming Ministerial consultation to provide clearer data and information on local preferences for structural options. This exercise will be conducted once local people and organisations have had the benefit of considering proposals. The survey feedback is as follows:

A total of 225 respondents (7%) gave active preferences in open text responses concerning which unitary council option they would prefer from the three proposed at the time of survey. Of these, 205 preferred a single unitary council governing

the whole county, 14 preferred the East/West option, and three preferred the Greater Gloucester option. Three people said they preferred two councils without specifying which option.

# Implementation Roadmap

**We've developed an implementation plan that sets out how Gloucestershire will move from submission of this proposal to Vesting Day and beyond. It's how we'll guarantee residents continue to access the support they need, safeguard statutory services, and lay the robust foundations for ambitious, ongoing transformation.**

Whilst we continue to sharpen the details and map out specific activities, this section sets out our initial considerations and phases of activity. The key programmes set out in this section are likely to evolve over time as the national and local context and priorities change.

## Framing our approach

Experience from previous LGR programmes highlights several factors that are critical to success for Gloucestershire:

- **Clarity of purpose:** a shared understanding amongst all organisations involved helps maintain momentum and alignment during planning and delivery, which will need to be undertaken collaboratively across all councils involved.
- **Early planning and mobilisation:** Early proactive planning (beginning before any MHCLG decision) is critical to manage delivery and improve implementation outcomes.
- **Robust portfolio and programme management:** LGR is complex and high stakes. We'll need a strong portfolio approach, with defined programmes, clear responsibilities, and the right resources in place to govern and manage delivery at pace.
- **Early appointment of senior leadership:** Recruiting into key posts such as the Chief Executive, S151 Officer, and Monitoring Officer early to provide leadership and stability.
- **Engagement and transparency:** Early, ongoing, and open communications is essential. Keeping staff, members, residents, and suppliers updated builds trust, enables proactive management of key risks, and provides confidence and reassurance to stakeholders.

## Working together

All councils in Gloucestershire have agreed how they will work together in the run-up to MHCLG's decision and during the shadow period, ensuring that staff, members, partners, and residents remain confident in the process. Our shared principles are as follows:

**Continue to involve all our staff proactively:** we'll continue to keep staff from all councils actively involved in co-designing our journey to Vesting Day – drawing on their collective expertise to lead, design, and manage key LGR programmes.

**Remain aligned around our shared future vision:** we will stay focused on our shared vision for the new councils and make the most of our collective strengths.

**Open and honest communication and collaboration:** We will continue to be transparent about activities, challenges, and decisions - with no hidden agendas - and commit to working in partnership across all seven councils.

**Aligned decision-making and transitional support:** As Vesting Day approaches, we'll agree practically how significant financial and other decisions are made across each council, and how we'll support each other – so that every council delivers on its existing plans and commitments. The transition programme will include a draft shadow constitution, a combined MTFS, a risk register, and a costed investment strategy to guide transition.

**Invest in core skills:** We'll need the right people in the right roles. That means bringing together not just technical specialists, but also standout leaders in programme management, procurement, change, and digital transformation. We'll harness strengths already in our councils – and invest in new talent and capacity wherever its needed – to make sure Gloucestershire's transition is expertly led from day one.

## Roadmap to Vesting Day

The roadmap to Vesting Day is structured across five clear phases aligned with indicative timelines, based on MHCLG guidance.

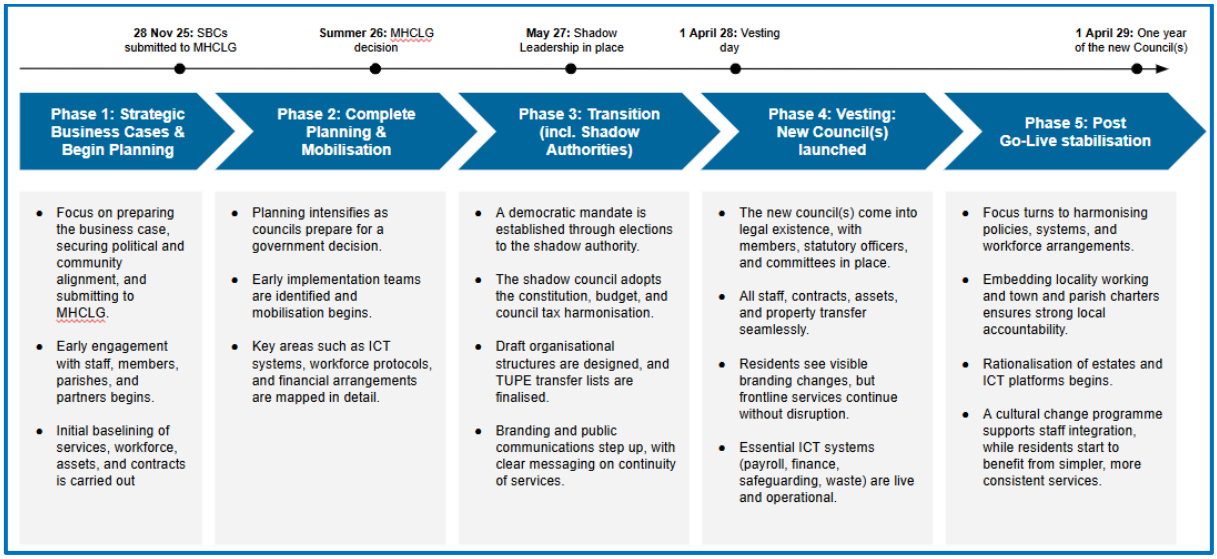



Diagram 4: roadmap to Vesting Day

## High-Level Activities by Phase

### Phase 1 – Strategic business cases (SBCs) and begin planning (to Nov 2025)

In this phase of work, councils focus on preparing and submitting the SBCs and starting to undertake preparatory baselining of key infrastructure across all seven councils (including workforce, assets, finances, policies, contracts etc). Continued engagement with staff, members, towns and parish councils, and partners ensures early buy in and alignment, which is critical for the coming months.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- All seven councils in Gloucestershire will finalise and submit a SBC to MHCLG by 28 November 2025 (setting out all options for LGR that are under consideration)
- Each council will start to gather baseline data on current services, strategic risks, establishment data, assets, contracts, and vacancies to work towards a consistent baseline across all seven councils
- The joint LGR portfolio and programme management capability will be designed, setting out key roles, role profiles, and capabilities required including an overall LGR Portfolio Director
- A more detailed transition and implementation plan will be developed in line with the five key phases of activity
- Staff will start to be invited to join core LGR programmes (e.g. secondments etc) to support detailed planning and delivery work
- Councils will engage with town and parish councils to co-design a town and parish charter and initial governance approach

### Phase 2 – Complete planning and mobilisation (Nov 2025 – Summer 2026)

Detailed planning will continue to take place while awaiting MHCLG's decision, particularly preparatory work which would be required irrespective of which option is chosen. The full LGR portfolio, including core programmes, will be mobilised, with staff in place to lead and deliver activities. This phase is crucial to ensuring alignment and clarity on how transition will be managed so that activities can progress at pace immediately after a decision is made.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- Portfolio management capability in place and actively running
- All core LGR programmes stood up with staff in place (either from existing councils or through external support being brought in where required)

- Detailed planning will be completed in readiness for MHCLG's decision, including timelines for key decisions such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) selection and resident contact channels on Vesting Day
- All seven councils will focus on cleaning data to get it into a consistent and complete format across areas such as staff (aligning with finances), contracts, systems, assets, strategic risks, existing policy frameworks etc. This will enable the development of a consistent Gloucestershire wide baseline of core infrastructure, service delivery, and risks, which will need to be managed by the new councils
- Implementation of Section 24 controls, as needed, to make sure significant financial decisions and contractual commitments made by the current councils do not adversely impact the new councils
- Development of options and policies for managing the HR implications of staffing changes, covering vacancy management, joint approaches to recruitment, redeployment approaches, senior staff implications, pay and grading harmonisation, and benefits harmonisation
- Discussions with trade unions on managing the HR approaches to ensure early and proactive involvement and challenge
- Development of a detailed communication and engagement plan (internal and external)
- Continued staff and partner engagement through communications and co-design opportunities to consider service aggregation and delivery model opportunities
- Starting to create a shadow authority decision log, including areas such as the new councils' budgets, council tax, and policy requirements
- Early engagement with suppliers to consider any potential implications of contract novation and other key supplier issues
- Draft design of neighbourhood governance, form, and function.

### Phase 3 – Transition (Summer 2026 – March 2028)

Councillors will be elected to shadow authorities who will lead the transition - making important decisions on how the new councils will be governed and funded, and how council tax will be set. Behind the scenes, preparations will focus on getting staff, IT systems, buildings, contracts, and locality arrangements ready for Vesting Day. Communications and branding will help residents understand the changes and feel confident about what's coming.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- Elections will be held (likely in May 2027) for shadow authorities which will, in turn, appoint key officers, approve the new constitution, set the budget, and decide how council tax will be aligned across areas
- Final TUPE staff transfer lists will be confirmed, and draft organisational structures will be developed and shared. Staff will begin to be recruited, trained, and sent letters confirming their roles, pay, and work locations
- The shadow authorities will also agree on the new council's values, branding, and communications plan
- Detailed service transition planning and service operating models will take shape, with aggregation and disaggregation implications
- Pay dates and staff benefits will be standardised in agreement with trade unions to ensure consistency before Vesting Day (critical for equal pay considerations)
- Senior leadership positions will be appointed, including Chief Executives, S151 Officers, Monitoring Officers and other key statutory roles such as Directors of Adults Social Care (DASSs)
- Asset and property registers will be updated, and health, safety, and compliance responsibilities clearly assigned
- Policies for transferring community assets and services will be developed (working alongside town and parish councils and the VCFSE)
- Engagement with suppliers will agree and formalise any contractual changes including termination, novation, and extensions
- Detailed design will progress for the key contact channels that residents will use on day one
- Neighbourhood Partnerships will be designed, costed and implementation underway
- A Town and Parish Councils Charter and a Civil Society Covenant will be finalised, and public-facing branding and communications stepped up, including the development of new websites for the new councils
- The councils' future operating models will be agreed, supported by a corporate plan that aligns services with strategic goals
- Financial support schemes, like council tax and business rate relief, will be aligned to ensure equity for residents
- Payroll arrangements for staff will be established
- The shadow authorities will review and sign off the MTFSs, investment plans, financial charts of accounts, and savings plans.

### Phase 4 – Vesting: new councils launched (1 April 2028)

All current councils legally cease to exist on 31st March 2028. Staff, contracts, assets, and systems transfer to the new councils. Essential services continue without disruption for residents. Residents will see new branding but experience continuity in delivery of services.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- The existing councils will formally cease, with all staff, functions, assets, property, and contracts legally transferred to the new authority
- TUPE transfers will be completed, payroll will run without disruption, senior staff savings will be realised, and members will take up their roles under the new constitutions with committee structures operational from day one
- All critical ICT systems - ERP, payroll, planning, ASC, CSC, safeguarding, waste, and the new electoral system will be live and stable (it is not anticipated that all systems will be aggregated / disaggregated on day one)
- Neighbourhood Partnerships will be live
- Staff will receive a new email address, but the majority will still be working on the same ICT hardware (laptops, phones etc) and from the same office locations on day one
- New phone numbers and email addresses for residents to contact the new councils will be live, with redirects in place on legacy contact channels
- New branding will be rolled out on tax bills, vehicles, uniforms, and signage to signal visible change and reassure residents the new councils are up and running
- Opening balance sheets will be agreed and predecessor accounts closed and audited
- Senior staff changes, including role realignment, redundancies, and benefits will be realised
- A high-profile public launch campaign will be delivered on day one and the immediate period thereafter to make sure there is appropriate awareness amongst residents, partners, and businesses.

### Phase 5 – Post go-live stabilisation (April 2028 onwards)

In this phase of the programme, the focus shifts to aligning policies, systems, and workforce arrangements, embedding new ways of working, and delivering against the transformation opportunities identified to enable long-term design and delivery of the identified benefits.

Some of the core activities in this phase will include:

- Fees and charges will be harmonised through a single register
- Ongoing change management programme to embed new organisational values and behaviours, supported by engagement and communications with staff, partners, and residents
- Development and implementation of more detailed organisational structures (likely in a phased manner, aligned with service transition plans)
- ICT systems will be consolidated and rationalised over time, with cyber security and data governance strengthened
- Procurement policies will be harmonised and guided by a new supplier strategy, while estate rationalisation continues
- Customer service standards will be embedded consistently across services, supported by a FOM action backlog that drives harmonisation and redesign beyond day one
- Continued communications and engagement with all stakeholders including residents, partners, members, and staff.

## Managing Delivery: Portfolio Structure

To oversee, manage, and deliver these transition and implementation activities, we will set up a robust portfolio and programme management structure.

Wherever possible, we would resource capacity and capability from across the seven councils by repurposing existing resources. There are likely to be certain capabilities or points during the five stages of the roadmap where we may need to bring in additional external capacity or capability to drive delivery at the pace required.




Diagram 5: LGR Portfolio Programmes

The scope of these 12 programmes could include:

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| **Communications, Engagement and Branding** | • Internal and external communications and engagement strategies for partners, residents, staff, councillors<br>• Design and agreement of new branding<br>• Public launch campaigns<br>• Monitoring effectiveness of communications with feedback loops to other programmes to act on sentiment and feedback. |
| **Governance and Legal** | • Design and adoption of the new constitutions and governance structures<br>• Leading the legal establishment of the shadow authorities, including oversight of elections<br>• Developing and embedding scrutiny arrangements<br>• Legal transfer of functions and statutory responsibilities from predecessor councils<br>• Policy oversight, ensuring that critical policies are in place for day one and that no decisions are taken that undermine continuity<br>• Legal assurance for implementation decisions and considerations, including service specific considerations such as transfers of assets and contracts. |
| **Finance and Risk** | • New financial structures and charts of accounts<br>• MTFSs, annual budgets, and statements of accounts<br>• Implementation of Section 24 controls<br>• Managing and delivering council tax harmonisation policies<br>• Opening balance sheets and closure/audits of predecessor accounts |

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| | • Development and management of the strategic risk registers. |
| **Performance** | • Developing performance frameworks to measure delivery of the transition and implementation portfolios<br>• Establishing metrics to track service continuity, staff engagement, ICT readiness, and financial stability<br>• Management of the benefits realisation frameworks. |
| **Property and Assets** | • Property and asset implications, including rationalisation opportunities, development of asset and estate strategies, and investment properties<br>• Consolidated asset and property registers<br>• Ensuring health and safety responsibilities for all property and assets are clearly assigned<br>• Supporting the transfer of ownership of all land, buildings, and property rights from predecessor councils<br>• Delivering against the estate rationalisation programme ambitions. |
| **Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT)** | • Ensuring all critical ICT systems are operational on day one, including ERP, payroll, safeguarding, and operational service systems<br>• Design, procurement, and implementation of new ERP systems<br>• A new email address for all staff on day one<br>• Ensuring legacy systems can integrate or run in parallel where required<br>• Longer-term system harmonisation and embedding of cyber security and data governance practices |

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| | • Developing and delivering against data migration requirements from predecessor councils, with a focus on security and GDPR compliance. |
| **Customer Contact** | • Designing the customer journey for the new councils, agreeing the balance between online by default and other forms of access and engagement<br>• Establishing clear customer contact points for Vesting Day, including phone numbers, websites, and email addresses<br>• Ensuring legacy contact channels redirect residents seamlessly to new channels<br>• Embedding consistent customer service standards across all services during the stabilisation period. |
| **Development of the FOM (incl. service redesigns)** | • FOM blueprints and implementation plans for the new councils<br>• Where needed, supporting specific services (e.g. leisure) to manage aggregation/disaggregation implications and consider operating model choices. |
| **People and Culture (incl. OD)** | • Baselining workforce structures and establishments across all current councils<br>• Redeployment and recruitment processes<br>• TUPE transfers<br>• Harmonisation of pay dates and benefits in negotiation with trade unions<br>• Staff engagement programmes, including opportunities for staff to join LGR programmes and co-design services<br>• Cultural change projects to embed new organisational values, identity, and ways of working. |
| **Neighbourhoods and Communities** | • Design, consultation, and implementation of Neighbourhood Partnerships, including elements |

| Programme | Description |
|---|---|
| | which relate to Neighbourhood Area Committee legislation<br>• Policies for parish asset and service transfers<br>• Towns and parishes engagement<br>• VCFSE engagement<br>• Town and Parish Charter and Civil Society Covenant (for both councils either jointly or separately)<br>• Community engagement (non-geographic), including corporate and service approaches to resident and stakeholder engagement and participation. |
| **Devolution** | • Political and strategic engagement with senior leaders on long-term devolution options<br>• Planning for potential strategic authority over the medium/long term. |
| **Procurement, Contracts and Commercials** | • Baselining of all contracts and external spend across all seven councils<br>• Identification of key contracts for novation and engagement with suppliers<br>• Harmonisation of procurement policies<br>• Exploring further opportunities for commercialisation, joint arrangements, and income generation. |

Table 21: the proposed scope of each LGR programme

## Portfolio and Programme Management

A Portfolio and Programme Management team will be established to oversee, coordinate, and manage delivery of the implementation roadmap - anticipated to be in place until at least March 2029.

The team is likely to consist of a range of programme, transformation, and change roles, and will be at the heart of managing the overall transition and implementation portfolio. This includes:

- Detailed planning and management of progress
- Enabling consistency across all LGR programmes
- Supporting the overall governance arrangements of the portfolio
- Providing regular progress reporting and internal assurance
- Developing and delivering the benefits realisation plan
- Working closely with the programmes in the portfolio, including in managing risks and interdependencies.

## Managing strategic risks

There will be a range of strategic, operational, and service level risks associated with transition and implementation. Strategic risks will likely include:

| Risk | Potential Mitigation |
|---|---|
| **Potential delay in Vesting Day timelines nationally -** There is a risk that changes or slippage in the agreed national timelines for the LGR process will undermine our ability to plan and sequence key activities effectively. This could lead to misalignment across programmes, reduced stakeholder confidence, and delays in achieving critical milestones. | Establish clear checkpoints both with MHCLG representatives and locally to monitor timelines and make sure there is early notification of any potential delays or changes in national timelines particularly around Vesting Day. |
| **Scale and complexity of change -** The level of change involved for all seven councils is significant (e.g. changes to how residents are engaged, policies, processes, organisational structures, leadership and culture, new services being delivered etc) and needs to be | • Develop a detailed transition and implementation plan which enables a smooth transition (as far as possible)<br>• Implement a robust portfolio and programme management capability as soon as possible to help manage and drive change, |

| Risk | Potential Mitigation |
|---|---|
| delivered and managed in very short timescales. | including managing interdependencies and risks. |
| **Capacity and capability to support transition and implementation -** There is a risk that we struggle to bring in the right capacity and capability to drive delivery alongside maintaining BAU service delivery for our residents and communities. | • Identify early the key resources required to enable successful delivery, including any subject matter experts. Engage with other councils who have been through LGR to identify resourcing needs<br>• The seven councils to consider where existing resources can be redeployed or reprioritised to support transition and implementation, including opportunities for secondments into the LGR portfolio<br>• Set aside specific funding as part of the overall transition investment to bring in additional external support where needed and support backfill arrangements. |
| **Maintaining service continuity –** Most service areas will be impacted by LGR and will need to be involved in supporting the portfolio (including service transition planning). There is a risk that service performance or continuity could be adversely impacted during transition or immediately post Vesting Day. | • Prioritise the principle of being 'safe and legal' on day one, with no resident experiencing a worse service than they do currently<br>• Develop a prioritised service transition plan to manage the transition and transformation in a phased manner<br>• Form early working groups for core service areas (across all seven councils) to undertake detailed transition planning - making sure any considerations for maintaining operational |

| Risk | Potential Mitigation |
|---|---|
| | service continuity can be managed e.g. systems access. |
| **Financial sustainability -** There is a risk that the transition budget is insufficient to cover unexpected or unforeseen circumstances or that the savings that have been identified cannot be delivered. | • Contingency has been built into the transition costs to account for unexpected circumstances<br>• A clear benefits realisation framework will be established to track and manage benefits delivery<br>• The portfolio and programme management capability will be responsible for making sure there is a tight grip on all costs and benefits associated with LGR, so any financial risks can be proactively identified and mitigated. |
| **Alignment with key stakeholders -** There is a risk that key stakeholders including staff, partners, members etc are not aligned with the vision for the new councils or experience change fatigue from the level of change and disruption they are going through. | • Establish early a clear communications and engagement strategy for all stakeholders and agree key messages for each group at different stages of the implementation<br>• Involve stakeholders early on to help co-produce plans<br>• Dedicated change management resource to help embed the change successfully<br>• Investment in leadership and managerial development so that they are equipped to support staff and engage with partners. |

Table 22: strategic risks and mitigations

## Managing the aggregation and disaggregation of services

Transitioning seven councils into two new councils is a major undertaking - and keeping services running smoothly for residents is our top priority. This will require a high degree of service aggregation and disaggregation.

### Aggregation

**Aggregation means uniting services, systems, and teams into a single structure, unlocking better coordination, less duplication, and more consistent delivery across Gloucestershire.**

We'll manage the challenges and opportunities presented from aggregation by:

- **Enabling services to lead design:** The people who know services best will shape how delivery changes - ensuring practical solutions and continuity for residents
- **Managing existing shared service and wholly owned company arrangements:** Shared services like Ubico, One Legal, and Publica already show the power - and complexity - of joint working. Where aggregation is straightforward, we'll keep it simple; where it's more complex, we'll manage the transition carefully, including TUPE and out-of-county partners, such as West Oxfordshire District Council
- **Considering data and system aggregation:** Consolidating IT and data platforms will drive savings (likely in later years) and consistency, but we know it takes careful planning and upfront investment
- **Keeping services local:** Even as we aggregate, we're committed to place-based delivery - tailoring services to local needs and making Neighbourhood Partnerships central to our approach
- **Strengthening our workforce:** Aggregation lets us pool talent, invest in skills, and create new career pathways - especially in high-demand areas like cyber, data analytics, and surveying
- **Driving prevention through integration:** By bringing together district and county services, like public health, housing, leisure, and planning, we can drive improved outcomes for residents, such as tackling the wider determinants of health at greater scale.

### Disaggregation

**Disaggregation involves separating services, systems, and teams that are currently delivered at county level so they can operate independently within the two new unitary authorities.**

We'll manage the challenges and opportunities presented from disaggregation by:

- **Enabling services to lead design:** The people who know services best will shape how delivery changes - ensuring practical solutions and continuity for residents
- **Robust governance:** Oversight boards with senior leaders, technical experts, and service professionals will be in place to monitor progress, resolve issues, and keep decisions evidence-based and aligned with our strategic goals.
- **Clear, open communication:** Residents, staff, and partners get timely, accurate updates through multiple channels. We're committed to transparency, building trust, and inviting feedback at every stage.
- **Careful systems and data separation:** Disaggregating core systems, especially those containing very sensitive personal data such as ASC and CSC, requires meticulous planning and investment. We're prioritising secure, safe data migration and strict adherence to information governance.
- **Protecting specialist expertise:** Some services, like public health, rely on small teams of specialists. We're focused on maintaining this capacity and operational resilience as teams are split across two authorities.
- **Staying 'safe and legal':** Above all, we're keeping a laser focus on statutory responsibilities and clear accountability - especially for safeguarding vulnerable children and adults.
- **Managing demand imbalances:** We're planning for the different needs and pressures in East and West Gloucestershire. For example, higher ASC complexity and costs in the West and the challenge of maintaining critical, high-cost highways assets in both new authorities. Resource allocation and financial viability are front of mind.

### Disaggregation of Fire and Rescue

The disaggregation of Fire and Rescue, prior to vesting of the new Councils, will be legally necessary in the 2UA scenario. It will involve the separation from the current County Council in governance, organisational, and financial terms. In this sense it is a very different disaggregation challenge than for other countywide services.

Given the organisational destination for Fire and Rescue will be outside of local government, a key mitigation may be to manage this disaggregation exercise separately from other LGR activity. In this way the very specific needs of Fire and Rescue over a period of change and possible instability can be given the focus needed.

## Disaggregation Case Study: Adult Social Care (ASC)

Our engagement with service professionals, initial data analysis, and lessons learned from other councils made it clear that a shared service for ASC is unlikely to work in Gloucestershire.

A disaggregated model between East and West (over a period of three to five years to fully disaggregate complex contractual arrangements) is likely to be the most operationally and strategically viable delivery model.

This approach enables each new authority to recruit its own DASS and retain clear accountability for Care Act duties. In the long-term this is also likely to be more politically viable given shared arrangements require continued negotiation across two sovereign organisations who will have very different demand profiles for ASC, financial challenges, and potentially political priorities.

Early considerations for making ASC disaggregation work:

- **Minimising additional workforce pressures:** Social care is already stretched - across social workers, nurses, and care staff. Many specialist teams are small, e.g. quality oversight, reablement, and performance monitoring. Mitigation of additional workplace pressures is important, including consideration of equal pay and grading to avoid poaching and competition, and protect specialist capacity wherever possible.
- **Data and systems:** All ASC data and care records are held in LiquidLogic/ContrOCC. A clear plan for data migration and splitting of care records over time will be needed to manage data loss risks and ensure services continuity is not impacted.
- **Ordinary Residence (OR):** Ordinary residence determines which local authority is responsible for funding an individual's ASC. It's based on where a person usually lives, unless specific legal exceptions apply (e.g. placements arranged by a council). Given the West has a much higher demand for multi-decade, high-cost care packages for supported living, there is a baseline structural cost imbalance between the two authorities. This not only has significant financial implications but there are also operational considerations, as there is insufficient provision of suitable accommodation in the East of the county. The availability of staff and suitably priced supported accommodation in the West means that there are a disproportionate number of people living in supported accommodation in the West. There are legal, ethical, and human rights considerations, as well as logistical challenges, to ensure vulnerable residents placed in care are not being unduly moved to a different part of the county away from an area that is 'home' for them.
- **Strategic market management:** Councils have a statutory duty to manage their market so continuing to manage provider relationships and ways of

working is critical. Retaining clarity of messaging in an already fragile care market will be key for both authorities. Joint commissioning may still be needed to tackle supply challenges and maintain negotiating power with providers.

- **Hospital discharge and integrated care:** Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, located in the West, is the county's central acute site and is often the place from where individuals are discharged into placements that become their long-term homes. Both authorities must agree joint protocols for hospital discharge and integrated care pathways to keep people safe and services running smoothly.

# Appendix 1: Vision and Ambition 'Personas'

## CHARLIE'S BIO



Charlie is a 15-year-old student living in Parkend. His area has limited public transport and he feels disconnected from school and community life. His school engagement is low, and he is often absent or disengaged in class. With limited access to youth facilities, Charlie spends most of his time online, often unsupervised.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Charlie is digitally curious and likes learning and connecting with people online. | Emotional isolation, lack of trust in adults, feels invisible in the community, vulnerable to online radicalisation and has limited access to safe youth spaces. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ By co-creating services that work for everyone, Charlie gains access to safe, inclusive digital and physical spaces shaped by young people like him.
- ✓ Digital services connect him to mentors and wellbeing resources, reducing isolation and offering healthy alternatives to unsupervised online use.
- ✓ Collaboration between community groups, schools and digital platforms helps rebuild Charlie's trust and sense of belonging.

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Driving Breakthrough Innovation for National Resilience: Forest of Dean becomes a pilot site for 'Project Beacon', an initiative using AI-powered early intervention tools, leveraging expertise from the Golden Valley Cyber Hub in Cheltenham These tools spot early signs of disengagement and connect young people like Charlie to trusted mentors and support networks. Workshops, both in-person and online, build digital resilience across the county in partnership with schools, the police and industry.
- Creating Together: Inspired by Project Beacon, Charlie becomes involved with the Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF). Working alongside community groups and local mentors, he helps design online platforms that promote resilience and peer support, as well as new youth activities that reflect what young people actually want. This gives Charlie a stronger sense of belonging, builds his confidence and ensures services are responsive to the needs of all generations.

## THE V**ARMA** FAMILY'S BIO



Priya (34 years old) and Arjun (33 years old) live in rented housing in Cheltenham with their young son, Ravi (9 years old) who has additional learning needs. Like many families in the town, they are balancing work, caring responsibilities and the rising cost of housing.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Priya and Arjun are eager to retrain to another industry to better financially support the family. Ravi enjoys music and building things. | The family struggles with insecure housing, long assessment wait times and navigating the education, health and social care services.<br>Priya and Arjun feel stuck in low-paid work and torn between caregiving responsibilities and pursuing career opportunities. Meanwhile, Ravi feels behind in school due to overstimulating environments and a lack of tailored learning approaches. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ By co-creating services that work for everyone, Arjun and Priya can help shape flexible training and SEND support that fits their family's real needs.
- ✓ Using digital inclusion initiatives, Ravi has access to secure, joined-up learning tools that support his education needs both in and out of the classroom, and give his parents visibility of his progress.
- ✓ Through linking housing skills and innovation locally, Arjun and Priya can take up retraining opportunities without moving away or compromising Ravi's care

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Using Data to Transform Transport & Services: Integrated data systems link Ravi's SEND support, the family's housing needs, and the parent's retraining. Because services communicate, the social care professionals are able to provide the Patels with proactive care. It is through this better data integration that Arjun and Priya are offered a suitable retraining programme through the Talent for Life initiative.
- Unlocking Talent, Skills & Housing for Inclusive Growth: Through linking housing, skills and innovation locally, Arjun and Priya can retrain in secure jobs while knowing Ravi's care and education are supported close to home. This gives Ravi access to new learning opportunities from tailored digital tools to his family's attendance at 'taster days' in local industries, helping him discover his own future pathway.
- Driving Breakthrough Innovation for National Resilience: Ravi discovers a passion for advanced manufacturing through hands-on activities at local skills hubs. With access to mentoring, modern equipment and real-world projects linked to clean energy and sustainable production, he is able to see how his interests connect to solving national challenges. As he grows up, these opportunities give him the skills and confidence to pursue a career in advanced manufacturing, contributing directly to Gloucestershire's role in building resilience for the United Kingdom.

## MARGARET'S BIO



Margaret (82 years old) lives alone in a small flat in Gloucester City. She has limited mobility and digital literacy, and no nearby family. Before retirement, she used to work in a garden centre where she enjoyed advising customers on garden needs.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Margaret has a strong desire to be a part of the community and is willing to engage if supported. | While public transport is available, she finds it difficult to navigate without support and feels overwhelmed by the pace of digital change. This makes it hard to access services or stay socially connected. She feels forgotten by the fast-changing world around her. She wants to remain in her own home for as long as possible and her family need assurance that she can be safe and cared for. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- Co-designed neighbourhood and health services reflect Margaret's needs and preferences, restoring her dignity and independence.
- Digital inclusion initiatives supported through LGR, give Margaret the confidence to use online health services and stay socially connected.
- Local community groups and health providers collaborate to bring companionship and tailored wellbeing support directly into her neighbourhood, reducing isolation.

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Putting Wellbeing, Housing & Nature Recovery at the Heart of Growth: Every policy and service in Gloucestershire is shaped by a wellbeing-first approach, ensuring Margaret's needs are central. From transport to housing, decisions prioritise her dignity and independence helping her remain at home and part of her community. Over time, this creates a fairer community where ageing is fully supported.
- Empowering Communities through Co-Design & Local Decision Making: Margaret contributes her experience to a local Neighbourhood Partnership, shaping age-friendly housing ideas and intergenerational community projects. This gives her a place in the community while ensuring older residents' voices are embedded in local decision-making.
- Using Data to Transform Transport & Public Services: Trusted, real-time data links Margaret's health, housing and care needs, ensuring services coordinate seamlessly. Her GP and social care team receive the same up-to-date information, avoiding duplication and preventing issues from escalating. Her family also gets reassurance through regular wellbeing updates.

## EMILY'S BIO



Emily (26) lives in Cirencester. She works part-time in admin and has caring responsibilities for her family. She is passionate about sustainability and wants to pursue a career in the field without leaving her district. However, she's not sure if that is possible within Gloucestershire. From her knowledge, she feels she needs to move to other areas like Bristol and London to access the opportunities she is looking for, an option not available to her

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Emily wants to find flexible, on-the-job training opportunities that offers career mobility, alongside care support for her father so she doesn't have to compromise on her ambitions. | Emily struggles to find local green skills programmes that are flexible, adaptable to her schedule and will help secure her a job in the industry. She feels torn between her caregiving responsibilities and her aspirations. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- Breakthrough innovation in clean energy and climate technologies creates local career pathways that allow Emily to stay close to her family while contributing to a globally significant sector.
- Collaboration across transport and training clusters connects her to opportunities in Stroud and Severn Edge.
- Digital tools support remote learning and flexible work, helping her balance ambition with caregiving.

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- ✓ Unlocking Talent, Skills & Housing for Inclusive Growth: Emily accesses flexible, online training tailored to her caregiving schedule, gaining credentials in clean energy. This allows her to build a local career in sustainability without sacrificing her family responsibilities whilst also connecting Emily to high potential sectors across the whole of Gloucestershire.
- ✓ Harnessing Digital to Tackle Inequality: Digital inclusion projects mean Emily can use high-quality online learning platforms and remote working hubs in the Cotswolds, supported by affordable transport to training centres for in-person learning.
- ✓ Driving Breakthrough Innovation for National Resilience. By linking into Gloucestershire's growing clean energy sector, Emily gains placements and mentoring that tie her personal goals to the county's contribution to net zero and energy security. Within a decade, she leads a flagship initiative promoting green fuel and zero-carbon mobility for visitors to the Cotswolds AONB.
- ✓ E**mpowering Communities through Co-Design and Local Decision Making:** Emily connects with peer support groups through local Family Hubs, finding access to wellbeing and respite care support. This provides visibility of a pathway for Emily to achieve her career goals and care for her loved ones.

## RACHEL'S BIO



Rachel is in her mid-30s and lives in Bussage with her two children. She commutes daily to Bristol for her job in marketing. The journey is long and expensive, with poor rail connections. She spends hours in traffic and pays high parking fees in Bristol. She's considering remote work or relocating but loves her home and community in Stroud.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| More time with family and friends, affordable and direct commuting options, local work flexibility. She hopes to grow her career, ideally without having to relocate. | Whether rail or car, Rachel's commute has caused her stress. She feels like she has little to no time to enjoy life during the weekdays. Her mother is currently helping with school pick-up but has expressed a desire to relocate outside of Stroud. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- ✓ By shaping local transport priorities through local community forums, Rachel has a voice in decisions that directly affect her daily life. .
- ✓ Improved connectivity enables hybrid working, reducing the need for Rachel to commute daily.
- ✓ Smart mobility platforms give Rachel real-time journey planning, reliable timetables and targeted pothole repairs that make her routes safer and quicker.

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- Using Data to Transform Transport & Public Services: Strategic partnerships underpinned by employee migration data make the case for improvement in regional connections. This reduces costs and journey times for Rachel. Smart data systems also prioritise road maintenance and pothole repair, making daily travel safer and more reliable. Together, these improvements give Rachael a quicker, more affordable commute and more family time all while ensuring she can progress in her career.
- P**utting Wellbeing, Housing & Nature Recovery at the Heart of Growth**: Transport and housing are planned with wellbeing in mind. Rachel benefits from community facilities linked to commuting routes, making family and work easier to combine.
- Harnessing Digital to Tackle Inequality, Improve Services and Drive Innovation: Rachel uses digital platforms to plan hybrid working and smarter travel, helping her stay rooted in Stroud while keeping access to regional career opportunities in the sectors where she has the most skills.

## DARREN'S BIO



Darren (52 years old) lives in Bishops Cleeve. Darren has been working hard to overcome addiction and is determined to build a new life. He wants to work and contribute more to his community but faces stigma and limited access to tailored employment support. He's proud of his recovery and seeks meaningful ways to stay on track and help others.

| DESIRES | CHALLENGES |
|---|---|
| Darren wants a stable employment that can enable him to be financially independent. Inspired by the support he has received from health and social care professionals, he wants to contribute and give back to those in need. | Darren feels socially isolated and is conscious of being judged by others. He has yet to find a stable job in Tewkesbury that will give him financial security, causing him stress, which he fears may cause him to relapse. |

## BRINGING OUR VISION AND AMBITION TO LIFE

- Integrated services mean Darren can access recovery, housing advice and employment support in one place, removing the barriers he previously faced navigating separate systems.
- Local employers and VCFSE partners offer supported routes into meaningful work, helping Darren rebuild confidence while contributing to his community.
- Digital tools track Darren's progress and connect him to peer networks, reinforcing his recovery and helping him sustain long-term stability

## TRANSFORMING OUTCOMES THROUGH OUR AMBITIONS

- ✓ Putting Wellbeing, Housing & Nature Recovery at the Heart of Growth: Darren accesses a new joined-up wellbeing and employment hub model that integrates housing advice, health support and training opportunities under one roof. Unlike existing services, the hub is embedded in local housing and regeneration projects, giving Darren stability in his home environment as well as tailored pathways into work. This integration reduces the stigma he's faced in fragmented systems and helps maintain recovery.
- ✓ Empowering Communities through Co-Design and Local Decision Making: Darren helps co-design recovery-to-employment programmes with local employers and VCFSE partners in Tewkesbury. His lived experience is treated as expertise, shaping more inclusive pathways that others in recovery can access. Over time, Darren takes on a mentoring role, feeding into decision-making that improves services county-wide and strengthens trust between residents and providers.
- ✓ Unlocking Talent, Skills & Housing for Inclusive Growth: Darren joins a reskilling programme linked to local employers, with wraparound housing and wellbeing support. He starts with part-time work at a social enterprise in Bishop's Cleeve, progresses into a supervisory role and ultimately secures a qualification that allows him to mentor others. By linking employment with social support, Darren's recovery is reinforced while also contributing to Gloucestershire's inclusive growth.

# Appendix 2: Digital, Data, and Technology Case Studies

Digital, data, and technology (DDaT) are already transforming services across Gloucestershire – making them smarter, faster, and more joined-up. These examples show how a customer-centred, data-informed approach improves outcomes, reduces avoidable demand, and enables proactive service delivery.

Right now, delivery varies by council. But when applied across the new organisations, our DDaT approach unlocks consistent, high-quality services for everyone – wherever they live.

**Case study 1:**

## Customer experience

**Streamlining and opening up data through AI (Tewkesbury BC)**

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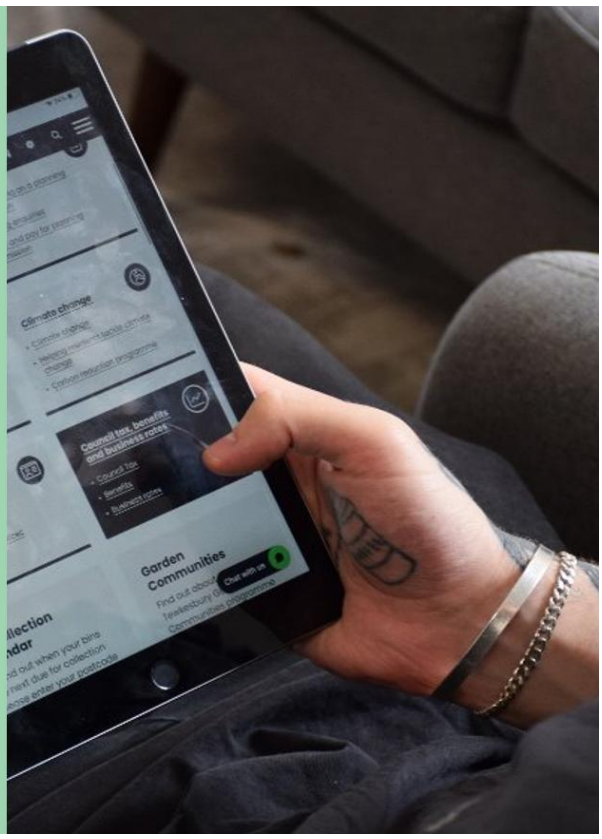
AI is redefining our customers' experience over the phone and online - there's no longer a need to navigate a lot of webpages or a maze of phone options (or to sit waiting on hold).

The customer types their issue into a responsive AI-driven chatbot online or speaks through a Large Language Model assistant over the phone (with a single phone number for all issues). If the issue is particularly complex, the customer seamlessly passes through to a human advisor who already knows why they're calling. If the teams are particularly busy, a simple call-back option is offered.

Residents are less frustrated, receive support quicker and have more confidence in contacting the council when they need help.

Real-time dashboards mean teams manage demand dynamically, and seamless integration into the council's digital platform means that customer contact can trigger automatic workflows depending on what they're contacting about.

| 50% | 38% | 17% |
|---|---|---|
| reduction in wait times in 6 months | shift to online services in 6 months | decrease in abandoned calls in 6 months |





Case study 2:

## AI virtual care

**Helping vulnerable residents live in their own homes for as long as possible (Gloucestershire CC)**

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Innovative AI-powered virtual care will help transform how social care is delivered. Using smart plugs, motion sensors and other remote devices installed in residents' homes to monitor daily activity and wellbeing.

Devices feed data into a technology-enabled care system (recently procured by Gloucestershire CC), which uses AI to detect changes in behaviour that may signal a health concern.

The proactive approach allows care teams to intervene early – before a crisis occurs. In Sutton, this has led to around 25 residents per month being supported by community response service, avoiding ambulance callouts and hospital admissions.

The technology supports residents to live independently for longer, with the reassurance that help is available 24/7. It also eases pressure on overstretched adult social care services.

Case study 3:

## Bulky waste

**Reducing demand by keeping customers updated (Tewkesbury BC)**

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Bulky waste bookings take place through an intuitive online booking system – no need to call or visit (although that option is available).

The online experience is really enjoyable. Information is clear and there's a basket for items to be added, and an integrated payment system – nowhere close to the traditional clunky online local gov experience. Residents get to choose a collection date that suits them from a calendar of availability.

Through automated communications, residents are kept informed at every stage of the process - from booking confirmations to collection updates. These messages, delivered via email and text, are clearly branded and consistent with the council's digital identity.

Live data integration allows collection crews to update the system in real time, enabling customer services to respond swiftly to any queries.

Similar proactive approaches will be used for missed bin reports, planning applications and many other services.

In six months:

| 60% | 70% | 261% |
|---|---|---|
| collections booked online | of items now recycled | rise in income |





Case study 4:

## Open Digital Planning

**MHCLG-funded programme to improve planning online (Gloucester City and Tewkesbury BC)**

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MHCLG's Open Digital Planning is transforming the planning service through systems that reduce invalid applications, improves customer experience and streamlines internal processes.

Plan X uses spatial data to assess site-specific constraints and guides users online through a tailored, question-based journey. This empowers applicants to self-serve, reducing calls to the council and improving the quality of submissions.

Through further development the system will integrate with Idox Uniform, enabling applications to be submitted directly and automatically populate back-office systems.

Gloucester City is also part of Back Office Planning System (BOPS), which is being developed with planning officers to improve the planning process - their input will help shape the system ensuring it meets the needs of planning officers and reduces the double handling and outdated processes in legacy back office systems.

- **Plan X:** Avg 113 visits per week for 'do I need planning permission?' tool (Glos City and Tewks BC).
- **BOPS:** 20% reduction in householder application processing time (Glos City).
- **Plan X:** Ratings of 'excellent' and 'good'.

Case study 5:

## Flooding

**Using spatial data to protect vulnerable residents (Tewkesbury BC)**

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A data-informed approach helps keep flood-risk communities and vulnerable residents safe.

With the introduction of a new digital system in ArcGIS, we can capture information quickly and accurately. Integrating satellite imagery with other datasets (such as the EA river gauge imagery and rainfall) means we can create predictive models of flood extent and impact.

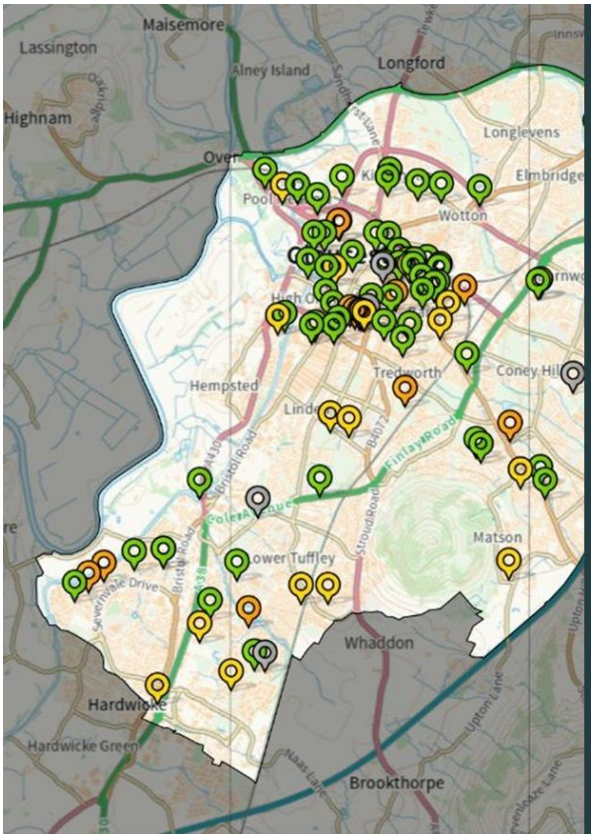
We know what different river levels mean on the ground, and mapped data will show where to direct support, such as:

- Where sandbags and rest centres are best located
- Which householders require targeted alerts and information
- Which vulnerable residents need welfare checks

This approach isn't just about reacting, but about being proactive in supporting at-risk communities.

LGR will enhance this approach even further by enabling a unified, cross-county view of flood risk and response. It allows for the consolidation of data sources from county and district councils, streamlined decision-making, and coordinated deployment of resources - ensuring that support reaches the right places faster and more effectively.






**Case study 6:**

## Fix My Street

**Fix My Street, a simple, map-based tool, lets residents report issues like potholes, fly-tipping, and broken streetlights via the web or mobile app.**

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Users drop a pin, add details and photos, and the report is sent directly to the right team—whether that's the City Council, UBICO, or the County Council.

The system links with in-cab tech, asset layers, and back-office systems to ensure accurate routing and real-time updates for crews. A public map shows reported issues and progress, improving transparency and removing the need for users to understand council responsibilities.

This streamlines service delivery, reduces call volumes, and improves the quality of reports across multiple authorities.

- City council: Average time to resolve issues dropped from **5.25 days** (previous process) to **1.25 days** with FixMyStreet and Alloy integration.
- GCC and city council: Of 198 city council cases reported to the county's FixMyStreet, **100% were automatically routed** to the city council **without any manual intervention.**
- GCC: **60% of highways issues** now reported through FixMyStreet – an increase of 20% on old process.

## Case study 7: CoPilot

**Gloucestershire CC: Average hours saved per week on different activities using M365 Copilot**




Future Gloucestershire
Digital, Data and Technology workstream

*Hours saved per week based on feedback received from 127 users*

# Appendix 3: Public Engagement Report (Cratus)

Cratus group



We're more than an agency.
We're change makers.

# Gloucestershire Local Government Reorganisation Public Engagement

August 2025

## Executive Summary

Between July and August 2025, Cratus Group engaged residents and stakeholders across Gloucestershire to gather views on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The programme combined 12 in-person events, two countywide webinars, and a countywide survey which in total generated more than 3,100 responses. A dedicated microsite and multi-channel campaign ensured broad reach across all six districts, though younger residents were notably under-represented.

Residents expressed a strong sense of belonging to their communities, with green spaces, safety, and access to essentials like buses and GPs ranked as the most important local priorities. Council services such as rubbish and recycling, libraries, and parks were generally well regarded, while roads, pavements, buses, and aspects of social care received lower satisfaction ratings. Respondents experience of engaging with councillors and/or council officers was relatively positive.

When considering the future of local government, most respondents prioritised making services better and ensuring council tax is well spent over issues of identity or representation. Community identity, transport infrastructure, housing, and environmental protection were the most commonly prioritised themes in the additional written feedback. Many residents are wary of change, as shown in the written feedback and noted in our conversations. In terms of those who gave a preference as to which model they felt would work best, a single countywide unitary was by far the most supported option. The East/West split and 'Greater Gloucester' model were widely opposed, with concerns about fairness, division, and efficiency.

The next stage of communication should focus on reassurance: showing that local voices and identities will not be lost, underlining the financial and service benefits of change, and clarifying how the new system will work in practice. Simplification of council responsibilities is a persuasive message, but trust will depend on continued engagement and transparency throughout the process.

## Introduction

This report summarises the engagement activity undertaken by Cratus Group in Summer 2025 on behalf of Gloucestershire councils around the future of local government in the county and sets out an analysis of the feedback received.

Please note that throughout this report, for brevity, we use the term 'district' to refer to city, borough and district councils in Gloucestershire. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole figure for neatness.

## Background and context

The Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) community engagement programme in Gloucestershire was initiated to gather views from residents, stakeholders, and partner organisations on the future shape and priorities of local government in the county. This work forms an early stage in the process of developing proposals for submission to Government in November 2025.

The aim was to engage communities across all six districts, ensuring that a broad range of voices contributed to the discussion. Importantly, this engagement did not ask people to choose between fixed options or vote on pre-defined models. This will be the focus of formal Government consultation during the early part of next year. Instead, it invited open conversation about the principles, priorities and values that matter most to people in Gloucestershire.

By building understanding and listening to what communities have said they want and need, the engagement sought to generate insights that will help inform decision-making later in the year. The process was designed to be transparent, inclusive and accessible, ensuring that residents could help inform the county's future governance arrangements.

## Objectives

- To inform residents about the context for potential changes to local government in Gloucestershire and the reasons for exploring these changes.
- To understand people's priorities, values and concerns in relation to the organisation of local government and the services it provides.
- To engage as widely as possible across all districts, reaching communities in both urban and rural areas.
- To gather insight that can be used to support councils in the development of proposals for submission to Government in November 2025.

## Methodology

The engagement was undertaken using a hybrid approach, combining online and face-to-face engagement to ensure broad coverage and accessibility.

We followed the principle of 'going where the people are', integrating with existing community events and venues to reach a diverse cross-section of residents, while also providing digital channels for those who preferred to take part online.

In person engagement included a set of materials summarising the changes and signposting to the survey.

## Survey

A county-wide survey was the central element of our public engagement. Hosted on Gloucestershire County Council's Engagement HQ platform, and developed with input from all seven councils, the survey included a blend of closed and open questions. This approach allowed for both quick responses and more detailed commentary.

- ✓ The survey was open to the public from **1 July to 8 August 2025**.
- ✓ The full list of questions is available in Appendix 1.

**Engagement and demographics**

We achieved high levels of engagement, with over 3,000 responses received. The demographic reach was also strong, with the distribution across most categories closely aligning with the general demographic makeup of the county of Gloucestershire, with the caveat that women were slightly over-represented (53% vs 51% in the 2021 Census) and the respondents skewed slightly older than the general population (33% over-65 vs 22% in 2021 Census). This suggests a broad range of residents chose to participate.

It is important to note that a digital survey of this nature is a self-selecting process rather than a representative poll. This means that people chose to engage with the survey, whether they found it online via social media or council content, or participated in person with a member of our team. Unlike a representative poll, we did not actively contact individuals with the aim of reaching a

statistically significant and truly representative sample of the county's or districts' populations. This was not feasible within the project's scope, budget, or timeframe.

Despite not being a statistically representative poll, we are confident that the feedback is robust and highly useful. The high level of engagement and the broadly representative nature of the respondents' demographics mean that the data provides clear and valuable trends. This feedback is therefore a reliable resource for councils as they develop local government reorganisation (LGR) options.

*Note: While the data aligns broadly with 2021 Census data for the county, this has not been assessed at a District level so we cannot assert that the views expressed are representative of individual Districts.*

The survey achieved good, useful results at a fraction of the cost and time a full-scale representative poll would have required, proving to be an effective and efficient engagement tool within the project's constraints.

## Microsite

A dedicated microsite – www.futuregloucestershire.gov.uk – was created to provide background information on LGR, answer frequently asked questions, and list details of upcoming engagement events and webinars. It also provided a direct link to the survey, ensuring a single point of access for the public.

## Outreach and marketing

To maximise reach, the survey and microsite were promoted through a range of channels:

*Elected members and council officers*
Councillors and officers received information to share with their networks, including a set of informational banners and flyers provided for each district council. Staff across district councils and partner organisations were reached through newsletters and intranet posts.

Gloucestershire County Council officers attended the parish and town council AGM in July to share information.

*Residents and community networks*
Social media activity included both organic and paid campaigns. Paid advertising targeted postcodes with lower response rates during the final two weeks of the engagement.

Posts were shared by each council's communications team via Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn and Nextdoor, alongside digital newsletters, community bulletins and business mailing lists. Flyers were also sent to libraries and other council owned buildings across the county.

*Events and webinars*
In-person engagement took place at two existing community events in each of the six districts, and two online webinars were held to enable countywide participation. All activities were designed to ensure residents could access clear information, ask questions, and provide feedback in a way that suited their needs.

## Engagement summary

As a result of online promotion, 12 in-person events (two per district) and 2 online webinars with countywide attendance, 3,112 survey responses and 1,480 written comments to open-text questions, providing rich qualitative insight, were received.

Events brought conversations into the heart of communities – from busy market towns to rural villages, whilst the online offer ensured residents could take part at any time. This mix of formats generated a balanced evidence base: hard data from the survey for statistical analysis, and detailed personal perspectives from written feedback.

# Engagement findings

## Events

The 12 events are detailed in the following section, with approximate figures for the engagement at each.

Teams attending the events had flyers to hand out, pull-up banners at the stands, and activities to attract people's attention.

People attending the events were encouraged to complete the survey, but discussions also provided useful insights into opinions on council services. Key findings are summarised below. People were encouraged to take flyers home, both as a reminder to fill out the survey themselves and to share with family, friends and neighbours, as we emphasised the desire to reach as many residents as possible.

### Stroud Show

Saturday, 12 July – Stroud district

~ 15 Surveys ~ 40 conversations ~ 70 leaflets handed out

The audience was largely local to Stroud, and local councillors and district leadership were also in attendance. Many people felt that the local voice would be lost under LGR reforms, and they weren't supportive of change. However, many acknowledged that the different levels of local government now were confusing.

Quite a few specifically mentioned that they liked their Parish Councils. Residents complained about the lack of buses and public transport. A few discussed personal council issues.

### Gloucester Quays Shopping Centre Pop-up

Saturday, 12 July – Gloucester City district

~ 8 Surveys ~ 50 conversations ~ 30 leaflets handed out

Feedback varied from disinterested to well-informed. Some attendees reported themselves as being from Gloucester, and identifying as such, but actually living within Stroud or Tewkesbury council areas.

There was some concern that unitary councils would not recognise the individual places that have their own unique identity under current arrangements. There was also a concern that any authority which contained Gloucester would have their resources diverted to the city. More broadly, there was a limited understanding of the difference between the levels of government and some disinterest in how services are delivered.

### Coleford Music Festival

Sunday, 13 July – Forest of Dean district

~ 4 Surveys ~ 25 conversations ~ 15 leaflets handed out

Conversations tended to focus on very local issues including the role of Town and Parish Councils, noting that the Coleford Town precept had gone up dramatically in recent years. All residents spoken to wanted to maintain the identity of the Forest of Dean as a unique place and were not supportive of any option to become a unitary council.

Some councillors had been to the parish event on the 12th and were keen to understand more about what other authorities were doing elsewhere in the country. There was some feedback that the northern part of the Forest of Dean faces toward Herefordshire and could benefit from becoming part of that authority.

## Moreton-in-Marsh Market

Tuesday, 15 July – Cotswold district

~ 21 Surveys ~ 25 conversations ~ 36 leaflets handed out

The busy market had a large tourist presence, making it harder to reach local residents. To counter this, the team engaged stallholders and shop staff directly. This approach ensured meaningful conversations with those living and working in the area.

Generally, there was a lack of trust of Cotswold District Council, partly due to the market stall holders themselves not having a positive experience when dealing with council officers. Aside from this, one of the biggest issues facing local people seemed to be with buses as some routes are being reduced or stopped altogether.

Regarding LGR, most were not aware this was happening but once explained, understood the reasons for the changes. Most were pleased with the idea it could lead to more effective and efficient councils.

## Lydney Community Day

Saturday 19 July – Forest of Dean district

~ 2 Surveys ~ 45 conversations ~ 30 leaflets handed out

Feedback reflected concerns that the Forest of Dean is already overlooked for investment and that Lydney, on the edge of the district, is even more marginalised. Local transport limitations and dependence on cars were raised.

The ‘Greater Gloucester City’ model was criticised as exclusionary. Residents feared that roads and services would be deprioritised in favour of higher-traffic areas. A young carer noted potential benefits if services became more joined-up.

Councillors expressed opposition to reorganisation, with some arguing the county/district system should remain. Other comments touched on roadworks coordination, declining community events, and the importance of youth engagement.

## Churchdown Summer Fun Day

Saturday, 19 July – Tewkesbury district

~ 1 Survey ~ 25 conversations ~ 15 leaflets handed out

Residents voiced concerns about historic boundary and naming issues, stressing Churchdown’s distinct identity from Gloucester and Tewkesbury. Some frustration was expressed that the process was not consulting on whether reorganisation should happen at all.

The general sentiment was that change felt imposed and unnecessary, though residents still engaged with engagement materials. Issues raised included access to waste facilities and representation.

## Cirencester Town Centre Pop-up

Sunday, 20 July – Cotswold district

~ 5 Surveys ~ 20 conversations ~ 15 leaflets handed out

Engagement included younger shop workers and local business owners. Leaflets were displayed in shops and community spaces.

Residents asked about potential combined authorities and whether reorganisation was required by national government. Concerns were raised about losing local identity, confusion over service responsibilities, and how planning could adapt to different topographical needs.

## Tewkesbury Market

Wednesday, 23 July - Tewkesbury district

~ 35 Surveys ~ 40 conversations ~ 10 leaflets handed out

Residents valued Tewkesbury's historic identity and stressed the importance of a localised response to flooding. While many saw opportunities for improved efficiency under reorganisation, concerns were voiced about differences between districts such as the Cotswolds and Gloucester and what this would mean if the local authority areas were combined.

## Gloucester City Centre Pop-up

Friday, 25 July – Gloucester City district

~ 30 Surveys ~ 50+ conversations ~ 10 leaflets handed out

This high-footfall location enabled engagement with a broad mix of residents. Safety, cleanliness, and homelessness in the city centre were key concerns, particularly from younger respondents.

Issues raised included a shortage of affordable housing, the use of hotels for temporary accommodation, and the pressures of migration on housing. Calls for more youth facilities, investment in health services, and stronger support for tourism were common themes.

## Greenways Fun Day

Saturday, 26 July – Stroud district

~ 10 Surveys ~ 40+ conversations ~ 6 leaflets handed out

Residents voiced concerns about east–west divisions in the county creating inequalities. They called for prioritisation of affordable homes for young people and better responses to anti-social behaviour.

As a busy, family-friendly event, it was harder to focus people on doing the survey then and there but there was a lot of interest and people took photos of the materials and/or scanned the QR code to follow up later.

## Cheltenham Town Centre Pop-up

Saturday, 2 August – Cheltenham district

~ 36 Surveys ~ 40+ conversations ~ 33 leaflets handed out

Engagement was steady throughout the day, with neutral or positive views towards reorganisation in the majority. Issues raised included concerns over council tax, immigration, potholes, and buses.

Awareness of local councillors was generally low, and most had not contacted council departments in recent years. Some raised issues with local SEN support.

## No Child Left Behind Festival

Wednesday, 6 August - Cheltenham district

~ 37 Surveys ~ 30+ conversations ~ 22 leaflets handed out

The family-focused event drew strong engagement. Activities at the stand encouraged conversations with parents and carers.

Recurring issues included poor road and street maintenance, lack of awareness of councillors, and concern that a county-wide unitary would erase local identity. Some welcomed the idea of area forums to retain local voices.

## Webinars

Two webinars took place, on 5 and 6 August, one held during the working day and the other during the evening, allowing for different people's schedules. Both events were advertised across social media channels by all the councils. A recording of the presentation was then hosted on the www.futuregloucestershire.co.uk website for those who could not attend.

The main sentiment from the Q&A portion of the webinar was requests for more details on exactly how the process will work, from questions about which council buildings will be kept to details on how departments will be organised and who will be responsible for policies.

The structure of local government beyond district and county level was raised, with several queries about how the potential combined authorities and mayoral areas will be organised, and on the other side, how this will affect Town and Parish Councils. It became clear that attendees had heard rumours about how both could work, including the concern that parishes will be given further responsibilities without more resources.

We learned that residents will need reassurance throughout the process. People were concerned about things like how council housing will work, whether libraries will be affected, whether staff are at risk of losing their jobs, and where council offices will be.

Also, a couple of comments concerned future updates, while attendees were happy to hear that the details were still not finalised, they were keen to hear the results of the survey and details as they emerge – so Gloucestershire councils must keep up the good momentum of engagement and information sharing.

We had 71 attendees across the two days (45 on Tuesday, 5 August and 26 on Wednesday, 6 August). The audience was a mixture of residents, council staff and councillors from all tiers of council.

Unlike some in-person conversations and the survey results, webinar attendees did not request that the status quo remain. This shows that if it is clearly explained then people do understand that LGR is a national government requirement, and change will be taking place. Attendees commented that they found it helpful and were grateful for the engagement.

## Survey results

### Demographics

The survey gathered demographic data from respondents so we could assess how representative the respondents were of Gloucestershire's population. Where possible, this has been reviewed against the 2021 Census data.

The key demographic findings are as follows:

Age: The majority of respondents were aged 55 and over (57%), followed by those aged 35-54 (30%), and under 35 (9%). Gloucestershire does have an older population than the national average, however given that the figures for 65+ at a county level are 22%, the survey responses skew to an older demographic than is fully representative.

Sex and Gender Identity: The respondents were almost evenly split between female (53%) and male (47%), with a slightly higher number of women than men responding, slightly higher than the census data which has 51% female. Almost all respondents indicated that their gender identity is the same as their sex at birth.

Sexual Orientation: About 80% of respondents identified as heterosexual/straight, which is less than the census data which 90% identified as such. Smaller proportions identified as asexual (~3%), bisexual (~3%), gay man (~2%), or lesbian/gay woman (~1%). The number of respondents identifying as LGBTQ+ was higher among under-35s (16%) compared to those aged 55 and over (less than 4%).

Ethnicity: The largest ethnic group was White British (87%), followed by White European (4%) and White Irish (1%). Other individual ethnic groups each accounted for less than 1%. This is reflective of the demographics of the county (based on the 2021, 88% of the population is White British with a further 5% coming from other White backgrounds).

Religion or Belief: The most common responses were 'No religion' (46%) and 'Christian' (44%). 'No religion' was more prevalent among under-35s, while 'Christian' was more common among older age groups, reaching around 62% in those aged 75 and over. The county levels for 'Christian' are higher at 48%, and lower for 'No religion' at 43%.

Long-term Illness or Disability: About 19% of respondents reported having a long-term illness or disability that limits their day-to-day activities, less than the census figure of 23%.

Caring Responsibilities: Approximately 20% of respondents had caring responsibilities, mainly for older family members (15%). A smaller proportion (4%) cared for children with additional needs, and around 1% had dual caring responsibilities. This is higher than the census' average of 9% providing unpaid care.

## Survey responses in detail

### Section 1: A sense of belonging

This section of the survey focused on where people lived and where they identified as 'home' within the county. Respondents were asked for their postcode (first half only), which councils they

thought represented them, and where they consider they live. The latter was to determine whether people's local identity is more closely tied to the county, district, or local neighbourhood.

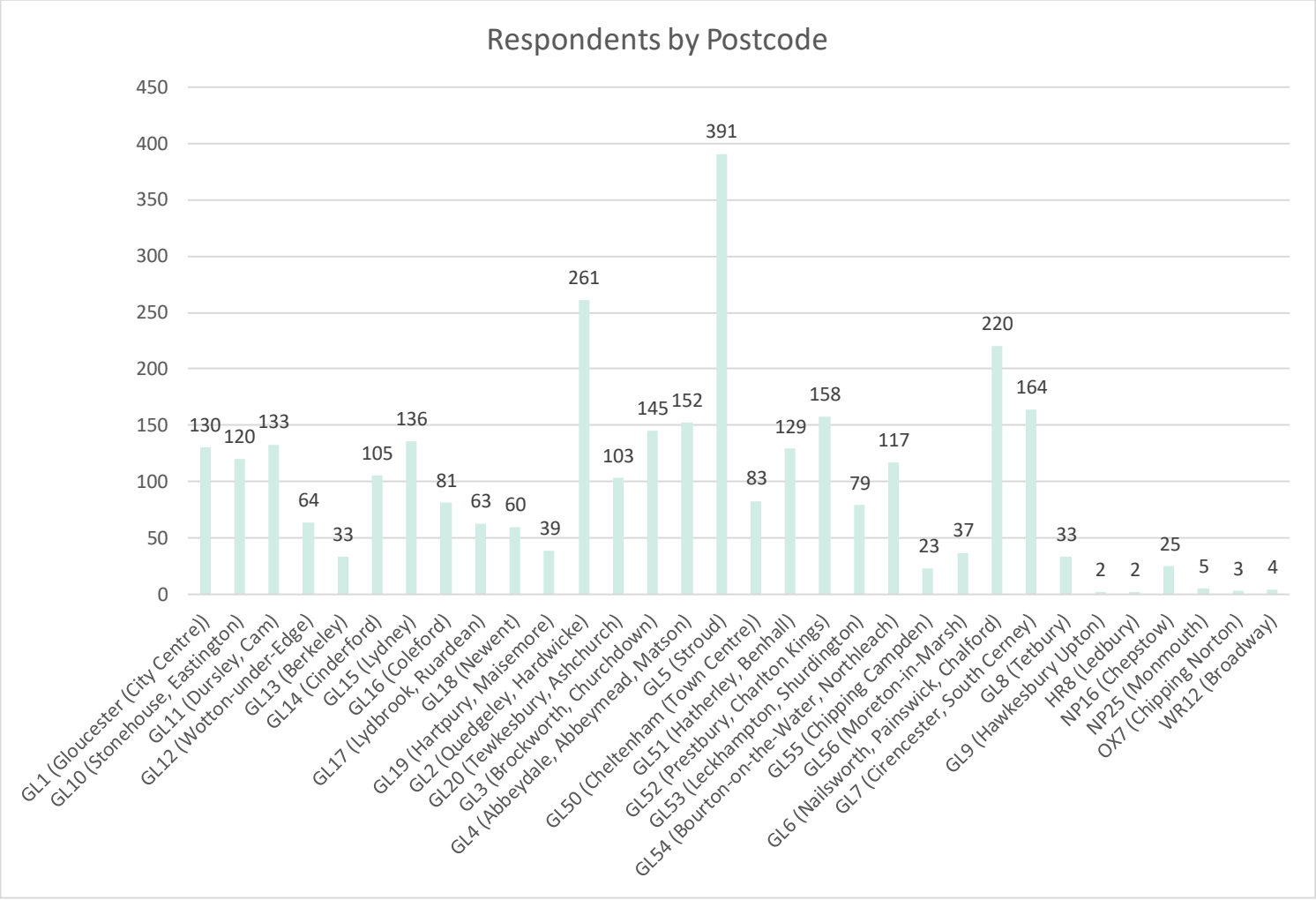



*Figure 1*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents across postcodes and the most commonly associated areas within the postcodes. There is notably high turnout from GL5 (Stroud), GL6 (Nailsworth, Painswick, Chalford), GL7 (Cirencester, South Cerney), GL52 (Prestbury, Charlton Kings), GL4 (Abbeydale, Abbeymead, Matson) and GL3 (Brockworth, Churchdown).

Eleven respondents gave a hometown postcode outside of Gloucestershire, explained by the fact some lived on the borders or visited the county for work. Those postcodes were: GL9, BS37, IP2, GL20, GL8, GL12, OX7 and TA1.

People were asked to select their council, with the option of all six districts, the county council, and 'other.' 52 (2%) were not sure which council they were served by, indicated by either selecting 'not sure' or by selecting multiple district councils. However, we were able to allocate all except seven using the postcode and description of where they live for the purpose of effective survey analysis.

1,012 (33%) included Gloucestershire County Council as part of their answer, with 15 of those placing it as their only council. This shows that 2,090 (67%) respondents either do not realise this is their council or do not see it as much a part of their day-to-day life as their district council.

As shown in Figure 2, the districts were relatively evenly represented in responses, except for Stroud District Council which saw a considerably higher response rate.

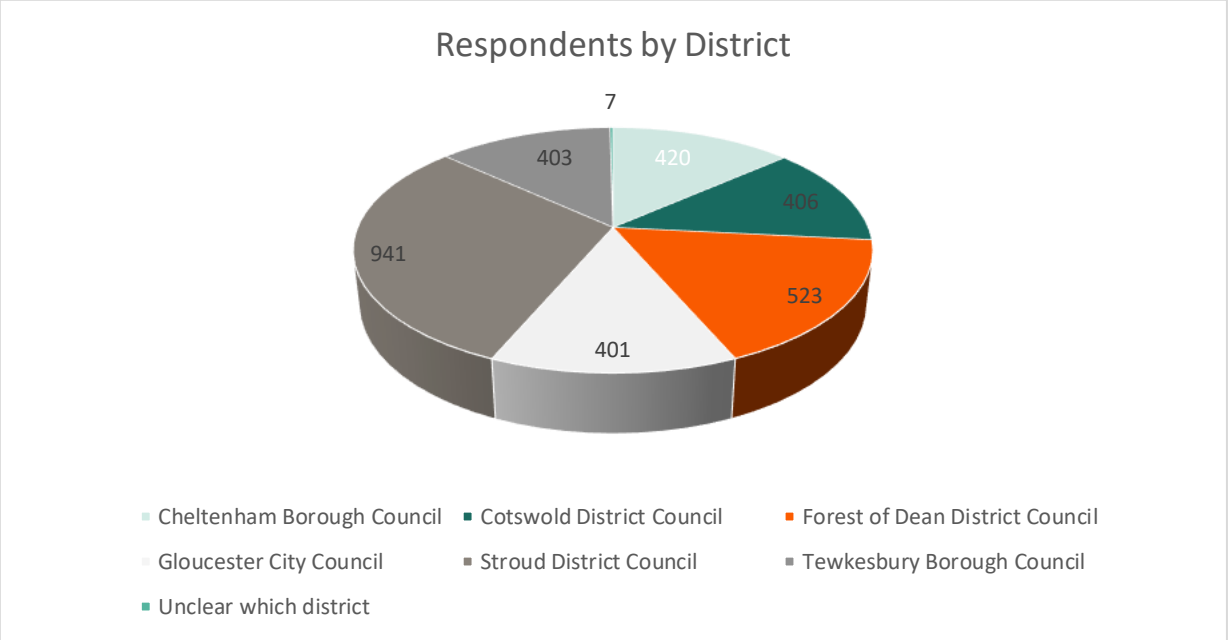



*Figure 2*

34 people added a council after selecting 'other'. Of these, 23 were Parish Councils and 11 were councils outside of Gloucestershire County Council lines (e.g. South Gloucestershire, Wychavon, West Oxfordshire, Malvern Hills, Somerset and Ipswich).

Next, people were asked to tell us first where they lived (Figure 3) and then what they considered to be their 'local area' (Figure 4). The word-clouds below summarise the most common responses to each.




*Figure 3*

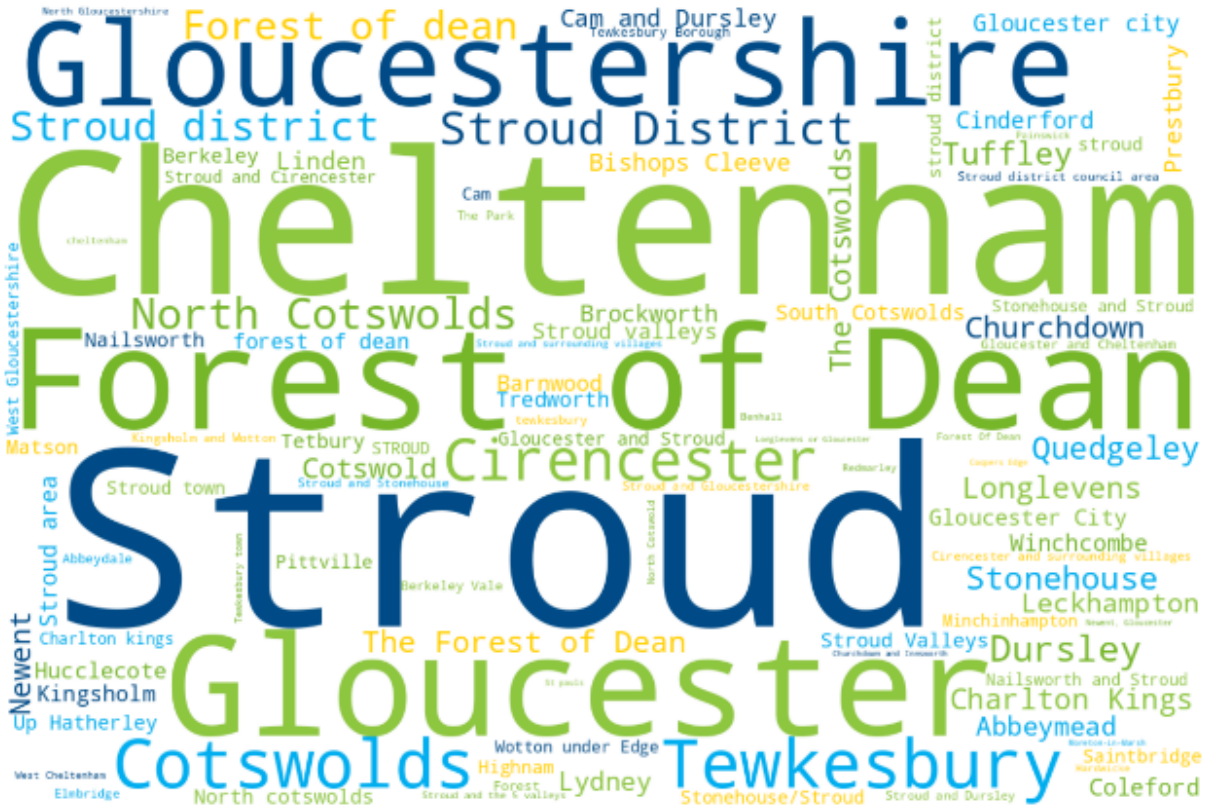



*Figure 4*

These two questions were designed to get people thinking about where they feel most connected to, rather than thinking solely in terms of council boundaries. The results show that people are

more specific when thinking about where they live vs what is their local area, and that while the district names are mentioned frequently, hundreds of smaller towns and villages are included, suggesting people's sense of home is more complex than which district or county they belong to.

We then asked people to what extent they felt a 'sense of belonging' to the local area they just identified. The responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive, with 1,503 (48%) saying strongly agree, and only 218 (7%) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (shown in Figure 5).

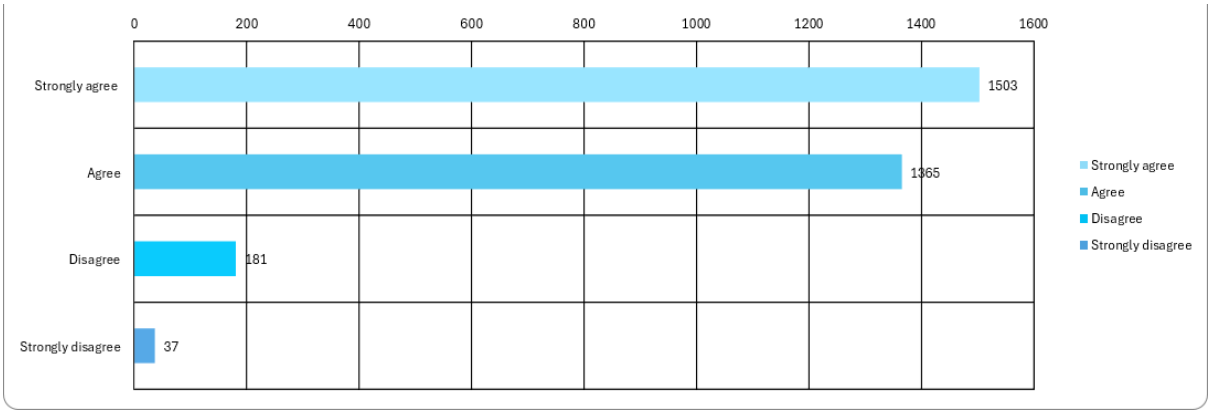



*Figure 5*

We then asked respondents to rank the importance of various key factors in contributing to this 'sense of belonging'.

Overall, green open spaces were rated as the most important element, with 72% saying they were 'very important'. Safety was the next priority, with 70% rating it very important, followed by 65% saying 'easy to get to important things like buses, schools and the GP' were very important.

Only 40% said history and heritage was very important to them, however overall, all elements were seen as more important than not important. 9% said events were not at all important, and this was the highest percentage of all 'not at all important' rankings.

## Section 2: Council Services

In this next section of the survey, respondents were asked for feedback on their council services as they are now, including assessments of a series of council services and feedback on their engagement with councillors and officers.

Overall, 2,215 (71%) know who their councillors are, and 1,045 (34%) have contacted them in the last two years. 77% were satisfied or very satisfied with the response from their councillor.

1,904 (61%) have contacted a council department, and 73% were happy or very happy with the response from the relevant department.

In terms of services provided, rubbish and recycling and parks and green spaces consistently receive a high positive sentiment across all councils, while roads and pavements are the weakest area – in almost every council, these saw the lowest 'very good' ratings and highest negative feedback.

Residents across all councils received good ratings on average, with little differentiation between the six districts.

Overall average satisfaction per district (rated 1–4 scale):

Cheltenham Borough Council: 2.89
Cotswold District Council: 2.70
Forest of Dean District Council: 2.72
Gloucester City Council: 2.81
Tewkesbury Borough Council: 2.87
Stroud District Council: 2.86

Each council's individual feedback figures are summarised below:

## Cheltenham Borough Council

420 responses were from residents in Cheltenham Borough Council. Table 1 shows how respondents from Cheltenham ranked the council services. Key things to note are that parks, gardens, and other green spaces were the highest rated, with 93% 'very good' or 'good', and roads, pavements, and streetlights were rated the lowest, with only 2% rating them as 'very good' and 76% as 'not good' or 'not very good at all'.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 32% | 55% | 9% | 4% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 2% | 21% | 48% | 28% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 40% | 53% | 6% | 1% |
| Schools and education | 23% | 69% | 6% | 2% |
| Libraries | 22% | 60% | 15% | 4% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 32% | 57% | 9% | 2% |
| Local buses | 14% | 59% | 23% | 4% |
| Social care and benefits | 5% | 56% | 29% | 10% |

*Table 1*

Engagement with Councillors
The survey included two questions about residents' awareness and interactions with their district or county councillors.

*Awareness*
A significant portion of residents (75%) are aware of their councillors, with 35% having actively engaged with them in the last two years. 15% did not know who their councillors were and 10% were unsure or did not respond.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 27% were very satisfied with the response, 40% were satisfied, 22% were dissatisfied, 10% were very dissatisfied and 1% did not respond.

The satisfaction levels are relatively positive, with 67% expressing satisfaction (either very satisfied or satisfied). However, the dissatisfaction rate of 32% (dissatisfied or very dissatisfied) indicates that there is still a notable portion of the population that feels their concerns are not being adequately addressed.

Engagement with Council Officers
The survey also included questions about residents' interactions with council departments over the past two years.

*Contact*
65% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years, some respondents mentioned contacting a different borough, possibly related to friends or family across the border or where they work.

*Satisfaction*
Of those who had contacted a council department, 19% of respondents were very happy with their experience, 47% were happy, 21% were not happy, 12% were not at all happy and 1% did not respond.

## Cotswold District Council

406 responses were from residents in Cotswold District Council. The rating of the services is detailed in Table 2 below. There were several well rated services in this district, with 90% rating Schools and education as 'good or very good', 89% rating rubbish and recycling as the same and 87% for parks, gardens, and other green spaces.

Roads, pavements and streetlights were less well rated, with 56% rating 'not good' or 'not very good at all', and 42% saying the same for social care and benefits.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 35% | 54% | 8% | 3% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 22% | 44% | 32% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 17% | 70% | 11% | 2% |
| Schools and education | 21% | 68% | 9% | 2% |
| Libraries | 18% | 60% | 16% | 6% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 15% | 58% | 22% | 5% |
| Local buses | 4% | 25% | 41% | 29% |
| Social care and benefits | 7% | 51% | 32% | 10% |

*Table 2*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
42% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 37% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 13% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 39% were very satisfied with the response, and 40% were satisfied. However, 15% were dissatisfied, and 6% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
65% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
18% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 46% were happy. However, 26% were not happy, and 9% were not at all happy.

## Forest of Dean District Council

523 responses were from residents in Forest of Dean District Council. Table 3 shows the range of ratings given to the services by the residents.

Rubbish and recycling were rated very highly, with 95% of respondents rating it as 'good or very good'. Roads, pavements, and streetlights, and local buses were seen as poor, with 67% and 64% rating them 'not good' and 'not very good at all' respectively.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 51% | 44% | 4% | 1% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 30% | 43% | 25% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 26% | 60% | 11% | 3% |
| Schools and education | 12% | 69% | 15% | 4% |
| Libraries | 16% | 62% | 16% | 5% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 10% | 56% | 27% | 6% |
| Local buses | 5% | 31% | 40% | 24% |
| Social care and benefits | 4% | 49% | 35% | 12% |

*Table 3*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
34% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 33% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 23% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 39% were very satisfied with the response, and 44% were satisfied. However, 10% were dissatisfied, and 7% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
59% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
26% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 52% were happy. However, 13% were not happy, and 8% were not at all happy.

## Gloucester City Council

401 responses were from residents in Gloucester City Council. Table 4 details the ratings given by people in this district. The data reveals that while some services, such as rubbish and recycling, are well-regarded (92% saying very good or good), but other areas are seen as sub-par, with 56%

reporting roads, pavements and streetlights as ‘not good’ or ‘not very good at all’ and 42% saying the same for social care and benefits.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 34% | 58% | 5% | 3% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 41% | 41% | 15% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 11% | 68% | 18% | 3% |
| Schools and education | 13% | 69% | 15% | 3% |
| Libraries | 18% | 66% | 13% | 3% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 9% | 57% | 28% | 5% |
| Local buses | 17% | 55% | 23% | 5% |
| Social care and benefits | 5% | 53% | 35% | 7% |

*Table 4*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
30% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 38% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 23% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 25% were very satisfied with the response, and 47% were satisfied. However, 17% were dissatisfied, and 12% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
61% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
16% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 46% were happy. However, 18% were not happy, and 10% were not at all happy.

## Stroud District Council

The district with the most responses was Stroud with 941, and the service ratings are below in Table 5. Responses were very positive overall, especially relating to rubbish and recycling which received 97% ‘good or very good’ ratings. Parks, gardens, and other green spaces, schools and education. Libraries all also had positive ratings above 85%.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 60% | 37% | 2% | 1% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 3% | 28% | 48% | 21% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 30% | 63% | 7% | 1% |
| Schools and education | 20% | 68% | 9% | 3% |
| Libraries | 26% | 59% | 12% | 3% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 19% | 67% | 12% | 2% |
| Local buses | 5% | 33% | 40% | 22% |
| Social care and benefits | 5% | 54% | 33% | 9% |

*Table 5*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
33% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 38% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 19% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 51% were very satisfied with the response, and 36% were satisfied. However, 8% were dissatisfied, and 5% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
63% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
33% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 44% were happy. However, 16% were not happy, and 7% were not at all happy.

## Tewkesbury Borough Council

403 responses were from residents in Tewkesbury Borough Council. The survey results indicate that Tewkesbury residents were most positive about rubbish and recycling services (96% very good or good), with schools and education second (84%) and most negative about roads, pavements and streetlights, with 66% rating them not good or not very good at all.

| | Very Good | Good | Not good | Not very good at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rubbish and recycling | 63% | 33% | 4% | 0% |
| Roads, pavements and streetlights | 4% | 30% | 43% | 22% |
| Parks, gardens, and other green spaces | 17% | 62% | 18% | 3% |
| Schools and education | 16% | 68% | 14% | 2% |
| Libraries | 24% | 57% | 15% | 3% |
| Sports facilities/festivals/events | 16% | 60% | 20% | 4% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local buses | 18% | 47% | 24% | 11% |
| Social care and benefits | 7% | 52% | 34% | 7% |

*Table 6*

Engagement with Councillors

*Awareness*
30% of respondents knew who their councillors were and had contacted at least one of them within the last two years. 40% knew who their councillors were but had not contacted them, while 20% did not know who their councillors were.

*Satisfaction*
Among those who had contacted their councillors, 36% were very satisfied with the response, and 36% were satisfied. However, 19% were dissatisfied, and 7% were very dissatisfied.

Contact with Council Departments

*Engagement*
56% of respondents had contacted a council department within the last two years.

*Satisfaction*
25% of respondents were very happy with their experience, and 46% were happy. However, 20% were not happy, and 9% were not at all happy.

## Other Services

An additional option after rating the eight specified services was 'I'd like to rate a different service'. Across all respondents, 261 respondents chose to respond to this question, just over 8% of the total respondents. This has been analysed across the county rather than by district, as the relatively low response rate to this question would imply

Issues around planning and highways dominate the comments - these two areas alone account for more than half of all service mentions. By noting that people felt the need to add extra analysis to topics such as roads and schools that had already been rated in the previous questions shows the strength of people's opinions.

For each, we have included a sentiment score[61] and some examples of the kind of comments included.

- Planning / Development / Building Control - 16.5% of comments

[61] *Each comment in the survey was tagged with a sentiment label: **Positive**, **Neutral**, or **Negative**. To quantify overall sentiment for each issue, these labels were converted into numerical scores as follows:*

- ***Positive** → **+1***
- ***Neutral** → **0***
- ***Negative** → **–1***

*For each category, the **average sentiment score** was calculated by taking the mean of all individual comment scores associated with that issue. This provides a simple, interpretable metric:*

- *A score **closer to +1** indicates generally positive feedback.*
- *A score **around 0** suggests mixed or neutral sentiment.*
- *A score **closer to –1** reflects predominantly negative feedback.*

*This approach allows for easy comparison across service areas and helps highlight where public perception is most favourable or critical.*

Average Sentiment Score: -0.27

There were concerns raised about new development, density, lack of local consultation and poor enforcement of planning decisions. There were also complaints raised about the performance of planning services.

- *"Planning decisions - this should be more under the umbrella of the town council not the district most of which do not live in the area".*
- *"Planning applications are dealt with extremely slowly... little consistency between councils."*
- Roads / Highways / Potholes - 10.0% of comments
  Average Sentiment Score: -0.30

There were recurrent complaints about potholes, poor road maintenance, resurfacing delays and local road safety. There were also localised complaints about the streetscape, covering issues like parking availability and enforcement, and litter and graffiti.

- *"Highways- not very good at all. Far too many road closures, and temporary traffic lights."*
- *"Fix my pothole website... a pothole in my street was fixed within the week!"*
- Housing / Homelessness / Council houses - 5.5% of comments
  Average Sentiment Score: 0.09

A number of comments were frustrated that housing services have not improved in the area.

- *"Lack of social housing for people."*
- *"Housing officers aren't good as they have too much work to do".*
- Schools / Education - 4.0% of comments
  Average Sentiment Score: 0.00

A small number of people raised issues around education, from a lack of nurseries through to problems with the education system overall. There were a number of comments about poor transport to school.

- *"Early careers - needs to be better in schools"*
- *"I think we should not have an 11 plus grammar school system. It is divisive. I went to a comprehensive school in Oxford."*
- Children's services / Child protection - 3.5% of comments
  Average Sentiment Score: -0.43

Similar to schools / education, a small number of people raised real concerns with children's services, mostly from parents trying to access SEND support for their children.

- *"Children's services - not good at all"*
- *"Parents trying to negotiate SEND provisions for children with extra needs is a lengthy and high stress process. This needs huge investment as these children will slip through the*

*cracks."*

- Waste / Bin collections / Recycling - 3.5% of comments
  Average Sentiment Score: -0.14

Missed collections and recycling issues appear across a number of comments. There was a surprisingly strong opposition to the way recycling centres operate with multiple people raising frustration with having to register in advance to attend and feeling that these centres make it harder for them to recycle.

- *"Any suggestion of bin collection every 3 weeks should be stopped".*
- *"Recycling Centres: Not very good at all due to having to book for a slot".*
- *"Recycling Household Centre. The registration of cars should be removed".*
- Public transport / Buses - 3.0% of comments
  Average Sentiment Score: -0.50

There were a range of complaints about bus reliability, frequency and connections — and a recognition that these impact people's ability to travel without a car. Many of these were very specific complaints about a local service.

- *"The Number 10 bus service: Inconsistent every single day, rarely happens according to the schedules at the bus stops. Many busy stops rely on printed schedules as they do not have electronic schedules. The Stagecoach West app sometimes lies about where buses are. And the overall cost is terrible. The monthly Rider Plus ticket now costs £85 per 28 days (i.e. £1,020+ per year). This is reaching a point where private transport is becoming economically comparable and vastly more comfortable and convenient over public transport. This is exactly the reverse of where public transport as a service in Gloucestershire should be heading."*
- Council tax / Benefits / Finance - 2.5% of comments
  Average Sentiment Score: -0.20
- *"Cost of council tax value for as council tax is incredibly expensive for the services received/provided."*
- *"Council tax can vary greatly in cost between councils & also which parish you live in."*

## Section 3: Local government reorganisation

In this section of the survey, we focused on questions about LGR and the future of councils in Gloucestershire.

### What are your top priorities when it comes to reorganising councils in Gloucestershire?

We first asked respondents to rank in order of priority the four key objectives of LGR, as set out by National Government:

'Make sure your council tax is well spent' was the top priority for most people, with 1,267 rating this highest. Next highest was 'make local services better', named as the top priority by 1,128 respondents.

There is then a large gap with only 330 naming 'provide a sense of community' as their highest priority and a similar figure of 337 saying 'provide a stronger voice for residents'.

We can see from this that overwhelmingly people's priority is the practical day-to-day spending and work of the council, rather than feeling the council should focus on issues of identity and feeling included.

### Is there anything else you think should be a priority, or anything you would like us to think about when putting together plans to reorganise Gloucestershire's local government structure?

The final question in the survey asked if there was anything else respondents wanted us to consider when designing proposals for how new council services will be delivered under LGR. Almost 60% of respondents answered this question and their comments are summarised below, divided into overall comments and specific references to different structures.

#### Topics to consider

Almost 60% of respondents answered this question and their comments are summarised below, grouped into key categories:

| Theme | Percentage (%) | Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Community | 16.06 | Concerns about local representation, community identity, and engagement in decision-making. |
| Transport | 9.36 | Issues related to public transport, road maintenance, and connectivity. |
| Housing | 5.47 | Comments on housing affordability, development planning, and infrastructure. |
| Environment | 3.51 | Feedback on climate action, sustainability, and environmental conservation. |
| Economy | 2.8 | Suggestions for economic growth, job creation, and business support. |
| Healthcare | 2.19 | Concerns about access to medical services and hospital facilities. |
| Education | 2.06 | Issues regarding schools, learning opportunities, and educational infrastructure. |
| Safety | 1.64 | Mentions of crime prevention, policing, and community safety. |

*Table 7*

Of the above, the most common concerns were:

**a)** Community engagement and local representation – Emphasis on keeping decisions local and maintaining identity.

- *"Local government is not just about providing services, it is also about being a place leader and convenor for the local system and communities. I am concerned that discussions about LGR are so reductive - just focusing on what the boundary should be. If I had a preference it would be for two authorities to retain local identity and prioritisation of areas that may be overlooked on a larger footprint with joint working to achieve economies of scale in service delivery."*

- *"Support for community hubs which provide a point of contact for services and places for people to come together."*
- *"The decision should be based on what's best for residents, NOT local politicians."*

**b)** Transport infrastructure – Calls for better public transport, road maintenance, and connectivity.

- *"Integrated public transport network."*
- *"Churchdown is part of Tewkesbury. I can't get to Tewkesbury on a bus from Churchdown."*
- *"Improve transport across the county as a one Gloucestershire scheme, not just good in the urban areas of Gloucester and Cheltenham."*

**c)** Housing development – Concerns about affordability, planning, and infrastructure support.

a) *"I recognise the need for more housing… but it's SO important that the roads and parks/green spaces around these new estates is managed well."*

b) *"Local housing only for local people and ex-military."*

c) *"Housing needs to be prioritised. Limited and get infrastructure right before new homes."*

**d)** Environmental protection – Requests for climate action, conservation, and sustainability.

- *"Protecting our green spaces, fields, woods, and farmland from development."*
- *"Climate and nature action for the transition to a low carbon economy."*
- *"Environmental concerns, green energy and net zero."*

Other Issues

Several other issues were raised, although in much smaller numbers. These included:

1. Youth Services
2. Public Health / GP services
3. Cycling infrastructure
4. Libraries and museums
5. Environmental services
6. Parking / Car Parking
7. Services Older People
8. PROW (Public Rights of Way)
9. Policing

### Council Structure

While at no point were respondents asked to give their view on the proposed structure options of the future unitary council, 225 (7% of the respondents) actively gave preferences in the written text on which unitary council formation they would prefer out of the three currently proposed options. Of these, 205 (91%) preferred one single unitary council governing the whole county, 14 (6%) preferred the East / West split, and 3 (1%) preferred the Greater Gloucester City model. Three (1%) people said they preferred a two-council split but did not specify the split.

There were concerns that the East / West split would essentially be seen as a rich / poor divide. Few were in favour of the East / West approach, with even fewer in favour of the 'Greater Gloucester' approach. There were some disparaging remarks about the latter not "making sense" and references to this model being a "political" manoeuvre.

- *"It would be extremely unfair to split our county into two councils, especially along the lines proposed - which would effectively mean a "rich" side and a "poor" side of the county, as this would likely cause greater feelings of division between people."*

- *"The Greater Gloucestershire option is also very silly. It's just a political idea that will make us poorer."*

Some people saw the two-council option as a half-measure, continuing to cause confusion over who is responsible for what, and causing disruption to existing services while not achieving the efficiency LGR claims to provide.

- *"Providing a 'one stop' shop for council services across the County, to eliminate confusion as to who does what. Also not to break up services that operate perfectly well at the moment to further a 'two unitary' arrangement."*

- *"To have two unitary authorities would be divisive, inefficient (compared to one), and cause identity confusion (with the additional factor of South Gloucestershire already existing)."*

Many said one large council was the most efficient option, noting concerns about splitting Gloucestershire County Council regarding health, fire, police services. Economies of scale were mentioned.

There was a feeling from Forest of Dean residents that they would be neglected in a larger council.

There were those who mentioned options outside those currently proposed. Many wanted the system to stay as it is, however, many who mentioned this realised this was not an option. Some offered alternative solutions such as areas joining Wiltshire or Herefordshire or South Gloucestershire Councils.

## Conclusions

### Headline conclusions

Existing councils are generally well-thought of, with high ratings for both services and interactions with councillors and officers. While this reflects well on local services, it does mean that residents may be concerned about any potential change to the way their councils operate. Several comments, in person and online, reflected a contentment with the current system and a preference for no change at all.

Reviewing any negative ratings and written feedback should guide improvements in the new system, especially by addressing limitations in the current two-tier system to improve services that are less

successful now. This could include emphasising that housing and infrastructure would now be more joined-up which was requested, or it could be shown that the change gives a chance to improve the environmental credentials of the councils.

Despite many concerns about local identity and community being lost, when respondents were asked to clearly rank their priorities for the future, efficient use of council tax and good service provision were far above sense of community and a local voice.

The whole Gloucestershire model was given as the preference by the majority of those who offered an opinion on future structures.

## Resistance to change

There is a need to explain to people that LGR is a national policy with wider objectives – and that no change is therefore not an option.

Our engagement activities have included informing residents about the purpose and requirements of LGR, so this process has already begun. Based on discussions and shared information, it appears that more residents now understand the national government's requirements. Although some express a preference for maintaining the current system, there is recognition that change will occur.

Many people were also aware of the wider plans for devolution, ranging from conversations about combined authority mayors to potential increased roles for parish and town councils. Future information will need to include references to what will happen here as soon as possible, to avoid the current information spreading which could be misleading.

## Next steps: Clear communications

It is important to build on the engagement already carried out, to keep residents' trust and prevent any misinformation. The key learnings of the engagement show which concerns were raised and where reassurance will be needed in future communications.

People wanted to see financial efficiencies – but not a service reduction: Those who preferred a unitary system cited financial efficiencies and the main priority was effective council tax spending and day-to-day services. Presenting evidence that supports these outcomes would strengthen the case.

People are confused about which council they belong to and who is responsible for what, leading to frustration when passed between councils. Messaging should highlight that a simpler system would be easier to navigate and encourage more engagement.

Each area has a distinct identity, so it must be made clear that the change is aimed at improving administration and efficiency, rather than changing altering the local character. Neighbourhood initiatives can help maintain a sense of community and clear roles for parish and town councils.

Another primary consideration is maintaining a sense of belonging to Gloucestershire, balancing local representation with broader identity. It should be noted that local representation will remain in place, and it will become more straightforward to identify and contact representatives.

Concerns were raised that larger councils will mean decisions are made for areas by people further detached from the area in question. Measures will need to be put in place to ensure officers or councillors handle this carefully.

Residents currently happy with the council services provided will need reassurance as to how services will be managed during the period of transition – mentioning the shadow council period and being open about the fact it may take a while but will provide a better service long term.

There were concerns raised that there was no real chance to state preference for the system. Since this was a period of engagement, rather than a formal consultation, the materials clarified that an official consultation would follow. When recommendations go to the government, local messages should make it clear that people can and should provide feedback.

As detailed plans to guide the choice of options are formed by officers, these facts and figures should then be used to support communications to residents, to work together to bring forward the future of Gloucestershire.

## Appendix 1: Survey questions

Section 1: A sense of belonging

What is the first part of your postcode (e.g. GL5)?

What is your local council (tick all that apply)?

- Cheltenham Borough Council
- Cotswold District Council
- Forest of Dean District Council
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Gloucester City Council
- Tewkesbury Borough Council
- Stroud District Council
- Not sure
- Other (please specify)

Where do you live?

What do you consider to be your local area?

Thinking about your answer to the last question, tell us how much you agree with the following statement: 'I feel a sense of belonging here'

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

How important are the following aspects in contributing to your sense of belonging to where you live?

Local places to go like shops, community centres, sports and fun places.

- Very important
- Important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important
- I don't have a view

Things happening nearby like festivals and events.

- Very important
- Important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important
- I don't have a view

People you know in your area like friends, family, and neighbours.

- Very important
- Important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

I don't have a view

Green areas like parks, communal gardens, nature, and open spaces.

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

Easy to get to important things like buses, schools and the GP.

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

How safe you feel in your area.

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

History and heritage like important things from the past and local traditions

Very important
Important
Slightly important
Not at all important
I don't have a view

Section 2: Council services

For each of the following everyday council services, please rate how well you believe they are working in your area.

Rubbish and recycling collection

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Roads, pavements and streetlights

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Parks, gardens, and other green spaces

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Schools and education

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Libraries

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Sports facilities/festivals/events

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Local buses

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Social care and benefits

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

I'd like to rate a different service:

Very good
Good
Not good
Not very good at all

Do you know who your DISTRICT or COUNTY councillors are, and have you contacted them within the last two years?

Yes, and I've contacted at least one of them
Yes, but I've not contacted them
I'm not sure
No, I don't know who they are

If you answered 'Yes, and I've contacted at least one of them', overall, how happy were you with how the dealt with your questions, concern or comment?

Very satisfied

Satisfied
Dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Have you contacted a council department (for example, parking, council tax, housing, etc) in the last two years?

Yes - several times a year
Yes - once or twice a year
No

Which council(s) did you contact?

Gloucestershire County Council
Cheltenham Borough Council
Cotswold District Council
Forest of Dean District Council
Gloucester City Council
Stroud District Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council

Think about the last time you contacted your council. Overall, how happy were you with the experience?

Very happy
Happy
Not happy
Not at all happy

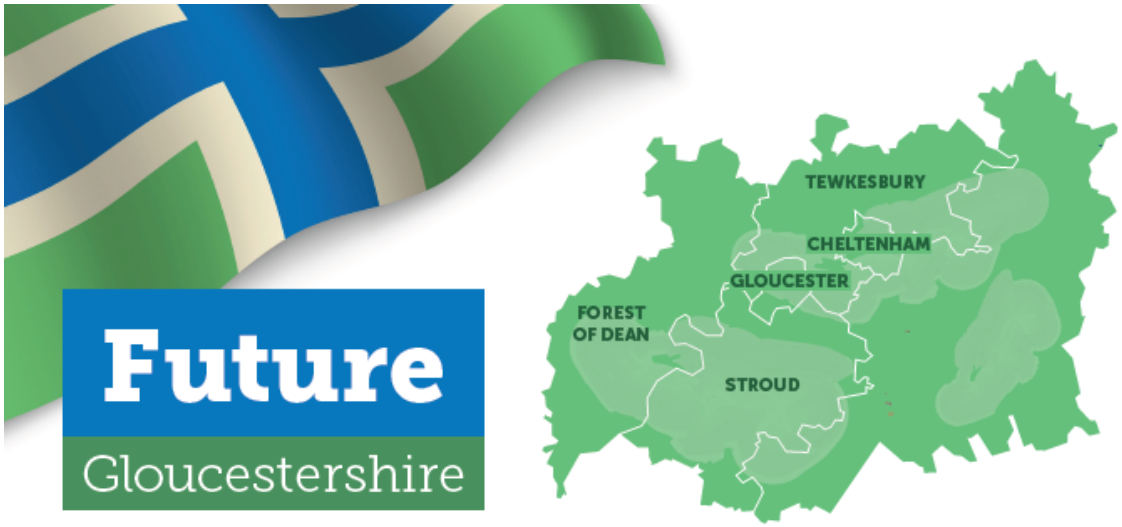
Section 3: Local government reorganisation – what matters to you?

What are your top priorities when it comes to reorganising councils in Gloucestershire? Please rate the following priorities from 1-4 (where 1 is the most important) based on how important they are to you:

Make local services better: This means improving things like rubbish collection, parks, and other services you use every day.
Make sure your council tax is well spent: Provide good local services without wasting your council tax.
Provide a stronger voice for residents – listening and responding to your concerns.
Provide a sense of community and belonging – respect the unique character of Gloucestershire, like its history and culture.

Is there anything else you think should be a priority, or anything you would like us to think about when putting together plans to reorganise Gloucestershire's local government structure?

## Appendix 2: Flyers and banners




### What is Local Government Reorganisation?

The national government wants to change how local councils work. You currently have one county council and six smaller district councils in Gloucestershire. The different types of councils are responsible for different services (explained overleaf).

The plan is to swap them for fewer, bigger councils that look after all services. These are known as 'unitary' authorities, and have existed across the UK in many places for several years - they can cover a whole county, part of a county or a large town or city.

The government produced an official document in 2024, showing their plans for devolution (handing power from national to local government) and saying that a unitary council system is the best way to achieve this.

### What does it mean for Gloucestershire?

Rather than stating the plans for reorganisation, the government asked local councils to produce proposals on how they would like to move to a unitary model. In Gloucestershire, this could involve combining all six districts into one unitary council or dividing into two separate unitary councils.

The district councils and the county council are discussing what the best plan would be, both individually and as a group. The views of residents and communities are an important part of the decision-making process.

These changes give us a chance to check all the services we offer, to give people in Gloucestershire good, strong, and effective public services for years to come.

### When will be know what is happening?

The deadline for all seven local councils to submit a joint final plan is the end of November 2025. If the seven cannot agree a shared plan, each council can submit one proposal, and the government would make the final decision.

**The transfer of services would take place gradually over two years, and the unitary authority or authorities would be up and running fully by 2028.**

www.futuregloucestershire.org.uk

Gloucestershire COUNTY COUNCIL

# What do councils do?

## County Council Services that Gloucestershire County Council is responsible for include:

- Helping children, including fostering and adoption
- Helping older people and adults who need support
- Making sure roads, paths, and cycle routes are safe and usable
- Buses, park & ride, and school travel
- Streetlights and traffic lights
- The fire and rescue service
- Making sure shops sell things fairly (Trading Standards)
- Registering important life events: births, deaths, marriages, and civil partnerships
- Working with businesses to create more jobs and help people learn new skills
- Free bus passes for older people and blue badges (parking for people with disabilities)
- Education
- Public Health - services that support people to become or remain healthy
- Libraries
- Large recycling centres and disposal of household waste collections

## District Council

Cheltenham Borough Council · Cotswold District Council · Forest of Dean District Council · Gloucester City Council · Stroud District Council · Tewkesbury Borough Council

- Home rubbish and recycling collection, and street cleaning
- Collecting Council Tax
- Public spaces like footpaths, parks and trees on streets
- Planning and Building Control - Looking at plans for new buildings
- Culture, sport and leisure e.g. events and museums
- Providing homes and reducing homelessness
- Community safety teams, preventing and dealing with issues such as vandalism or noise complaints
- Community wellbeing - looking how to make people happier and healthier
- Managing benefits to help people pay their rent and council tax
- Licencing - permits for things like pubs, taxis, and events.
- Making sure places like restaurants are clean and safe
- Collecting taxes from businesses in the area (Business Rates)
- Public toilets

## Town and Parish Councils

The most local voice you have is the town or parish council, although they do not have as many required roles to carry out as district, county or unitary councils. Each one could carry out different roles than their neighbour, and not all areas will have one. These will be unaffected by any plans for local government reorganisation. Responsibilities can include:

- Supporting local community groups
- Allotments
- Car parks
- Community centres
- Providing local grants
- Playgrounds
- Vandalism
- Neighbourhood plans
- Providing an official neighbourhood voice e.g. on planning applications

# Future Gloucestershire

SCAN ME




# Have your say!

**Your district and county council want to hear from you:**

How well do you feel council services in our area work?

Have you ever spoken to your local council or councillors?

What about your community is most important to you?

How can we make Gloucestershire run as smoothly as possible?

**To fill out our survey, scan the QR code or visit www.futuregloucestershire.org.uk**




# Local Government Reorganisation

Did you know there are national plans to re-structure the way local government works?

The system will change from a 'two-tier' to a 'unitary' authority – come and ask us what this means!

Help your local councils shape the future of Gloucestershire.

**To fill out our survey, scan the QR code or visit**
**www.futuregloucestershire.org.uk**

Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

# Appendix 4: Summary Report of Feedback from Partner Organisations (Engagement conducted June - August 2025)

## Background

Ministerial guidance for LGR has provided clarity about the role and purpose of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) stakeholder engagement in the proposal development process. Criteria 4c of the Ministerial criteria makes clear that:

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

In addition, GCC has been mindful of its role in providing most of the 'crucial services' referenced in criteria 3c:

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

Guidance has also been provided to ensure wider public sector providers are engaged as proposals are developed. The relevant guidance is contained within the Letter to Leaders from the (former) Local Government Minister.

In this context, it was necessary for a stakeholder engagement exercise to be undertaken, at pace, to ensure GCC's county-wide stakeholders were positively engaged. All engagement was conducted in the context of GCC Cabinet policy to be agnostic of structural options.

The feedback from stakeholder groups has been considered alongside the outcomes of other forms of engagement and is addressed clearly in the substantive engagement chapter of this proposal.

## Objectives and methodology

Over June – August 2025, senior GCC officers held stakeholder meetings concerning LGR, focusing on services or matters of relevance to the council's work.

The objectives of the engagement process were to:

1. Ensure stakeholder views were taken into account as proposals for the single unitary and east/west two-unitaries were developed;
2. Gather intelligence about the impact of LGR on stakeholder organisations;
3. Understand what aspects of LGR were of most importance to stakeholders, as well as any concerns; and
4. Gauge appetite and interest for future involvement in LGR (and Devolution).

To achieve these objectives, the following information was provided as part of each meeting:

- An update on how LGR proposals and Devolution discussions are progressing in Gloucestershire;
- An update on the LGR policy position of GCC's new Cabinet (i.e. to be agnostic and evidence-led in considering both a one unitary and two unitary model); and
- The timetable and key processes underway.

A total of 41 meetings were held. Many of the meetings, particularly those involving Gloucestershire associations, were attended by multiple attendees. Some stakeholders chose to write to us after the meeting setting out their views. Where consent has been obtained, this correspondence is appended.

## Analysis of responses – key themes

The stakeholder discussions have been synthesised and anonymised. Four key themes, together with short quotations, are set out in the table below:

### Theme 1: Structural options

There was a preference amongst stakeholders for a single county unitary model. This was described by one as the *"only workable solution"*. Further comments included that two unitary authorities would *"create economic chaos and a social divide"*, whereas a single unitary would *"open up opportunities, creating aspiration"*.

Creating two unitary authorities was referred to as *"risky"*, potentially resulting in *"confusion, disruption and duplication"* and creating *"barriers and bureaucracy where it isn't needed".*

Further comments included that a two unitary model would *"exacerbate existing disparities, particularly in rural western areas such as the Forest of Dean"* and *"create greater division over time, due to the further potential different political leadership".*

Concerns were expressed that *"job losse*s", *"delay and disruption in services"* and *"loss of local identity"* would follow as a result of a two-unitary solution.

Some stakeholders supported a two-unitary model for its targeted benefits. One noted potential *"savings of £4–6 million annually"*, and argued that the West would not be disadvantaged, citing evidence of *"affluent people moving to the Forest of Dean"*.

Stakeholders that supported the two unitary model emphasised its potential to deliver more localised and responsive governance. As one stakeholder observed, *"Splitting the county would enable each authority to focus on the*

*priorities unique to their communities, providing services that truly reflect local needs."* Another stakeholder remarked, *"With two unitaries, there's an opportunity for healthy competition, driving innovation and ensuring better value for our residents."*

An education leader commented that a two unitary model would *"lead to a long period of protracted negotiation and uncertainty"* and *"make the delivery of public services more challenging and not achieve the same economies of scale"*.

Special school headteachers felt that a two unitary model would *"make it even more challenging to place all the children who require specialist provision in an appropriate setting – sufficiency is already one of the key barriers".*

Stakeholders from the adult social care sector raised a concern about continuity of care under a two unitary model with one stakeholder feeling that, *"waiting times for adult social care services would increase."*

## Theme 2: Local identity

There was widespread support for a stronger neighbourhood approach and a place model to drive increased engagement, with repeated calls for *"co-design"* and consultation informing boundaries.

Faith and voluntary leaders highlighted that *"relationship is at the heart of what it means to be human,"* urging that *"an emphasis on neighbourhood-level engagement and the creation of place-based structures"* should underpin reform.

## Theme 3: Devolution/strategic partnerships

Some stakeholders felt that West of England Combined Authority (WECA), based on patterns of economic activity and travel, was the right devolution partner. However, there was also support for considering broader Devolution models (e.g., three counties) to maximise economic opportunities and regional collaboration.

Some also saw merit in partnerships with Herefordshire / Worcestershire, especially for sectors like cyber and agri-tech. However, there was also concern that Devolution would result in "*loss of local voice"* and *"funding competition*".

## Theme 4: Finances and implementation

A stakeholder stated that analysis shows *that "single unitary models incur lower transition and ongoing costs"* and *"clear benefits in annual gross savings, payback period and net savings".*

Business groups felt that *"the two unitary model would create confusion and lack identity outside of the county. They also felt that it would weaken our ability to promote the place for investment and create an artificial economic split"*.

Stakeholders mentioned the benefits of simplification, cost savings, and better use of resources under a single unitary authority.

A risk highlighted was the potential for *"paralysis in any of the seven existing authorities, during the period of change/implementation and public sector realignment"* and whether *"the anticipated savings being promoted in the LGR take into account the investment required to create the best countywide service departments"*.

There was also concern over central government interference potentially impacting coordinated implementation.

## Stakeholder Meetings

Engagement took place with the following organisations and individuals:

| Name | Organisation | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Alistair Russell | Laing-Russell | Business Membership Group Member |
| Sam Holliday | Federation of Small Businesses | Representing 4,000 small business members in Gloucestershire |
| Helen Bojaniwska, Chair | Gloucestershire Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) | |
| Mark Gale, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Gateway Trust | |
| Matt Lennard, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire VCS Alliance | On behalf of VCSE Strategic Partnership and Integrated Locality Partnership representatives in Gloucestershire. Eight organisations represented in meeting |
| Barbara Piranty, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) | |
| Simon Pickering, Chair | Energy Business Group | 14 individuals in meeting representing different |

| Name | Organisation | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | | businesses and other organisations |
| | Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers | Numerous attendees |
| | Federation of Principals – Further Education and Higher Education | Numerous attendees |
| | Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers | Numerous attendees |
| | Gloucestershire Association of Secondary School Leaders | Numerous attendees |
| Francesca Inman | Chief Executive, Cheltenham Business Improvement District | |
| Andy Bates, Chief Financial Officer | Gloucestershire College | |
| Robert Nettleton, Chief Executive & Martyn Blackman, Chief Investment Officer | Bromford Housing | |
| Ruth Dooley, Partner | Hazelwoods LLP | |
| Anonymised | CyNam | |
| Rupert Waters | Social Value Gloucestershire | |
| Simon Carey, Managing Director | Barnwood Construction | |
| | Northrop Gumman | Name not shared for security reasons |
| Rob Stemp | Deepminds Ltd | |
| Bishop Rachel Treweek | Bishop of Gloucester | Joined by senior clergy including Deans of the Diocese |
| Michael Ratcliffe | MR Insurance Services & Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce | |
| | Adults Collaborative Board | A group of people with lived experience of adult social care |
| | Gloucestershire Care Providers Association | GCPA Board Members:<br>• Cathy Andrews<br>• Chris Atkins |

| Name | Organisation | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Claire Hopkins<br>• Della Gilby<br>• Josh Isaac<br><br>GCPA Staff:<br><br>• Pip Wilson<br>• Riki Moody |
| Sarah Bell-Hartley | Barclays Bank | |
| David Goodall | FW Capital | |
| Suzanne Hall-Gibbins, Angela Edwards | C2S Ltd | Business membership organisation |
| Chris Farr, Regional Adviser (South West), | Country Land and Business Association (CLA) | |
| Michael Jones, Warden | The Honourable Company of Gloucestershire | |
| | Construction and Infrastructure Business Group | Numerous attendees |
| Chris Haine, (Chief Executive), Kerrin Wilkinson (Strategic Support Officer) | Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) | |
| | Cyber Tech Business Group | Numerous attendees |
| Ruth Greenwood (OPCC Chief Officer), Chris Nelson, (PCC), Maggie Blyth, Chief Constable | Gloucestershire OPCC, Gloucestershire Constabulary | |
| Sarah Truelove (CEO), Dame Gill Morgan (Chair) | Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board | |
| Phil Smith, Chief Executive | Business West | |
| Matt Bishop MP, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, Alex McIntyre MP, Simon Opher MP, Cameron Thomas MP, Max Wilkinson MP, Roz Savage MP | Gloucestershire Members of Parliament | |

## Written responses

Some stakeholders, listed below, chose to provide further feedback via email or letter. Their responses, together with any other organisation or association who chose to write to GCC, are included below:

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Matt Lennard, Chief Executive | On behalf of VCSE Strategic Partnership and ILP Representatives in Gloucestershire |
| Maggie Blyth, Chief Constable | Gloucestershire Constabulary |
| Stephen Limbrick, Chair on behalf of the group | Construction and Infrastructure Business Group |
| Fran Inman, Chief Executive | Cheltenham BID |
| Bishop Rachel Treweek | Diocese of Gloucester |
| Gill Blackwell, Chair | Hucclecote Parish Council |
| Gloucestershire FE Colleges (Federation of Principals) | Gloucestershire College, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, Cirencester College, Hartpury College and University, National Star College |
| Hollie Wakefield | CyNam and Cyber Tech Business Group Member |
| Kerry Cunningham, Co-chair | Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH) |
| Barbara Piranty, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) |
| Steve Rudd, Associate Director of Strategy and Transformation and Gloucester GP | Gloucestershire GP Collaborative (GDOC) |
| Sarah Truelove, Chief Executive | Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board |

## Response from VCSE sector

**Date:** 05/08/2025
**From:** VCSE Strategic Partnership and ILP Representatives in Gloucestershire
**To:** Siobhan Farmer and Alex Khaldi

Firstly, we would like to thank Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) for engaging meaningfully with the VCSE sector throughout this process. We have welcomed the opportunity to take part in open and constructive dialogue about the future of local government in our county.

As representatives of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, we recognise the scale and significance of this reorganisation. The decisions taken will shape how communities are supported and how services are delivered for many years to come. It is therefore vital that the voice of the VCSE is heard and that the implications for our sector, our communities, and the wider population are carefully considered.

One of Gloucestershire's longstanding strengths lies in its coterminous structure. This alignment has enabled strong partnership working, effective strategic planning, and efficient use of resources across the public and VCSE sectors. A move away from this model, by dividing the county into two separate unitary authorities, would risk undermining these strengths. For the VCSE sector, the consequences could include duplicated relationship management, more complex and fragmented commissioning and monitoring processes, and reduced capacity for coordinated delivery at scale. These risks carry both financial and operational costs, particularly for organisations already operating under significant pressure.

We are also particularly concerned about the impact of structural changes on smaller, place-based VCSE organisations. Many of these groups are deeply rooted in specific districts and neighbourhoods and play a critical role in supporting their communities. Splitting the county into two unitary authorities could dilute the visibility and influence of such organisations. In contrast, a single countywide unitary, if designed with strong local engagement in mind, offers a more stable platform for inclusive, locally responsive governance. It would allow for consistent commissioning approaches, clearer points of contact, and reduced administrative complexity, ensuring that smaller groups are not required to navigate multiple, potentially inconsistent systems.

We understand that the move to a unitary structure is part of a broader national policy direction, as outlined in the 2024 English Devolution White Paper and reiterated in the June 2025 *Local Government Reorganisation: Summary of Feedback on Interim Plans*. These documents emphasise the importance of clear rationale in decision-making, particularly where population thresholds are concerned. However, we do not believe the case for splitting Gloucestershire into two unitaries

has been sufficiently made. There is currently no robust evidence that such a model would improve outcomes for residents or offer any advantage to the VCSE sector.

On the contrary, analysis from PricewaterhouseCoopers suggests that single unitary models incur lower transition and ongoing costs compared to two-unitary models. Furthermore, Gloucestershire's unique geography and the clustered distribution of employment, housing, and inequalities suggest that a single structure would be better placed to support equitable development. There is a real risk that a split would exacerbate existing disparities, particularly in rural western areas such as the Forest of Dean and reduce the strategic capacity of each authority to respond to future challenges.

We appreciate the ongoing engagement from GCC officers and the commitment to working with the VCSE. Our shared ambition is for a Gloucestershire where all communities thrive, inequality is actively addressed, and services are delivered efficiently, equitably, and in partnership with the people and organisations who know their communities best.

We believe that a single unitary authority offers the clearest path toward this vision by preserving the strengths of our current system while enabling more joined-up and responsive governance.

We look forward to continuing this important conversation and to working together to co-produce a future that works for everyone in Gloucestershire.

**Signed,**
Matt Lennard
CEO, Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance
*On behalf of the VCSE Strategic Partnership and ILP Representatives*

Response from Gloucestershire Constabulary

**Gloucestershire Constabulary**
Police Headquarters
No.1 Waterwells, Waterwells Drive
Quedgeley, Gloucester. GL2 2AN
**www.gloucestershire.police.uk**

Jo Walker

Chief Executive

Gloucestershire County council

Shire Hall

Gloucester

Thursday 7th August 2025

Dear Jo,

I am writing to congratulate you on behalf of Gloucestershire Constabulary on your recent Ofsted inspection of your Children's Services. This is a tremendous achievement and a complete acknowledgement of the work that Ann and your wider leadership team have done to drive through improvements for children in Gloucestershire.

I know that my chief officer group, led by our ACC for Crime, Rich Ocone, are absolutely clear that working with and supporting you in keeping children safe is a top priority for Gloucestershire Constabulary. I am reassured that you and I have already met as Lead Safeguarding Partners to outline the key areas in which we will work together, and I am supportive of our joint plans for the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Clearly, from our perspective it is vital that policing, alongside the local authority and health service fully discharge our joint statutory safeguarding duties and you have our full chief officer group support.

There are a couple of areas I thought it may be worth reinforcing as we move forward.

**Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) and MASH**

Firstly, I am aware that Rich will continue to work with Ann in overseeing the detail of evolving multi agency safeguarding arrangements and will continue to work with Ann and partners to make sure these are successful. We are keen to help shape these, and I know Rich and Ann will update us accordingly. We can also keep close in our CEO roles so we can create the most effective and coordinated response to child protection concerns, with improved communication and information sharing and putting children's needs and interests at the heart of our joint MASA. From our

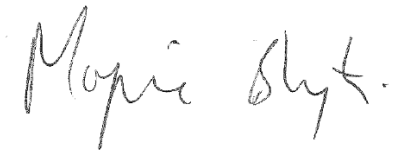
perspective our one MASH enables one front door for our respective workforce to ensure the right assessment, identification of risk and support for children requiring intervention or protection happens swiftly and robustly- we are keen to maintain one MASH to ensure consistency and coordination across the partnership, and swift assessments to respond to all children in need/requiring protection. I know that as you and colleagues work through your plans for local government and devolution you will be considering different options for the local authority. From a policing perspective, as PCC Chris Nelson and I reinforced when we met you and Cllr Lisa Spivey, we much prefer the positioning of one unitary authority so we can maintain and improve our coordination of vital capability, such as the MASH. Moreover, as we increase our analysis of our joint responses for children at risk of CSEA, criminal exploitation, going missing and the ever-increasing harm of online threat, we know that a focus on coordination, pooling of resources, identification of specialist capability and careful and swift risk assessment will be key. We are keen to ensure that we are not in a position where we dilute our current MASH capability but build on it together as a crucial front door to a range of services across the County, including police investigation and resource where required.

Secondly, we are really keen to ensure that our front-line workforce continues to receive the latest training and CPD on the threats facing children in our County. I am pleased that we have identified the joint training day on CSEA in February 2026 and we are also keen to develop our approach to responding to online harm, perhaps working with wider colleagues in CT policing and wider law enforcement. I know there are early meetings to take this forward already.

Finally, we will be disseminating our improvements since our national child protection inspection undertaken in December 2024 – we are pleased that we are making progress and would be keen to share this with you over the next month.

I look forward to working with you,

Kind regards,



**Maggie Blyth, KPM MA, BA (Hons)**
**255558**
**T/Chief Constable**
Gloucestershire Constabulary
Police Headquarters | No. 1 Waterwells | Quedgeley | GL2 2AN
Office – 01452 752313
www.gloucestershire.police.uk | X page | Facebook page

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

Response from Business Groups

**For the kind attention of David Owen, Director of Economy and Environment, GCC**

**Ref: Responses from the Construction and Infrastructure Business Group on the Local Government Re-organisation and Devolution plans.**

**Date: 4th August 2025**

**LGR – Have you a preferred model?**

- Our preference is the Single County Unitary Option.
- This should help to enable and create planned and managed strategic, sustainable growth and social regeneration throughout the county.
- It should ensure a whole county approach which does not disadvantage businesses in rural areas or urban hubs that continue to need long term investment and regeneration solutions
- This option meets the Government's size criteria

**Devolution – Have you a preferred geography?**

- Our preference is for Gloucestershire to be a standalone, single authority.
- If we are required to combine with another authority as part of Devolution, then we consider that South Gloucestershire has more established and relevant links with important business sectors in Gloucestershire including: - Defence, Cyber, Advanced Manufacturing, Creative, Education and Sustainable Energy.

**What are the big economic opportunities from change?**

- Planned strategic and sustainable growth.
- An opportunity to create centralised exemplar departments for key services e.g. A Planning / Sustainable Environmental Growth Team. This should be a new team with strong leadership and resources combining: - Planning, Highways (building on their delivery capacity), Planning Legals, mains Services, Water, flooding etc., working around solutions to, and promotion of, a Countywide Strategic Plan for economic regeneration and development (already in its infancy). This could be an exemplar department providing a proactive, quality and effective service across the whole of the county in a balanced, joined up and integrated manner.
- A Utilities Czar could be a new role focusing on coordination and cooperation between all parties over challenging needs and requirements of development and infrastructure, helping to minimise log jams and delays across the county. This would also help to avoid strategic, countywide, economic planning needs being affected by individual district priorities and boundaries e.g. J10 and Cyber Park.It is accepted that to create such a department and

service will require new investment in new professional skills and resources, however, the benefits are anticipated to be considerable in assisting sustainable growth and regeneration for Gloucestershire.

- It is hoped that the anticipated savings being promoted in the LGR take into account the investment required to create the best countywide service departments as the one broadly outlined above.

**What are the economic threats from change?**

- It is anticipated that there will be job losses (especially at senior level) to achieve LGR.
- In the short term there is likely to be delay and disruption seen in services, however, it is anticipated that these issues will be outweighed by the long-term benefits.
- Lack of investment in the right personnel and resources in the detailed planning, establishment and management of new operational service structures will impact on the effective change and value of LGR. This is essential for their success.
- Risk of reduction in Government funding to the county following savings promoted in LGR.

Response from Cheltenham Business Improvement District

**From:** Fran Inman
**Date:** Thursday, 7 August 2025 at 11:16
**To:** OWEN, David
**Subject:** Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

Good morning David,

Please see below how devolution and local government reorganisation could provide both pros and cons for Cheltenham Business Improvement District:

**Key Threats to the BID from Devolution**

- Loss of local voice: A larger devolved authority may centralise decisions, weakening Cheltenham's influence.
- Funding competition: Risk of resources being directed to bigger centres.
- Reduced business engagement: Complexity and distance from decision-making may disengage levy payers.
- Policy misalignment: Devolved priorities may not reflect Cheltenham's business needs or placemaking ambitions.

**Opportunities for Cheltenham**

- Access to greater funding: For transport, regeneration, and skills development.
- Stronger strategic voice: If BIDs are embedded in governance structures as a key stakeholder, we can influence regional economic strategy.
- Joined-up planning: Opportunity to align infrastructure, town centre growth, and skills strategies.

2. Cheltenham as a hub: A chance to position Cheltenham as a key economic and cultural centre within a devolved geography.

Cheltenham BID does not take a position on the political decision of whether devolution or LGR should happen. However, if change does occur, we believe the voice of Cheltenham's businesses must be represented, local decision-making should be protected, and opportunities for investment in our town centre should be maximised.

Always happy to discuss further.

Best wishes,
Fran

**Francesca Inman**

**Chief Executive**

Response from Diocese of Gloucester

The Rt Revd Rachel Treweek
Lord Bishop of
Gloucester & Anglican
Bishop for HM Prisons
The Bishop's
Office 2 College Green,
Gloucester, GL1 2LR
bgloucester@glosdioc.org.uk
Tel: 01452 835511

+RG/AODP
29 July 2025

Siobhan Farmer
Director of Public Health
Gloucestershire County Council
Shire Hall
Westgate
Street
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

Dear Siobhan

**Reflections following our recent meeting on Local Government Reform**

Thank you again for meeting with the Bishop's Staff Team on 17 July 2025 to explore the implications of the proposed Local Government Reform for Gloucestershire. We appreciated the opportunity to contribute to your thinking at this formative stage and to reflect together on both the risks and opportunities for our communities.
As you noted, the shift to a unitary authority model raises complex questions of identity, representation, and place.

Our discussion focused heavily on the importance of identity. Gloucestershire as a whole lacks a single, cohesive identity. Many communities are orientated more towards external centres - Bristol, Birmingham, London, and even Wales—than towards a unifying county centre. This is reflected in regional media coverage, patterns of travel, and informal networks. Interestingly, many communities feel as if they are 'on the edge' (e.g. bordering Oxford, Wales etc).

As a diocese (covering an area from just south of Stratford upon Avon to just north of Bristol-the old ceremonial county) we have two Archdeaconries (Gloucester and Cheltenham), each with a number of what we call deaneries (clusters of parishes). The Gloucester deaneries are Gloucester City, Stroud, Forest, Wotton and Severn Vale; and the Cheltenham deaneries are Cheltenham, North Cotswolds, Tewkesbury and Winchcombe, and Cirencester.

About 10 years ago we did an analysis of the social context, and Benjamin Preece Smith (Diocesan Secretary) would be very willing to share that with you. One of the things we observed is three key areas in the county: Forest, Vale and Hill. Neither Cheltenham or Gloucester are big enough as single entities and are quite insular settlements. In Gloucestershire, a number of settlements are quite old, and several of the market towns act as hubs for the villages and surrounding areas e.g. Northleach/Moreton-in-Marsh,

Stow and Chipping Campden.

Each of the 42 dioceses in the church of England are grouped into regions. This diocese is formally in the SW region but we have removed ourselves to the West Midlands region as we have far more in common with Worcestershire and Herefordshire (not least regarding events such as the Three Counties Show and the Three Choirs Festival). We are curious about how connections with these counties are being considered in proposals.

Gloucestershire is actually relatively small compared to many large cities and counties, and we are concerned that the discussion is around dividing what is already small into something even smaller. What does this mean in terms of critical mass for the University, our schools etc? Dividing the county into east and west could weaken rather than strengthen local governance and complicate partnerships—particularly in areas such as education and health, where scale and consistency matter.

When we appoint new clergy to the diocese we always talk about the diocese as being large enough to be well-resourced and small enough that we know each other. In all of your discussions, we would want to keep an emphasis on relationship, which is something that is not emphasised enough in political thinking, new housing, governance and policies etc. As Christians, we believe that relationship is at the heart of what it means to be human and to be made in the image of God, and we believe that people of different faiths and of no faith would recognise the fact that, in the UK, we have diminished the importance of relationship across so much of our society. We would want you to be asking questions about relationship and community. Thus, we strongly support your emphasis on neighbourhood-level engagement and the creation of place-based structures that reflect where people actually live and relate. This is what we endeavour to live as a diocese, encouraging local community engagement.

We were encouraged to hear that any neighbourhood model will be co-designed and that consultation will inform how boundaries are drawn. We would welcome the opportunity to support that work and would be glad to contribute parish and deanery mapping to help build a fuller picture of local networks.

In all of this, there are also questions about social identity. There is undoubtedly much greater diversity in Gloucestershire than some people wish to acknowledge, not least regarding social background and racial diversity. In areas which are often characterised as middle-class and affluent, there are many pockets of hardship, and much greater inequality than many people want to recognise. I also believe we have to be asking the hard questions about why young people choose not to come back to Gloucestershire once they have left home.

Finally, it was good to acknowledge that, in all these discussions, we are certainly not saying that the structures we currently have work really well. Some district councils are performing better than others, and we note that authority and influence are pretty poor in other areas. For example, we would certainly want to acknowledge that the city centre in Gloucester has changed hugely, and no one seems to have a grip on owning it or bringing about change.

Having said that, we did also comment on the fact that Gloucestershire punches above its weight when it comes to charities, voluntary organisations and the third sector. How will proposed changes affect the activity of civil society?

Finally, we were glad to note the commitment to continued engagement and consultation.

Thank you again for your time and partnership. Please do keep us informed as the process develops - we would be very glad to remain part of the conversation.

Yours sincerely.



Copy to:

Benjamin Preece-Smith (Diocesan Secretary)

Lucy Taylor (Head of Diocesan Comms & Engagement & Deputy Diocesan Secretary)

gloucester.anglican.org

01452 835511 bgloucester@glosdioc.org.uk

@BishGloucester /Diocese.of.Gloucester Diocese of Gloucester

Bishop's Office | 2 College Green | Gloucester | GL1 2LR

Registered in England: 162165. Registered Office: Gloucester Diocesan Board of Finance, Church House, College Green, Gloucester, GL1 2LY. Registered Charity Number: 251234.

Response from Gloucestershire Further Education Colleges

Campus,
Llanthony
Rd
Gloucester
GL2 5JQ
*0345 155 2020*

29th July 2025

To whom it may concern

**Response from the Gloucestershire Further Education Colleges to Unitary Authority Proposals for Gloucestershire**

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discussion around local government reform in Gloucestershire. Further education (FE) colleges play a central role in delivering technical and professional education, improving social mobility, and addressing the region's skills needs. Whilst we will ultimately work proactively with whichever model is adopted, we strongly favour the creation of a single all-county unitary authority. This model offers the most coherent, equitable and strategic approach to supporting learners, employers, and the county's economic development.

We believe that option has the following advantages:

- Strategic Alignment Across the County - A single authority enables a joined-up approach to economic development, transport, housing, and education -all of which are essential to integrated skills planning.
- Simplified Relationships - Colleges currently operate county-wide, working with multiple stakeholders and systems. A single point of engagement would reduce duplication, streamline planning, and improve accountability.
- Efficient Commissioning and Funding - Fragmentation risks are likely to increase commissioning costs, with more overhead and bureaucracy -meaning less funding reaches the learner. A single authority offers economies of scale and consistent commissioning decisions.
- Equitable and Impact-Led Resource Allocation - A county-wide authority is better positioned to allocate capital and revenue funding where it delivers the greatest impact for learners and employers, not simply within rigid administrative boundaries.

- Unified Voice in Devolution and Investment - A single authority would be a stronger and more coherent partner in any future devolution deals or combined authority arrangements. This is essential to secure fair access to devolved budgets and influence key strategic decisions.

Whether through an East/West division or a "Greater Gloucester" configuration, we have significant concerns about the impact of splitting Gloucestershire into two unitary authorities. Some of us already have experience or working across multiple local government areas and the attendant administrative and strategic consequences which include:

- Multiple EHCP and Transition Pathways - Working with multiple local authorities risks increasing inconsistent approaches to EHCPs, transition planning, SEND funding, and placement decisions - adding complexity and creating inequity for vulnerable learners.
- Diverging Priorities and Governance - having to align to multiple sets of political priorities, governance structures, and reporting processes. This reduces clarity for the communities we serve and adds pressure to strategic and operational planning.
- Fragmented Transport, Careers and Support Services - Inconsistent approaches to transport policy, travel subsidies, and wraparound support (e.g. mental health, careers advice) can undermine participation and progression -especially for rural and disadvantaged learners.
- Risk of Geographic Ring-Fencing of Funding - If future funding (including capital) becomes restricted to specific local authority areas, this creates distortions in investment decisions and reduces the ability to deliver provision where it is most needed - especially where college catchments span boundaries.
- Devolution Misalignment - There is a risk that different parts of Gloucestershire could become aligned to different combined authorities or mayoral areas. This would fragment influence, reduce coherence, and complicate FE's ability to engage with regional priorities.

In conclusion, based on our experience and the operational realities of FE delivery, we believe that the single all-county unitary model represents the best option; and have reservations about any structure that splits the county and introduces duplication, inconsistency, or competition for resources.

We look forward to engaging further as proposals develop.
Signed on behalf of:

Gloucestershire **College, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, Cirencester College, Hartpury College and University, National Star**

Response from Hucclecote Parish Council

**HUCCLECOTE PARISH COUNCIL**

Ms Jo Walker
Chief Executive
Gloucestershire County
Council Shire Hall
Westgate Street
Gloucester
GLI 2TJ

13th August 2025

Dear Ms Walker

Hucclecote Parish Council discussed the recent Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) engagement exercise that is being undertaken at its 28 July meeting, and we could not understand why the survey did not clearly ask which of the three current LGR options we preferred.

As we could not state our preference, we felt we had to set out why we strongly support the single countywide unitary option.

- It is likely to result in the most cost effective and efficient delivery of services.
- It will also provide the opportunity for early Community Governance Reviews would enable the uniting of fractured communities to be considered: -
    - The majority of the existing Hucclecote Parish within Tewkesbury and the remainder ofHucclecote currently within the City of Gloucester.
    - The creation of a single parish to cover Coopers Edge, which currently straddles the border between Tewkesbury Borough and Stroud and is split between three parish councils.

It should also be noted that the single unitary option is also supported by the County Councillor for the Brockworth Division, as well as the Borough Councillors for the Churchdown Brookfield and Hucclecote Ward.

We believe the suggested two unitary split of East and West Gloucestershire would permanently re-enforce the current difficult local boundaries for local communities.

We therefore seek your assurance that you will actively advocate for a single unitary council for the county.

Yours sincerely



Gill Blackwell
Chair of Hucclecote Parish Council

CC:
Cllr Lisa Spivey, County Council Leader
Alistair Cunningham. CEO Tewkesbury Borough Council Cllr Richard Stanley, Tewkesbury Borough Leader
Jon McGinty, MD of Gloucester City Council
Jeremy Hilton, Gloucester City Leader
Alex McIntryre, MP Gloucester Cameron Thomas, MP Tewkesbury Max Wilkinson, MP Cheltenham
Matt Bishop, MP Forest of Dean Dr Simon Opher, MP Stroud
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, MP North Cotswold

Response from Cyber Tech Group

**From:**
**Sent:** 07 August 2025 12:37

**To:** CAMPBELL, Karen
**Cc:** WOODHOUSE, Paul
**Subject:** Re: Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

Hello Karen,

Thank you for the note. Please find my feedback below.

Whilst I do not have a deep understanding of the implications of selecting a single unitary authority, or two unitary authorities, or the Greater Gloucester model, my preferred model would be a single unitary authority. There are ovbious benefits like cost savings and efficiencies, alongside the ability to develop a strong narrative and plan for the whole of Gloucestershire which competes on a national and international level. I am not sure how much I buy into a couple of arguments specifically put forward about the east/west model. Specifically:

1. Whether the average person understands the role of their local councillor (especially the younger population), how often they utilise their local councillor and their MP, and whether a person identifies with their ward, their town/city, or their county. It would be interested to know what the turnout of the population voting in the local elections versus the general election in the 6 authorities, as this would likely show how much of the population would be affected by less localisation.
2. Forest of Dean being put into the clean energy cluster - they have huge advanced manufacturing capability and so would surely align more with the defence and advanced manufacturing organisations in Tewkesbury for example
3. Cotswolds in the secure tech cluster - not sure what capability exists in this authority for this rationale

Regarding devolution, preference seems to be WECA as government has made it clear funding will be funnelled through mayoral authorities, yet there is a slight concern that Gloucestershire's tech cluster will be overshadowed by Bristol and Bath, and the funding they have already received. If mayoral elections could be held for the Herefordshire/Worcestershire option, I would welcome more information on Worcestershire and Herefordshire's key sectors to think about alignment. There is a defence alignment that I am aware of already, for example.

The main economic opportunity I see is funding, and how the accessibility of this funding will be impacted by the option we choose.

The main threat I see is the disparity in the services and the costs associated with them provided by each Council, and how future service provision and associated costs will be calculated, as this is what will impact the average person the most. E.g.

Cheltenham and Gloucestershire's licensing fees are more expensive than the other 4 authorities, and Stroud has the highest council tax rate in the county. I also mentioned above about competing for funding with other established strategic authorities and the places within them.

Thank you,

Member of Cyber Tech Group – Name withheld for security reasons

Response from Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH)

Director for
Education
Gloucestershire
County Council
Shire Hall,

Westgate
St
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

*Sent by email to Kirsten Harrison cc: Ann James*

16.07.25

Dear Kirsten

Thank you so much for the meeting on Thursday 10.07.25 and for introducing us to the potential change for Gloucestershire.

As Co-Chair of Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH), on behalf of the Executive, I am writing to you in your capacity as Director of Education, to set out our views on this proposal.

We would have waited until the GAPH Executive Meeting in September, which you will attend, however, as you explained in your presentation, you have a meeting on 17th July 2025, with the Chief Executives group and we therefore wanted to make our position clear on this very important issue for Gloucestershire as a whole and in particular the Education sector, for which the District Councils have no jurisdiction, nor responsibility.

The Government Criteria for Change:

- *Establish a single tier for the whole of the county area*
- *The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand shocks (aim for 500k population or more)*
- *High quality public services with specific mention of 'crucial' services (children's, SEND, homelessness)*
- *How devolution will be unlocked*
- *Enabling stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment*

As conveyed by the unanimous views of the members of GAPH Executive, with representation from each Partnership, we hold the view that one, single tier, Unitary

Authority is the only workable solution for Gloucestershire, with reasons including the following:

- Children's Services and the Education sector's current working model (countywide) for statutory duties (for example: Admissions, EHCPs and timely access to support for children with SEND, Hospital Education, Social Care) would need to be split in an East/West model, creating potential difference and division over time, due to the further potential different political leadership.
- How would the Designated Schools Grant this be apportioned fairly and equitably, with schools located as they are geographically in an East/West model?
- The potential costs of splitting the single authority responsibilities of Children's Services- Education into two authorities will lead to a long period of protracted negotiation and uncertainty. You cited Northamptonshire as an example of disaggregation, which, having created two Authorities in 2018, only in August 2024 finally came to agreement over the financial settlement.
- The standard for a Unitary Authority is 500,000. The current county size is 650,000. Creating East and West would make those two Authorities smaller than the proposed standard size, which would making the delivery of public services more challenging and not achieve the same economies of scale that a single Unitary Authority would make, creating higher overall vulnerability to 'shocks'.
- How would the current countywide High Needs debt be apportioned fairly, in a two-tier system?
- Forming two Authorities from one, would create an additional border for the county and result in working an 'out of county' services model, for services which sit within the same postcode.
- The geography of schools means that schools working in Partnerships, Federations and/or in Gloucestershire MATS could find themselves working with two different Authorities, making effective and efficient running of these settings more challenging.

In your meeting with the Chief Executive Group, we are seeking written reassurance that you and Ann James, as our representatives, advocate strongly the view of GAPH and our position that a single county Unitary Authority is the only workable solution to this Government Strategy.

Yours sincerely,



Kerry Cunningham
Co-Chair of GAPH and Executive Headteacher of The Longlevens Primary Federation

Response from GRCC

GRCC Community Action in Gloucestershire

## Formal Feedback from GRCC
## Local Government Reorganisation County Options

There is an overwhelming need for the whole process of Local Government Reorganisation to be properly managed due to the risk of becoming a major distraction, take longer to implement, and cost significantly more to achieve meaningful rationalisation.

GRCC has a role in supporting Parish and Town Councils, whose concern is that this first tier of government will get either bypassed or forgotten or, worse still, be required to take on, possibly by default, delivery of local services without the wherewithal, especially financial, to ensure continued, viable service delivery.

The concept of Local Neighbourhoods, with populations of between 20- 50,000 is an interesting one, possibly comparable with the old Rural District Councils. However, there are currently major questions which remain unanswered:

- How would the Local Neighbourhoods be configured?
- Where would the local alignments be set?
- What responsibilities and powers would they have?
- What relationships would they have with the upper tier?

Within these higher population configurations, smaller communities, particularly those situated on the periphery of the county, perceive a risk of being subsumed into larger clusters with which they perhaps share neither natural connections nor established relationships. More concerning still is the fear of being entirely overlooked. Such communities frequently express apprehension that their perspectives will be marginalised, leaving them with limited or no opportunity to have their voices acknowledged or meaningfully heard

GRCC is in a position to support local communities in the transition to new models of local government and enable them to step in to help provide local services. Most of these services are currently delivered by District Councils which may otherwise struggle, for example: management of allotments, playing fields and open spaces; maintenance of highway verges; management of public toilets etc.

It is noticeable that there is no GCC cabinet member with a specific remit / portfolio for rural. Gloucestershire is the 33rd most rural authority in terms of its geographic area.

It is in the top 20% of authorities in terms of rurality, and 87.5% of its area is classified as rural, therefore a specific rural focus would be beneficial. We would of course be happy to support this work as rural specialists.

A question that needs to be answered also is whether Devolution would come with a recalculation of funding for Gloucestershire.

## Options Appraisal

**Single Unitary Authority**

A single unitary authority meets government criteria in terms of size, will be more cost effective, and will eliminate the confusion of the current fragmented county and district council system.

It also preserves 'Brand Gloucestershire' – a clear identity which is stronger with all constituent towns and parishes taken together, speaking with one voice on a regional and national level. 'Brand Gloucestershire' is more marketable as a single countywide authority. It would provide a strong, cohesive entity which would play its full part in the operation of any upper tier Strategic Authority, irrespective of whether Gloucestershire is combined with WECA or with Herefordshire / Worcestershire.

The single unitary option will also provide an opportunity to create strong community hubs to address local matters, supporting small communities.

The single unitary option makes eminent sense and is the only option which would achieve the Government's stated objectives, with the following benefits:

- With a population of circa 652,000 it would meet the Government's aspiration for Councils to have a population of over 500,000. One unitary authority would be a considerable size, but would mirror the county's current footprint.
- The current three tier authority model is outdated and creates dissention between the differing tiers, especially over planning, waste management, etc., as well as causing confusion for communities as to 'who does what'. The single unitary is simpler, saving the most amount of money, and communities already know this governance model.
- It has the potential to achieve significant operational and financial savings by:
    - removing duplication of service delivery, e.g., planning, waste collection / disposal, etc.;
    - rationalising property, particularly office accommodation;
    - securing economy of scale benefits generally
- It has the potential to:

  - strengthen the County's voice at national and regional levels;
  - achieve effective strategic alliances with Health, Police, Highways;
  - provide more attractive career pathways for staff to progress, which will in turn help recruitment and retention;
  - enable proper countywide strategic thinking and planning to take place, especially in terms of:
    - land use disposition;
    - new housing allocations;
    - proper forward planning;
    - development of creative economic models to enhance growth and employment;
    - flood management
- It removes confusion in the minds of the general public and could provide opportunities to establish genuine 'One Stop Shop' Local Service Delivery points around the county
- From the perspective of the rural communities we serve and smaller VCS organisations and groups we support, there is a real fear around loss of voice and loss of funding to support the most vulnerable

**East and West Option**

The only real benefit is the improvement on the current seven district and county council arrangement for most of the reasons set out above, albeit to a lesser extent due to there still being two councils operating within the geographic county area instead of one. It would also allow communities to keep a local identity, and not feel as if they are being swallowed up by the county.

If this option were to be pursued there would be an overwhelming case for not aligning it around the current District Council configuration because this would perpetuate, indeed exacerbate current boundary anomalies and tensions. Much of this is currently being played out in the case being made by Gloucester City Council to create a Greater Gloucester to overcome largely historical inconsistencies created in 1974 when Tewkesbury Borough Council in particular was established.

The major disadvantage of the two-council split model is that it could lead to the disaggregation of services currently delivered on a countywide basis by Gloucestershire County Council, such as Social Care, Education, Fire and Rescue, Highways Management, Libraries, County Farms, etc., into two separate organisations. It raises concerns around consistency and quality of care provision, such as mental health and social care services, where Gloucestershire County Council

has taken on responsibility for more of these services from Gloucestershire Health and Care Trust.

More boundaries add complexity for support and service delivery, contracting may be become a logistical nightmare, and ultimately it could result in fragmented and inequitable service provision across the county. This split of services into two organisations could be avoided by joint board or lead authority models being put into place, but this would largely defeat the object of adopting this option in the first place. This model would also exacerbate cross-border issues, especially in health provision, cause confusion for communities, and cause a wealth divide.

Overall, adoption of this model would be a major missed opportunity to create an organisation with identity and presence, and many of the benefits of a single council option would be significantly diluted or dissipated.

**General Issues**

### Affordable Housing delivery

Local Government Reorganisation offers both potential benefits and drawbacks in terms of affordable housing delivery. While the pros include greater clarity for residents, potentially more efficient and cost-effective service delivery due to larger scale, and easier strategic decision making, these must be balanced against a list of cons that might involve a key potential loss of local responsiveness, difficulties in achieving projected savings, and challenges in boundary alignment with functional economic areas.

Rural areas already face significant challenges in delivering affordable housing due to a combination of factors including: high house and land prices; area designation; relatively low wages and limited development opportunities. These issues are exacerbated by factors like second homes, short-term lets and restrictive planning policies.

Differing policies within the districts in terms of planning and allocation policies are also an issue. When we add that loss of “localness and clarity” that is essential in the delivery of truly affordable homes to those challenges, the difficulties faced by those in dire housing need in rural Gloucestershire become insurmountable. We have started to witness areas within rural Gloucestershire that are becoming gated, dying communities with unbalanced demographics, where socioeconomic development is stagnant. The reduction in the number of Local Registered Providers is becoming a real issue as more and more merge, with a significant and detrimental effect on the delivery of small numbers of homes in rural villages. However, Rural Affordable Housing is finally being recognised as a significant and important topic for everyone.

It is about much more than just building a house; it is actually the foundation of everything else in our society.

Affordable housing must become a KPI of every major sector, be they Public or Private, and this is especially true in rural areas such as Gloucestershire. Affordable Rural Housing delivery is crucial for a thriving economy and society, impacting heavily upon various industries and communities as well as public sector bodies such as health and education. This means that policies and initiatives, including Local Government Reorganisation, must consider the housing needs of rural regions. In the refresh of the Leadership Gloucestershire group, GRCC feels decision makers should seriously consider a place for planning. Having this level of expertise available to the group would enable efficient countywide strategic planning to take place in terms of housing, land use, and the economy.

As LGR emerges in Gloucestershire it is vital that there is a uniform and consistent approach from all sectors at all times. The more boundaries and borders there are, the more difficulties and costs faced by sectors such as Health, Education and the Police, and the delivery of Rural Affordable Housing becomes even more challenging. This at a time when all sectors need to be able to work coherently and seamlessly together in order to deliver sustainable, quality services that can also work together, forming strong partnerships.

One Health Authority, one Education Authority, one Police and Emergency Authority, one Planning Authority, and one Rural Affordable Housing organisation could mean faster, more efficient partnership-based delivery of affordable housing. Lack of affordable housing affects all areas including economic growth, social equity, health and wellbeing, education, hospitality and retail.

In conclusion, as a neutral, independent Voluntary Sector organisation and rural specialist whose role is to represent and serve the communities of Gloucestershire, we hope to have provided a balanced and constructive view/opinion of both options based on over a century of understanding and knowledge of the county, along with our multi-level connections and reach into those communities.

**August 2025**

## Response from GDOC (Gloucestershire's GP provider organisation)

Hi Alex,

We tested this with our GP Collaborative Summit today, comprising all of our Gloucestershire GP practices and Primary Care Networks. There was a clear majority decision from our practices, which has informed the response that I'm pleased to provide below:

Gloucestershire General Practice Collaborative, on behalf of our general practice providers across Gloucestershire, welcome the opportunity to comment on proposals for future local government structures in our county. Our primary objective in providing this feedback is ensuring that the health and care system best supports the delivery of high-quality, sustainable and integrated care for our population and the patients we serve on a daily basis.

We believe that a **single unitary authority for Gloucestershire** would bring clear benefits compared to establishing two smaller unitary authorities:

1. **Clearer Alignment with NHS Structures**
   - Gloucestershire is a clearly defined 'place' within the new Gloucestershire and BNSSG Integrated Care Board (ICB). Furthermore, our primary care structures are also aligned to our Gloucestershire footprint, such as our GP Collaborative, our Local Medical Committee (LMC) and our Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC). A single unitary authority would align with this geography, avoiding the duplication and fragmentation of relationships that two authorities would inevitably create.
   - This alignment would streamline joint planning for population health, prevention, and service delivery.

2. **Simplified Partnership Working**
   - General practice is engaging in system-level programmes, through our GP Collaborative, our Primary Care Networks, our Integrated Locality Partnerships and our ICB. Having one local government partner makes collaboration more straightforward, saving time and resources.
   - A two-unitary model would double the number of political, officer, and governance forums practices would need to engage with, stretching already limited leadership capacity in primary care.

3. **Consistency for Patients, Communities and Neighbourhoods**
   - A single authority provides residents with a more consistent offer for public health, social care and other services that directly affect health and wellbeing.
   - In contrast, a two-unitary model risks divergence of policy and provision, leading to inequities between communities and confusion for patients, potential boundaries in our recognised primary care networks and neighbourhoods and inequalities being exacerbated by two-unitary authorities with potentially quite divergent economic positions.

4. **Efficiency and Value for Money**
   - From a health system perspective, the fewer the boundaries, the less duplication in commissioning, contracting, and monitoring arrangements. This efficiency ultimately releases more resource for front-line services.
   - At a time when both the NHS and local government face severe financial pressures, avoiding duplication is essential.

5. **Stronger Strategic Voice**
   - A single Gloucestershire authority would be a more robust and influential partner when working with NHS England, regional bodies, and government departments on health and care issues.
   - It would reduce the risk of competing priorities or fragmented lobbying across different councils.

**Conclusion**

Gloucestershire General Practice Collaborative strongly favours a single unitary authority for the county. This model is most compatible with the way health services are organised now and also with the future plans for organisation, best supports effective partnership working, and minimises duplication. Most importantly, it provides the clearest and fairest route to improving outcomes for patients, communities and neighbourhoods across Gloucestershire.

With best wishes,

Steve

**Steve Rudd MBA** | Associate Director of Strategy and Transformation and Gloucestershire GP Collaborative Management Lead | G DOC LTD | Quayside House, Quay Street, Gloucester, GL1 2TZ | Mobile: 07795 685090 | Email: stephen.rudd@nhs.net



G DOC LTD

Registered Office: Quayside House, Quay Street, Gloucester GL1 2TZ

Registered in England and Wales, CRN 08230041

## Response from Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB)

One Gloucestershire
Transforming Care, Transforming Communities

NHS Gloucestershire

2nd October 2025

NHS Gloucestershire
Shire Hall
Westgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

PA. tara.carr@nhs.net

Jo Walker
Chief Executive
Gloucestershire County Council
Shire Hall
Westgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 2TG

**(sent via email)**

Dear Jo

**Local Government Reorganisation**

Following the ICB Board seminar agenda item on Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution that Sarah Scott led I am writing to give the feedback on behalf of the ICB to the three options presented. The strong preference from the ICB is for the Single County Unitary option. The key points that we felt supported this view were as follows:

- Having developed social services at a whole Gloucestershire level we think it would be a backward step to move to two social work teams for the county. This would increase complexity for those working in our NHS services, to have two sets of processes and teams to engage with to ensure the flow of people through our care.
- There is also significant risk that we have a higher concentration of people with complex needs living in the West of the County because as commissioners of services that have been driving to achieve best value for the whole county we have physically placed certain care settings where property prices are lower (in the West of the County). This is a risk that in an East/West split of unitary authorities that there will be an imbalance of responsibility for high need groups that will cause unforeseen consequences and exacerbate inequalities.
- The PWC financial option analysis shows a clear advantage to having a single unitary authority from a financial perspective and in a period when all public services are under considerable pressure to deliver best value to our population we feel this is an important consideration.
- We recognise that we need to work closely with you to ensure we continue to shift our care models to meet the changing needs of our population. This is best done in neighbourhoods and we feel the option described as Greater Gloucester may disturb some of those natural communities and the good strong working that we have developed in our localities.

Becky Parish has shared evidence with Siobhan and Sarah from previous public engagement exercises which shows little difference in what is important to people from their public services.

I hope this response is helpful as part of the business case development and I am happy to discuss this further at our next 1:1 if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Truelove

**Sarah Truelove**
**Chief Executive Officer**
**NHS Gloucestershire**

cc: Shane Devlin
Jane Cummings

# Appendix 5: Detailed Options Analysis

This appendix provides additional detailed commentary assessing a **Single Unitary Authority (1UA)** and **Two Unitary Authorities (2UA - East and West)**, against the nine criteria agreed for this business case.

## Detailed analysis of **single unitary (1UA) model** against criteria

| Criteria | Sub-Criteria | Alignment Summary | RAG |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Sensible single tier of local government | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned. | Under a 1UA model, the current councils would be replaced by a single authority (albeit legally GCC would be a 'continuing authority').<br><br>This would remove structural duplication and create one point of democratic and operational accountability for all services across Gloucestershire.<br><br>• **Removes two-tier complexity** – Seven existing councils (one county, six districts) would be replaced by one organisation delivering all functions<br>• **Simplifies resident experience** – Residents would contact one council for all local services, reducing confusion and referral between tiers.<br>• **Consolidates statutory roles** – All key statutory officers would sit within a single executive team, streamlining leadership and governance.<br>• **Enables consistent locality governance** – The Place Model for Gloucestershire proposes establishing Neighbourhood Partnerships in every part of the county. A single council can embed this consistently across all areas, regardless of historic district structure.<br>• **Supports whole-system working** – Joined-up delivery becomes easier when strategic and local functions sit within one structure. | G |

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| | | • **Meets MHCLG expectations** – The model delivers a complete single-tier structure for the area, as defined by government policy. | |
| | B) Sensible economic breakdown: with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities. | The 1UA model allows financial variation across Gloucestershire to be managed within a single council. This enables redistribution between areas, protects against localised risk, and supports a unified approach to tax and budget strategy.<br><br>• **Enables pooled resources** - Council tax, business rates, and government funding can be allocated based on need across the whole county.<br>• **Supports financial equity** – A single UA can help drive more equitable growth across the county as a whole balancing any disparities that might exist in productivity and growth across individual areas at the moment (e.g. Business Growth in the East is 1.10% v/s -1.15% in the West).<br>• **Simplifies council tax alignment** - Aligning current tax levels has reduced political and legal complexity under one council.<br>• **Increases fiscal stability**– A larger tax base and merged reserves lower the risk of localised budget pressures and increases the ability to effectively manage Local Authority Debt (£819 for countywide v/s £674 in the East and £948 in the West).<br>• **Allows single financial strategy** – One Medium-term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and capital programme can be used to balance investment and risk county-wide, including place-based regeneration and neighbourhood infrastructure. | G |
| | C) Sensible geographic breakdown: which will help increase | The 1UA model keeps Gloucestershire's existing administrative and strategic footprint intact. This aligns with current health, community safety, transport, and economic delivery boundaries, reducing disruption and supporting long-term coordination. | G |

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| | housing supply and meet local needs. | • **Alignment with existing partner geographies** – The ICB, Police, Fire and NHS all operate on a countywide footprint, reducing need for renegotiation or duplication e.g. in terms of engagement activities.<br>• **Maximise the council's influence with the ICB -** Given the proposed changes with ICBs looking to take on more local authority areas, retaining a single UA across the county will enable Gloucestershire to retain a strong voice.<br>• **Avoids the creation of administrative internal borders** – A 1UA structure removes the risk of current countywide services or geographies being split (e.g. children's admissions, SEND pathways, acute hospital discharge pathways etc).<br>• **Supports more strategic spatial planning** – The model enables Local Plans, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the Gloucestershire Infrastructure Strategy to be aligned across the county. This would ensure strategic projects such as The Forum project in Gloucester City and the Berkeley Site low carbon energy park in the West are planned in a coordinated way, alongside shared housing and infrastructure corridors that link Gloucester, Cheltenham, and Tewkesbury<br>• **Simplifies strategic countywide structures that already exist** – There are already numerous examples of successful countywide partnerships across all seven councils including Climate Leadership Gloucestershire; Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP); Gloucestershire Strategic Housing Partnership etc. These partnerships enable strategic countywide coordination and leadership for things like housing priorities, rough sleeping, cross cutting climate issues etc. A 1UA model makes this even simpler to drive with a single council.<br>• **Strategic management of homelessness and housing land supply**- A single council could be better positioned to take a more joined up approach to homelessness and housing supply countywide, which could reduce variation in housing capacity and support in meeting the increasing demand and complexity particularly in temporary accommodation across the county. This would allow strategic allocation of sites, directing development to areas with greater capacity while managing demand hotspots. Consistent policy could be applied to meet the countywide shortfall against the | |

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| | | five-year supply target (East has 4.97 years and West has 3.83 years, with a countywide shortfall of 4.37 years). | |
| 2. Right-sized local government | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless specific scenarios make this unreasonable) | The 1UA option:<br>• **Meets statutory benchmark** – The combined population of ~659,000 is above the MHCLG target of 500,000 or more.<br>• **Supports strategic scale** – This population size enables the council to manage key statutory functions (e.g. ASC, education, planning) with scale and consistency.<br>• **Aligns with successful precedent** – The population aligns closely with other approved unitaries (e.g. North Yorkshire, Cornwall, Buckinghamshire). | G |
| | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers | By consolidating governance, systems, and staffing, the 1UA model offers significant opportunities to reduce duplication and generate savings over time.<br>• **Delivery of potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£21.1m per annum.**<br>• **Reduces duplication** – Only one set of ICT systems, governance structures, and senior statutory roles e.g. one Director of Adults Social Care Services (DASS), one Director of Public Health (DPH) etc.<br>• **Streamlines service delivery** – A single operating model for each service (e.g. One revs and bens team and set of policies and not seven) avoids overlapping teams and inconsistent standards or support offers for residents across the county.<br>• **Contracting economies of scale** – Significant benefits from aggregation of contracts (particularly noting bringing together Line of Business system contracts for service areas etc). In addition to this, | G |

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| | | increased economies of scale and procurement leverage of procuring a single contract (as opposed to six smaller ones) for specialist services e.g. cyber, contaminated land, asbestos etc. | |
| | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand financial shocks | The 1UA model offers stronger resilience, especially in high-cost and high-risk areas like ASC and CSC. In addition to this, through aggregation of some fairly small and stretched teams, there is increased resilience in areas where there are already significant workforce recruitment and retention challenges and scarce professional expertise and capacity.<br><br>• **Enablers better management of significant imbalances in demand across the County –** In particular, within ASC, there is significantly higher demand and cost for working age adults (specifically for supported living) between the East and West of the county. A single UA can deploy resources (incl. finances and staffing) more flexibly to service this imbalance in demand.<br>• **Increased workforce resilience for highly qualified and specialist service professionals –** Skills sets which are already highly scarce (with national shortages) e.g. environmental health officers within public health, planners, social workers benefit from being in single organisation to enable pooling of expertise, support succession planning and reducing the risk of exacerbating workforce challenges through duplicating or splitting staff across multiple organisations (or creating competition between authorities for the same staff).<br>• **Frontline workforce flexibility –** A single UA can flexibly deploy front line staff incl. casual staff across the county to support delivery e.g. library staff currently working across multiple libraries or even the registrars team maintaining a single pool of c.80 casual celebrants who are deployed flexibly to deliver weddings and ceremonies across the county.<br>• **Supports statutory resilience** – A single set of statutory roles reduces recruitment pressure and minimises significant additional ongoing costs of senior roles.<br>• **Protects Place Model delivery** – Central support functions (finance, HR, data) are key to enabling locality-level delivery across Gloucestershire. | G |

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| | | • **Strong support resilience for front-line services –** Core services such as fire and rescue rely on local authority support services and financial support e.g. HR, legal, finance etc to support delivery. A single larger UA is likely to offer strong financial resilience and create less administrative burden of apportioning out support costs etc.<br>• **Decreased senior management capacity –** Due to the aggregation of senior management roles, the 1UA model could potentially have a reduced capacity at senior levels to sustain financial shocks | |
| | *D) Manageable transition costs* | A single authority model allows for less structural duplication and avoids the cost and complexity of standing up two separate organisations, through reduced disaggregation<br><br>• **Requires creation of only one new authority and legal structure, minimising transition costs** - estimated to be ~£21.3m. *Assumption based on assuming a continuing authority being in place.*<br>• **Simplifies legal setup** – Only one constitution, shadow authority, electoral review, consultation and governance framework would need to be designed, approved and run.<br>• **Reduces portfolio and programme duplication** – A single implementation portfolio required to manage the transition and implementation.<br>• **Lower ICT migration and integration costs –** Currently shared countywide systems such as Liquid Logic (for ASC) would not need to be disaggregated or duplicated. In addition to this, data and systems migration could be managed on a service by service once (as opposed to multiple sets of systems migrations activities for each service). Lastly, one single website can be developed for the new council.<br>• **Minimises duplication of senior roles** – One executive team avoids the need to recruit and fund parallel statutory leadership posts which can be significantly costly.<br>• **Reduces duplication of county input –** Current county council stakeholders can be a part of a single implementation portfolio and would not need to spend additional time in multiple meetings, governance forums, working groups (i.e. county council stakeholders would need to be involved in all conversations if there were multiple UAs being created given disaggregation implications). | G |

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| | | • **Reduced risk of disruption to traded services –** Reduced risk of disrupting effective traded services that operate on a countywide footprint particularly in relation to services provided to schools. | |
| 3. High quality, sustainable services | *A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation* | The 1UA model would preserve current integrated delivery structures in areas like social care, education, and public health. A single unitary within Gloucestershire, if designed with strong local engagement in mind, offers a more stable platform for inclusive, locally responsive governance. Colleagues currently operate countywide, working with multiple stakeholders and systems. A single point of engagement would reduce duplication and improve accountability.<br><br>• **Preserves current service integration** – Existing countywide delivery in areas such as transport, ASC, CSC, SEND, and safeguarding would remain intact, avoiding risk to safeguarding, statutory thresholds, and pathway coordination.<br>• **Supports end-to-end planning** – Joined-up pathways for prevention, care, education, and housing can be planned across one structure (particularly important for high-risk residents who cross multiple services).<br>• **Enables minimum disruption to significant transformation and improvement journeys that are ongoing** – e.g. there are significant multi-year transformation programmes planned in ASC which could continue with minimum disruption under a 1UA scenario.<br>• **Minimal disruption to multi-agency partnership arrangement** – Only one set of safeguarding boards, ICB pathways, youth justice panels, and place-based health partnerships are required, making service collaboration easier and more effective.<br>• **Resilience through scale and leadership continuity -** Professional Service Leads consistently highlight that larger authorities reduce risk during transition by retaining experienced senior leadership teams and service delivery infrastructure.<br>• **Challenges of delivering services across diverse geographies -** The 1UA model would require the integration of two urban centres (Cheltenham and Gloucester) and expansion of capabilities to | G |

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| | | meet the rural needs across the county. This could complicate existing operating models and ways of working and risking inconsistencies in access and quality that could endure into the future.<br>• **Increased aggregation risk** – A 1UA model would require aggregation of six district-specific services into one collective service which is likely to be significantly complex e.g. aligning six different council tax support schemes etc. | |
| | *B) Opportunity for public service reform including where this will lead to improved value for money* | The 1UA model enables a unified transformation strategy and consistent investment in digital tools, analytics, automation, workforce planning, and shared infrastructure, all of which are already underway through the transformation initiatives and emerging Place Model design.<br>• **Creates a single platform for change** – Transformation programmes in ICT, workforce, data, and estates can be delivered countywide.<br>• **Enables shared innovation** – AI, automation, and digital case management tools can be designed once and used everywhere.<br>• **Supports cultural alignment** – One council avoids divergence in practice or priorities, allowing consistent reform over time.<br>• **Improves analytical capacity** – Shared data infrastructure can support predictive and population-level service planning, particularly linking to public sector partners like Police and NHS – this is key to continuing to drive a focus moving away from eligibility to focus on prevention and early intervention (i.e. not waiting for the crisis to happen first).<br>• **Backed by service insight** – Service leads across ICT, libraries, revenues and benefits, asset management, housing and homelessness etc consistently stated that a 1UA model would remove duplication in systems and governance, strengthen programme alignment, and enable investment to scale across the county.<br>• **Improved strategic influence and collaboration with partners –** A single larger UA is likely to have more influence and scale to negotiate with local and national partners incl. educational | G |

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| | | institutions, DWP, ICB etc to drive stronger system-wide leadership and delivery of improved shared outcomes locally.<br>• **Increased scale and financial resilience to innovate –** A single larger UA is likely to have access to large amounts of resources (workforce, finances, connections with others) to innovate, fail fast and learn. This is critical to driving improvement and reform.<br>• **Better value for money** – In services such as ASC, CSC, public health and commissioning, the scale of a 1UA model could provide better value for money through economies of scale and single strong voice in the market.<br>• **Creation of a single trusted front door for residents and partners** – A 1UA model can retain a simple, universal, trusted front door for residents to simplify their experience but also drive efficiencies in contact and delivery. | |
| | *C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk of negative impact on, crucial services* | A single authority can manage variation in service demand and outcomes across the geography by redistributing resources and targeting investment based on need. This supports equity in access and outcomes, especially for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public protection services including for public safety.<br>• **Enables flexible resource allocation** – Investment can be targeted where demand is highest (e.g. higher ASC and CSC spend in the West) can be managed effectively.<br>• **Improves consistency** – A single authority can maintain common standards and expectations for service access across the county, with flexibility built in at the point of delivery.<br>• **Supports data-led prioritisation** – Systemwide data enables identification of emerging needs across urban and rural areas and supports early intervention strategies that can be locally delivered.<br>• **No need for disaggregation of critical countywide services delivered to the most vulnerable in society** - Service leads across CSC, education, public health, and commissioning warned that two unitary authority models would pose risks of disaggregating safeguarding, school admissions, EHCP timeliness, statutory performance oversight etc. | G |

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| | | • **Reduces postcode variation** – Residents in different areas would experience equal levels of service and support which drives fair and equal access for all.<br>• **Protects Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) and MASH –** Minimum disruption to the single front door to make sure the right assessment, identification of risk and support can be provided to children at most risk who need to be protected. In line with engagement with stakeholders from the Police, *"a 1UA provides the best opportunity to continue to maintain and improve coordination of this vital MASH capability with a focus on driving consistency, pooling of resources and alignment"* between the Police and local authority workforce.<br>• **No borders created between the county** – A countywide model makes it easier to coordinate placements for education or social care to be considered across a bigger geography without the need to negotiate potential 'out of county' placements if administrative boundaries were to be created.<br>• **Addresses homelessness strategically** – A single housing and commissioning function can plan across high-demand urban areas (e.g. Gloucester and Cheltenham) and rural areas, ensuring consistent prevention and support offers. | |
| 4. Meets local needs | *A) Meets local needs and is informed by local views* | While formal public consultation has not yet taken place, this options analysis has been informed by engagement undertaken with the public through surveys and in-person events, officers from service areas and partners across the county (including county council, district councils and other partners including Police, VCSFE, health etc). Many countywide partners, including further education, health, VCFSE, Constabulary and the Diocese, voiced strong support for a single voice and shared strategic frameworks to maintain coherence across Gloucestershire. The EqIA analysis that has been conducted also indicates that a single council could strengthen consistency in engagement with groups with protected characteristics (e.g. disabled residents, ethnic minority communities) by creating one countywide approach to inclusive communications and accessible consultation materials, reducing risk of variation in how voices are heard across areas. | **A** |

- **Reflects strategic partner input** - The 1UA structure aligns with preferences expressed by the NHS, Police, and some economic partners for a single interface, highlighting that a single accountable authority would reduce duplication and improve clarity for service users.
- **Backed by some VCFSE organisations** – Some VCFSE representatives who have been engaged emphasised that a single UA would make partnership working and funding engagement "simpler and more consistent," reducing the duplication they currently face when working across multiple districts.
- **Supported by some of the county's local business networks** – Feedback from business representatives, including the Federation of Small Businesses, highlighted the benefit of "one clear voice" for economic development, inward investment, and regulatory services, making Gloucestershire easier to promote to investors and government.
- **Based on current delivery structures** - The model builds on the existing approach to ASC, CSC, public health, transport - all delivered at county scale.
- **Enables future local engagement** - Under a 1UA model, the council would have capacity to design and invest in community-level consultation structures.
- **Capacity to combine strategic oversight with local delivery-** Services such as HTST, EHCP delivery, and ASC benefit from being managed by a single larger UA which has the scale to sufficiently manage and resource but with the ability to flexibly deploy resources locally.
- **Places local voice at the centre** - The Place Model workstream (co-led by GCC and partners including OPCC, VCS Alliance, and ICB) has designed mechanisms for neighbourhood engagement within a single authority.
- **Service-led locality feedback** – Discussions across ASC, CSC, libraries, ICT and education consistently supported a single authority with locally delivered services. Officers favoured retaining local footprints for operational delivery, noting this was already how people experience services.
- **Risk of reduced local visibility if locality model is not prioritised** – Several stakeholders, including parish councils and VCSFE representatives, expressed concern that without sustained investment in neighbourhood governance, a single UA could appear more distant from communities,

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| | | particularly in rural areas such as the North Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean, where access to decision-makers is already seen as limited. | |
| | *B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural and historic importance* | The 1UA Model has been designed to protect and celebrate the many places of Gloucestershire. 267 parish councils currently cover the majority of the county and our Neighbourhood Partnership proposals seek to decentralise services and give greater voice to communities of place, interest and identity.<br>• **Local identities –** There could be concerns that a single UA could dilute the distinct cultural, social and economic identities of Gloucestershire's two key urban centres (Gloucester and Cheltenham) which therefore may not gain local support. However, this can be mitigated as noted below.<br>• **Civic identity retained** – Town and parish councils, mayoralties, and ceremonial roles would remain in place. For Gloucester a parish (city council) would be created, and similarly for Cheltenham, a parish (town council) would be created. These new parishes would serve to strengthen the identity and significant cultural and historic value of each city/town within Gloucestershire<br>• **Allows for place-based branding** – Services can retain local naming, visual identity, and signage to reinforce place association, a priority raised in the Diocese and VCFSE stakeholder engagement responses.<br>• **Reflects community affinity** – Feedback from planning, libraries and safeguarding services emphasised that residents associate more strongly with place-based identities than with institutional structures, making it essential to maintain visible local identity alongside a single governance tier.<br>• **Neighbourhood Partnership proposals will make the new council closer to the places people know.** – The model will create a coherent offer for populations of 30k-50k, bringing the council and decision making closer to residents<br>• **Supports visibility of place** – The new authority can retain ward and locality names to reflect place-based identity across the county. | **A** |

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| | | • **Builds on community infrastructure** – Areas like the Forest, Stroud, and the Cotswolds already have strong place-based partnerships in place. The 1UA model enables these current strengths to be built on with a more powerful place-based emphasis and approach.<br>• **Builds on current area-based practice** – e.g. ASC and CSC already hold case review forums and safeguarding panels at area level, often aligned to the current districts. This culture of place-based accountability would continue to be retained and formalised under the single authority.<br>• **Successful precedents exist** – Unitaries such as Buckinghamshire and North Yorkshire have adopted area boards and neighbourhood forums to maintain local visibility, improve outcomes and encourage community participation. | |
| | *C) Addresses local concerns* | The 1UA model enables county-wide service planning while allowing targeted investment in places with higher levels of need. This supports consistency of offer while maintaining flexibility to respond to local variation.<br><br>• **Could be perceived as overcentralisation –** A single larger UA could be perceived by some stakeholders and residents as moving services further away from people and creating less understanding and tailoring of services to meet local needs. However, this can be mitigated with robust locality governance and retaining operational delivery close to people (as is the case already e.g. with locality based social work teams etc).<br>• **Supports differentiated planning** – Strategic services (e.g. ASC, education) can be commissioned based on local demand and vulnerability indicators.<br>• **Addresses inequality** – The model enables planning across areas with different outcomes (e.g. West: 16,609 children in low-income families per 100k vs East: 12,274). The 1UA model maintains the ability to respond strategically while allowing delivery to reflect place.<br>• **Place-sensitive commissioning already in use** – Commissioners in ASC and education noted that funding allocations already account for variation in deprivation, demand and access (e.g. funding per | **A** |

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| | | capita is higher in the West for ASC and in the East for transport access). A 1UA model protects this flexibility while enabling oversight of equity countywide<br>• **Supports coherent infrastructure and regeneration investment** – Officers stressed the value of having one capital planning and housing function able to target investment into high-need areas (e.g. brownfield regeneration in the West; affordability and access issues in the East), rather than splitting strategic capacity across two smaller councils. EQIA findings highlight current East–West disparities in transport access for disabled and older residents, and a 1UA model enables these to be addressed in a single transport accessibility strategy linked to Local Transport Plans. | |
| 5. Supports devolution arrangements | *A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution* | The 1UA model simplifies engagement with Whitehall and regional partners.<br>• **Streamlined governance** – A single authority avoids internal fragmentation, simplifies representation, and strengthens Gloucestershire's strategic negotiating position. A single council gives partners a single door in for strategic collaboration and funding opportunities.<br>• **Improves visibility and scale** - A bigger footprint and unified leadership increase Gloucestershire's credibility and profile in national negotiations.<br>• **Compatible with existing regional structures** – Gloucestershire currently aligns with the South West for funding and some aligned service delivery (e.g. South West Ambulance Service) and also shares ties with the West Midlands (e.g. through economic corridors and shared events). A single council can better preserve overlapping relationships and flex across both without splintering Gloucestershire's strategic position or regional partnerships.<br>• **Improved clarity in negotiations** – Members and senior officers highlighted that a single unitary would allow Gloucestershire to present itself with clarity in devolution negotiations, and avoid unnecessary complexity in areas like housing, infrastructure and skills. | G |

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| | | • **Attractive investment platform** – A single council is better positioned to attract investment in growth sectors like advanced manufacturing, cyber, and clean energy, which operate across county boundaries. These areas require joined-up strategic leadership and investment.<br>• **Improving transport connectivity -** There are already plans in place across the county to improve transport connectivity. Devolution offers opportunities to build on this and connect Gloucestershire with other economic corridors enabling further regional collaboration and enabling residents to access further opportunities. | |
| | *B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority* | Under a 1UA model, Gloucestershire would join any future Combined Authority or Strategic Authority as a single partner, with a population of ~659,000. This contributes meaningfully toward the 1.5 million minimum benchmark used in current legislation and policy design for deeper devolution.<br><br>• **Compatible with multiple strategic groupings to meet minimum population thresholds by and large –** With one voice, Gloucestershire can engage in potential Combined Authorities including:<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + West of England Combined Authority (WECA) Core: 1.6m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire + WECA (incl. North Somerset): 1.81m<br>  ○ Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire: 1.45m (falls a little short of the 1.5m threshold).<br>  ○ Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire + Swindon: 1.63m<br>• However, concerns were noted around the relative size of a single Gloucestershire Unitary Authority in comparison with other partners in a Combined Authority. For example, in the case of a WECA option, Gloucestershire would be the largest partner in WECA, with a population of c. 659,276, compared to Bristol's c.472,400, South Gloucestershire's c.290,400 and Bath and North East Somerset's c.193,400 (population figures based on ONS 2021 census). This could potentially make a single unitary less appealing for other partners. | G |

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| 6. Local engagement and empowerment | *A) Enables stronger community engagement* | The 1UA model removes local district councils but can introduce new forms of local representation and democratic engagement. Its success in this area would depend on strong designs and investment in locality arrangements. Some partners expressed concern that community engagement in a 1UA model must be deliberately designed, with one noting: 'if you don't build in real localism, people will feel even further away".<br><br>• **Could be perceived to be further away from communities –** A larger authority may be perceived by some stakeholders to be moving further away from communities with a much larger and more diverse geography to consider.<br>• **Requires active design** – The model does not automatically strengthen participation; new structures would need to be developed (a process already initiated through the Neighbourhood Area Partnerships proposed by the Place Model programme).<br>• **Supports consistent frameworks** – A single council can create countywide standards for local structures including Neighbourhood Area Partnerships.<br>• **Avoids duplication of democratic processes** – One tier of governance reduces overlap and potential confusion over responsibilities (a key concern in feedback from the VCFSE sector and the Diocese).<br>• **Can be designed to enable inclusive local representation** – Governance can be shaped to reflect towns, parishes, and historic communities across Gloucestershire.<br>• **Rooted in ongoing local work** – The Neighbourhood Partnership model, co-designed by GCC, OPCC, the ICB, and the VCS Alliance, is already testing place-based forums that bring residents, councillors and service teams together to shape local priorities.<br>• **Allows for a strengthening of capacity to support engagement** - The 1UA delivers the highest overall savings of options being considered (c.£21.1m annual net savings). In turn, this may allow for its Neighbourhood Partnership proposals to be given greater financial support and expert officer capacity. | G |

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| | *B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment* | The 1UA model allows the council to embed neighbourhood governance into its core structure, particularly through the development of Neighbourhood Partnerships and Locality Hubs. It can formalise new models of area-based working and build on existing parish and community networks. There are also projected to be greater financial benefits from a 1UA model (noted above), which can support investment in place-based working and visible local governance across the county.<br><br>• **Facilitates locality working** – Existing family hubs, community wellbeing teams, and parish clusters can be aligned to formal locality areas, ensuring operational delivery remains close to communities.<br>• **Enables shared design** – Area committees (formal sub-committees of a local authority that operate at a more local, geographical level) or Neighbourhood Partnership can be co-designed with communities and elected members. The Place Model being worked on already in Gloucestershire explicitly sets out a roadmap for co-production.<br>• **Formalises locality governance** – Proposals are being co-designed with partners including OPCC, ICB and VCS Alliance, with clear plans for shared decision-making at place level.<br>• **Supports consistent service access** – Local service offers can be standardised, targeted and resourced across the county.<br>• **Backed by services and partners** – Service professionals including CSC, planning, and ASC leads stressed the importance of retaining area-based decision-making capacity, noting that local visibility matters for legitimacy.<br>• **Raises the visibility and role of local councils and VCFSE organisations**: The creation of a Civil Society Covenant and a Local Councils charter elevate the role of vital local and hyperlocal organisations<br>• **Protects equity of access** – A single council can strive to ensure that every locality, rural or urban, has the same opportunity to develop Neighbourhood Partnerships and access resources. However, this may sometimes be harder to achieve on such a big footprint. | G |

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| | | • **Reduces risk of divergence** – Feedback from ICT, audit and planning services highlighted that neighbourhood working is best enabled by shared systems, standardised training, and joint commissioning, which is possible under a 1UA model.<br>• **Builds on existing models** – Several services (e.g. ASC, children's services, housing) already operate with area-based or district-level coordination. For example, in CSC, local safeguarding hubs and area panels are already delivering place-based oversight.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit** – By removing layers of government people feel as though the unitary is far removed from their local issues which can decrease engagement. | |
| 7. Environmental and climate protection | A) Ensures the new authority/authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans. | The 1UA model offers scale and continuity in environmental governance. It enables strategic investment, consistent targets, and stronger institutional leadership on net zero, nature recovery, and flood resilience while safeguarding key partnerships and plans.<br><br>• **Preserves existing plans and partnerships** – Gloucestershire's Climate Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Climate Leadership Gloucestershire and Strategic Flood Risk Management approach are all designed countywide and can continue seamlessly under 1UA.<br>• **Enables scale of investment** – Environmental budgets, procurement, and staffing can be centrally coordinated, with local delivery shaped through Neighbourhood Partnerships.<br>• **Avoids duplication of leadership** – A single structure prevents gaps or overlaps in environmental governance.<br>• **Aligns with existing officer capacity** – Current small specialist teams in areas such as flood risk and climate strategy can be consolidated.<br>• **Enables neighbourhood engagement** – Through the Place Model, the new authority can embed environmental priorities into Neighbourhood Partnership plans, empowering communities to lead on climate actions suited to local needs. | G |

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| | | • **Bolster the role of the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) -** Pooled resources between County and Districts, and the ability to direct those resources according to need across the whole county would maximise the resources we do have (i.e. whether based on the location of consenting and enforcement cases, schemes, planning consultations or individual flooding events). In addition to this, a single authority would have single ownership of Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (Levels 1and2) and could also drive a more coordinated approach to identification and delivery of flood alleviation schemes and associated bids to national funding | |
| | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB). | The 1UA model supports joined-up spatial planning and stewardship across protected landscapes. It maintains geographic continuity and ensures consistent protections across jurisdictional boundaries.<br>• **Avoids splitting landscape governance** – Natural assets such as the River Severn catchment, Cotswolds escarpment, and Forest woodlands would remain under one set of policy and delivery arrangements.<br>• **Supports integrated land-use planning** – The Local Plan and planning policy can incorporate rural, urban, and protected areas under one authority. Officers confirmed that issues like nutrient neutrality need consistent policy and joint delivery at county level.<br>• **Retains current plans for Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)** – Developed at a county level over the past three years and to be delivered by upper tier / unitary authorities.<br>• **Retains current infrastructure for biodiversity net gain (BNG)** – Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund (GNCF) is a not-for-profit body supported by all seven LAs to trade BNG development units within Gloucestershire<br>• **Preserves cross-boundary programmes** – Flood schemes, biodiversity corridors, and green infrastructure plans are easier to deliver through one capital plan and Local Plan framework.<br>• **Allows local tailoring within one system** – Local protections (e.g. Cotswold design codes, Forest regeneration priorities) can be embedded in area-specific planning and delivery through the Place Model. | G |

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| | | • **Supports rural stewardship through locality governance** – Parish partnerships and community networks, particularly in the Forest and Cotswolds, can be empowered through Neighbourhood Partnerships to influence local environmental strategy. | |
| | c) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. "Fairer Greener Forest", Climate Emergency responses). | The 1UA model provides the governance platform to protect, expand and align Gloucestershire's district-led climate initiatives. It strengthens monitoring and accountability while enabling communities to drive action locally.<br><br>• **Does not erase local ambitions** – Protects locally developed climate action - Programmes such as "Fairer Greener Forest," Stroud CAN, and Cheltenham's net zero route map which can continue with local leadership but benefit from countywide funding, systems, and legal support.<br>• **Allows integration of district priorities** – The new authority can build a single climate plan that draws on existing strategies. reducing duplication and aligning priorities without weakening local ownership.<br>• **Supports accountability** – A single scrutiny framework allows monitoring of commitments made at both county and locality level.<br>• **Enables targeted support –** Rural off-gas areas, high-deprivation urban communities, and at-risk flood zones can be prioritised in capital investment using a shared dataset and single capital plan.<br>• **Backed by partners** – Stakeholders, including public health, VCFSE and environmental partners, emphasised that 1UA would simplify joint action on climate and support more joined-up community participation. | G |

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| 8. Civic engagement and participative democracy | *A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy.* | The 1UA model creates the scale and reach to invest in countywide civic engagement, while retaining flexibility for local communities to shape how they participate. It provides the infrastructure to support both digital and in-person engagement through the Place Model.<br><br>• **Supports digital and in-person tools** – Investment in consultation platforms, community budgets, and resident panels can be made at county scale, supported by the central functions of the new council<br>• **Embedded in service design** – Housing, planning, transport, ASC and CSC services are already designing resident input into locality plans and Local Development Frameworks. A 1UA allows this to continue without duplication.<br>• **Protects equal access to voice** – A single model of civic engagement ensures that all areas, including rural parishes and urban neighbourhoods, can participate on equal terms.<br>• **Supports community leadership** – Officers emphasised that strong place-based leadership is already being built through co-design pilots in the Forest and Cheltenham, and that a single authority enables these structures to scale.<br>• **Anchored in Gloucestershire's tradition of community partnership** – The VCFSE sector and local clergy highlighted the need to maintain grassroots decision-making. The 1UA model can help to make sure the local voice can be protected and funded within a single, countywide democratic framework.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit -** Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. | **A** |

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| 9. Inclusive growth and equity | *A) Ability to tackle disparities in wealth setting up one unitary authority or two unitary authorities.* | The 1UA model allows the council to address local disparities across the county through joined-up economic, transport, and skills planning with the ability to redistribute funding and focus support on areas of need. A single structure would be well-placed to support equitable development and reduce strategic risk.<br><br>• **Enables countywide planning** – Economic development, employment, and regeneration can be designed to benefit the full geography, not just high-growth areas.<br>• **Targets investment to areas of need** – Indicators show clear differences between areas (e.g. GDHI: £26,149 in East vs £21,191 in West, and job density is 1.01 and 0.82 respectively) that can be addressed through unified policy and without governance friction. The West also has higher deprivation scores (IMD 17.16 vs 12.71 in the East) and carries 60% of the county's children in low-income households - factors that a single authority can address through pooled resources, targeted regeneration, and shared preventative service funding.<br>• **Reduces risk of postcode inequality** – A single structure avoids divergence in access to services or funding between two separate councils.<br>• **Improves delivery of levelling up goals** – National funding (e.g. LUF, SPF, Homes England) can be more effectively coordinated through a single accountable body, improving Gloucestershire's attractiveness as an investment partner.<br>• **Supports area-based targeting** – Through Neighbourhood Partnerships, the council can ensure each area has a local regeneration plan focused on its specific barriers to growth and access. | G |

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| | *B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration.* | The 1UA model allows for pooled budgets and shared commissioning strategies that prioritise support for those most in need. Vulnerability and deprivation can be addressed without artificial boundaries between areas.<br>• **Supports consistent targeting** – Shared datasets and analytics platforms allow services to target support to where indicators show the greatest unmet need (e.g. West Glos: 16,609 children in low-income families per 100k vs 12,274 in East).<br>• **Enables flexible, place-based intervention** – Services such as ASC, housing, and CSC already work with local partners (e.g. Family Hubs, VCFSE, schools) to deliver support through local forums, which would be retained and enhanced under 1UA.<br>• **Simplifies cross-cutting delivery** – Services such as mental health, substance misuse, and housing need require coordinated input across teams. A 1UA allows wraparound offers to be planned centrally and delivered locally.<br>• **Retains current safeguarding structures** – Countywide safeguarding boards, early help pathways, and integrated commissioning would remain intact, avoiding disaggregation risk.<br>• **Builds from neighbourhood action plans** – The Place Model already includes a neighbourhood planning model for co-produced regeneration strategies, which can be aligned to countywide outcomes under a single council. | G |
| | *C) Ensures that financial sustainability is not achieved at the expense of service levels.* | A 1UA model enables savings and efficiencies through consolidation - not service withdrawal. It allows services to be protected by reforming back-office structures, harmonising systems, and pooling reserves, particularly important in high-cost statutory functions like ASC and CSC.<br>• **Improves efficiency through strategic consolidation** – Consolidation savings can be achieved through shared platforms, aligned contracts, and joint infrastructure investment, as confirmed through extensive engagement with both upper and lower tier service professionals. | A |

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| | | • **Supports strategic commissioning and market shaping** – A single commissioning function can set consistent pricing, improve leverage with providers, and reduce fragmentation in markets such as ASC or education placements.<br>• **Enables financial flexibility and cross-subsidy** – Shared MTFS, pooled reserves and countywide income allow high-cost services in one locality to be sustained without placing disproportionate strain on that area's council tax base.<br>• **Reduces service fragmentation risk** – Disaggregation of statutory services like SEND and CSC was seen by officers as high-risk under 2UA. The 1UA model removes that risk entirely.<br>• **Supports long-term value** – Investment in digital, prevention, early help and neighbourhood working can be delivered once, reducing cost over time without cutting access or quality.<br>• **Reinvestment in frontline service delivery** – Most of the savings noted by service professionals are across back-office functions (and not directly from already overstretched front line teams). These savings can be reinvested back in front line delivery and interventions focussing on prevention and early intervention to drive improved outcomes.<br>• **Countywide Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit projected to reach ~£234m by Vesting Day (1 April 2028).** If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks.<br>• **Impact of the Fair Funding Review** – This also remains unknown at this time presenting further financial uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. | |



## Detailed analysis of **east/west two unitaries (2UA)** model against criterion

| Criteria | Sub-Criteria | Alignment Summary | RAG |
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| 1. Sensible single tier of local government | A) Establishes a single tier of local government for the whole of the area concerned. | The 2UA model fully removes two-tier governance by creating two all-purpose councils. While this simplifies governance within each new authority, it introduces an internal boundary that cuts across several existing countywide systems and partnerships.<br>• **Removes two-tier structure** – Both county and district councils would be replaced by two new single-tier organisations which meets the overall criteria.<br>• **Simplifies local service access** – Residents would interact with only one council for all services within their local area.<br>• **Establishes clear internal governance** – Each authority would hold its own statutory roles and make decisions independently. | G |
| | B) Sensible economic breakdown: with a tax base which does not create undue inequalities | The 2UA model creates two financially independent authorities. While their tax bases are broadly similar at the point of transition, underlying income, need, and reserve disparities mean each council would have to manage its own risk, cost pressures, and investment strategies.<br>• **Creates separate tax bases and MTFSs** – The East and West would operate independent financial strategies, with no shared reserves or risk-pooling between councils.<br>• **Similar tax base across both areas** - The 2024 tax-base (Band D equivalents after council tax support) for two-unitary authorities model, shows a tax base in the West of 49% compared to 51% in the East [62].<br>• **Potential fiscal disparities** – Local Authority Debt is much higher in the West (£948) compared to the East (£674) and there is also a higher household benefit claimant rate (17.87% in the West compared to 13.79% in the East). These pressures would need to be | A |

[62] Council Tax Receipts, 23/24, MHCLG

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| | | managed by each individual authority with limited ability to create more fiscal resilience overall e.g. through pooled reserves etc.<br>• **Increased potential exposure for West** – Higher service costs particularly for ASC where spend per resident is £629 in West vs £405 in East. This is likely to put a significantly higher pressure on the West council given the majority of a unitary authority budget is attributed to ASC Spend.<br>• **Opportunities to drive economic growth based on the unique strengths of each authority –** Opportunities to drive a coherent narrative within each authority for their sector specialisms (Clean Energy in the West and Technology in the East). This will support in creating more job opportunities, upskilling young people and attracting inward investment to kickstart economic growth across both UA areas. | |
| | C) Sensible geographic breakdown: which will help increase housing supply and meet local needs | The proposed East/West boundary reflects historic district groupings but introduces a new internal division across some shared service areas and travel-to-work zones. While this may support visibility and identity at a local level, it creates complexity in coordinating planning, housing, transport, and environmental strategy, all of which currently operate at county scale.<br>• **Builds on existing urban centres in the county –** Gloucestershire has two significant urban centres (Cheltenham and Gloucester) and the proposed East / West 2UA model aligns with these. In addition to this, the 2UA model is based on familiar district boundaries which will continue to enable the retention of unique local identities. This could also be helpful in designing place-based governance.<br>• **Reduces alignment with partners -** The Police, Fire and Rescue, ICB, Education partners all largely operate on a countywide footprint currently and the creation of 2UAs would mean partners likely need to engage with two different organisations which is inefficient and can also drive reduced influence for each of the respective UAs. | **A** |

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| | | • **Each UA can retain its own housing and HRA –** There are currently two councils in Gloucestershire with their own housing stock (c.5,000 homes each) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA): Stroud and Cheltenham. In the proposed 2UA model, there would be minimum disruption or change required to this arrangement given one of these is in the West and one in the East.<br>• **Challenges around private housing market** - Average house prices illustrate that the private housing market faces greater challenges in the West, where values are lower [63] (e.g. Gloucester £225,000; Forest of Dean £291,000) compared to the East (e.g. Cotswolds £419,000; Cheltenham £324,000), reducing profit margins and making it less likely that the private sector will deliver sufficient supply without public intervention.<br>• **Variations in housing supply** –Homelessness is higher in the West compared to the East [64] (0.21% in the West and 0.11% in the East) with housing land supply following the opposite trajectory (lower in the West at 3.83 vs 4.97 in the East). This could result in more demand for housing in the West with less supply to meet this efficiently within the new UA borders.<br>• **Risks inconsistency in spatial planning** – Without a shared framework, the East and West could pursue divergent housing policies, development standards, and regeneration priorities, which could make Gloucestershire less coherent in the eyes of investors and government.<br>• **Fragmentation of strategic housing functions and engagement -** Fragmentation of delivery partnerships and engagement / negotiations with housing associations, developers, and Homes England, increasing the risk of inconsistency in policy, pipeline delivery, and tenant standards across East and West Gloucestershire. |

[63] House Prices, 2025, ONS
[64] Homelessness, 2024, ONS

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| 2. Right-sized local government | A) A population of 500,000 or more (unless specific scenarios make this unreasonable) | Under the 2UA model, each authority would have a population above the 300,000 minimum threshold, but below the 500,000 MHCLG guideline. The East would serve ~310,641 people and the West ~348,635.<br><br>• **Meets the viability threshold** – Both authorities exceed 300,000 population, in line with recent two-unitary models (e.g. Cheshire East/West).<br>• **Falls short of MHCLG guidance** – Neither authority reaches the preferred 500,000+ benchmark for strategic scale but this could enable each UA to target their resources and focus on manageable population sizes and geographies (noting both the East and West would each have a densely populated metropolitan area with surrounding rural areas).<br>• **Comparable to successful precedent** – East (~310k) and West (~349k) align with other approved two-unitary areas such as Cheshire East/West, Dorset, and Somerset, which have demonstrated operational viability.<br>• **Aligns with precedent** – Dorset and Cheshire provide examples of approved two-UA models operating at similar population sizes. | **A** |
| | B) Supports efficiencies and value for money for council taxpayers | The 2UA model can continue to offer some efficiencies within each authority, but also introduces duplication of systems, statutory posts, and governance. Gloucestershire also has some good examples of shared working across existing councils which can continue to be built on under a 2UA model (where beneficial and appropriate to do so).<br><br>• **Creates duplication for county wide services** – County-wide infrastructure would likely need to be split or duplicated e.g. in relation to governance structures; statutory roles e.g. two Director of Children's Services (DCCs), DASSs etc; Upper tier service systems used by adults and children's services etc. This will reduce the overall net savings achievable in a | **A** |

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| | | 2UA scenario (potential net revenue savings from reorganisation of ~£10.7m per annum under a 2UA model).<br>• **Reduces potential economies of scale** – Whilst there remain continued opportunities to jointly commission specialist services e.g. cyber between the two authorities, it is possible that over time strategic contracts would be negotiated separately within each authority e.g. for Childrens and Adults. This is likely to result in less market influence and a potential risk of suppliers 'playing both authorities against each other'. | |
| | C) Improves capacity and supports the council to withstand financial shocks | Each new authority would need to independently build and sustain specialist teams and leadership capacity. Smaller scale may reduce resilience, particularly in hard-to-recruit areas such as social care.<br>• **Supports competitive positioning** – Each council can engage in targeted regional partnerships (e.g. East with WECA, West with Midlands Engine) to maximise sectoral strengths and funding opportunities.<br>• **Continued opportunities to share services in a targeted way to drive efficiencies and improve outcomes -** A 2UA model can continue to build on the strong foundation of shared services and wholly owned companies in Gloucestershire already (e.g. Ubico for waste management, Publica for transactional services, One Legal, audit and counterfraud etc). However, this can be done in a targeted way to enable the 2UAs to operate independently where tailored approaches are required to serve their populations but come together to achieve scale where it drives more value and increases resilience / capacity e.g. continuing to operate waste collection via Ubico to reduce costs, offer improved scale and a more consistent offer to residents.<br>• **Overall tax base similar across both UAs –** There is not likely to be significant variations in total council tax receipts between both UAs. | **A** |

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| | | • **Increased senior officer capacity** – In a 2UA model, both authorities may have to recruit for identical senior officer roles, allowing for greater capacity in senior leadership.<br>• **Could result in a significant financial burden for the West authority –** Given the significant imbalance in demand and cost between the East and West for ASC (e.g. £405 spend per resident in East v/s £629 in West), there could be a significant risk around Ordinary Residence implications which could create a financial challenge for the West authority.<br>• **Reduced workforce resilience -**Smaller teams are more exposed to capacity pressures and recruitment risk, especially in specialist roles. Service leads flagged risks in safeguarding, SEND, commissioning, and public health with concerns that "we'll each be half as strong".<br>• **Limits financial flexibility in hardship** – Without pooled reserves or a shared workforce, each council would need to absorb shocks (e.g. market failure, inflation) independently which does reduce overall financial resilience for both statutory and non-statutory services.<br>• **Additional overheads / administrative burden for shared services –** Where services are retained as shared, there is likely to be additional costs of managing governance, performance, budgetary allocations, potential disputes etc.<br>• **Potential budget deficits for the West on day one -** Current financial analysis indicates that the East council in a 2UA scenario would be established with a day one General Fund surplus of ~ £21.9m. Whilst a West council would be established with a day one General Fund deficit of ~ £21.9m. This assumes the full delivery of unidentified savings required by all seven councils between now and Vesting Day (1 April 2028) and does not fully account for the impact of the Fair Funding Review (subject to further detail from government). | |
| | D) Manageable transition costs | Transitioning to two authorities would involve higher implementation costs and programme complexity compared to a single authority (currently estimated at ~ £29.0m). This means potentially | **A** |

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| | | higher legal, staffing, ICT, and governance setup costs than a single-authority model, alongside increased programme complexity and coordination risk.<br><br>• **Requires two sets of transition and implementation governance** – Two constitutions, two electoral reviews, two consultations, two shadow authorities, and dual branding would be required.<br>• **Lowered aggregation risk -** A 2UA model would require aggregation of three district-specific services into one collective service per region, resulting in reduced administrative and transitional risks for aggregated services.<br>• **Disaggregation of systems and contracts** – High-risk, high-cost systems like Liquidlogic, Capita One, SAP, and GIS platforms would need to be split or reprocured, which are flagged as major risks and costs from discussions with service leads across ASC, ICT, and education.<br>• **Increased implementation portfolio staffing costs -** Two separate transition and implementation portfolio teams are likely to be set up (noting close working between the two in some areas). This is likely to result in additional internal and external costs particularly in areas such as programme management, Legal and governance support, IT support etc.<br>• **Prolonged implementation timelines -** Shadow arrangements, TUPE consultations, contract revisions, and legacy system exit timelines could vary between East and West.<br>• **Additional ongoing costs of additional shared services arrangements** - Any new shared services arrangements (e.g. potential considerations around coroners, registrars, archives etc) would require formal governance and charging frameworks to operate across both councils which are likely to add increased ongoing running costs and effort to delivery.<br>• **Costs to key services –** Essential services such as ASC and CSC require the appointment of statutory senior roles. These positions are mandated by law and therefore represent unavoidable costs that will be incurred by both councils. | |

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| 3. High quality, sustainable services | A) Improves local government and service delivery, avoiding unnecessary service fragmentation | The 2UA model would require the disaggregation of services that are currently delivered at county scale. This may increase the risk of fragmentation and inconsistency, especially where delivery depends on cross-county governance or shared systems. Delivery challenges have also been noted by stakeholders from the VCFSE sector particularly given increased duplication, fragmented commissioning, and reduced ability to coordinate delivery at scale.<br><br>• **Aligns delivery to distinct area profiles** – East could design services around its rural access needs, building on the Cotswolds' established community transport networks and the Tewkesbury Garden Communities. West could integrate regeneration and safeguarding priorities for Gloucester and the Forest of Dean.<br>• **Strengthens local partnerships** – Smaller geographies make it easier to work intensively with anchor institutions such as the University of Gloucestershire in the West and Royal Agricultural University Cirencester in the East, embedding them into local economic and education strategies<br>• **Potential disruption to countywide transformation pipelines** – Significant multi-year transformation and digital programmes, largely at county level, already underway would likely need to be paused and rescoped for each authority – This could slow down improvements to service delivery.<br>• **Requires disaggregation of critical countywide services** – ASC, CSC, education, SEND, public health, emergency planning, transport would each need to be split out in a 2UA scenario (or at a minimum with some form of shared arrangements in place to enable delivery across two sovereign organisations). Given the statutory responsibilities associated with these services and the legislative requirements and governance, it is most likely services would need to be fully disaggregated to maintain clarity in accountability and enable long-term service stability. While this is possible, it is noted it will be extremely complex e.g. issues regarding ordinary residence (i.e. who pays for the cost of delivery) in social care as well as the disparity of need across the two unitary authorities. | **A** |

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| | | • **Requires the creation of a standalone Fire and Rescue Authority -** Under the provisions in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, fire and rescue will need to move to non-local authority governance, financial, and service arrangement (i.e. the creation of an independent Fire and Rescue Authority), which will incur additional costs and may increase risk to sustainable service provision.<br>• **Reduces potential operational flexibility for transport and highways services** - Operational flexibility may be reduced if contractors are restricted to specific UA boundaries, limiting the ability to respond efficiently to local issues.<br>• **Introduces governance complexity** – Safeguarding, legal, and commissioning leads confirmed that multi-agency boards would need to be split or restructured, adding complexity to ICB engagement and joint delivery with NHS and Police.<br>• **Could lead to variation** – Differences in resources, priorities or capacity could lead to divergence in how services are delivered across the two areas with residents close to boundaries experiencing variations in provision.<br>• **Disaggregation introduces risk of fragmentation** – Education, ASC and public health services warned that users moving between East and West may face different systems, policies, and access routes.<br>• **Challenges for cross-border services** – School trusts, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), and regional partnerships may have to deal with two education strategies, SEND policies, and admissions frameworks, which was flagged by GAPH and FE as significant risks to consistency and collaboration.<br>• **Place-based delivery becomes harder to coordinate** – With two sovereign councils, divergence in how neighbourhood models are resourced and prioritised becomes more likely.<br>• **Lack of a unified capital programme** - Service leads across strategic finance, ASC, and planning emphasised the importance of a unified capital programme that allows resources to flow toward the county's most deprived areas, including Gloucester, Cheltenham, and the Forest, without needing to negotiate priorities between councils. | |

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| | | • **Examples of inter-authority collaboration** - Gloucestershire already operates several shared service models, including Ubico, One Legal, Publica, and shared audit arrangements. These demonstrate that inter-authority collaboration is possible and has worked successfully in Gloucestershire. *However, it is important to note that professional service leads emphasised that disaggregating countywide statutory functions such as ASC, CSC, and public health would be significantly more complex than these current arrangements given the significant cost, legal and care implications associated with them.* | |
| | B) Opportunity for public service reform including where this will lead to improved value for money | Each new authority would be responsible for designing and funding its own service transformation agenda. While local flexibility may increase, fragmentation of platforms and investment plans may limit the pace and scale of change.<br>• **Enables local flexibility** – each council can shape its own digital investment, reform priorities, and neighbourhood model in line with community needs and political ambition, alongside being agile and flexible enough to implement<br>• **Focused investment in area-specific reforms** – The East could prioritise digital health outreach and rural connectivity upgrades, and the West could channel regeneration funds into brownfield redevelopment and city-centre renewal in Gloucester, as identified in local growth plans.<br>• **Reduces scale for innovation** – Smaller transformation budgets and teams may limit ability to adopt digital and analytics tools at pace.<br>• **Increases technology fragmentation** – Without aligned procurement, the two authorities may implement incompatible systems (e.g. finance, social care case management, HR), reducing future interoperability and driving long-term inefficiency. | **A** |

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| | | • **Undermines shared learning and replication** – Innovation tested in one council may not scale to the other, limiting transferability of successful models and requiring duplicated discovery work and investment. | |
| | C) Improves delivery of, or mitigates risk to negative impact on crucial services | Separate authorities could create inconsistency in design and delivery of crucial services.<br><br>• **Risk to homelessness prevention** – Housing and homelessness services flagged that disaggregating commissioning and housing capital programmes could make it harder to manage countywide pressures, especially with differing homelessness rates in both regions (0.21% in the West and 0.11% in the East)<br>• **Public safety governance** – Disaggregating safeguarding structures would require new MASA boards and potentially separate Police partnership frameworks. Senior Police stakeholders stressed that this could weaken consistency of response in child protection and community safety.<br>• **Disrupts end-to-end service planning** – Care pathways, school placement systems, early help, and transition into adult services are all currently managed across one system, and disaggregation would complicate coordination and risk continuity. In addition to this, splitting services like admissions, EHCPs and SEND into East/West would create division over time and risk undermining delivery.<br>• **Disruption to hospital discharge and integrated care pathways** - This is an area of concern for service professionals, particularly as Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, located in the West, serves as the county's central acute site. The countywide discharge-to-assess (D2A) model, which provides short-term bedded care for assessment (Pathway 2), often leads to placements that become individuals' long-term homes. Introducing a requirement to source placements based on the boundaries of two separate unitary authorities, depending on ordinary residence, could reduce placement options and delay discharge processes. | **A** |

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| | | • **Ordinary residence implications for ASC -** The challenge around 'Ordinary Residence' is not only operationally / financially complex but impacts the most vulnerable residents if there are implications in terms of moving people across the County specifically those with long-standing placements.<br>• **May increase outcome variation** – Differing financial starting points, access to reserves, and workforce size could affect ability to maintain parity of service quality. In addition to this, divergent policies on exclusions, admissions, and SEND support could result in inequity between areas.<br>• **Inequitable access for vulnerable residents** - Splitting education commissioning and admissions could lead to inequitable access to the county's 14 specialist schools, especially for children with rare needs.<br>• **Disruption to home to school transport (HTST)** - due to disaggregated placement decisions and geography, particularly availability of drivers, fleet, and routes to special schools.<br>• **Requires robust governance and assurance** – Without shared framework; monitoring, escalation, and intervention pathways may vary - which service leads warned could expose gaps in statutory performance (e.g. SEND timeliness, EHCP outcomes).<br>• **Creates complexity for regional partners** – Public health, education and safeguarding professionals expressed concern about splitting countywide responsibilities and the need to co-manage performance across two legal bodies.<br>• **Increase in out of county placements** – The creation of 2UAs would create an additional border for the county and result in working an 'out of county' services model, for services which sit within the same postcode. | |
| 4. Meets local needs | A) Meets local needs and is | The 2UA model aims to reflect established localities, with an East/West split broadly aligned to existing district boundaries. This may support a stronger sense of local identity and enable more | **A** |

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| | informed by local views | localised leadership and governance. However, some stakeholders raised concerns that splitting into two authorities would risk 'fragmenting already fragile cross-county partnerships' and pull focus away from place-wide strategies for education, health, and climate.<br><br>• **Localities do not always follow district lines** - Some communities span the proposed boundary or rely on countywide services and networks. The 2UA model risks weakening connections between these areas. Alongside this, Education, safeguarding and housing teams noted that many communities rely on shared infrastructure and networks. A 2UA model risks creating artificial barriers around lived geography.<br>• **Supported by some local voices –** Stakeholders in Cheltenham and some parish councils suggested that smaller units may improve visibility and local responsiveness.<br>• **Risk of undermining cross-county place design** – The Place Model assumes consistent Neighbourhood Partnerships and locality governance. Splitting delivery governance may result in inconsistent coverage or investment.<br>• **Some community feedback highlighted risks around marginalising communities** – The Diocese and parts of the VCFSE sector expressed concern that splitting Gloucestershire would further marginalise communities already on the edge, especially in rural transition zones like the Severn Vale and North Cotswolds.<br>• **Some resident feedback highlighted concerns around creating a divide** - Concerns were consistently noted by some residents (who responded to a survey issued out by all Gloucestershire councils in July 2025) around fairness, division, and efficiency – with particular references to "creating a rich side and a poor side of the county". | |
| | B) Improves / mitigates risk to issues of local identity, cultural | The 2UA model allows each new council to retain visible place identity, which may strengthen civic pride. It supports branding and ceremonial continuity, but only if local governance and engagement are properly resourced and consistent. | **A** |

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| | and historic importance | • **Aligns to known geographies** – District geographies in the East and West already support local branding, parish engagement, and heritage-based governance.<br>• **Reflects distinct demographic and community profiles** – EQIA work suggests the East UA combines a more diverse urban centre (Cheltenham) with older rural areas (Cotswold, Tewkesbury), while the West UA combines Gloucester's higher ethnic diversity with older rural communities (Forest of Dean, parts of Stroud). This supports locally tailored equalities frameworks across both UAs.<br>• **Enables place-led branding** – East could emphasise its international tourism offer around the Cotswolds, Regency Cheltenham, and cultural festivals; West could promote the Forest of Dean's green heritage and industrial legacy and Gloucester's historic docklands regeneration as part of its identity.<br>• **May enhance local connection** – Smaller organisations may allow residents to feel more seen, particularly in distinct areas like the Forest, Cotswolds, and Stroud Valleys.<br>• **Strengthens local heritage partnerships** – Smaller authorities could work more intensively with heritage bodies, e.g. Gloucester Cathedral Chapter in the West and Cotswold Conservation Board in the East, to protect and showcase local assets.<br>• **Not a guarantee of civic strength** – As several service leads noted, "having smaller boundaries doesn't automatically deliver stronger community governance." Success depends on local design and sustained political investment.<br>• **Civic identity retained** – Town and parish councils, mayoralties, and ceremonial roles would remain in place. For Gloucester a parish (city council) would be created, and for Cheltenham, options would be considered for parishing unparished areas of the town. These new parishes would serve to strengthen the identity and significant cultural and historic value of each city/town within Gloucestershire<br>• **Supports continuity of place names** - Councils can adopt names, branding, and narratives rooted in local geography and history. |

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| | | • **Inconsistent rollout of locality models** – Without a shared vision or resourcing strategy, Neighbourhood Partnerships and area boards may develop unevenly between the two councils, risking postcode variation in access to voice and influence.<br>• **Risk from divergence in civic promotion -** Without coordinated messaging, the two councils could present different external identities for Gloucestershire, weakening the countywide brand.<br>• **Heavy focus on the two urban centres** - Findings from local engagement with residents in July 2025 highlighted that it could be difficult to create local identities for each unitary that do not revolve around the largest towns which would exclude other areas. | |
| | C) Addresses local concerns | The 2UA model could also increase inconsistency in service design and delivery unless shared frameworks are agreed.<br><br>• **Enables localised service design -** West Gloucestershire could focus on tackling urban deprivation and higher ASC/CSC demand, drawing on targeted regeneration in Gloucester and the Forest of Dean. The East could prioritise rural access needs, while maximising the economic impact of Cheltenham's Golden Valley Development and related secure tech sector, alongside the Cotswolds' tourism and agri-tech industries<br>• **Magnifies financial and capacity disparities** – Demographic and Economic data shows that the West has higher ASC costs, higher household benefits claimant rates, higher homelessness, lower income, and higher deprivation. This may create potential challenges for the West Authority in terms of financial resilience and the ability to meet local needs effectively.<br>• **Opportunities for joint working will remain across the 2UAs** – Employment zones, housing markets, transport corridors, and flood risk do not respect the East-West divide. For example, major commuting flows link Cheltenham, Gloucester, and Tewkesbury across the | **A** |

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| | | proposed boundary; the Golden Valley tech corridor and proposed Severn Edge energy project both require countywide planning to maximise investment potential. | |
| 5. Supports devolution arrangements | A) Helps to support devolution arrangements / unlock devolution | In a 2UA structure, each new council would be the accountable body for its own area so there would not be a single Gloucestershire voice in national negotiations for devolution.<br><br>• **Scope for tailored devolution asks** – Two councils could negotiate complementary but distinct devolution priorities, enabling the East to focus on innovation and cyber skills linked to The Innovation Village at Royal Agricultural University Development, while the West prioritises clean energy investment and infrastructure for the Berkeley Site.<br>• **Potential to broaden regional alliances** – East could strengthen alignment with WECA and Oxfordshire for tech and high-value manufacturing; West could align with Worcestershire/Herefordshire or the West Midlands to secure agri-tech, tourism, and industrial regeneration funding.<br>• **Could increase coordination demands** – The two councils may need to join up on priorities, funding bids, and delivery models for housing, transport, skills, and climate programmes to drive increased influence and negotiating power.<br>• **Adds negotiation complexity** – Government may seek assurance that the two councils can act with unity on countywide matters. Stakeholder feedback from FE colleges and the VCFSE sector emphasised that clarity of leadership is essential to secure confidence from Whitehall.<br>• **Risks divergence in place vision** – Without a shared countywide strategy, the two councils could set different priorities for Neighbourhood Partnerships, local regeneration, and climate action, weakening a consistent Gloucestershire offer in negotiations.<br>• **Feedback from Economic development and planning**: Service leaders in economic development and planning warned that without joint frameworks for infrastructure, skills, and housing, the county's competitive edge could be diluted in a crowded regional market. | **A** |

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| | | • **May require dual representation** – Combined Authorities like WECA or Oxfordshire may need to engage with two Gloucestershire councils, complicating governance and coordination.<br>• **Place delivery risks** – Without countywide oversight, devolved funding for Neighbourhood Partnerships could be designed and resourced differently between East and West, creating variation in local empowerment models. | |
| | B) Sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority | Under a 2UA model, Gloucestershire would be split into two councils, East and West, with populations of ~310,000 and ~349,000. There is a chance that each of the two UAs may join a different strategic authority if there is political divergence which has implications for scale and coherence.<br><br>• **Still meets 1.5m minimum if coordinate groupings** – If both councils join different groupings (e.g. East joins WECA; West aligns with West Midlands), the full benefits of scale could be lost, and we could fall short of the minimum thresholds, but if they coordinate with each other then the minimum thresholds can be met<br>• **Worcestershire and Herefordshire group** - Two smaller Gloucestershire authorities would cause concerns around meeting the minimum 1.5m benchmark in all potential combined authority scenarios e.g. Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a combined population of c.806,000 so if only of the one Gloucestershire authorities was to form a combined authority with these two areas, this would fall short of the minimum 1.5 million threshold (at a max, it would be c.1.2m).<br>• **Flexibility in regional partnerships** – By joining different Combined Authorities, each council could target the most relevant funding streams and policy platforms for its local economy, increasing the total range of investment opportunities for Gloucestershire.<br>• **More comparable relative size with partner authorities -** In terms of relative size of two smaller Gloucestershire authorities compared with potential partners, this may be more | G |

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| | | palatable. The populations of c.300,000-350,000 for Gloucestershire would not be significantly higher than potential partners particularly in the case of a WECA option. | |
| 6. Local engagement and empowerment | A) Enables stronger community engagement | By reducing the size of each council to ~310k (East) and ~349k (West), the 2UA model could allow councillors and officers to work more closely with their local communities. Some stakeholders believe this scale feels more approachable than a single countywide body. However, the quality of engagement would depend on how each council designs, resources, and sustains its locality governance model.<br><br>• **Smaller footprint may improve visibility** – Members and officers could be more locally embedded, with shorter travel distances and potentially closer relationships to communities.<br>• **Allows more localised decision-making** – Committee structures and warding arrangements can be designed to reflect local culture, population density, and settlement patterns in each area.<br>• **Service leads stressed importance of design** – ASC, CSC, and housing officers emphasised that engagement structures need dedicated staffing, budget, and authority to work effectively, with size alone not guaranteeing impact.<br>• **Improved councillor–resident connection** – Smaller populations and geographies make it easier for members to be directly accessible, as already seen in district-level ward surgeries in Stroud, Cotswold, and Cheltenham.<br>• **Potential to embed local culture in governance** – Allows warding and committee structures to reflect distinctive settlement patterns, e.g. rural parish clusters in the Cotswolds or ward-based representation in Gloucester.<br>• **Risk of inconsistency** – Each authority may take a different approach to engagement, leading to uneven governance strength across the county. | G |

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| | | • **Maintaining partner coherence is harder** – VCFSE and parish representatives warned that cross-county organisations may face duplication in engagement, consultation, and partnership work. | |
| | B) Delivers genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment | Each authority would be responsible for designing and maintaining its own locality governance offer in a way that aligns with its geography, culture, and service profile. This could create opportunities for innovation but risks fragmentation if frameworks are not aligned. There is strong support around an emphasis on neighbourhood-level engagement and the creation of place-based structures that reflect where people live. Feedback suggested that two smaller councils might 'create stronger local ties,' but this would depend heavily on capacity and willingness to devolve power within each.<br><br>• **Allows place-based design** – Each council could shape governance in dialogue with parish and town councils, community groups, and residents to reflect local traditions and priorities.<br>• **May reflect civic identity more closely** – The West could prioritise structures for strong rural parish engagement in the Forest and Stroud Valleys, while the East could focus on urban–rural connectivity in Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Cotswolds.<br>• **Scope to pilot local decision-making** – Smaller councils could trial devolved budgets for specific localities, mirroring models in Buckinghamshire and Dorset, but adapted to Gloucestershire contexts.<br>• **Encourages innovation in community partnerships** – Each authority could adapt the Neighbourhood Partnership principles to local capacity and needs, enabling diversity in engagement while keeping community leadership central.<br>• **Risk of fragmentation in place delivery** – The Place Model envisions consistent Neighbourhood Partnerships across Gloucestershire. Under 2UA, these could evolve differently in each council, leading to unequal investment or capability. | G |

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| | | • **Risk of duplication or gaps** – Where partnerships (e.g. safeguarding boards, housing associations, climate forums) span the East–West boundary, separate locality models could create administrative complexity and reduce efficiency.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit** – By removing layers of government, some residents may feel as though the unitary is far removed from their local issues which can decrease engagement. | |
| 7. Environmental and climate protection | A) Ensures the new authority/authorities have clear capabilities to deliver existing and future climate and nature plans. | The 2UA model could potentially mean splitting existing specialist teams, strategies, and funding streams, creating a higher risk of inconsistency and duplication.<br><br>• **Could still retain strategic Climate Leadership Gloucestershire –** This already operates across seven councils currently and could continue to provide an overarching collaboration mechanism between the two UAs to strategically coordinate some activities where scale offers improved outcomes / efficiencies.<br>• **Requires duplication of plans and delivery** – Each council may produce separate climate and nature plans, scrutiny arrangements, and reporting cycles, increasing administrative cost.<br>• **Risks weaker investment leverage -** Countywide funding bids (e.g. for nature recovery, flood defence, EV charging infrastructure) may lose scale and competitiveness if submitted separately.<br>• **Feedback from Flood Risk and Planning leads** – Officers stressed that some climate and flood issues are inherently cross-boundary and require shared governance to avoid duplication or gaps.<br>• **Neighbourhood Partnerships could diverge** – Without a shared approach, local environmental action plans could vary in scope, resourcing, and ambition between East and West. | G |

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| | B) Reflects local priorities in areas with sensitive landscapes (e.g. Forest of Dean, Cotswolds AONB). | The 2UA model is still likely to require cross-boundary coordination for shared natural systems.<br>• **Aligns to clear geographic distinctions** – East: Cotswolds AONB, river catchments, rural agricultural land; West: Forest of Dean, Severn Estuary, urban-rural interface.<br>• **Still requires joint governance for shared assets** – River catchments, wildlife corridors, and flood plains cross the proposed boundary would need shared planning and investment to remain effective.<br>• **Service leads warned of coordination risk** – Planning and environmental health officers flagged that without aligned design codes and infrastructure plans, developers and land managers could face conflicting requirements in different parts of the county. | G |
| | C) Builds on existing commitments (e.g. "Fairer Greener Forest", Climate Emergency responses). | Each authority would be able to maintain and expand current district-led climate commitments, but with differing capacities and investment potential depending on their starting points.<br>• **Allows continuity of local plans** – Existing commitments like “Fairer Greener Forest,” Stroud’s climate strategy, and Cheltenham’s climate targets could be retained and developed.<br>• **Maintains political accountability** – Climate and environmental decisions would remain close to elected members and communities, which some stakeholders believe would encourage stronger local ownership.<br>• **Requires alignment where appropriate** – Shared goals such as emissions reduction, transport decarbonisation, and biodiversity corridors would still need coordinated policy to prevent gaps or duplication. This is particularly relevant to countywide assets like the proposed Severn Edge project, which spans clean hydrogen, nuclear, and synthetic aviation fuel production, and contributes directly to Gloucestershire’s net zero targets. This is | G |

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| | | something that could be coordinated by a strategic countywide forum (building on the existing Climate Leadership Gloucestershire principles). | |
| 8. Civic engagement and participative democracy | A) Promotes civic engagement and strengthens participative democracy. | Both authorities would be able to develop civic engagement strategies suited to their geographies and communities. The smaller scale may enable closer relationships between councils and residents, but investment and commitment will vary depending on resources and leadership.<br>• **May feel more accessible to residents** - Councils serving 310k–350k residents may be seen as more approachable, with shorter decision chains and closer member–resident relationships.<br>• **Risk of unequal investment** - Financial or political priorities may lead to different levels of civic participation infrastructure.<br>• **Requires long-term commitment** - Strong participative democracy relies on consistent leadership and culture, not just structural change.<br>• **Risk of democratic deficit -** Given LGR will reduce the number of elected councillors and create larger electoral divisions, this will increase the number of residents each councillor represents. This could risk a democratic deficit. | **A** |
| 9. Inclusive growth and equity | A) Ability to tackle disparities in wealth setting up one unitary authority or two unitary authorities. | The 2UA model would allow each council to focus on its own economic geography and priorities, which may improve local targeting of interventions. However, without a shared tax base or pooled reserves, there is no direct mechanism to redistribute resources between East and West, meaning inequalities may persist or grow over time without intervention. | **A** |

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| | | • **Greater ability to focus on local economic drivers** – East could align its growth strategy to maximise Cheltenham's festival economy, and Cotswolds tourism; West could drive regeneration of Gloucester's city centre redevelopment, and Forest of Dean industrial renewal.<br>• **Limits redistribution capacity** – Income and demand would need to be managed independently, reducing ability to manage known variations and inequalities across the East and West.<br>• **Service leads voiced concern** – Finance, ASC, and CSC officers warned that over time, the West could face greater difficulty sustaining service quality and investment without a countywide balancing mechanism. Demographic projections show the West has higher deprivation levels and demand pressures. This has implications for long-term financial sustainability, preventative care, and integration with NHS partners.<br>• **Neighbourhood regeneration may diverge** – The Place Model's ambition for consistent Neighbourhood Partnerships could be undermined if each council invests at different levels in deprived areas.<br>• **Risk of splitting resources** - EqIA analysis shows that economic challenges are different in each part of the county and can affect groups protected under equalities law. In the West, young people face higher unemployment. In the East, there is less access to apprenticeships and training, which can particularly impact young people and disabled residents. A 2UA model could target these local issues more directly, but splitting resources may make it harder to run countywide programmes to reduce these gaps. | |
| | B) Prioritises vulnerable residents and community-level regeneration. | The scale of need, particularly in the West, may place more pressure on local finances and delivery unless partnership structures or funding mechanisms are established. There is a risk that different parts of Gloucestershire could become aligned to different combined authorities fragmenting influence and complicating engagement with regional priorities. | G |

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| | | • **Closer integration with local VCFSE networks** – Smaller councils could embed local community organisations (e.g. GL Communities in the West, Cotswold Friends in the East) directly into regeneration planning, improving reach and trust<br>• **Exposes resource gaps** – The West's higher need may not be matched by local income, making it harder to fund regeneration and preventative work without external support.<br>• **Requires robust local commissioning** – Each council would need strong capability to identify, fund, and measure interventions, which was a challenge raised in ASC and housing disaggregation discussions with service professionals, where market capacity varies significantly between East and West. | |
| | C) Ensures that financial sustainability is not achieved at the expense of service levels. | With two independent MTFSs, each council would control its financial decisions, giving flexibility to align budgets with local priorities. However, without shared reserves or risk pooling, cost pressures in high-demand services could lead to service reduction, particularly in the West.<br>• **Enables local control over budgets** – Each authority can shape its own financial strategy to align with its values and priorities.<br>• **Enables targeted financial planning** – East could direct reserves toward rural health access; West could prioritise safeguarding and early intervention in high-need urban areas.<br>• **Potential to attract different funding streams** – Separate authorities could pursue distinct grant opportunities, widening the overall pool of external investment brought into Gloucestershire.<br>• **Increases pressure on high-cost services** – The West, with higher ASC and CSC spend per resident, may face difficult decisions if cost pressures outpace funding.<br>• **Creates risk of service variation** – One council may be able to protect frontline services more easily than the other. | **A** |

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| | | • **Could require trade-offs** – Without pooled reserves or cross-council subsidy, service levels may be more exposed to short-medium- and long-term budget constraints.<br>• **High Needs funding uncertainty** – Stakeholders raised concerns about how Gloucestershire's current countywide High Needs deficit would be apportioned fairly, warning that uneven settlement could undermine education support in one area.<br>• **Countywide Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit projected to reach ~£234m by Vesting Day (1 April 2028).** If statutory override is not maintained or an alternative solution implemented, then both a 1UA and 2UA would face significant financial risks.<br>• **Impact of the Fair Funding Review -** This also remains unknown at this time presenting further financial uncertainty to both 1UA and 2UA scenarios. | |

# Appendix 6: Proposed Service Delivery Models

## Scope of services considered

### Corporate services

- Digital & ICT
- Asset Management & Property
- Strategic Finance
- Pension Fund
- Insurance & Counter Fraud
- HR
- Transactional Services incl. Payroll, AP / AR
- Legal Services (Incl. One Legal)
- Democratic Services & Elections
- Communications
- Transformation
- Planning, Performance & Insight (Data)
- Information Governance
- Customer Management

### Front-line upper tier services (only county council services currently)

- Public Health
- Adult Social Care
- Children's & Education
- Transport & Highways
- Archives
- Fire & Rescue
- Trading Standards
- Coroners
- Libraries
- Registrars
- Employment and Skills

### Front-line lower tier services OR both (only districts OR both county and districts currently)

- Public Protection
- Emergency Planning
- Revenue & Benefits
- Housing Strategy, Maintenance & Homelessness
- Leisure & Culture
- Economy & Sustainability (incl. Tourism & Visitor Economy)
- Planning & Building Control
- Development & Regeneration
- Waste & Environmental Services
- Parking
- Cemetery and Crematoria

## Defining the key parameters used

| | High | Medium | Low |
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| **Change Required** - Transformation or alignment needed to realise the benefit. | **Fundamental redesign of team structure, roles, and processes; introduction of new systems or services; significant cultural change.** | **Moderate restructuring, role changes, or process improvements; some new tools or systems introduced.** | **Minor adjustments to workflows or responsibilities; no structural or system-wide changes.** |
| **One - off Costs** - The upfront investment required to implement the change | **Over £1,000,000 – Includes major IT systems, infrastructure, consultancy, or large-scale training programmes.** | **£500,000–£1,000,000 – Includes moderate system upgrades, recruitment drives, or targeted training.** | **Under £500,000 – Includes minor equipment, short-term consultancy, or small-scale training.** |
| **Recurring Cost** - Ongoing annual expenses to maintain or operate the new arrangement. | **Over £500,000 annually – Ongoing staffing, licensing, or service delivery costs.** | **£250,000–£500,000 annually – Include staffing, subscriptions, or maintenance.** | **Under £250,000 annually – Minimal ongoing costs such as software licences or admin support.** |
| **Aggregation Benefits** - The benefits of aggregating services based on both financial and non financial benefits | **Strong efficiencies and strategic gains from combining services; consistent delivery and reduced duplication.** | **Some coordination and savings achieved, but benefits are limited** | **Minimal improvement realised through aggregation** |

## Corporate Services

# Corporate Services | Summary (1 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
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| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Digital & ICT** | Different delivery models across the Councils.<br><br>County / Tewkesbury / Glos City / Stroud - In-House<br><br>Cotswold / Forest of Dean / Chelt - Publica | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary.**<br>*(Noting that some specialist functions e.g. cyber security,*<br>*(Noting that some specialist functions e.g. cyber security, hardware and software may be jointly outsourced / shared across the two)* | **High** | **High** | **Low** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Asset Management & Property** | **All councils currently deliver property and asset services largely in-house.**<br>*However, there are external consultants and framework partners utilised for specialist services by councils.*<br>*Note services previously delivered by Publica were brought in house with the exception of one health and safety advisor.* | **Hybrid: In-house strategic teams with some shared services of technical functions under an SLA and hosted arrangement.**<br>*Strategic ownership and direction would remain local to each authority.*<br>Note: This excludes commercial property | **High** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **Medium** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Pensions** | **Operated and administered in-house via the Gloucestershire Pension Fund within GCC for all councils in Glos** | **One of the two new UAs is designated as the administering authority for the Gloucestershire Pension Fund;** the other becomes a scheme employer within the fund (similar to current arrangements with district councils). | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Low** |
| No discussions so far | **Strategic Finance** | **In House** | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary.** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Insurance & Counterfraud**<br>***CFEU***<br>***ARA***<br>***SWAP – South West Audit Partnership*** | | **Shared Countywide Service –** Hosted in the east with traded services | | | | |

# Corporate Services | Summary (2 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
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| Engmnt to date | Service Area | Current delivery model | Recommended Delivery Model | Level of change required | One off Transition Costs | Additional ongoing recurring costs | Aggregation Benefits |
| Joint Officers Template | **Democratic Services** | **In-House across all councils** | **Two separate in-house , one per unitary** with local delivery teams. Also combined Democratic services and elections teams into one team. | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **Medium** |
| | **Elections** | **In-House across all councils** | **Two separate in-house , one per unitary** with local delivery teams. Also combined Democratic services and elections teams into one team. | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **High** |
| No discussions so far | **Legal Services**<br><br>**Incl. One Legal** | **Mixed –** One Legal between 4 councils, quasi shared service between 2 councils and in-house for county | **Hybrid:** shared services or hosted on day 1 –with some functions independent and traded services. Will need 2 monitoring officers | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Comms** | **In house** | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary.** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **HR** | | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary.** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Transactional Services incl. Payroll, AP / AR** | | **Shared service – hosted by one of the two organisations with traded services** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Planning, Performance & Insight (Data)** | **In house** | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary** | | | | |

# Corporate Services | Summary (3 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
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| Engmnt to date | Service Area | Current delivery model | Recommended Delivery Model | Level of change required | One off Transition Costs | Additional ongoing recurring costs | Aggregation Benefits |
| No discussions so far | **Information Governance** | **In house** | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Transformation** | **In house** | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Customer Management** | In house | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary** | | | | |
| No discussions so far | **Internal audit** | **Tewkesbury** – In-House<br><br>**Cheltenham, Cotswold and Forest of Dean** – South West Audit Partnership (SWAP)<br><br>**Gloucestershire County** – In-house service which is also provided to Gloucester City Council and Stroud. | **Delivery model to be determined following an options analysis of the different options.** | | | | |

## Front-line upper tier services

# Front-Line Upper Tier Services | Summary (1 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
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| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Public Health** | **In-House management & advisory with a range of commissioned services** | **Two separate in-house, one per unitary** *(disaggregated)*<br>*Noting that there is still likely to be joint working in some limited areas where it makes sense to retain county wide provision and economies of scale e.g. sexual health.*<br>*Will need* **2 DHPH**<br>Could be joint commissioner of supply chain e.g. - out of hours | **High** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Adult Social Care** | ASC is **delivered in-house by GCC**, and the care market is managed centrally, with countywide contracts and provider relationships | **Two separate in-house , one per unitary with its own DASS.** *(disaggregated)*<br>delivered locally Noting: commissioning may take between 3 - 5 years to fully disaggregate. Commissioning jointly on areas e.g. - tech enabled care | **High** | **High** | **High** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Childrens** | **Mixed Delivery Models**<br><br>The service is managed overall in-house but there are also a number of elements of the service commissioned out e.g. Family and Youth Hub development | **Two separate in-house , one per unitary** *(disaggregated)* each undertaking their own commissioning and statutory partnership arrangements<br>Will need 2 DCS<br>And become 2 members of Adoption West | **High** | **High** | **High** | **Medium** |
| | **Education** | **In-house**<br><br>*Note: Cross-authority music service* | **Two separate in-house , one per unitary** *(disaggregated)* | **High** | **High** | **High** | **Medium** |

# Front-Line Upper Tier Services | Summary (2 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
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| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Archives** | **In-house** | **Shared Countywide Service -** *Hosted by West given this is where the Heritage Hub is (Gloucester).* | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Transport & Highways** | **In-House** With outsourced service delivery | **Two separate in-house , one per unitary** *(disaggregated)* Commissioning but flexibility on supply chain (over the long-term) but on day 1, may have to have the service hosted in one authority and providing services to the other. | **High** | **High** | **High** | **Low** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Fire & Rescue** | **In-House -** GCC currently holds the governance and service responsibilities. | **Independent Fire and Rescue Authority** Legally cannot remain in-house | **High** | **High** | **N/A** | **N/A** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Trading Standards** | **In-House** | **Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary** | **Medium** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Coroners** | **In-House** | **Shared Countywide Service (Hosted) -** Hosted by the West as the Coroner's court is located in Gloucester | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** |

# Front-Line Upper Tier Services | Summary (3 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Libraries** | **In-House** | **Two separate in-house , one per unitary** *(disaggregated) Joint* Library Management System | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Registrars** | **In-House** | **Shared Countywide Service -** Hosted *TBD which authority would be the host with shared Proper Officer* | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** |
| County Council Officer meeting | **Employment and Skills** | **In-House** | **County wide, Hosted by one authority** | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** |

Front-line lower tier services OR both (only districts OR both county and districts currently)

# Front-Line Lower Tier Services | Summary (1 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Public Protection** | **Mixed.** Most services are delivered in-house by district councils though Publica provides services for Forest of Dean and Cotswold with some local differences. There are also some services (in some councils) contracted out e.g. stray dogs, contaminated land. | **Two separate in-house teams** but with some specialist functions shared e.g. contaminated land. | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Discussed under Public Protection | **Emergency Planning** *Discussed briefly under Public Protection but was not a detailed discussion – Ratings therefore may need to be refined* | **In-House across all councils currently** | **Two separate in-house teams with opportunity for joint working** | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** | **Low** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Revenue & Benefits** | **In-House** Cotswold and FoD via Publica | **Two separate in-house teams Consider merging customer services** | **High** | **High** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers Template | **Cemetery and Crematoria** | **In – House** across all 7 councils | **Two separate in-house team** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Housing Strategy, Maintenance & Homelessness** | Mixed - All councils have some elements in-house but note:<br>Stroud and Chelt have in-house DLOs and their own housing stock.<br>FoD and Cotswold have shared housing staff in Publica (shared with West Oxfordshire too)<br>Glos City host the Strategic Housing Partnership which is countywide across all 7 councils.<br>All councils commission some services externally | **Hybrid -** Each UA would operate some services in-house and some under shared arrangements (hosted by one authority) *Unanimous consensus that Corporate Landlord services would be retained within each UA (not a shared service)* | **High** | **High** | **Medium** | **High** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Economy & Sustainability -** *Climate & Sustainability* | In-House teams in each council but there is also a county-wide Climate Leadership Gloucestershire Team managed by Glos City.<br>o be updated on 31.07.25 | **Two in-house teams, with a shared partnership forum for collaboration** | **High** | **Medium** | **Low** | **Low** |

# Front-Line Lower Tier Services | Summary (2 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Economy & Sustainability -** *Economic Development* | All councils have in-house ED capabilities noting variations in terms of scope of services, structures and extent of partnership working | **Two in-house teams but with countywide partnership working (where needed)** | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Economy & Sustainability -** *Tourism & Visitor Economy* | All Councils have small in-house local tourism teams, but they are all also part of (and put varying amounts of funding towards) the Cotswolds Plus Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). | **Strategic Countywide Visitor Economy Function with Local Place Marketing**<br><br>*Not yet been determined if the strategic element would be in-house or as a separate organisation* | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **High** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Leisure** | Stroud - **In-House model**<br><br>**5 of the 6 councils outsource provision** *(3 to Freedom Leisure; CBC to the Chelt Trust and Tewkesbury to Places Leisure)* | **Harmonisation of current contractual positions over time to move to a sustainable and aligned model** | **High** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Culture & Heritage** | **Mixed**<br>A number of councils have this in-house; Cotswold outsource running of museum to Freedom Leisure; A lot of partnership working e.g. Glos City have a strategic partnership with Gloucester Culture Trust | **Codesigned future delivery models with the sector and communities with a consideration of future implications related to devolution** | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Planning & Building Control** | **Planning:**<br>In-house | **Two separate in house teams both same as 1UA model - recognising SDS** | **High** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **Medium** |
| | | **Building Control:**<br>**Mixed -** Some in-house and some with shared arrangements e.g. - Gloucester City and Stroud partnership / Cheltenham and Tewkesbury | **Delivered as a shared service across both UAs, with joint governance, shared systems, and local operational teams** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **Medium** |

# Front-Line Lower Tier Services | Summary (3 of 3)

| | | | 2UA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Engmnt to date** | **Service Area** | **Current delivery model** | **Recommended Delivery Model** | **Level of change required** | **One off Transition Costs** | **Additional ongoing recurring costs** | **Aggregation Benefits** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Development & Regeneration** | In house | **Two separate in house teams** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers meeting | **Waste & Environmental Services (Incl. Ubico)** | **Waste Disposal and HRCs:**<br>**Mixed Delivery -** Through in house teams and contractors such as Ubico and FCC (Javelin Park) | **Managed county wide by Ubico.**<br>**Commissioned by two UA's Disposal**: In-House Strategic Service, and Disposal Authority Role for the new UA<br>**HRCs:** Ubico continue to manage HRC Operations<br>**FCC:** West would provide due to Javlin Park location | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| | | **Waste Collection:**<br>**Delivered via Ubico** | **Remains delivered by Ubico** | **Low** | **Low** | **N/A** | **Low –** *Consistency and standardisation* |
| | | **Environmental Services - Mixed Delivery -** in house team with some elements contracted out, some delivered by Ubico e.g. tree planting | **Two separate in-house teams** | **Medium** | **Medium** | **N/A** | **Medium** |
| Joint Officers Template | **Parking** | **Mixed.** Most services are delivered in-house by district councils though Publica provides services for Forest of Dean and Cotswold with some local differences. .<br><br>All enforcement activities at GCC are outsourced | **Two separate in-house teams** for management and notice processing.<br>Outsource physical enforcement | **High** | **Medium** | **Low** | **Medium** |

# Appendix 7: Equalities Impact Assessment (2UA)

The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty which states that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act
2. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
3. Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

This document demonstrates how the Council is meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty by setting out the findings of an equality analysis that has been undertaken in relation to a proposed change to assess whether it has a disproportionate impact on people who share a protected characteristic. The Council's Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process covers additional groups not 'protected' by section149 of the Equality Act 2010, including care leavers and care experienced adults.

## Background

| | |
|---|---|
| Title of the proposed change being assessed i.e. the policy, service or other development | Local Government Reorganisation |

| Describe the purpose of the proposed change and the intended outcomes |
|---|
| This Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been developed to support the consideration of proposals to restructure local government in Gloucestershire, assessing both the single unitary authority (1UA) and two unitary authorities (2UA) options.<br>This document focuses on the 2UA option only, the proposed makeup of which is set out in Table 8 below and involves creating two unitary authorities based on an East/West split of the county. Each unitary authority would be based on the footprint of three district councils: |

*Table 8: Structure and 2023 Population of Option 2*[65]

| East | | West | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cheltenham** | 120,255 | Forest of Dean | 89,104 |
| **Cotswold** | 91,490 | Gloucester | 134,991 |
| **Tewkesbury** | 98,896 | Stroud | 124,540 |
| **East Total** | 310,641 | West Total | 348,635 |
| **% of Gloucestershire population** | 47.1% | % of Gloucestershire population | 52.9% |

[65] *Ibid.*

The purpose of this assessment is to understand and evaluate the potential impacts of these changes on all service users and council staff with protected characteristics.

The reorganisation of local government is a significant change that could affect how services are delivered, how decisions are made, and how residents engage with their local councils.

This assessment aims to:

- Identify any potential positive or negative impacts on service users with protected characteristics
- Consider how these impacts might differ between the one-unitary and two-unitary models
- Highlight opportunities to promote equality and mitigate any adverse effects

It is intended for this EqIA to be a live document, updated as proposals are refined and further engagement with stakeholders takes place. Additionally, after a decision has been made by Government on the chosen model for Gloucestershire, to inform implementation.

| Who is affected by the proposals? |
|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Service users: | Yes |
| Wider community: | Yes |
| Workforce: | Yes |
| Other (please specify): | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Decision to be taken and decision maker | The decision under consideration is whether the local government structure in Gloucestershire is replaced by either:<br>• A single unitary authority; or<br>• Two unitary authorities (East / West)<br><br>This decision will significantly impact how local services are delivered, how residents engage with local government, and how resources are allocated across the county.<br><br>Although the ultimate decision will be made by Government, councils in Gloucestershire are able to make a local decision on their preferred model to present to Government. |

**Information and Data Collection**

Summarise how you have collected the information and data required to assess the current situation (section 3.1 below) and the potential or actual impact of the proposed change (section 3.2 below) on those who share the protected characteristics and the additional groups (e.g. survey of services users, running community focus groups, analysing service usage data, engaging with staff networks). The actual information and data should be set out in Appendix 1 (Service Users) and Appendix 2 (district & county staff in Gloucestershire).

If there are any gaps, include an action in section 4 to fill these. This does not mean that you cannot complete the equality impact assessment, but you need to follow-up the action and revisit as part of the monitoring and review arrangements set out in section 5.

| Stakeholders | Engagement and Consultation | Other Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Service Users / Wider Community | Workshops with services across the county council and district councils to understand the risks and opportunities associated with aggregation and disaggregation of each service.<br><br>A public local engagement process has also been undertaken across Gloucestershire, designed and delivered by an independent, external engagement company - Cratus.<br><br>The engagement process includes an online survey with both structured and open-ended questions, a dedicated microsite, 12 in-person events (two per district), and two online webinars. A total of 3,112 survey responses were received. | Outputs of disaggregation / aggregation service workshops.<br><br>Cratus engagement report. |

| | | |
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| Workforce | A workforce pulse survey has been undertaken across all councils.<br><br>Top line outputs from the survey are:<br>top lines from the survey which you can see below:<br>• 86% of staff understand what LGR might mean in Gloucestershire<br>• 82% of staff understand what devolution might mean for Gloucestershire<br>• 63% understand the difference between LGR / devo<br>• 75% of staff think messages are being well communicated.<br>• Email and staff briefings are the most popular ways staff like to hear messages about LGR/devo<br>• 46% of staff don't feel confident their views will be listened to<br>• 78% feel confident to ask questions<br>• 69% have felt no impact on morale<br>• 78% feel supported by leadership and management<br>• 90% feel they can discuss with their line manager | Staff engagement outputs from the pulse survey on LGR and Devolution across the seven councils in Gloucestershire |
| Partners | To support the wider local engagement being delivered across Gloucestershire to inform the development of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals, | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Gloucestershire County Council's (GCC) senior leadership conducted meetings with key stakeholders, with whom they had established relationships, across June – August 2025.<br>The meetings addressed the following, with some stakeholders choosing to provide further feedback via email or letter:<br>• Update stakeholders on how LGR Full Proposals and Devolution discussions are progressing in Gloucestershire.<br>• Update stakeholders on the LGR policy position of GCC's new Cabinet to be agnostic and evidence-led in considering both a one unitary and two unitary model.<br>• Provide information on the timetable and key processes underway.<br>• Understand more about how LGR / Devolution could impact specific stakeholders / organisations, what is important to them in relation to this topic and address any concerns or issues for them.<br>• Gauge interest in further collaboration and engagement (as appropriate).<br><br>Stakeholders engaged includes:<br>• Various members of the business community | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Gloucestershire Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)<br>• Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance<br>• Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC)<br>• The Bishop of Gloucester, joined by senior Clergy including Deans of the Diocese.<br>• Gloucestershire's schools associations<br>• Gloucestershire College<br>• Hartpury University<br>• National Star College<br>• SG & Stroud College<br>• Bromford Housing<br>• Adults Collaborative Board<br>• Gloucestershire Care Providers Association | |
| Other | | |



**Equality Assessment**

Indicate the impact on each group and explain how you have reached your conclusions (i.e. through analysis of the information and data that was collected through the engagement, consultation and other sources / methods that were set out in section 2).

Consider sub-categories (e.g. different kinds of disabilities) and how the groups are interconnected (e.g. young women) resulting in particular needs or types of disadvantage and discrimination (sometimes known as intersectional or combined discrimination).

*The Proposed Change*

Summarise your assessment of the likely or actual impact of the proposed change on each of the groups. If an action is required, this should be recorded in Section 4.

| Service Users | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Protected Characteristics / Additional Groups | Positive Impact | Neutral Impact | Negative Impact | Not Sure | Summary of Impact | Action Required (Y/N)? |
| Age | | | | X | There are some general risks posed by service disaggregation on groups of older adults and children who receive social care support. With the West area having greater overall Adult Social Care demand than the East.<br><br>Gloucestershire has an ageing population. Demographics are projecting a dependency ratio of 0.69 by 2047. An increase from 0.65 in 2022. With the East being projected to have a greater dependency ratio than the West and Gloucestershire as a whole. For every 100 people the East will be supporting around 5 more dependents than the West, which could translate to higher demands on council services under a 2UA model, and more people who are not in the workforce than those who are working, potentially constraining growth in the local economy. | Y |

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| | | | | | The West has a higher population of children than the East. The West also has a higher level of child safeguarding activity, and a greater rate of children subject to Education, Health and Care Plans.<br><br>Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | |
| Detailed summary of Impact | Potential disproportionate impact:<br>There is potential for impact to services dependant on the ways of working and delivery models that are agreed under the new authorities. Further analysis is needed once delivery models are agreed to review impacts to commissioned services for children and young people if commissioned services are disaggregated and commissioning power reduced. Examples include: School places planning, SEND, early years, education, children's specialist placements, some public health services, e.g. public health nursing, sexual health. | | | | | |
| Disability | | | X | | It is considered that there is potential for a disproportionate impact on service users with a disability under a 2UA model.<br><br>• The West has the highest proportion of residents with a disability (17.7%) exceeding the figure for the county as a whole and the | Y |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | national average. The East area has the lowest proportion of residents with a disability (15.8%) below the county and national average.<br>Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | |
| Detailed summary of Impact | Potential disproportionate impact:<br>• With a higher proportion of residents with a disability in the West, there is a risk that services will lose the joined up approach across the new boundaries and commissioning power will be reduced. Opportunities to share and learn about the best accessibility approaches may be limited by the creation of two authorities. As part of implementation planning, further analysis will be undertaken to ensure appropriate mitigants are considered. For example: delivery of highways issues including local transport, adult social care services, planning implications for schools, commissioned services etc.<br>• Potential negative impact on delivery of services for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, as SEND inclusion support is based on the setting the child attends, and early years support is based on where the child lives. Consideration needs to be given for access to specialist provision.<br>• Demographics suggest a 2UA option would result in higher numbers of children requiring additional support, SEND and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in the West, resulting in higher costs and greater deficit.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed, consideration will need to be given to service user networks to understand their needs. Such as parent-carer forums and children and young people voice. | | | | | |

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| | Potential positive proportionate impact:<br>• A model covering a smaller geographical area might be able to be more responsive to local needs and may therefore be able to respond to specific needs and requirements of residents with disabilities. | | | | | |
| Sex | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Race | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Gender reassignment | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to | Y |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | |
| Pregnancy & maternity | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Religion and/or belief | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Sexual orientation | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |

| | | | | | | |
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| Marriage & civil partnership | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Armed Forces community | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Carers | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Detailed Summary of Impact | • Parent-carer forums and networks are established as county-wide, so disaggregation could impact support | | | | | |

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| Care leavers / care experienced adults | | | X | | Under a 2UA delivery model there is potential for disproportionately negative impact on service users where commissioning power and existing services would be reduced.<br><br>Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Detailed Summary of Impact | Potential disproportionate impact<br>• Potential impact on breadth of commissioned services for care leavers if commissioned services are disaggregated and commissioning power reduced.<br>• Children's services often commission supported living in Gloucester (West) due to wealth of wider support services. As a result, a greater number of Care Leaver Accommodation Based Support services are situated in Gloucester so redistribution of services might be needed to respond to changes in CYP models over time.<br>• Unequal split of current supported accommodation provision across East and West.<br>• There is a risk that service provision across each authority is not equal, therefore creating a postcode lottery of service across the East and West boundaries. | | | | | |
| Digital exclusion | | | | X | Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to | Y |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | |
| Geography, for example, urban and rural areas | | | | X | There is a risk of disproportionate impacts on service users with key geographical characteristics under a 2UA model, where location of existing services may change.<br><br>Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | Y |
| Detailed Summary of Impact | Potential disproportionate impact:<br>▪ Impact on tenant farmers with potential change in T&Cs with new authority e.g. rent increases.<br>▪ Local Transport plan would be divided creating a less strategic approach<br>▪ Service users may experience reduced access to library services in each unitary<br>▪ Where services have District hubs, main HQ is often Gloucester (West), so some consideration needed by providers of property requirements.<br>▪ Travellers' sites are all located in the East.<br>▪ Provision of SEND services in rural areas: in smaller delivery units (2UA) there may be less resilience to support current arrangements.<br>▪ Reablement units, discharge services, and in-house facilities rely on shared access to county-owned or managed property assets currently<br>▪ Hospital discharge is a key area of concern in the context of LGR -. Gloucester Royal (located in the West) is the central acute hospital, and pathways are currently managed at county scale. LGR options need to consider how discharge responsibilities continue to be managed to | | | | | |

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| | minimise clinical and operational risk. The countywide discharge-to-assess model, which provides short-term bedded care for assessment (Pathway 2), often leads to placements that become individuals' long-term homes. Introducing a requirement to source placements based on the boundaries of two separate unitary authorities, depending on ordinary residence, could reduce placement options and delay discharge processes.<br>▪ Adult Social Care is facing sharply rising demand, especially from older people and working-age adults with complex needs. West Gloucestershire carries a higher baseline demand and projected growth, particularly in supported living and long-term placements.<br>▪ Imbalance in demand between East and West - A 2UA model could potentially fragment delivery and reduce the ability to achieve consistent outcomes for residents as demand and supply patterns differ significantly across the county, and a split could exacerbate inequalities rather than resolve them.<br>▪ Disruption for the most vulnerable residents (Ordinary Residence) - The challenge around 'Ordinary Residence' is not only operationally / financially complex but impacts the most vulnerable residents if there are implications in terms of moving people across the county, specifically those with long-standing placements.<br>▪ Income deprivation is typically higher in more urban areas; and the West has higher deprivation compared to the East. Deprivation is a key determinant of health outcomes, and the differing health profiles and needs of the 2UAs need to be considered in assessing impact.<br>▪ Public health services are typically commissioned on a countywide footprint, with locality provision based on population need. Consideration will need to be given to how services are disaggregated in a 2UA model, and risk of a reduction in the breadth and scale of provision which can be afforded/supported across urban and rural communities if commissioned on a smaller geographic footprint. | | | | | |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | | | | X | Under a 2UA model the risk to those with Socio-economic disadvantage characteristics is access routes to services. Both physically, depending on where a service is offered, and for referral routes. | Y |

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| | | | | | Deprivation levels within the West Unitary will be higher than the deprivation levels within the East. Meaning that public health grants would be smaller for the East. There is concern that the grant would not be proportionate and the East could therefore be disadvantaged overall.<br><br>There is also a potential impact of service delivery where additional roles may be needed under a 2UA model in services that are already encountering recruitment challenges.<br><br>Socio-economic disadvantage is a key determinant of health outcomes, and the differing population and health profiles of the 2UAs will need to be considered when assessing impact on service users.<br><br>Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | |
| Potential disproportionate impact: | | | | | | |

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| • The disaggregation of county-wide services (e.g. transport subsidies, or digital inclusion programmes) could reduce access or make service more expensive per resident.<br>• Local Transport plan would be divided creating a less strategic approach<br>• Given higher deprivation levels in West than East, West allocation of the public health grant is likely to be greater than East. Currently, in West there are 37,422 people living in the national 20% most deprived LSOAs in England, in the East this is just 13,900 people. Smaller budgets may impact on the scale and breadth of public health services which can be commissioned and staff capacity, potentially leading to differential service provision across the 2UAs.<br>• Children and education service delivery could be impacted if a 2UA arrangement exacerbates recruitment challenges through increased competition for hard to fill posts, such as social work, Educational Psychology and Special Advisory Teachers, or other recruitment such as foster carers.<br><br>Potential positive proportionate impact:<br>• With smaller authorities there is potential that planning and procuring services can focus more on creating local jobs, training opportunities, and helping the local economy grow.<br>• There is also the potential that more localised services would mean a possible reduction in travel costs associated and reduced distances being travelled by residents.<br>• There is potential for more localised provision of public health services and neighbourhood/locality-based delivery aligned with population needs. | | | | | | |
| Vulnerable groups of society | | | X | | The potential for disproportionate impact here is based on the data where there are higher rates of vulnerable people in the West than the East.<br><br>Consideration will be needed to mitigate risks of disaggregation to services under a 2UA model.<br><br>As delivery models are developed and agreed, further consideration will be needed to | |

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| | | | | | consider the potential equalities impact on service users. | |

Potential disproportionate impact:

- Need to ensure continuity of provision through transition, notably for vulnerable, high-risk populations. Experience would suggest that we would likely see an adverse impact on service outcomes and team productivity through transition.
- Higher rate of co-morbidities and long-term conditions in the West than in the East. This makes the population more vulnerable to poor health outcomes, such as the impact of a pandemic (as observed during and following Covid 19).
- Distribution of inclusion health groups differs across East and West which needs to be considered in assessing impacts.
- Asylum accommodation predominantly located in West.
- Refugee population higher in East.
- Traveller accommodation all located in East.
- Homelessness/rough sleeper - predominantly in West.
- Care leavers – predominantly in West
- Two hospital discharge teams could result in reduction in service for effective support of hospital discharges

| Council Workforce |
|---|

Moving to Two Unitary Authorities (2UA) will bring changes to how we work and how teams are set up. Further assessment is needed to understand how these changes will affect different groups of staff across the councils.

| Protected Characteristics / Additional Groups | Positive Impact | Neutral Impact | Negative Impact | Not Sure | Summary of Impact | Action Required (Y/N)? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• As the biggest age demographic for staff falls within the 45-59 age range, consideration will need to be given to this group<br>• When jobs are reorganised or changed, there's a risk that older people might be treated unfairly in hiring. HR will need to take steps to prevent this.<br>• There's a risk that HR policies and practices might not be consistent across councils that will be making up the new authorities.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• As roles change and teams are reorganised, younger staff might have more opportunities for promotion. | Y |

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| | | | | | • The new councils could create policies that support staff of all ages, including training and flexible retirement options.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Disability | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff with disabilities might be more affected by changes in location, especially if transport or building access isn't properly planned.<br>• When the new councils are created, there may be delays or gaps in providing workplace adjustments (like special equipment, flexible hours, or software) during team or office moves. | Y |

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| | | | | | • Where services may be split up, there is a risk of losing important knowledge and support networks (like disability staff groups or equality officers) if these aren't kept in place in the new councils.<br>• Changes to how people work or being moved to a new employer (TUPE) may disproportionately affect staff with mental health needs or neurodiverse conditions.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new councils have a chance to build accessible workplaces, systems, and flexible working options from the start.<br>• The opportunity to ensure that the councils create stronger inclusion policies, which could lead to better support and visibility for staff with hidden disabilities or mental health conditions.<br>• As part of implementation, efforts will be made to make sure staff policies around workplace adjustments are in place and that workspaces are accessible. However, the exact impact may vary between services, and a more detailed review will be needed.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs. | |

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| | | | | | As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Sex | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>As with other personal characteristics, the impact of changes will vary depending on the makeup of each team. However, changes that affect frontline staff and team leaders are likely to affect women more, where they make up a large part of these roles. It will be important to consider this when planning any potential staff restructures linked to LGR.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There's a higher risk of women being affected unfairly, as they make up over 70% of the workforce. Consideration should be given when affecting any contractual changes to ensure individuals are not disproportionately affected due to sex.<br>• There is a risk that pay structures do not provide equity for those of any sex. | Y |

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| | | | | | Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new councils could use this to improve gender balance, especially in leadership, management, and technical roles.<br>• There is an opportunity to ensure there are equal pay policies and structures<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Race | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Like with other personal characteristics, the impact of changes will vary depending on the makeup of each team or service. However, there is risk that staff from ethnic minority backgrounds are impacted:<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts: | Y |

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| | | | | | • There's a risk that anti-racism work or equality efforts might lose focus if teams are split or priorities shift.<br>• Communication could be harder during the transition, especially for staff who don't speak English as their first language.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Gender reassignment | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>There is no data available on staff who declare that they are going through or have gone through gender reassignment. Consideration will be needed to ensure there are no disproportionate impacts on staff with this characteristic. | Y |

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| | | | | | Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There's a risk that HR policies and practices might not be consistent across councils that will be making up the new authorities. For example, how names and pronouns are recorded, dress codes, or access to support.<br>• Some councils may have different policies that will need to be aligned during the TUPE process.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• Setting up the new councils is a chance to improve support for trans staff. This could include better training, updated policies on gender identity, and more inclusive facilities.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>• Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Pregnancy & maternity | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration: | Y |

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| | | | | | Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff on maternity leave during the transition might feel concern about job security, changes in their manager, or changes to their role.<br>• Through this process, working hours or locations might change. This could be difficult for pregnant staff or new mothers, especially if it's different from what they agreed before going on maternity leave.<br>• As the new councils are set up, there could be problems with managing leave, pay, or flexible working during the change.<br>• There is a risk that HR policies and practices and not consistent across councils that will be making up the new authority. There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• On the positive side, the new councils might be able to plan their workforce in a more local and flexible way.<br>• This could lead to better support for returning to work, more flexible working options, and improved arrangements for staff with caring responsibilities.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with | |

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| | | | | | employee groups to understand their needs – such as physical space for breastfeeding<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Religion and/or belief | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Like with other personal characteristics, the impact will vary depending on the makeup of each team. Consideration will be needed to ensure there are no disproportionate impacts on staff with this characteristic.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There's a risk that religious needs might be missed during potential office moves or when new policies are created. For example, staff may need prayer rooms or multi-faith spaces if they're asked to work in a new location.<br>• There is a risk that HR policies and practices are not consistent across councils that will be making up the unitary authority. | Y |

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| | | | | | There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• Any changes to office spaces as part of creating the new councils should be a chance to design more inclusive workplaces. This might include multi-faith rooms, culturally appropriate food options, or more flexible leave policies.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Sexual orientation | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Like with other personal characteristics, staff don't have to share their sexual orientation, so data is limited on this characteristic. As implementation plans are agreed there will be | Y |

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| | | | | | more opportunity to work with employee groups, such as LGBTQ+ groups to understand their needs.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There's a risk that existing LGBTQ+ support networks or allies could be lost if teams are split up or moved.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new councils should show strong support for LGBTQ+ inclusion from the start by creating new networks, policies, and support systems for LGBTQ+ staff.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Marriage & civil partnership | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected. | Y |

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| | | | | | As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Armed Forces community | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• There is a risk that HR policies and practices are not consistent across councils that will be making up the unitary authority. There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br><br>Potential for positive impact: | Y |

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| | | | | | • As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Carers | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Like with other personal circumstances, the impact on staff with caring responsibilities will need to be considered in more detail once detailed plans are developed. Workplace policies may need to be updated to support carers, including options for leave and flexible or hybrid working.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff who care for others may feel additional pressures if they're worried about job security or increased workloads. | Y |

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| | | | | | • There is potential for loss of informal support, like understanding managers or flexible arrangements, during team changes.<br>• Moving to a new work location, if required could mean longer travel times and higher costs, making it harder to manage their caring duties.<br>• There is a risk that HR policies and practices are not consistent across the councils that will be making up the unitary authority. There will be a need to harmonise HR policies.<br><br>Potential for positive impact:<br>• The new councils could use this opportunity to improve support for carers by creating fair and consistent policies. For example, carers' leave and flexible working— across all areas.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent. | |

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| | | | | | Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Care leavers / care experienced adults | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | Y |
| Digital exclusion | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to | Y |

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| | | | | | ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Geography, for example, urban and rural areas | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent. | Y |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>Considerations for disproportionate impacts:<br>• Staff on lower incomes may struggle more with potential changes with moving to a new location, longer travel, or job uncertainty.<br>• If there are redundancies or changes in pay, those already financially stretched could be disproportionately affected. However, based on the experiences of other local authorities who have already gone through this process, redundancies have been minimal and mostly limited to senior leadership roles (such as Chief Executives, Directors etc).<br><br>Potential for positive impact: | Y |

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| | | | | | • The reorganisation and TUPE process should be used to reduce inequalities - for example, by improving access to training, career progression, or digital tools.<br>• As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs.<br><br>As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |
| Vulnerable groups of society | | | | X | Based on the different needs of the current workforce, below highlights some general points for consideration:<br><br>Consideration will be needed for any changes to or new internal policies and practices to ensure people with this characteristic are not disproportionately affected.<br><br>As implementation plans are agreed there will be more opportunity to work with employee groups to understand their needs. | Y |

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| | | | | | As with other areas, work will be done to make sure staff policies are consistent.<br><br>Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on the workforce. | |

**Action Plan**

Set out the key actions that will be undertaken, following the equality assessment in section 3, to further maximise the positive impact or mitigate the negative impact of the proposal on the protected characteristics and additional groups prior to implementation (any negative consequences should be eliminated, minimised or counter-balanced by other measures):

| Identified Potential or Actual Impact | Recommended Action(s) | Owner | Target Completion Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| Further analysis is needed once delivery model is agreed to assess any potential equalities impact on service users and workforce. | As part of implementation planning, each LGR programme will need to complete an EqIA to consider the impact of proposed changes to service delivery and ways of working on those with protected characteristics and inform decision making. | Programme Managers | Nov ’25 - Aug ‘26 |
| Depending on the implementation plan chosen, there is potential for equalities | | People & Culture LGR Workstream | Nov ’25 – Apr ‘28 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| impact on workforce with protected characteristics.<br>Mostly likely to be Geography and disability, should any change in working location be needed | People & Culture workstream to ensure all workforce risks are mitigated against through policy. | | |

**Monitoring and Review**

Public bodies must have regard to the aims of the duty not only when a policy, service or development is being created and decided upon, but also when it is implemented and at regular intervals thereafter. The Equality Duty is a continuing duty.

| | |
|---|---|
| Lead officer(s): | Gareth Edmundson, Chief Executive – Cheltenham Borough Council<br>Jane Portman, Chief Executive, Cotswold District Council<br>Nigel Brinn, Chief Executive, Forest of Dean District Council<br>Jon McGinty, Managing Director, Gloucester City Council<br>Jo Walker, Chief Executive – Gloucestershire County Council<br>Kathy O'Leary, Chief Executive – Stroud District Council<br>Alistair Cunningham, Chief Executive – Tewkesbury Borough Council |

*Part 1 – Initial arrangements (up to around six months following implementation)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Date of the post implementation review: | October 2028 |
| Approach to measuring the impact of the change to enable a comparison between | Review on implementation to be completed by each LGR Programme as agreed under finalised implementation plans. Each programme will need an individual EqIA |

| | |
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| the anticipated impact (as set out in section 3) with the actual impact:<br><br>▪ What mechanisms will be used?<br><br>▪ How will service users / the wider community / GCC staff and other stakeholders be involved? | to ensure there is consideration of equalities and ownership of actions throughout the process. |

*Part 2 – Ongoing arrangements (from around six months onwards)*

| | |
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| Frequency of monitoring and review: | Ongoing monitoring via individual LGR programmes. |
| What mechanisms will be used?<br><br>How will service users / the wider community / GCC staff and other stakeholders be involved? | Via individual programme EqIAs. |



**Appendix 1: Service User Data and Information**

Details of service users affected by the proposed activity:

| Groups | Service User Data and Information |
|---|---|

Age

Dependency ratios are a measure that indicate the level of support that needs to be provided by the working age (16-64) population to the younger and older population, people aged 0-15 or 65+. A low dependency ratio indicates that there is a sufficient ratio of the working-age population to the dependent population. In contrast, a high dependency ratio indicates there may be more financial burden on the working population to support the dependent population

The West has a higher overall population than the East, it has a slightly lower proportion of those aged 65 and over, which are likely to require more targeted support.

*Table 5: Age distribution of the mid 2023 Population, by the proposed unitaries*[1]

| | Gloucestershire | | East | | West | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | |
| **Total Population** | 659,276 | 100.0% | 310,641 | 100.0% | 348,635 | |
| **0-16** | 115,485 | 17.5% | 53,920 | 17.4% | 61,565 | |
| **16-64** | 398,322 | 60.4% | 186,241 | 60.0% | 212,081 | |
| **65+** | 145,469 | 22.1% | 70,480 | 22.7% | 74,989 | |

Table 8 shows the projected dependency in 2047. The East area is projected to have a greater dependency ratio than the West and Gloucestershire as a whole. For every 100 people of working age the East will be supporting around 5 more dependents than the West, which could translate to higher demands for council services, and more people who are not in the workforce than those who are working, potentially constraining growth in the local economy.

*Table 8: Projected dependency ratio, 2047, by the proposed unitaries*[2]

| | Dependency ratio |
|---|---|
| **Gloucestershire** | 0.69 |
| **East** | 0.72 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **West** | 0.67 |

Figure 2 looks at the projected population across the three areas in more detail, breaking it down by sex and 5 year age band. Across all areas the largest 5 year cohort is those aged 55-59. All areas have a similar age profile, although the West area has a higher proportion of those aged 35-59, and a lower proportion of older people than other areas.

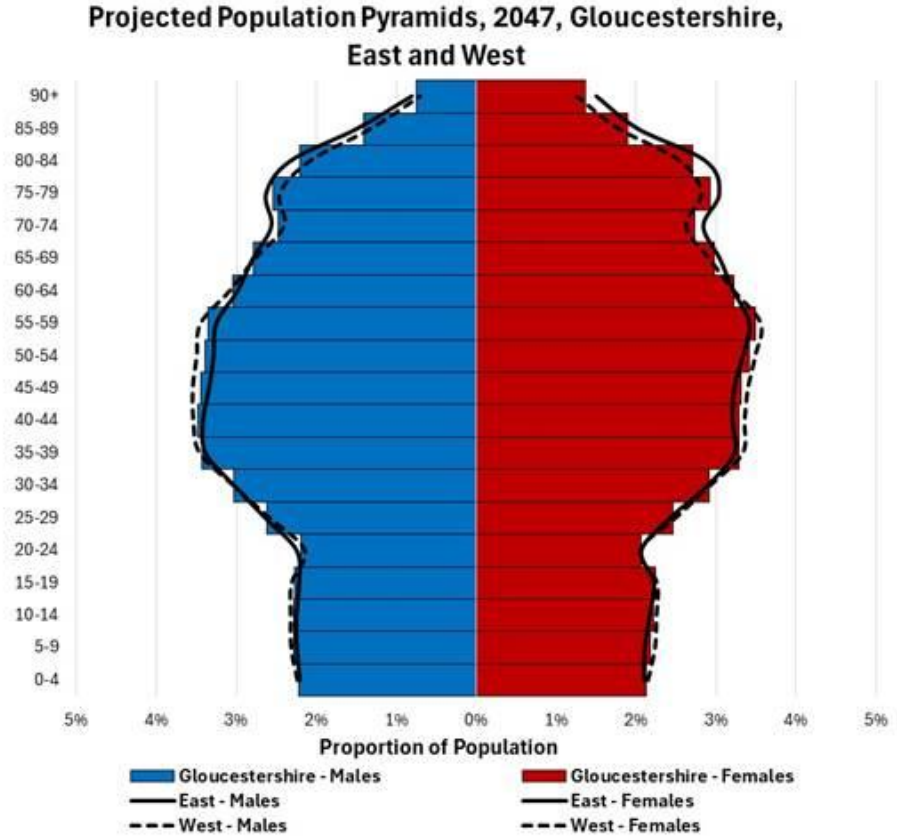


*Figure 2: Projected Population Pyramids, 2047, Gloucestershire, East and West*[3]

Adult Social Care

The information below shows a break down of the Adult Social Care case cohort by age groups, Gloucestershire, East and West areas and the component districts.

Table 9 shows the caseload for age groups over 75 are the highest across all areas. The West area has greater overall demand than the East.

*Table 9: Adult Social Care Service Users by age, Gloucestershire, East and West, as at 31st March 2025 (DRAFT)*[4] [5]

**East Unitary**

| | Under 18 | 18 - 24 | 25 - 34 | 35 - 44 | 45 - 54 | 55 - 64 | 65 - 74 | 75 - 84 | 85+ | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham | 0 | 56 | 80 | 99 | 81 | 167 | 165 | 319 | 328 | 1271 |
| Cotswold | 0 | 16 | 25 | 22 | 28 | 69 | 99 | 217 | 307 | 770 |
| Tewkesbury | 0 | 40 | 57 | 44 | 44 | 119 | 99 | 203 | 239 | 836 |
| **0** | **0** | **112** | **162** | **165** | **153** | **355** | **363** | **739** | **874** | **2877** |

**West Unitary**

| | Under 18 | 18 - 24 | 25 - 34 | 35 - 44 | 45 - 54 | 55 - 64 | 65 - 74 | 75 - 84 | 85+ | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucester | <5 | 159 | 190 | 156 | 179 | 302 | 220 | 371 | 333 | 1865 |
| Stroud | <5 | 82 | 101 | 79 | 87 | 187 | 164 | 294 | 340 | 1313 |
| Forest of Dean | 0 | 65 | 87 | 72 | 73 | 157 | 156 | 257 | 278 | 1113 |
| **0** | **0** | **306** | **378** | **307** | **339** | **646** | **540** | **922** | **951** | **4291** |

**Countywide**

| | Under 18 | 18 - 24 | 25 - 34 | 35 - 44 | 45 - 54 | 55 - 64 | 65 - 74 | 75 - 84 | 85+ | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham | | 56 | 80 | 99 | 81 | 167 | 165 | 319 | 328 | 1271 |
| Cotswold | | 16 | 25 | 22 | 28 | 69 | 99 | 217 | 307 | 770 |
| Tewkesbury | | 40 | 57 | 44 | 44 | 119 | 99 | 203 | 239 | 836 |
| Gloucester | <5 | 159 | 190 | 156 | 179 | 302 | 220 | 371 | 333 | 1865 |
| Stroud | <5 | 82 | 101 | 79 | 87 | 187 | 164 | 294 | 340 | 1313 |
| Forest of Dean | | 65 | 87 | 72 | 73 | 157 | 156 | 257 | 278 | 1113 |
| Out of County or Unknown | <5 | 18 | 24 | 50 | 54 | 60 | 42 | 55 | 49 | 349 |
| **Grand Total** | **7** | **425** | **559** | **512** | **533** | **1042** | **939** | **1710** | **1871** | **7433** |

Vulnerable Children

The information below shows a break down of the vulnerable children across Gloucestershire, East and West areas and the component districts.

The West has a higher population of children than the East. The West also has a higher level of child safeguarding activity, and a greater rate of children subject to Education, Health and Care Plans.

*Table 10: Service demand for children's services as at 09/07/2025*[6]

| | Population aged 17 and under (MYE 2023) | All open referrals/cases[7] | CiN / CP / CIC[8] | CYP with EHCP[9] [10] |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| Area | Number | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cheltenham | 23,777 | 662 | 2.80% | 333 | 1.40% | 1,106 | 4.70% |
| Cotswolds | 16,623 | 419 | 2.50% | 270 | 1.60% | 733 | 4.40% |
| Tewkesbury | 20,515 | 575 | 2.80% | 346 | 1.70% | 1,235 | 6.00% |
| East | 60,915 | 1,656 | 2.70% | 949 | 1.60% | 3,074 | 5.00% |
| | | | | | | | |
| Forest of Dean | 16,192 | 460 | 2.80% | 301 | 1.90% | 867 | 5.40% |
| Gloucester | 29,192 | 1,196 | 4.10% | 617 | 2.10% | 1,708 | 5.90% |
| Stroud | 24,173 | 596 | 2.50% | 308 | 1.30% | 1,294 | 5.40% |
| West | 69,557 | 2,252 | 3.20% | 1,226 | 1.80% | 3,869 | 5.60% |
| | | | | | | | |
| Gloucestershire | 130,472 | 3,908 | 3.00% | 2,175 | 1.70% | 6,943 | 5.30% |

[1] Mid 2023 Population Estimate, ONS

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

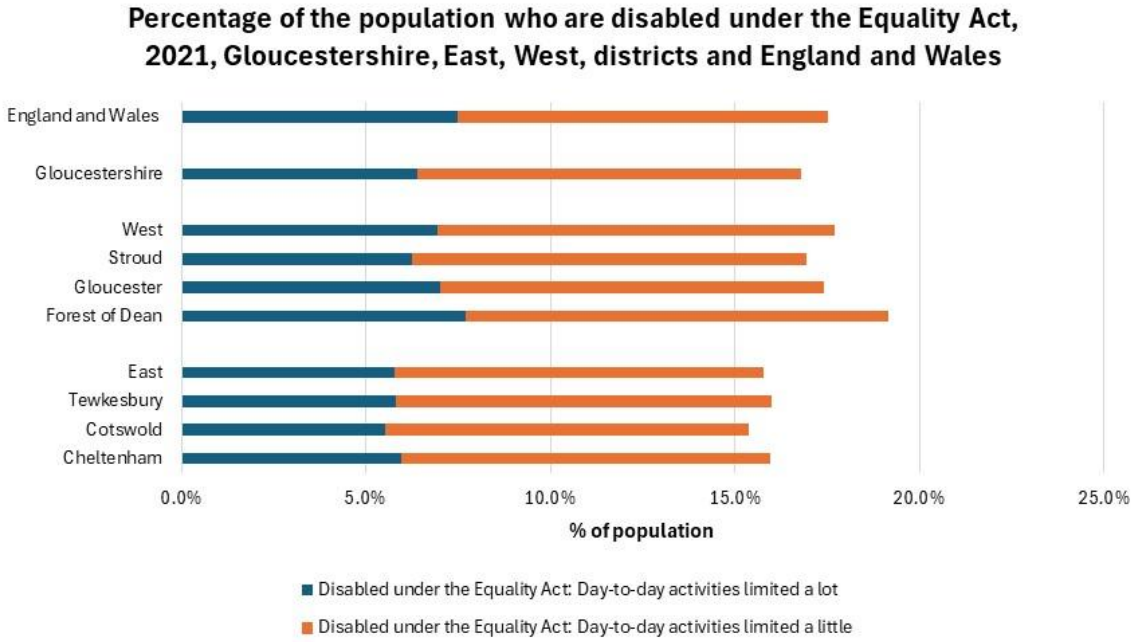
[4] DAIT, GCC

[5] The tables are based on our Client Level Dataset (CLD), representing a distinct count of individuals by age and postcode at the point of service commencement. Please be aware that the CLD is currently undergoing a comprehensive review and enhancement process, which may lead to future refinements in the data. All service types are included in this snapshot—this encompasses Health, Fully-Funded, Part-Funded, and selected Self-Funded services. No services have been excluded.

[6] DAIT, GCC

[7] Figures refer to all open Social Care referrals, as of 09/07/2025. Address information refers to Home Address as of 09/07/2025. Totals may not add up to 100% as either address information not being recorded or child residing outside of Gloucestershire at that time.

[8] Of the above children, those who were either subject to a CiN plan, CP plan or were a Child in Care, as of 09/07/2025

| | |
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| | [9] Figures include children and young people aged 0-25 with an EHCP maintained by the LA and are a snapshot as at 09/07/2025. Based on the child / young person's home postcode.<br>[10] * EHCP runs from 0 to 25, but the majority of plans are for under-18's, so the same population (0 to 17) is used for the % for consistency |
| Disability | In 2021, 16.8% of Gloucestershire residents were classified as having a disability under the Equality Act. Looking at the East and West areas, the West area has the highest proportion of residents with a disability (17.7%) exceeding the figure for the county as a whole and the national average. The East area has the lowest proportion of residents with a disability (15.8%) below the county and national average.<br>  <br> |

Sex

According to the 2023 population estimates, 51.1% of Surrey's population is female. This is in line with the national average. The East and West areas are also broadly similar to the national and county average with 51.2% and 51.0% of the population being female respectively.

*Table 13: Sex breakdown of the mid 2023 Population, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[1]

| | Number | | | Percenta |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male |
| **Cheltenham** | 59,011 | 61,244 | 120,255 | 49.1% |
| **Cotswold** | 43,963 | 47,527 | 91,490 | 48.1% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 43,698 | 45,406 | 89,104 | 49.0% |
| **East** | **146,672** | **154,177** | **300,849** | **48.8%** |
| | | | | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 66,984 | 68,007 | 134,991 | 49.6% |
| **Gloucester** | 60,868 | 63,672 | 124,540 | 48.9% |
| **Stroud** | 47,832 | 51,064 | 98,896 | 48.4% |
| **West** | **175,684** | **182,743** | **358,427** | **49.0%** |
| | | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | **322,356** | **336,920** | **659,276** | **48.9%** |
| | | | | |
| **England and Wales** | 29,835,992 | 31,018,735 | 60,854,727 | 49.0% |

As age increases, females outnumber males by an increasing margin. In Gloucestershire in 2023, 52.8% of people aged 65-84 were female, whilst for people aged 85+ the difference was more marked with females accounting for 61.4% of the total population; this difference is observed across the East and West areas as well as at a national level.

| | |
|---|---|
| | *Table 14: Sex and breakdown of the mid 2023 Population, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[2] |

| | 0-15 | | 16-64 | | 65-84 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| **East** | 50.6% | 49.4% | 49.1% | 50.9% | 46.8% | 53.2% | 38.3% |
| **West** | 50.9% | 49.1% | 49.7% | 50.3% | 47.6% | 52.4% | 38.8% |
| **Gloucestershire** | 50.8% | 49.2% | 49.4% | 50.6% | 47.2% | 52.8% | 38.6% |
| **England and Wales** | 51.2% | 48.8% | 49.3% | 50.7% | 47.1% | 52.9% | 38.1% |

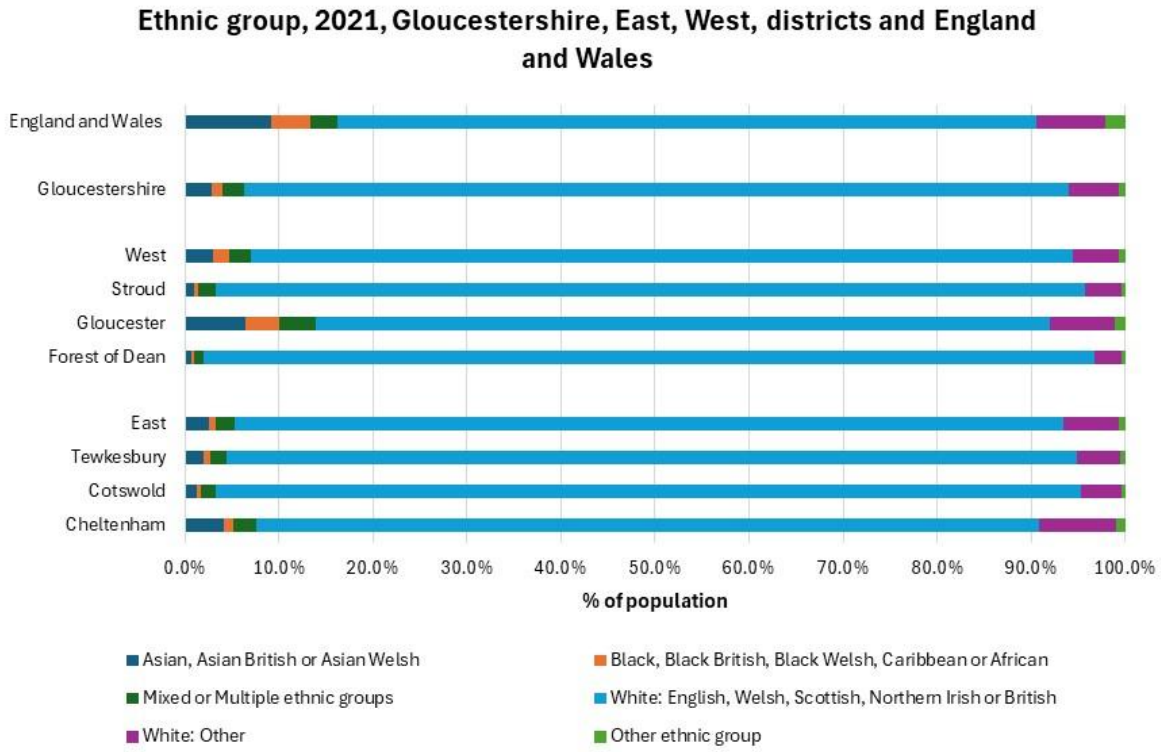
[1] Mid 2023 Population Estimates, ONS

[2] *Ibid.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Race | The Equality Act states that race includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins. The government refers to ethnicity and not race; this is because surveys usually ask people for their ethnicity and not their race, and using consistent terms helps people to understand the data.<br><br>In Gloucestershire 87.7% of residents identified as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British, which was considerably higher than the national average of 74.4%. The East and West have a similar proportion of residents who identified as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British to Gloucestershire with 88.1% and 87.4% respectively.<br><br>White Other accounts for the second largest proportion of residents in Gloucestershire, East and West. In Gloucestershire 5.3% of residents fall into this category, lower than the national average of 7.3%. In the East area 5.9% of residents are classified as White Other, slightly higher than the Gloucestershire figure but lower than the national figure, while in the West area 4.8% of residents fall into this category, higher than the Gloucestershire and national figure. |

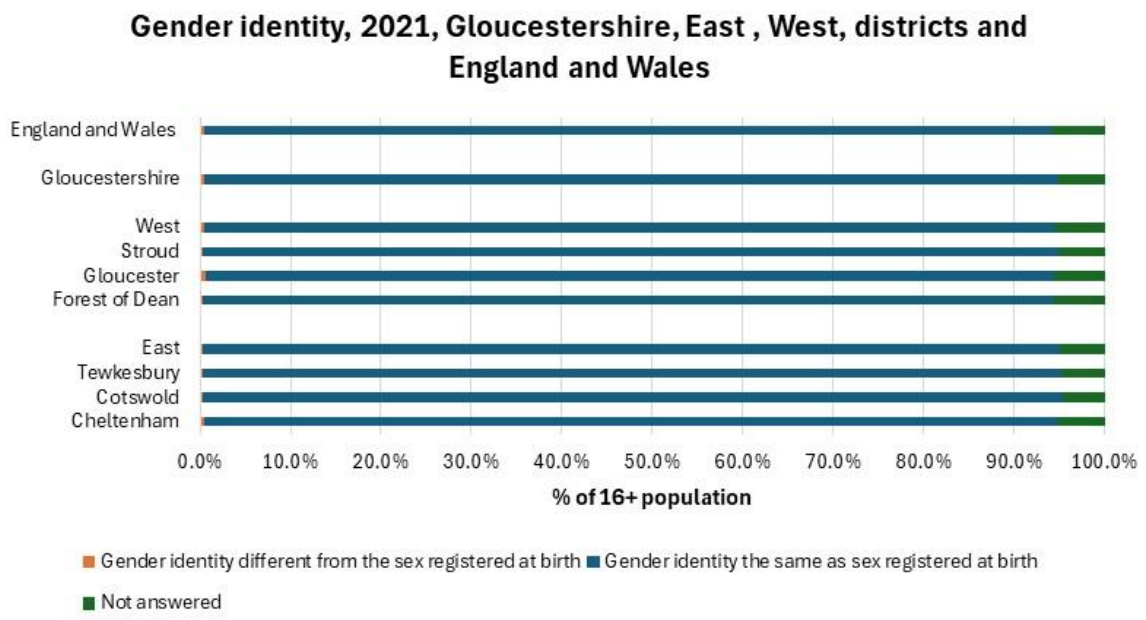
The Asian, Asian British and Asian Welsh category made up the largest percentage of the non-White Gloucestershire, East and West population and represented 2.9% of Gloucestershire residents, lower than the national average of 9.3%. The East and West areas have a similar proportion of Asian, Asian British and Asian Welsh as Gloucestershire as 2.6% and 3.1% respectively.

There are minimal differences in the proportion of Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African residents and Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups across Gloucestershire, East and West areas.



| | |
|---|---|
| | *Figure 6: Ethnic group, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[66] |
| Gender reassignment | The Census 2021 has provided the first set of official data on gender identity in England and Wales. In the 2021 Census there was a new question around gender identity, asking 'is your gender the same as the sex you were registered at birth?'. The question referred to a person's sense of their own gender. It was directed only at people aged 16 and over, and answers were voluntary. However, as of November 2024, the Census 2021 data on gender identity no longer hold the accredited official statistics designation and have been reclassified as official statistics in development.<br><br>ONS states: There are some patterns in the data that are consistent with, but do not conclusively demonstrate, some respondents not interpreting the question as intended; given other sources of uncertainty, not least the impact of question non-response, we cannot say with certainty whether the census estimates are more likely to be an overestimate or an underestimate of the total number of trans people aged over 16 years in England and Wales.<br><br>Census estimates on gender identity are, however, broadly consistent with the best available comparator of the GP Patient Survey and international comparators.<br><br>Overall, 94.8% of residents in Gloucestershire aged 16 and over answered the question. Of these, almost 2,200 people (0.4%) regarded their gender identity to be different from the sex registered at birth. The East and West areas also saw 0.4% of their population stating their gender identity was different from the sex registered at birth. However, in the East 95.1% of residents answered the question this was slightly higher than the 94.5% in the West. |

[66] 2021 Census, ONS

| | |
|---|---|
| |  <br>*Figure 7: Gender identity, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[67] |
| Pregnancy & maternity | There were 5,839 live births in Gloucestershire in 2023, this equates to a crude fertility rate of 8.9 live births per 1,000 people of all ages. This was lower than the national average of 9.7 live births per 1,000 people of all ages. Looking at the East and West areas, the highest crude birth rate was in the West (9.1), which exceeded the county average but was lower than the national average. The East had a crude birth rate of 8.6 live births per 1,000 people, this was lower than the county and national average. Crude birth rates are affected by the |

[67] *Ibid.*

demographic make-up of an area. Gloucestershire's relatively older population means it has proportionally less women of childbearing age than England, which may explain its lower crude birth rate.

*Table 9: Crude birth rates, 2023*[68]

| | Live births | Total Population | Crude Birth Rate per 1,000 population |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cheltenham** | 1,009 | 120,255 | 8.4 |
| **Cotswold** | 657 | 91,490 | 7.2 |
| **Tewkesbury** | 1,001 | 98,896 | 10.1 |
| **East** | **2,667** | **310,641** | **8.6** |
| | | | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 709 | 89,104 | 8.0 |
| **Gloucester** | 1,448 | 134,991 | 10.7 |
| **Stroud** | 1,015 | 124,540 | 8.1 |
| **West** | **3,172** | **348,635** | **9.1** |
| | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | **5,839** | **659,276** | **8.9** |
| | | | |
| **England and Wales** | 591,072 | 60,854,727 | 9.7 |

The limitation of crude birth rates is that it doesn't account for the age and sex structure of the population. General Fertility Rates account for this by expressing live births per 1,000 females aged 15-64, this adjusts for women of childbearing age in an area. A higher general fertility rate (GFR) means that, on average, more children are being born to women of reproductive age. The General Fertility Rate in Gloucestershire stands at

[68] Live births in England and Wales, ONS

50.4 live births per 1,000 females aged 15-44, which is slightly higher than the national average. Looking at the East and West areas, the highest general fertility rate was in the West (51.9), which exceeded the county average but was lower than the national average. The East had a general fertility rate of 48.8 live births per 1,000 females aged 15-44, this was lower than the county and national average.

*Table 10: General Fertility Rates, 2023*[69]

| | Live births | 15-44 year old female population | General Fertility Rate per 1,000 population |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cheltenham** | 1,009 | 23,432 | 43.1 |
| **Cotswold** | 657 | 13,724 | 47.9 |
| **Tewkesbury** | 1,001 | 17,525 | 57.1 |
| **East** | **2,667** | **54,681** | **48.8** |
| | | | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 709 | 14,206 | 49.9 |
| **Gloucester** | 1,448 | 26,915 | 53.8 |
| **Stroud** | 1,015 | 19,969 | 50.8 |
| **West** | **3,172** | **61,090** | **51.9** |
| | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | **5,839** | **115,771** | **50.4** |
| | | | |
| **England and Wales** | 591,072 | 11,879,690 | 49.8 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Religion and/or belief | The 2021 Census asked about religion, but this question was voluntary and 'no religion' was a common answer, a proportion of people also chose not to answer the question. |

[69] Live births in England and Wales, ONS

| | |
|---|---|
| | According to the 2021 Census, 49.2% of residents in Gloucestershire were Christian, making it the most common religion, the proportion of residents selecting this religion was higher than the national average (46.2%). The East and West have a broadly similar proportion of residents who identified as Christian to Gloucestershire with figures of 50.2% and 48.3% respectively.<br><br>No religion accounts for the second largest proportion of residents in Gloucestershire, East and West. In Gloucestershire 41.4% of residents fall into this category, higher than the national average of 37.2%. In the East area 41.0% of residents are classified as having no religion, slightly lower than the Gloucestershire figure but higher than the national figure, while in the West area 41.7% of residents fall into this category, higher than the Gloucestershire and national figure.<br><br>Islam was the second most common religion in Gloucestershire, East and West Areas, Muslims represented 1.4% of Gloucestershire residents considerably below the national average of 6.5%. In the East area 0.8% of residents are classified as Muslim, slightly lower than the Gloucestershire figure and considerably lower than the national figure, while in the West area 2.0% of residents fall into this category, higher than the Gloucestershire figure but lower than the national figure. |

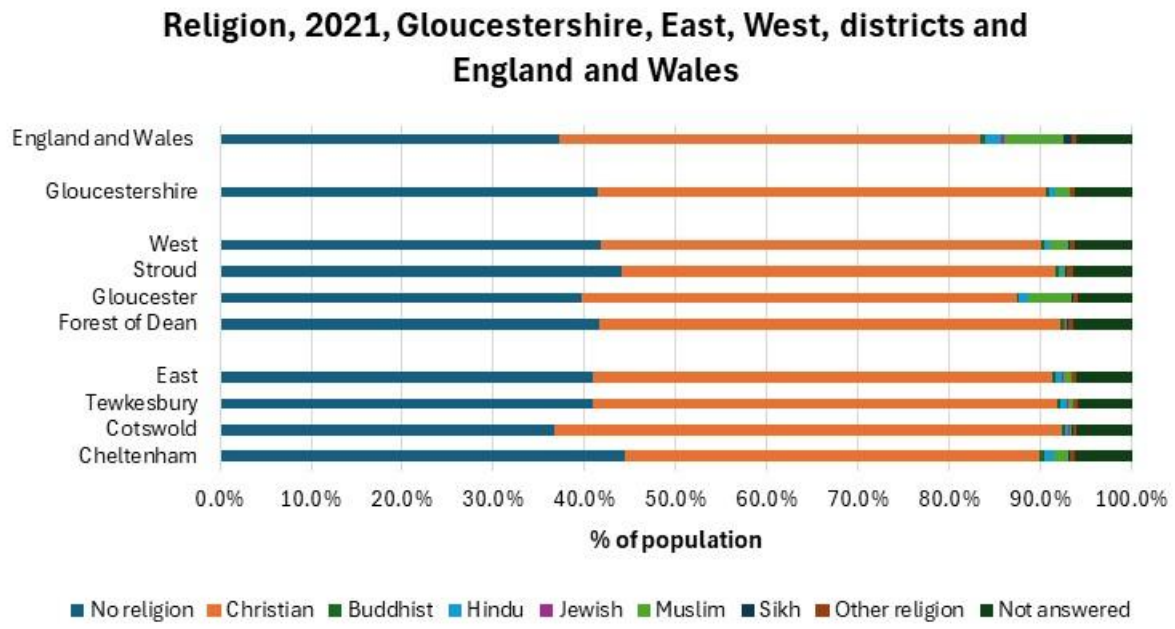
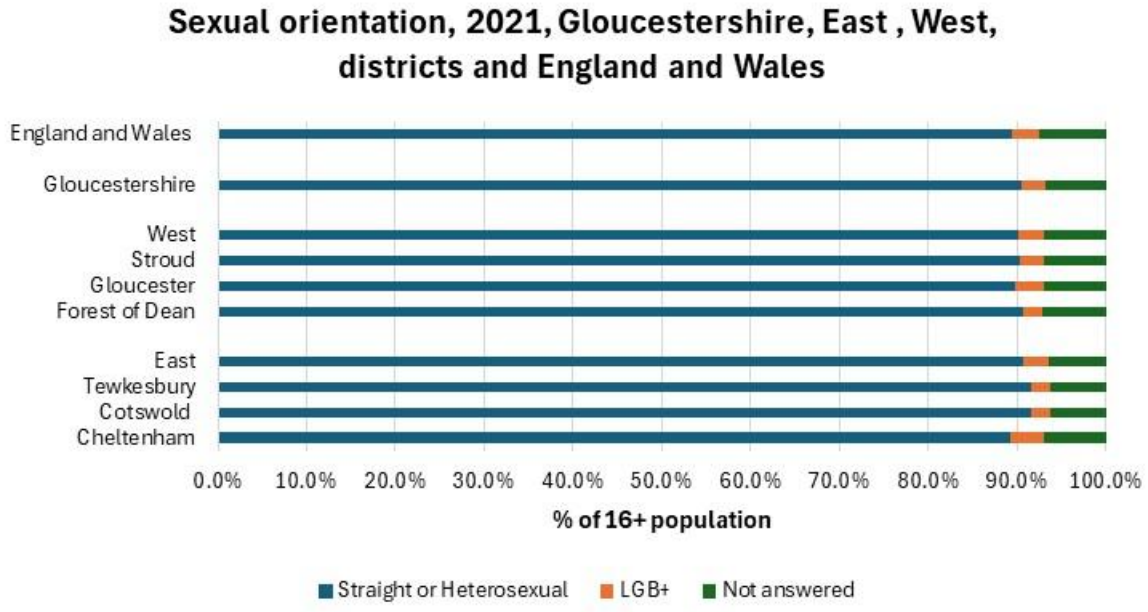


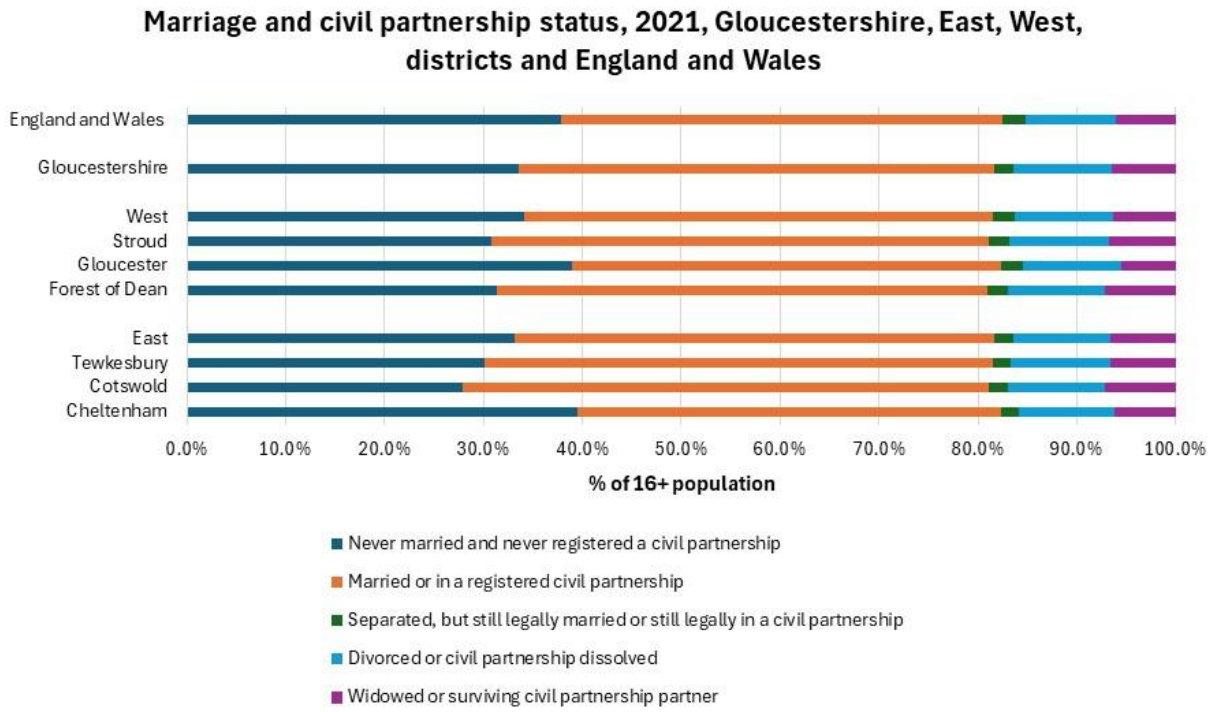

*Figure 8: Religion, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[70]

| | |
|---|---|
| Sexual orientation | As with gender identity, the Census 2021 has provided the first set of official data on sexual orientation in England and Wales. In the 2021 Census there was a new question around sexual orientation, asking 'which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?', and providing a list of options. It was directed only at people aged 16 and over, and answers were voluntary. Overall, 93.2% of residents in Gloucestershire aged 16 and over answered the question. The majority of people who answered described their sexual orientation as 'straight or heterosexual', at 90.4% of the population. This is slightly higher than the national average of 89.4%. In |

[70] *Ibid.*

| | |
|---|---|
| | the East area 90.6% of residents described their sexual orientation as 'straight or heterosexual', marginally higher than the county average and the figure for the West (90.2%).<br>  <br><br>*Figure 9: Sexual orientation, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[71] |
| Marriage & civil partnership | There minimal differences between Gloucestershire, the East and West areas. The East area has a slightly lower proportion of people who have never married and never registered a civil partnership (33.1%) than the West (34.1%) with the county sitting in the middle of the two areas (33.6%). Conversely the West area has a slightly |

[71] *Ibid.*

| | |
|---|---|
| | lower proportion of people who have married or are in a registered civil partnership (47.5%) than the East (48.6%) with the county again sitting in the middle (48.0%).<br>  <br><br>*Figure 10: Marriage and civil partnership status, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[72] |
| Armed Forces community | Local authorities, national government, businesses, local authorities, charities and the public have committed to support the Armed Forces community through the Armed Forces Covenant. It was adopted in 2011 and |

[72] *Ibid.*

articulated the principles of no disadvantage and special consideration; that no current or former member of the armed forces, or their families, should be at a disadvantage compared to other residents in the provision of public and commercial services. This was followed by the Armed Forces Act 2021 introduced a new requirement for some public bodies, including the NHS and local authorities, to pay due regard to the principles of the Covenant when carrying out specific public functions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education.

The information captured relates to armed forces veterans rather than current personnel and was captured by the 2021 Census. In 2021 there were there 27,418 people who had previously served in the UK armed forces resident in Gloucestershire. This equates to 5.2% of the 16+ population. The proportion of armed forces veterans was higher in Gloucestershire than it was across England and Wales (3.8%). The East has a slightly higher proportion of armed forces veterans (5.4%) than the West (4.9%) and the county as a whole, but the difference is minimal.

**Armed forces veteran status, 2021, Gloucestershire, East , West, districts and England and Wales**

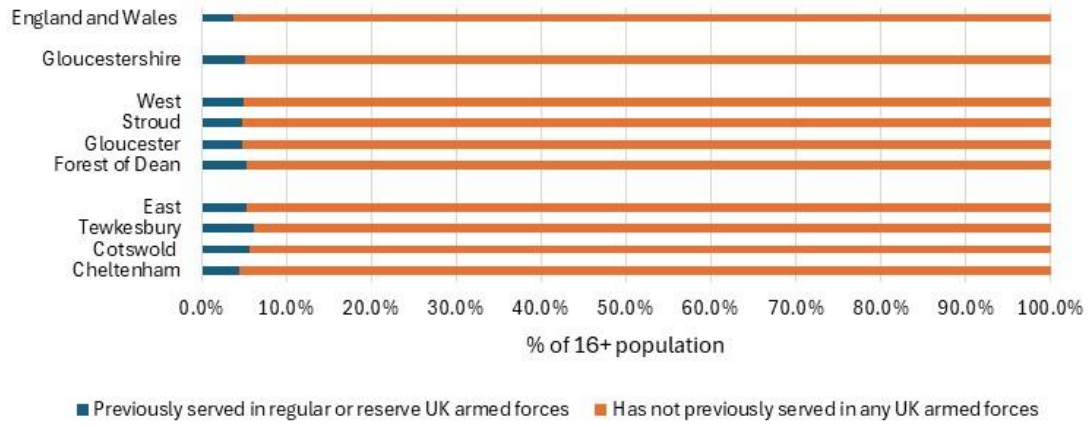


*Figure 11: Armed Forces Veteran Status, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[73]

Carers

This information is based on self-reported caring status according to the 2021 Census, this means figures will be different from sources which look at registered carers.

In 2021, there were 51,862 people aged 5+ providing unpaid care in Gloucestershire, this is equivalent to 8.5% of the population. In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of the population in England and Wales (8.9%) said they provided unpaid care. In the East area 8.0% of residents aged 5+ provided unpaid care higher slightly higher than the county average and the figure of 8.9% seen when looking at the West area. There are minimal differences observed in the levels of care provided by the East, West and Gloucestershire total.

*Table 11: Residents aged 5+ by caring status, 2021, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[74]

| | Percentage of 5 + Population | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Provides no unpaid care** | **Proved some unpaid care** | **Provides 19 hours or less unpaid care a week** | **Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week** | **Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week** |
| **Cheltenham** | 92.6% | 7.4% | 4.2% | 1.3% | 1.9% |
| **Cotswold** | 91.9% | 8.1% | 4.7% | 1.2% | 2.2% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 91.5% | 8.5% | 4.7% | 1.4% | 2.4% |
| **East** | **92.0%** | **8.0%** | **4.5%** | **1.3%** | **2.1%** |
| | | | | | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 90.3% | 9.7% | 5.1% | 1.7% | 2.9% |
| **Gloucester** | 91.6% | 8.4% | 4.2% | 1.8% | 2.4% |
| **Stroud** | 91.1% | 8.9% | 5.3% | 1.4% | 2.2% |

[73] 2021 Census, ONS
[74] *Ibid.*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **West** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.8%** | **1.7%** | **2.4%** |
| | | | | | |
| **Gloucestershire** | **91.5%** | **8.5%** | **4.7%** | **1.5%** | **2.3%** |
| | | | | | |
| **England and Wales** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.3%** | **1.8%** | **2.7%** |

Care leavers / care experienced adults

This information is based on self-reported caring status according to the 2021 Census, this means figures will be different from sources which look at registered carers.

In 2021, there were 51,862 people aged 5+ providing unpaid care in Gloucestershire, this is equivalent to 8.5% of the population. In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of the population in England and Wales (8.9%) said they provided unpaid care. In the East area 8.0% of residents aged 5+ provided

unpaid care higher slightly higher than the county average and the figure of 8.9% seen when looking at the West area. There are minimal differences observed in the levels of care provided by the East, West and Gloucestershire total.

Percentage of 5 + Population Provides no unpaid care Proved some unpaid care Provides 19 hours or less unpaid care a week Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week

| | Percentage of 5 + Population | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Provides no unpaid care** | **Proved some unpaid care** | **Provides 19 hours or less unpaid care a week** | **Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care a week** | **Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care a week** |
| **Cheltenham** | 92.6% | 7.4% | 4.2% | 1.3% | 1.9% |
| **Cotswold** | 91.9% | 8.1% | 4.7% | 1.2% | 2.2% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 91.5% | 8.5% | 4.7% | 1.4% | 2.4% |
| **East** | **92.0%** | **8.0%** | **4.5%** | **1.3%** | **2.1%** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | **Forest of Dean** | 90.3% | 9.7% | 5.1% | 1.7% | 2.9% |
| | **Gloucester** | 91.6% | 8.4% | 4.2% | 1.8% | 2.4% |
| | **Stroud** | 91.1% | 8.9% | 5.3% | 1.4% | 2.2% |
| | **West** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.8%** | **1.7%** | **2.4%** |
| | | | | | | |
| | **Gloucestershire** | **91.5%** | **8.5%** | **4.7%** | **1.5%** | **2.3%** |
| | | | | | | |
| | **England and Wales** | **91.1%** | **8.9%** | **4.3%** | **1.8%** | **2.7%** |

**Digital exclusion**

Very little information is collected about this group. The latest information taken from the Participation Survey is at district level and covers the period from May 2023 to March 2024. The results show that in Gloucestershire an estimated 95.6% of respondents have used the internet either at home or elsewhere which is higher than England average of 92.7%. The West area (94.4%) has a lower rate than the East (96.8%) and the county average but still exceeds the national average.

*Table 12: Percentage of respondents aged 16 and over who have used the internet either at home or anywhere else, Gloucestershire, East and West, districts and England, 2023-2024*[75]

| | **Percentage of 16+ Population** |
|---|---|
| **Cheltenham** | 96.9% |
| **Cotswold** | 94.4% |
| **Tewkesbury** | 95.8% |
| **East** | **96.8%** |
| | |
| **Forest of Dean** | 91.3% |

[75] Participation Survey, DCMS

<table>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<table>
<tr><td>Gloucester</td><td>92.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Stroud</td><td>95.9%</td></tr>
<tr><td>West</td><td>94.4%</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucestershire</td><td>95.6%</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>England</td><td>92.7%</td></tr>
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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography, for example, urban and rural areas</td>
<td>
This includes specific areas and rural/urban geographies and how this can make it difficult for some people to access the services they need.
The 2021 Rural-Urban Classification (RUC) is a statistical classification system used to categorise geographies based on the form and characteristics of the settlements present within them. It aims to provide a consistent and standardised method for classifying areas as Rural or Urban, based on address density, physical settlement form, population size, and relative accessibility.
Gloucestershire has a significantly higher proportion of its population living in rural areas than the national average (17.5%). The East area has a higher proportion of its residents living in rural areas (32.6%) than the West (26.2%) and the county average.
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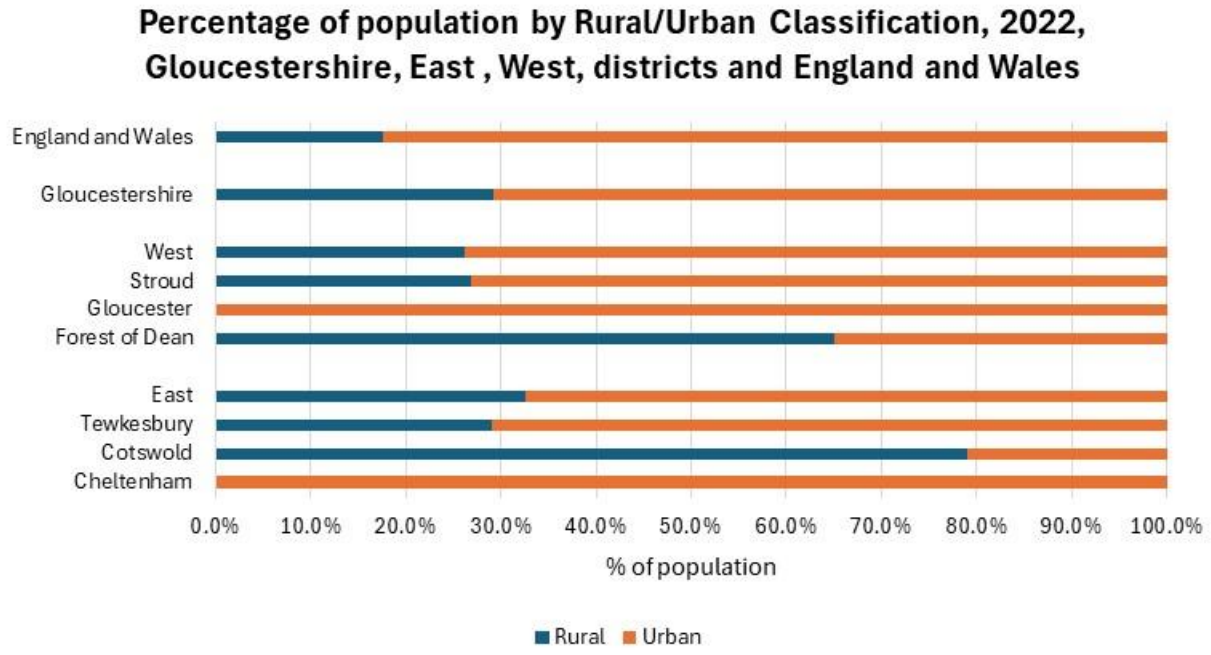
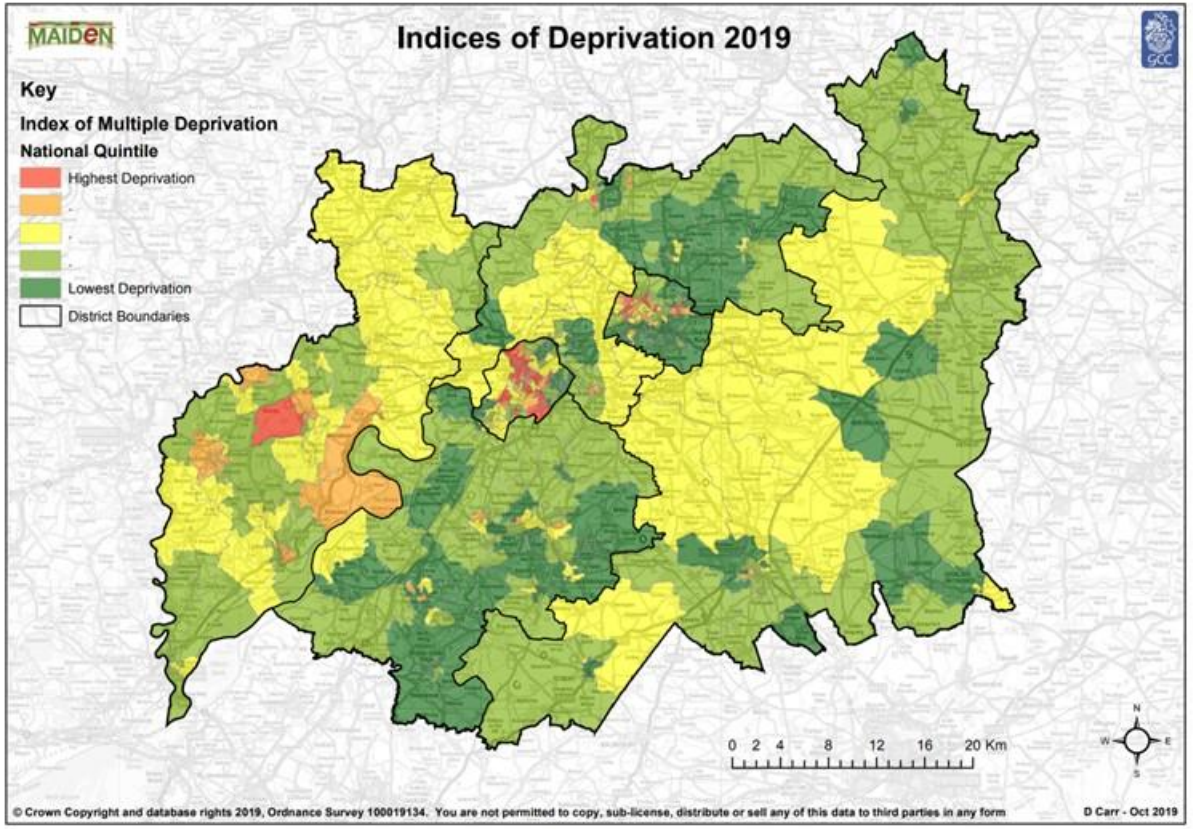



*Figure 12: Percentage of population by Rural/Urban Classification, 2022, Gloucestershire, East, West, districts and England and Wales*[76]

| | |
|---|---|
| Socio-economic disadvantage | The main measure for this is the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. In general, Gloucestershire is not a very deprived county, ranking 126 out of 151 (where 1 is the most deprived) county and unitary authorities, putting it in the least deprived 20% of authorities across England.<br>At district level, even the most deprived districts in the county (Gloucester City, and Forest of Dean) are amongst the middle 20% of districts for deprivation out of 317 English authorities. Tewkesbury, Cotswold, and Stroud |

[76] Rural Urban Classification, 2021 and 2022 Mid Year Estimates, ONS

districts are in the least deprived 20% of districts nationally. Cheltenham is in the second least deprived 20% of districts nationally. However, there are pockets of deprivation, 31 out of 373 small areas in Gloucestershire are amongst the 20% most deprived in England with 7.9% residents of Gloucestershire living in these areas[77].




[77] Indices of Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG

*Figure 13: Indices of Deprivation, 2019*[78]

The West area has a higher proportion of residents living in the most deprived 20% nationally (10.9%) than the East (4.5%) and the county as a whole (7.9%)

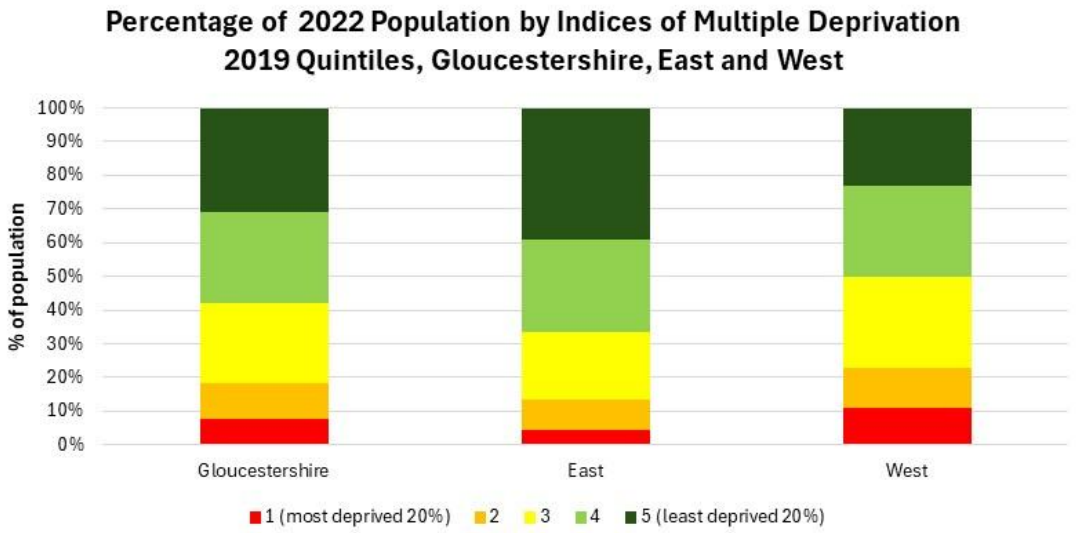



*Figure 14: Percentage of 2022 population by Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 Quintiles, Gloucestershire, East and West*[79]

*Table 13: Percentage of 2022 population by the domains of Indices of Deprivation 2019 Quintiles, Gloucestershire, East and West*[80]

| | Gloucestershire | East | West |
|---|---|---|---|



[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Indices of Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG and Mid 2022 Population Estimates, ONS
[80] Indices of Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG and Mid 2022 Population Estimates, ONS

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 (most deprived 20%) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 (least deprived 20%) | 1 (most deprived 20%) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 (least deprived 20%) | 1 (most deprived 20%) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 (least deprived 20%) |
| **Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)** | 8% | 11% | 24% | 27% | 31% | 5% | 9% | 20% | 27% | 39% | 11% | 12% | 27% | 27% | 23% |
| **Income** | 9% | 13% | 22% | 29% | 26% | 6% | 12% | 16% | 31% | 36% | 12% | 14% | 28% | 27% | 18% |
| **Employment** | 8% | 14% | 21% | 28% | 28% | 4% | 12% | 14% | 29% | 41% | 12% | 16% | 28% | 27% | 17% |
| **Education, Skills and Training** | 13% | 18% | 19% | 23% | 26% | 10% | 14% | 15% | 21% | 40% | 16% | 23% | 23% | 24% | 13% |
| **Health Deprivation and Disability** | 8% | 14% | 17% | 29% | 32% | 4% | 12% | 11% | 30% | 43% | 12% | 15% | 23% | 29% | 22% |
| **Crime** | 6% | 9% | 10% | 23% | 52% | 5% | 9% | 8% | 29% | 49% | 6% | 8% | 13% | 18% | 55% |
| **Barriers to Housing and Services** | 19% | 19% | 22% | 28% | 13% | 22% | 13% | 23% | 30% | 11% | 16% | 23% | 21% | 25% | 15% |
| **Living Environment** | 14% | 14% | 17% | 24% | 31% | 13% | 10% | 21% | 25% | 31% | 14% | 18% | 15% | 23% | 31% |

| | |
|---|---|
| Vulnerable groups of society | No specific data held on this characteristic. Where vulnerable groups are addressed through other characteristics. |

## Appendix 2: Council Staff Data and Information

Details of staff affected by the proposed activity:

<table>
<tr><th>Groups</th><th>Workforce Data and Information</th></tr>
<tr><td>Age</td><td>The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils.
<table>
<tr><th>Organisation</th><th>Snapshot date</th><th>Headcount / FTE</th><th>Age profile</th><th>Source</th></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucestershire County Council</td><td>1 Jul 2024</td><td>4,369 (excl. schools)</td><td>45–54 largest (32.4%)</td><td>GCC-EDI-2024</td></tr>
<tr><td>Stroud District Council</td><td>Apr 2022</td><td>379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual</td><td>50–59 largest group</td><td>SDC-Workforce-2022</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cheltenham Borough Council</td><td>Mar 2023</td><td>238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual</td><td>50–59 largest group</td><td>CBC-Workforce-2023</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tewkesbury Borough Council</td><td>31 Mar 2022</td><td>216</td><td>—</td><td>TBC-GPG-2022</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cotswold District Council</td><td>2024</td><td>Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica. Data provided represents 127 individuals</td><td>50–59 largest group (36.2%)</td><td>CDC-Publica-2024</td></tr>
<tr><td>Forest of Dean District Council</td><td>2024</td><td>Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return. Data provided represents 112 individuals</td><td>50+ largest group (43.8%)</td><td>FODDC-Publica-2024</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucester City Council</td><td>2022</td><td>261</td><td>56+ largest group (26.1%)</td><td>GC-EDI-2022</td></tr>
</table></td></tr>
<tr><td>Disability</td><td>The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils.
<table>
<tr><th>Organisation</th><th>Snapshot date</th><th>Headcount / FTE</th><th>Disability</th><th>Source</th></tr>
<tr><td>Gloucestershire County Council</td><td>1 Jul 2024</td><td>4,369 (excl. schools)</td><td>4.80%</td><td>GCC-EDI-2024</td></tr>
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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | 5.0% | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| | Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | 10.1% | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| | Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| | Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | 1.57% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | 2.36% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | 6.1% | GC-EDI-2022 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sex | **Organisation** | **Snapshot date** | **Headcount / FTE** | **Gender split** | **Source** |
| | Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | 70.1% F / 29.9% M | GCC-EDI-2024 |
| | Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | 58.6% F / 41.4% M | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| | Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | 52.9% F / 47.1% M | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| | Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | 70.4% F / 29.6% M | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| | Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | 70.87% F/ 29.13% M | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | 65.18% F/ 34.82% M | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | 60.9% F / 39.1% M | GC-EDI-2022 |
| Race | The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils. | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Organisation** | **Snapshot date** | **Headcount / FTE** | **Ethnicity** | **Source** |
| | Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | White British 86.6%; DEC 7.5% | GCC-EDI-2024 |
| | Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | 89.7% White British | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| | Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | 210 White British; 11 Other; 17 Unknown | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| | Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| | Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | White - British: 29.92% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | White – British: 36.61% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | White 70.5%; Unstated 21.5%; BME 8.0% | GC-EDI-2022 |
| Gender reassignment | No data is publicly available regarding gender reassignment for any of the councils. | | | | |
| Marriage & civil partnership | The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils. | | | | |
| | **Organisation** | **Snapshot date** | **Headcount / FTE** | **Marriage & Civil Partnership** | **Source** |
| | Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | Divorced/Dissolved Civil Partnership 5.8%; Married/Civil 48.2%; Separated 2.4%; Single/Never Married 35.3%; Widowed 0.6%; Prefer not to say 7.7% | GCC-EDI-2024 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | — | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| | Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | — | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| | Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| | Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | Married: (7.56%<br>Single: 14.17%<br>Divorced: 3.94%<br>Living with Partner: 0.79%<br>Widowed: 0.79% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | Married: 16.07%<br>Single: 6.25%<br>Divorced: 0.89% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | - | GC-EDI-2022 |
| Pregnancy & maternity | No data is publicly available regarding Pregnancy & Maternity for any of the councils. | | | | |
| Religion and/or belief | The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils. | | | | |

| Organisation | Snapshot date | Headcount / FTE | Religion | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | Buddhist 2.1%; Christian 32.2%; Hindu 0.0%; Jewish 0.0%; Muslim 3.4%; None | GCC-EDI-2024 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | 52.1%; Other 4.1%; Sikh 0.7%; Prefer not to say 5.5% | |
| | Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | — | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| | Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | — | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| | Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| | Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | No religious belief: 20.47%<br>Christian: 3.94%<br>Some other religion or belief: 0.79%<br>Prefer not to say: 74.80% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | Christian: 2.68%<br>No religious belief: 1.79%<br>Prefer not to say: 0.89%<br>Protestant: 0.89%<br>Blank / Not Provided: 93.75% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | - | GC-EDI-2022 |
| Sexual orientation | The table below summarises the most recent publicly available workforce figures for the councils. | | | | |
| | **Organisation** | **Snapshot date** | **Headcount / FTE** | **Sexual orientation** | **Source** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Gloucestershire County Council | 1 Jul 2024 | 4,369 (excl. schools) | Bi-sexual 2.6%; Gay/Lesbian 2.1%; Heterosexual/Straight 86.0%; Prefer not to say 9.4% | GCC-EDI-2024 |
| | Stroud District Council | Apr 2022 | 379 (344.3 FTE) + 50 casual | — | SDC-Workforce-2022 |
| | Cheltenham Borough Council | Mar 2023 | 238 (220 FTE) + 12 casual | — | CBC-Workforce-2023 |
| | Tewkesbury Borough Council | 31 Mar 2022 | 216 | — | TBC-GPG-2022 |
| | Cotswold District Council | 2024 | Small direct workforce; most staff via Publica | Heterosexual: 32.28%<br>Not stated: 2.36%<br>Bisexual: 0.79%<br>Blank / Not Provided: 66.93% | CDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Forest of Dean District Council | 2024 | Part of Publica; 270+ staff proposed to return | Heterosexual: 41.07%<br>Blank / Not Provided: 58.93% | FODDC-Publica-2024 |
| | Gloucester City Council | 2022 | 261 | - | GC-EDI-2022 |
| Armed Forces community | No data is publicly available regarding the Armed Forces Community for any of the councils. | | | | |
| Carers | No data is publicly available regarding Carers for any of the councils. | | | | |
| Care leavers / care experienced adults | No data is publicly available regarding Care leavers / care experienced adults for any of the councils. | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Digital exclusion | No data is publicly available regarding Digital exclusion for any of the councils. |
| Geography, for example, urban and rural areas | No data is publicly available regarding Geography of the workforce for any of the councils. |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | No data is publicly available regarding Socio-economic disadvantage of the workforce for any of the councils. |
| Vulnerable groups of society | No data is publicly available regarding Vulnerable groups of society disadvantage of the workforce for any of the councils |
| References used for Staffing Data | GCC-EDI-2024: Gloucestershire County Council – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Report 2024/25<br>https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2126661/edi-report2024_workforce_final_.pdf<br><br>SDC-Workforce-2022: Stroud District Council – Workforce Statistics (April 2022)<br>https://www.stroud.gov.uk/media/2103085/workforce-statistics-2022.pdf<br><br>CBC-Workforce-2023: Cheltenham Borough Council – Workforce Statistics (March 2023)<br>https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/downloads/file/6208/workforce-statistics-march-2023<br><br>TBC-GPG-2022: Tewkesbury Borough Council – Gender Pay Gap Report 2022<br>https://www.tewkesbury.gov.uk/media/fzxhofgv/gender-pay-gap-report-2022-final.docx.pdf<br><br>CDC-Publica-2024: Cotswold District Council – Council spending / staffing details (Publica model)<br>https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/about-the-council/transparency-and-open-data/council/spending/<br><br>FODDC-Publica-2024: Forest of Dean District Council – News release (July 2024)<br>https://news.fdean.gov.uk/news/local-authorities-to-consider-moving-forward-with-plans-to-take-greater-control-of-council-services |

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|---|---|
| | GC-EDI-2022: Gloucester City Council Workforce Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Report (Sept 2022)<br>https://www.gloucester.gov.uk/media/4m3p0bpy/city-workforce-equality-diversity-inclusion-report-final-2022.pdf<br><br>LGA-GPG-2025: Local Government Association – The gender pay gap in English local authorities 2024/25<br>https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/gender-pay-gap-english-local-authorities-20242 |

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# The Creation of Greater Gloucester and Gloucestershire Unitary Councils

**DRAFT**

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# 1. Executive Summary

## A New Future for Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire stands at a turning point. Government has invited proposals on replacing the current two-tier system with single, unitary structures. This is an opportunity to build a structure of Local Government that will deliver improved outcomes and services for residents over the next 50 years. It is also an opportunity to enable the historic City of Gloucester and the County of Gloucestershire to achieve their potential - an innovative economy, a world-class natural and cultural heritage and optimally leveraging the economic powerhouse of Gloucester, with its capacity for significant housing and economic growth.

**This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to unlock growth, strengthen identity and improve outcomes.**

This proposal offers a new model: two strong, complementary unitary councils designed around the real lives of our residents, Greater Gloucester (GG) and Gloucestershire Unitary (GU).

These councils will reflect the people and places they serve, making them able to tackle Gloucestershire's deepest challenges. They will reset failing services, address entrenched health inequalities and unlock sustainable growth. They will be simpler and fairer; they will improve outcomes for the vulnerable and protect our ancient heritage and identity. In addition, they will give a stronger voice to the people of Gloucestershire.

## Rooted in Identity & Economy: Two Councils meeting the Needs of the Population

This proposal will replace the current system of one county council and six district councils with two strong, complementary unitary authorities. These authorities will reflect the true identities and heritage of the places they serve.

**Greater Gloucester (GG) -** comprising Gloucester City (and, subject to Ministerial direction to expand geographies beyond the existing boundary into neighbouring parishes within the existing Districts of Stroud, Tewkesbury and Forest of Dean, totalling a current population of some 178,000).

This urban authority will drive economic growth in the sub-region, built on the boundaries of the real lives of the residents who live and work in its geography. Most importantly, as a place with a significantly different demographic and deeper-rooted urban social challenges to the rest of the county, it will be able to relentlessly focus on the issues that matter to its population without the diversion of the challenges faced by rural Gloucestershire: in particular addressing higher social needs, tackling homelessness and improving children's services, along with protecting its heritage.

Building on the heritage of Gloucester as one of England's significant and largest cathedral cities, this proposal recognises its historic and current status as a regional centre.

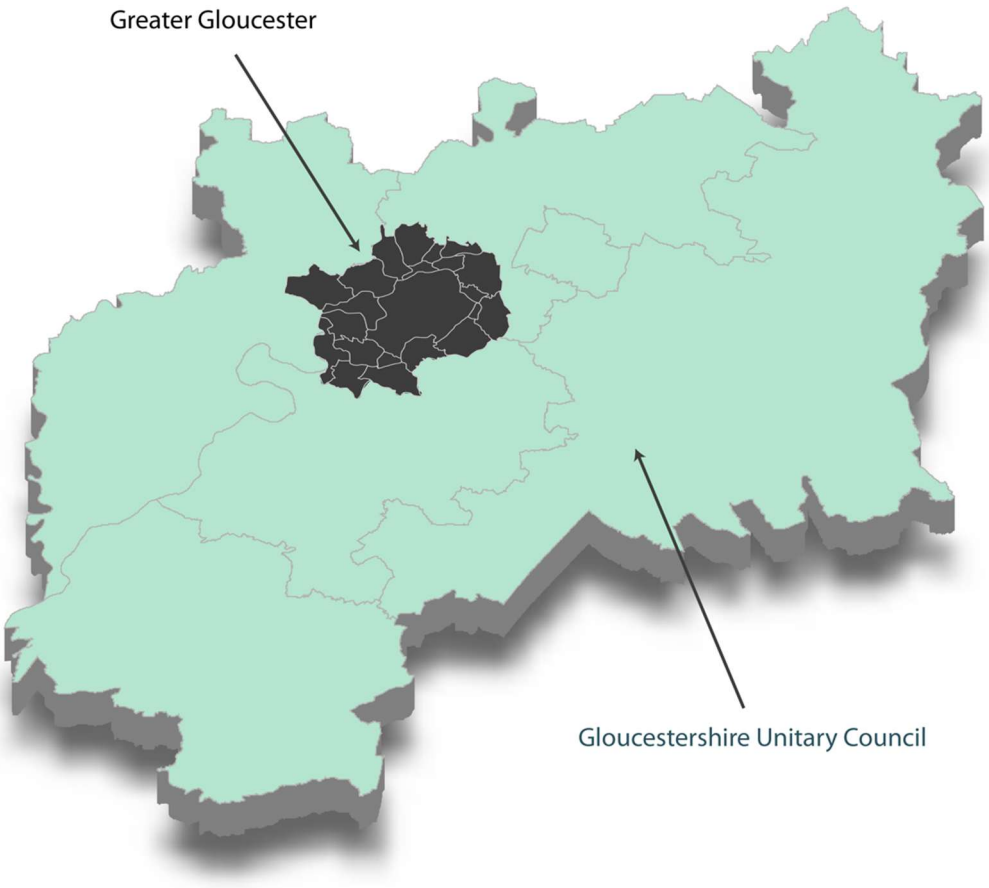
**Gloucestershire Unitary (GU) - population c.470,000 -** covering Cheltenham, the Cotswolds and (subject to a Ministerial direction to change boundaries, the remaining parts of) Stroud, Tewkesbury and Forest of Dean.

This authority will represent its very different demographic and need: it will be able to combine the economic strengths of Cheltenham, the country's leading cyber super-cluster, along with a strong focus on scale, stability and rural heritage and natural environmental assets, and ensuring the economic vibrancy of key

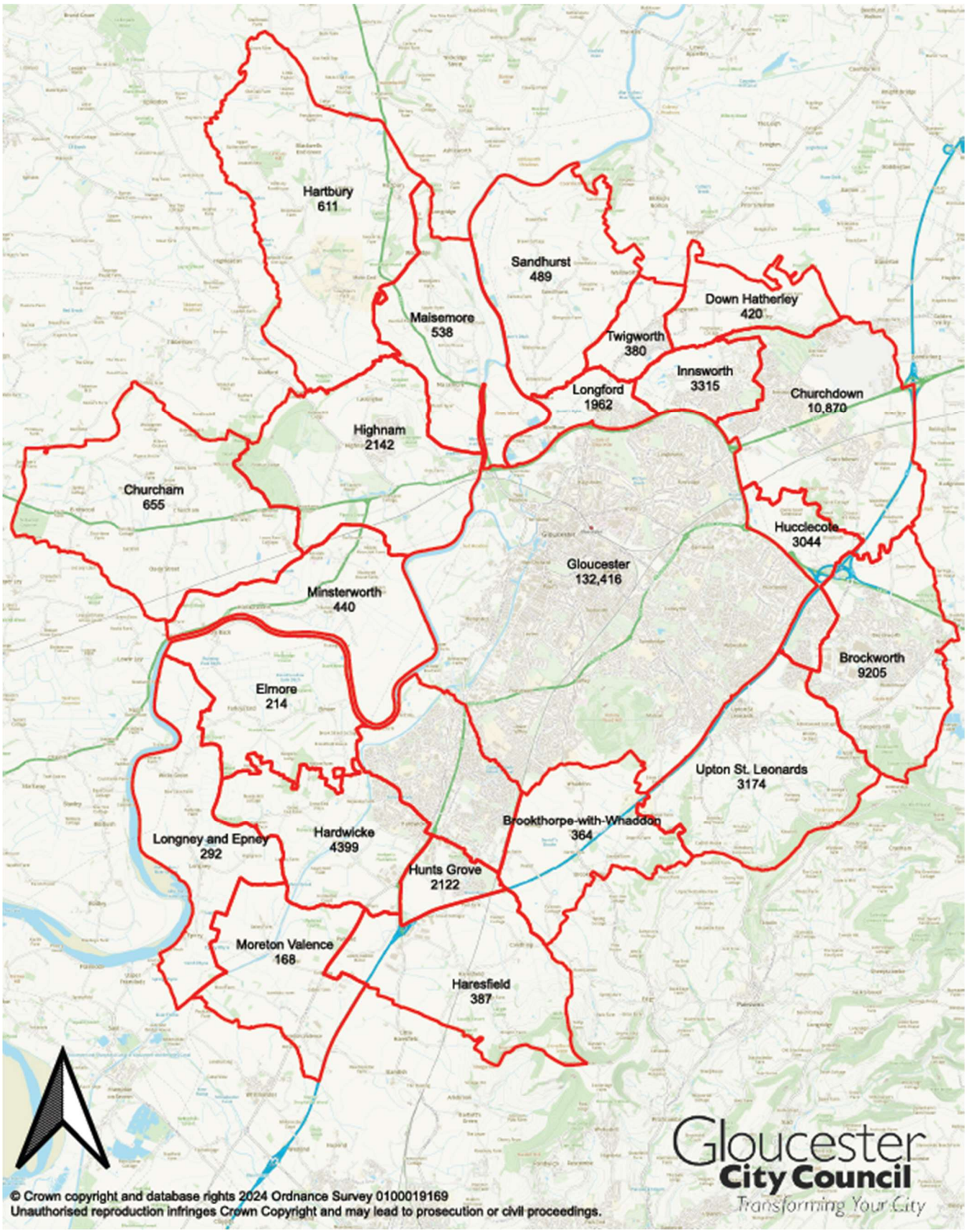
market towns. This council will have the ambition to deliver growth in market towns, secure rural transport connectivity and sustain prevention in adult care.

Together, these councils will simplify governance, end duplication and deliver services that are easier for residents to understand, outcomes that are better for all and local government that is truly rooted in the place it serves.

## Proposed Unitaries*




* subject to Ministerial direction to expand the Greater Gloucester Council boundaries as set out in this proposal. The baseline unmodified proposal comprises a unitary for the Gloucester district and a unitary for the five other districts.




* Proposed boundary expansion for Greater Gloucester set out in this proposal. Numbers show 2021 population estimates.

## Why We Need Change

The current system restricts growth, creates duplication and delays progress. City boundaries are outdated, services are split across seven councils, and government have said it is time for change. People deserve services that are easier to access, governance that is easier to understand and a system that works for them seamlessly, enabling economic growth, for the good of its residents.

Key services are ready for improvement: Adults and SEND have been rated as requiring improvement for over a decade, and many services are struggling to meet local need. The recent positive OFSTED report for Children's Services shows progress, but follows a decade of mixed performance.

Gloucestershire as a county has clear geographic division in need and these disparities have led to an inefficient and fragmented approach to support and service delivery. A single approach for the whole county that fails to recognise the differences in its population and places is bound to fail. Gloucester City has much higher demand for social care than the rest of the county, including in the area of homelessness and children's services. While it makes up 27% of the county's population, it accounts for over 35% of its demand for children's services.

The known demographic distinctions are not reflected in the current structure. Urban needs are managed within a county structure designed around predominantly older, more rural communities leading to misaligned planning and priorities. The proportion of people over 65 is 25% lower in Gloucester than the County average. In Gloucester, there are 21 Super Output areas in the highest quintile as measured by the index of multiple deprivation (with only 10 for the rest of the County). A more localised model would create opportunity for significant improvement in outcomes and delivery by allowing a hyper-local 'total place'-type focus on each area.

Meanwhile, economic growth in Gloucester is constrained by outdated district boundaries which do not reflect the lives of those who live and work in the city. Existing city boundaries are misaligned with the needs of our population, reducing efficiency, stifling housing growth and fragmenting service delivery[1].

As a recent national report identifies, many boundaries "were [historically] drawn intentionally close to the original urban core in order to limit growth," a legacy that "undermines both local leadership and a locally led planning system which can only function well if it is considering a place as a whole – if it is right-sized, with the right boundaries aligned to their true footprint and function" ("A Case for Cities" – Inner Circle).

Councils in Gloucestershire are already doing their best to work and plan across organisational boundaries, demonstrating current boundaries no longer reflect the working limits of the population.

Without boundary change, the city's size will not have the scale necessary to be able to deliver desired outcomes, or foster the economic growth required to sustain today's population. **The county is in need of change.**

[11] Appendix B: Case for Cities Report

*England's smaller cities are some of our nation's greatest assets. English cities are economically dynamic centres of innovation, creativity, and culture - places with long history, deep roots and bold ambitions. From cathedral cities to the once historic market towns turned modern hubs, they generate ideas, nurture talent, and power regional economies. Their scale gives them something unique: the ability to connect people, place, and opportunity in ways that can transform lives and strengthen whole regions. They deserve attention, to be recognised and celebrated.*

*Equally, we can't deny that cities face their own distinct challenges - the reality is that many of our cities embody both the UK's greatest potential and its starkest inequalities.*

*Across the UK, smaller and medium-sized cities drive regional economies and provide opportunity for surrounding towns and rural communities, they carry the weight of complex challenges without the powers to address them at the scale required - we need governance which reflects our challenges and opportunities across cities. Cities…have different profiles to their surrounding counties that risk being 'swallowed up' into them. Instead, governance should reflect the fact that local people want and need control over their own economic development, housing, education, transport, social care and other services.*

*This is why getting the governance right matters. Our country is highly centralised. That centralisation will not diminish if our smaller cities have less control over their development, with this ceded to counties. Instead, we need to enable and empower cities to realise their potential, building on successful metro mayor models by making them fit for our smaller and medium-sized cities.*

*So much of the potential in cities remains untapped. Getting this right means our cities could be doing even more to drive national prosperity, strengthen communities, and tackle the great challenges of our age, from the housing crisis to health inequalities, from decarbonisation to skills – yet too many are held back by governance systems designed for a different era.*

*…They must be recognised meaningfully in Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution through city-led unitaries which are right-sized, with commitment to a long-term cities strategy…If we want stronger public services, higher productivity, and thriving local economies, then we must give our cities the powers to act with clarity, coherence, and confidence.*

*The Rt Hon. Annelise Dodds, Member of Parliament for Oxford East*
*The Case For Cities, 2025*

## What Difference It Will Make

This proposal addresses Gloucestershire's challenges head-on. The new councils will:

- **Improve outcomes for residents:** by addressing imbalance in demand for services - through early intervention, local place-based delivery and simpler access to services. The Councils will continue to work together where it makes sense to do so.

- **Reform failing services:** with Greater Gloucester focused on a younger demographic to improve children's services outcomes, tackle homelessness and health inequalities, while the Gloucestershire Unitary focuses on the rising pressures of an ageing, more rural population with challenges around transport connectivity and access to services - each council tackling the issues most acute in their area

- **Unlock growth:** giving Gloucester the ability to match the economic and housing growth performance of peer cities, while the Gloucestershire unitary sustains prosperity across market towns, villages and the rural economy, fostering accelerated growth through the Cheltenham Golden Valley cyber super-cluster

- **Create financial sustainability**: simplifying governance, reducing duplication will unlock operational savings; while a prevention-first delivery approach will improve outcomes in children's and adults' services bringing long-term savings. While having two councils brings higher costs than a single unitary, the wider benefits of the right geography far outweigh any efficiency savings foregone. This proposal will generate ongoing savings of £13.48m, will pay back transition costs in four years and by year 10 have created savings of £89m.

- **Preserve historic identity:** with Greater Gloucester strengthening Gloucester's heritage as an ancient cathedral city, and Gloucestershire Unitary protecting the internationally recognised heritage of locations such as the Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and Stroud.

Together, the councils will tackle inequality, unlock city-led growth, improve essential services and preserve what people value most: local identity, heritage and accountability.

The size will enable the most efficient and targeted growth. Examples such as the former Cumbria County Council (Westmoreland and Furness Council and Cumberland Council) show how smaller, focused unitaries can drive improved performance in a short period of time and create systems that support sustainable, high quality services. The same can be achieved in Gloucestershire, with a place-based structure that tackles failing services, unlocks growth and strengthens identity.

## Listening to Gloucestershire

This case is built with, not for, Gloucestershire - shaped by residents, councils and partners who see the logic of aligning governance to real places. The seven councils have worked hard to consult with a range of stakeholders about all aspects of the reorganisation process. The message that came through loud and clear in all the public engagement work undertaken is that people value their place and their local identity, and don't want to see this lost or diminished through any reorganisation. Gloucester residents, in particular, have a strong affinity with their distinct identity. Businesses and partners see the logic of aligning governance with real economic geographies and travel-to-work areas.

We will continue meaningful consultation with residents, councils, parishes, the VCSFE sector and businesses throughout the duration of this transition, ensuring local voices are heard and meaningfully reflected in the outworking of this case.

## Devolution and the Wider Picture

Gloucestershire is actively exploring three strategic partnerships to the north, south, and east. Of these, we found each offer unique opportunities to accelerate growth and influence:

- West of England Combined Authority (WECA)
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Swindon and Oxford

Whichever partnership is finally chosen, our ambition is that both councils would sit as full partners within the Combined Authority (WECA), ensuring Gloucestershire has a strengthened voice in discussions around housing, skills, transport and economic growth in the sub-region. As two unitary authorities rather than one, our size would be more akin to those other partners around the table.

## Key strengths of this proposal

Three proposals for the future organisation of local government are currently under development by the seven councils in Gloucestershire. Key points of differentiation between this proposal and either or both of the others are as follows:

1. The only proposal to retain principal local government structures for both the historic city of Gloucester and the historic county of Gloucestershire
2. The only proposal to address the historic under-bounding of the city's geography up-front, avoiding the complexity of a post-restructure review a few years after vesting day
3. Two unitary councils able to be more focused on the needs of different demographic populations than a single county-wide unitary
4. Each unitary will have a significant (100k+ population) town or city at its centre, to drive twin hubs of economic growth for the county
5. Fairer democratic representation for the residents of Gloucestershire (compared to the existing constituent authorities' population sizes) if joining the West of England Combined Authority than a single county-based unitary
6. Stronger voice for the neighbouring parishes and parish councils around Gloucester on the future development of the city than alternatives
7. Higher Councillor to Elector ratios than other proposals, giving increased democratic representation and accountability.
8. The only proposal that is not expected to lead to the future parishing of the City of Gloucester, with the associated increased precepting risk that that entails
9. Lower redundancy costs and job losses during transition than a single county unitary option, avoiding unhelpful waste of public funds and loss of technical expertise in the new unitary councils.
10. The only proposal to be based around two 'continuing' authorities, meaning that transformation costs will be lower, and maximising use of existing IT infrastructure.

## Next Steps

- 28 November 2025 - Submission of the business case
- May 2027- Elections to shadow authorities
- April 2028 - Vesting Day: Greater Gloucester and Gloucestershire Unitary take full control of services
- May 2029 - Potential integration with existing/creation of new Strategic Mayoral Authority

This aligns Gloucestershire's governance with the national timetable for new unitary authorities and combined authorities.

A phased transition will protect vital services, give communities confidence and ensure delivery is stable throughout.

# 2. Rationale for Boundary Change

We are formally submitting the a 'Type B' submission (as set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) for two new Gloucestershire Unitary Councils which is set out in Appendix A.

However, we are clear that the 1974 boundaries of existing districts and boroughs no longer reflect the way in which people in Gloucestershire live their lives. Specifically, we believe that a major constraint on the growth of the city of Gloucester has been that the city is under bounded, restricting the potential of the City to drive the economy of the county. Therefore, in our proposal, whilst we are retaining the county boundary of Gloucestershire, we have submitted a modification request to expand the boundaries of the Gloucester City unitary to include surrounding Parishes which are in the existing districts of Tewkesbury, Stroud and Forest of Dean to create a Greater Gloucester unitary council. Appendix A outlines the rationale for this proposed modification.

# 3. Introduction and Context

Cities are where most of us make a home. They are the nation's engines of growth and innovation and critical to economic success at the regional level. They're also centres of cultural vibrancy and diversity and where most public services are centred.

Some 80% of us live in cities (70% in Gloucestershire). With economic growth the Government's declared number one priority, and local government reorganisation (LGR) now in motion across large parts of the country, there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to connect policy thinking around cities' role in the life blood of the country.

Devolution and LGR offer a vital opportunity to unleash our cities' potential. It offers a chance, if we grasp it quickly, to grow a distinct and diverse network of cities.

There are well-documented agglomeration benefits from creating clusters of businesses in and around cities that drive innovation and economic growth.

The potential Gross Added Value generated through globally significant clusters of advanced manufacturing, cyber technology, AI and other technologies runs into the billions, and dwarfs the scale of savings that could be achieved alone by merging councils into larger units of local government.

Devolution and LGR offer a vital opportunity to unleash our cities' potential. We have a chance to grow a distinct and diverse network of cities that can support housing growth, tackle poverty and homelessness and drive a prevention revolution in public health that should keep many more people out of our NHS and care systems.

Cities also offer a more sustainable way of living, with a smaller land take and carbon footprint than rural-based communities; and a more immediate return on investment in public transport and active travel through the connectivity and public health benefits they provide.

To advance policy thinking around cities, we have to break through old boundaries – literally. Many of our small cities are under-bounded, which has constrained their growth. In order to achieve our future vision for cities, we need to redraw the boundaries to enable their expansion.

And we need to give them a clear voice and the opportunity to properly represent their potential, alongside London and the core cities, that already have an established place in the national growth agenda.

Of course, cities don't exist in a vacuum. They are interconnected with their local areas. In a new world of unitary councils and regional devolution, successful units of local government based on cities can champion their interests while working in partnership with neighbouring rural-based authorities. In this way the right levels of growth can be achieved in the right places.

This thinking forms the basis for this proposal for LGR in Gloucestershire. It proposes the creation of **two new unitary councils** to replace the seven councils that currently exist:

- one based around the county capital **City of Gloucester** – an historic yet diverse, young and vibrant city with a quarter of the entire county's population and employment, driving economic growth through a significant programme of urban regeneration, and
- one based around the rest of the **county of Gloucestershire** – a largely rural county rich in heritage

but with key natural assets such as the Forest of Dean and the Cotswolds, and nationally-leading strengths in green technologies and cyber resilience.

The needs, demands, challenges and opportunities faced by a largely young and urban population are very different to those of an older and more rural population. Form should follow function and Councils should be designed around the needs of the people they serve. This forms the rationale underpinning this LGR proposal. Together, they provide the best form of local government for Gloucestershire.

Creating a Greater Gloucester Unitary Authority, and a Unitary Authority for the rest of Gloucestershire, will:

- **Provide clarity and accountability** – one council for all residents and businesses, ending the two-tier confusion of who does what, making local democracy more transparent
- **Unlock inclusive growth and prosperity** – aligning housing, planning, transport and skills under one authority to deliver more homes, modern infrastructure and sustainable economic growth, ensuring the benefits are shared across all communities
- **Tackle inequalities through prevention** – integrating housing, health, social care and early help to support people earlier and more effectively, reducing crises, improving outcomes and delivering efficiencies
- **Drive efficiency and innovation** – consolidating functions to free up resources for frontline services, enabling more joined-up, digitally enabled and neighbourhood-based delivery tailored to local need
- **Strengthen place-based identity** – protecting historic, cultural and civic roles while creating a governance model that reflects lived community identities and ambitions
- **Secure Gloucester's seat at the devolution table** – ensuring that the influential city of Gloucester is properly represented in regional decision-making, closing the democratic deficit and giving residents the influence they deserve over investment and powers that shape their daily lives.

The proposal is ambitious but realistic, and rooted in evidence. It is not a detailed blueprint for how services will operate on day one. Those decisions will rightly rest with the new shadow councils and elected members during transition. However, the proposal does set out a compelling vision. By establishing these two new unitary authorities, Gloucestershire will gain the scale, financial resilience and democratic voice it needs to deliver better services, stronger local leadership, and a future-proof system of local government.

## Joint working – two unitary Councils working for the benefit of the people of Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire already has a strong foundation for joint working, backed by a range of formal and informal governance arrangements**.** These reflect the close ties between different parts of the county and a shared commitment to collaboration.

Key structures include:

- **Leadership Gloucestershire:** a strategic alliance of senior public sector leaders - spanning councils, health, police, and key agencies - providing unified direction on cross-cutting issues to benefit communities countywide.
- **Gloucestershire City Region Board**: a joint committee of all seven councils, driving a shared vision for strategic growth and economic success, and championing Gloucestershire with partners to attract further investment and growth.
- **Health and Wellbeing Board and a Health and Wellbeing (Integrated Care) Partnership**
- **Strategic Local Plan**: when finalised, this will shape future housing and employment growth across

three local planning authority areas.

- **Climate Leadership Gloucestershire**: an innovative public sector partnership of councils, NHS, police and academic institutions, developing solutions to tackle the climate emergency.
- **Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool:** Gloucestershire boosts local growth by pooling business rates to keep more revenue circulating within the county.
- Other informal arrangements exist to enable joint working on other areas of shared responsibility, for example **Gloucestershire Resources and Waste Partnership**, **Gloucestershire Strategic Migration Partnership**, **Gloucestershire Housing Partnership**, and the **Gloucestershire Children and Young People's Coalition**.

Beyond formal governance, collaboration is also embedded in service delivery. For instance, **Ubico** is a local authority-owned company owned by all seven Gloucestershire Councils and others, delivering a range of environmental services across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire, including waste, recycling, and street cleansing.

We see no reason why this excellent strategic intent to collaborate should not continue with the two proposed unitaries. In addition to keeping Ubico going for the benefit of the whole county, other services where there is agreement to continue to provide a single shared service include:

- **Fire and Rescue** – We will create a single standalone Fire and Rescue Authority for Gloucestershire, with democratic representation from both Councils.
- **Archives** – Splitting physical and digital collections would be costly, disruptive, and face significant legal challenges, with no benefit to residents. A single, shared archive service protects access, quality, and value. Indeed, this approach is already taken as Gloucestershire Archives provides those services and facilities to all councils in the historic county of Gloucestershire, including South Gloucestershire unitary council.
- **Coroners** – Gloucestershire's coroner area boundary is already set by the Ministry of Justice under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Keeping a countywide service avoids unnecessary boundary changes and preserves specialist expertise.
- **Registrars** – A shared approach is key to financial resilience - especially with demand varying so widely across the county. Pooling resources ensures a sustainable, high-quality service for all.

## Public service reform & preventative services

Local Government Reorganisation will be costly and disruptive in the short-term. Thereafter there is a choice between consolidating the current operating models with marginal gains on operating costs or realising the profound opportunity of change in which not only the structures, but services themselves, can be restructured and redesigned to best serve local communities.

We believe that LGR in Gloucestershire can be a moment for public service reform where a prevention-focused model can be embedded across the distinct and different populations in our city, and across the rest of the county.

Our proposal has been designed with a view to how each organisation can be focused on prevention, building trust and delivering growth for each authority.

There are distinctive challenges across the county footprint, be that a 15-year life expectancy difference in adjacent parts of Gloucester city, or the high levels of demand for transport connectivity and access to employment and services in the Forest of Dean and Stroud.

An approach that simply assumes a continuation of the status quo is likely to further entrench deprivation,

inequality and demand for acute services – having a negative impact on both the financial sustainability of organisations and the long-term life experiences of residents. Our NHS is changing through the Government's 10 Year Health Plan and our council services must too.

The Government set out the case for change clearly, saying "We can continue down our current path, making tweaks to an increasingly unsustainable model - or we can take a new course". We agree, and our approach aligns with the Government's view of how services can be reshaped and will work alongside the NHS' move from hospital to community, analogue to digital and sickness to prevention.

Our proposed model is one that shapes organisations around the needs of residents, rather than one that expects residents to navigate around and between professionals. Services are focused on local root causes of demand, rather than simply treating needs as they arise, supported by meaningful community networks building upon existing collaboration and partnerships.

This is a model that places prevention at its heart, moving staff and resources from services currently dispersed across tiers of government into one cross-cutting department that can provide holistic support to residents, from children to older adults, to increase resilience and reduce demand for statutory services. This approach does not stop when a resident requires long-term support, with strengths-based, independence-focused service delivery.

We recognise that resilient communities also require resilient local economies – and core to our future model is a growth function that can deliver on the ambitions that the two unitaries have for their respective areas – from culture, digital and regeneration in Gloucester, to green and renewable technologies in Stroud, Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean, and cyber/defence services in Cheltenham and Tewkesbury.

Our model is more than just reorganising the way services are delivered – but one that commits to achieving long-term outcome improvement for residents no matter where in the county they live.

All of this depends on solid foundations for the transition and transformation to new operating models that work across public sector organisations with communities, empower neighbourhoods and meet the true potential of this moment of change, reform and renewal for our county.

## Assessment against Government Criteria

| LGR Criteria | How this proposal meets those criteria |
|---|---|
| A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government. | Under this proposal, a single tier of local government for the whole of Gloucestershire is achieved as two new unitary authorities are created from the current two-tier, seven authority system. |
| Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage of disadvantage for one part of the area. | Each of the two unitary areas creates a sensible economic area with viable tax bases across both areas and each is designed to recognise the different economic roles, social needs, and service demands across Gloucestershire's varied geographies. |
| Proposals should be for a | The proposed boundary modification will tackle Gloucester |

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| sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs. | city's historic under-bounding which has inhibited its growth potential and will enable it to drive significant housing growth alongside the growth identified for the rest of the county.<br>By bringing together the rest of Gloucestershire into a single unitary council, this proposal enables the county to take a holistic approach to housing delivery, given the significant constraints that exist in different parts of the area e.g. in the AONB. |
| Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected<br>to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement. | The development of the proposed service delivery models has been informed by a comprehensive engagement exercise including council leaders, and officers from across all seven councils. We have also assessed the financial implications of reorganisation and have estimated the costs, savings, and income implications of the proposal, using information from all councils as well as drawing on evidence and experience from other areas that have gone through reorganisation previously. |
| Proposals should clearly describe the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these areas expect to achieve the outcomes described. | Our proposal sets out how the new unitary councils will have the powers, capacity and leadership at the optimum spatial scale and proximity to residents to respond to the challenges and opportunities of each place.<br>This will allow people to live better lives of their choosing, reduce demand on services, and contribute to Government priorities around growth and housing. |
| Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. | Our two unitary councils are the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks as they deliver the optimal balance between scale and responsiveness. Our model prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services above all else. It achieves efficiencies, strengthens organisational capacity, and creates financially resilient councils capable of withstanding shocks without importing the county's existing weaknesses into a single point of failure. |
| As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 of more. | The current total population of Gloucestershire is estimated at 669,380. The district of Gloucester has an estimated population of 138,598, however the proposed boundary modification would take the estimated population of that unitary council up to around 180,000, with growth in the near future estimated to take this over 200,000. The rest of Gloucestershire has an estimated population of 530,782. |
| 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. | While the populations of one of the proposed unitary councils is below the 500,000 figure, the economic, demographic, and service delivery distinctiveness for Gloucester City warrants a bespoke governance model. The case for unitarisation should not be built on strict adherence to population size, but on functional need and strategic opportunity, reflecting distinct opportunities and challenges faced by the two areas, and the imperative to align services with the real geography of people's lives.<br>The (proposed modified) Greater Gloucester unitary council would be larger than or of a comparable size to nearly a quarter |

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| | of all unitary Councils in England and Wales, most of whom are financially stable and delivering good or outstanding services to their communities. |
| Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money. | Our proposal sets out how efficiencies can be achieved through public service reform and redesign, moving to a preventative model of service delivery which creates efficiencies through reducing cost and reducing demand. Our modelling suggests that £4.04m of annual savings will be made by year 1, rising to £12.13m by Year 4, at which point the cumulative savings will outweigh any upfront investment.<br>Uniquely, this is the only proposal being worked on for Gloucestershire which would not require the creation of a new parish council or councils for the city of Gloucester, with all of the associated risk of additional costs and precepting risk that that might incur. |
| Proposals should set out how we will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects. | Reorganisation creates upfront transition and disaggregation costs, but we believe these are outweighed by the scale of recurrent savings. Our modelling demonstrates that by Year 6 there is projected to be £14.5m recurring annual savings and a cumulative net impact of around £35.1m across the two unitaries.<br>Considering the efficiencies that are possible through both reorganisation and public service reform, we expect that we will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects. |
| Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens. | The proposal sets out an optimum way to provide high quality public services to citizens, as reorganisation into two new unitary councils provides the opportunity to design the new councils from first principles to address the distinct challenges and opportunities of each place, while providing a platform for deep transformation that can yield savings. This will allow people to live better lives of their choosing (and so reduce demand), as well as maximising the contribution of each area to Government priorities such as prevention, growth and housing. |
| Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services. | The proposal shows how new structures will improve service delivery, as through developing delivery models for each new unitary we have sought to avoid unnecessary fragmentation or disaggregation of key services where a joined-up approach is the optimum solution. |
| Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money. | This proposal offers a great opportunity to deliver real public service reform by addressing the distinct challenges and opportunities in each place and developing distinct operating models that provide a platform for deep transformation and reform as well as yielding savings. |
| Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, | As part of our proposals, service delivery models have been scoped for each new unitary for a wide range of public services including adult social care, children's social care and SEND, |

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| children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety. | housing development and management, homelessness, and a community-based early intervention and prevention model. The proposals also consider a range of place-based and enabling services such as planning, economic development, asset management, building control and highways. |
| Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views. | All seven Gloucestershire Councils have worked together across all the dimensions of these proposals, including co-commissioning a single collaborative approach on engagement. The engagement outputs have built an informed understanding of the community's wants and needs from a new form of local government, and this input has been used to shape the model set out in this proposal. |
| It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal. | All seven Gloucestershire Councils worked together to co-commission a single collaborative approach on engagement. A number of engagement channels and strategies were adopted by the specialist communications consultant engaged by the councils to reflect different geographies, urban/rural areas, and different communities, including those without access to digital channels.<br>As part of the development of this proposal, Gloucester City Council also began an engagement with parish and town councils in the proposed area of Greater Gloucester, in addition to a collective engagement process that was undertaken with all parish and town councils across the wider county area. |
| Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance. | This is the only proposal being put forward for Gloucestershire that truly respects and maintains the historic importance of the City of Gloucester and the county of Gloucestershire.<br>Gloucester City has had a principal council overseeing the interests of its citizens for over 500 years, and this is the only proposal being put forward which maintains that dedicated governance. Equally, it does this in conjunction with a council for the rest of Gloucestershire, ensuring that the historic county boundary and identity is also retained. |
| Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed. | The proposal includes evidence derived from the collaborative engagement process undertaken by and for all seven Councils through a specialist consultancy. Additionally, it contains information derived from specific engagement undertaken by Gloucester City Council with neighbouring parish and town councils relating to the Greater Gloucester unitary council. |
| Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered. | A base case proposal, using the district of Gloucester boundaries for one unitary and the boundaries of the other five district councils for the other, is included and considered in this proposal in appendix A. However, in developing this option, it became apparent that it has some critical limitations, in relation to the effectiveness resulting from the size of the Gloucester unitary council and also the disbenefit to public service delivery that citizens of the wider urban area of Gloucester would experience being continued to be locked out of the city where they live and work. The remainder of this proposal therefore seeks and is modelled on a proposed boundary modification to bring the real communities of Gloucester together into a single |

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| | unitary council.<br>Whilst this would represent a one-off change of boundaries, this proposal argues that it represents the right long-term LGR decision for the people of Gloucester and Gloucestershire, given the scale and diversity of Gloucestershire and how and where our residents live their lives in 2025, compared to 1974. |
| New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements | This two unitary model for Gloucestershire, provides the perfect platform for moving to a Mayoral Strategic Authority, be it through joining an existing MSA such as the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), or through the creation of a new one, for instance alongside Herefordshire and Worcestershire.<br>It enables balanced decision-making, supports shared priorities like infrastructure, skills, and housing, and ensures diverse voices inform regional governance. This structure fosters inclusive growth and operational resilience while maintaining local accountability and effective collaboration. |
| Where no Mayoral Combined County Authority is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution. | The county's devolution direction is the subject of ongoing conversations with MHCLG officials and neighbouring areas, but this two unitary model for Gloucestershire provides the perfect platform for moving to a Mayoral Strategic Authority, be it through joining an existing MSA such as the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), or through the creation of a new one, for instance alongside Herefordshire and Worcestershire. |
| Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities. | Whereas a single County unitary council for Gloucestershire would dwarf all other existing members of WECA by population size, this two unitary proposal for Gloucestershire would provide much more compatible and appropriate size ratios compared to the other WECA partner authorities.<br>The Greater Gloucester unitary council would be of a comparable size to Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset Councils, and not far short of South Gloucestershire Council in size, providing an appropriate and democratically sympathetic counterbalance to those authorities. Equally, the Gloucestershire unitary council would be of an effective size and counterbalance to Bristol Council.<br>Together, these two authorities would ensure that Gloucestershire residents as a whole would not be democratically, 'short-changed' should they be able to join WECA. |
| New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment. | Specific structures for community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment have been developed for each unitary area, considering both existing town and parish councils and new democratic models and forms of community representation.<br>In particular, there would be a much higher Councillor to Elector ratio in the Greater Gloucester unitary council than in other proposals being submitted for Gloucestershire, ensuring that residents are better represented and engaged and connected in democratic governance and their local government. |
| Proposals will need to explain | The engagement collectively undertaken by all seven |

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| plans to make sure that communities are engaged. | Gloucestershire councils has helped develop a strong understanding of how communities want to be engaged in and with the new local councils. The proposal sets out plans to ensure all communities see themselves as co-creators and partners in the governance of their areas going forward. |
| Where there already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement. | The proposal does not propose the creation of any new town or parish councils, nor the abolition or merger of any existing ones. It does set out an exciting new model for parish and town engagement in the new unitaries, including the suggestion of a new committee of parish and town councils in the Greater Gloucester unitary council, and a new model of neighbourhood area management boards across the rest of Gloucestershire. |

# 4. The Strategic Case

## a. Our Vision and Ambitions for Gloucestershire

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to design local government around the way people live their lives.

The proposed model is sensitive to natural geography and is informed by economic evidence, building on travel to work areas and enhancing housing growth. This structure protects those most in need, reforming essential services, such as Adults and SEND which need to make improvement in order to meet the needs of vulnerable adults, Children and Young People with SEND. and ensuring that Children's services are focused on meeting the needs of the people who rely on them most.

It is focused on delivering the best outcomes for people, through a localised approach, relevant to demographic and geographical needs, which will ultimately lead to reduced cost to the public purse.

This model protects our heritage and prepares Gloucestershire for a secure and stronger, future.

This is a chance to create councils that reflect how people live, work and travel today - councils that are closer to their communities, financially sustainable and capable of delivering better outcomes.

**The proposed two new unitary authorities are the following:**

### Greater Gloucester (GG) Unitary Council (population 178k)

Comprising of the current Gloucester City Council (132k) expanding into parishes that form part of the existing Districts of:

- Tewkesbury (34,000 in GG)
- Stroud (11,730 in GG)
- Forest of Dean (660 in GG)

GG will be a city-focused authority, but driving growth across the sub-region, with target housing growth likely to take its population over 200,000 by 2031. Gloucester is younger, more deprived and carries disproportionate need compared to the rest of the county, and this is the primary factor in its needing its own political leadership and council strategy, separate to that of the rest of the county. Though it has only 27% of the county's population, it accounts for over 35% of children's services demand. Gloucester has not achieved the same level of growth as South West cities like Bristol and Exeter (who make up 4 of the top 6 in the "Good Growth For Cities" report), in part due to its under-bounding caused by the constrained boundaries imposed on it since 1974.

This new expanded city focuses on the true lives of residents, reflecting the wider travel to work area than the current city boundaries and will allow the city to economically grow and fulfil its potential as the county's primary city hub. The expanded boundaries will allow those many thousand residents of the wider urban area to have a fully democratic influence over the city where they live and work, for the first time in decades.

Gloucester as an ancient Roman and cathedral city has a unique heritage in the County, this is an opportunity to build on, enrich and enhance that heritage, creating an authority that reflects both its history, its present

and builds for the future.

## 2. Gloucestershire Unitary Council (GU) (population c470k)

Comprising of the entire populations of:

- Cheltenham Borough Council (119k)
- Cotswold District Council (91K)

and part of the populations of:

- Tewkesbury Borough Council (61k in GU)
- Stroud District Council (109k in GU)
- Forest of Dean District Council (89k in GU)

GU provides scale and stability, with its older and more rural communities facing different challenges to those of the city, particularly in adult social care and transport connectivity. GU also anchors nationally recognised heritage and a powerful tourism economy. It has a major and regionally important urban hub in Cheltenham, leading the UK's cyber sector, along with locally important market towns and more rural communities.

Together these two councils replace complexity with clarity. They align services to real communities, unlock Gloucester's growth potential and secure long-term financial resilience for the county.

## What we will achieve:

- **Reset services and improve outcomes** - particularly in Children's Social Care, SEND and Adults. Gloucester's higher demand will be met through hyper-local, prevention-first, family and community-level reform, while GU provides focus and stability for adult care in a rapidly ageing population.

- **Unlock city-led growth** - enabling Gloucester to perform on par with City peers across the country, while GU sustains county-wide prosperity through Cheltenham and market towns, garden towns, the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean.

- **Deliver value for money** - a frontline-first redesign that reduces duplication and creates two sustainable strong councils, with wider economic value over time.

- **Strengthen local identity** - GG protecting Gloucester's cathedral city heritage, GU preserving county identity - the only one of the three proposals that does this.

- **Enable devolution** - aligning Gloucestershire with the West of England Combined Authority (our preferred option), creating two strong voices at the devolution table for Gloucestershire, giving the county more proportionate voting rights in the governance of the Combined Authority. A strong City voice, alongside the County, to counterbalance the voices of Bristol and Bath in the sub-region and to drive growth more equitably across the sub-region, securing devolved powers for housing, skills, transport and growth, in line with national government policy. This proposal would equally deliver a successful and proportionate Strategic Mayoral Authority if the county were to create a new one with other partners, such as Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

### How we will lead:

- **Closer to communities, strong enough to deliver**: both unitaries will embed co-production in the development of services; giving parents, children and young people a say in how their local services are improved and developed. GG will focus on city need and growth; whilst GU will provide the scale and resilience to support a more rural county with key town hubs - a balanced model that meets core government criteria and delivers on wider government objectives while reflecting Gloucestershire's real geography and economy.

- **Evidence-led and outcomes-driven**: we will use robust analysis and benchmarking to track improved outcomes for vulnerable children and adults, healthier places and stronger economic performance.

- **Partnerships first**: deepen collaboration across health, policing, schools, VCSFE and shared service platforms (e.g. Ubico) to integrate delivery and reduce duplication.

Our ambition is simple: creating councils that are easier to understand, quicker to help and better at delivering - creating healthier communities, stronger growth and greater value for every resident and business in Gloucestershire.

## b. Better Services for Residents

At the heart of this proposal is a simple ambition: to make services better, more responsive and more straightforward for the people who use them.

### Clearer Responsibilities

Residents say the current structure — with two tiers of local government in most of Gloucestershire — is confusing and inefficient. By replacing seven councils with two, it becomes much easier to understand who is responsible for what.

Each new unitary council will be responsible for the full range of local services in its area — giving residents a clear and consistent point of contact.

This proposal ensures that the Councils are both of a scale which are financially sustainable and will promote better access to services and drive economic growth.

### A Better Experience

No more being passed between county and district councils. No more duplication or delay. Whether it's applying for housing, accessing support, or resolving an issue in their neighbourhood, residents will deal with one council that knows their place and understands their needs.

The two proposed unitary authorities will be able to operate at scale and aggregate existing best practice demonstrated across all of the authorities, as well as join up interrelated services to deliver improved outcomes and experiences to our residents. For example, bringing together services like parking — currently

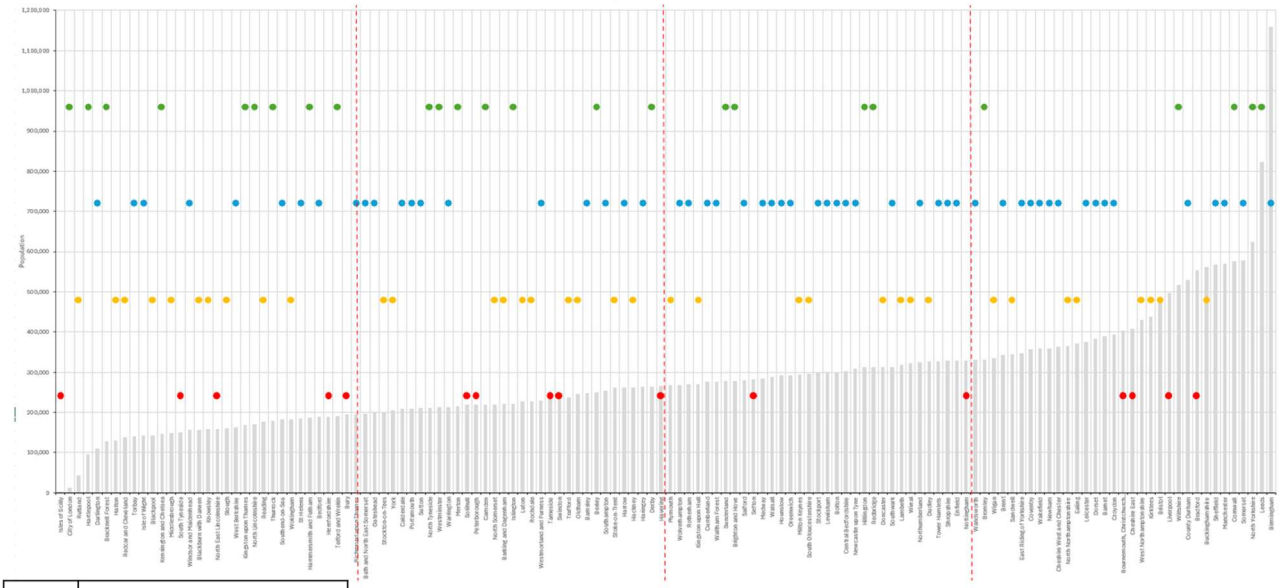
split between different tiers of councils — will simplify everyday experiences, reduce administrative waste and improve customer satisfaction.

This model allows services to be designed around people and create appropriate, place-based solutions to real need. It avoids the fragmentation of multiple districts, while tailoring delivery to the urban and rural needs. This will provide the opportunity to deliver better services, closer to the people it serves; leading to better outcomes for people and lower cost to the Councils and other public services.

Learning from elsewhere shows the value of this approach:

- County-wide footprints (including Gloucestershire's current structure) consistently fail to meet required standards.

**Graph 4 – criteria: Potential: – ranking of current unitary by population size showing most recent Ofsted Children's Services inspection result headline conclusion**



| | |
|---|---|
| Green | Outstanding |
| Blue | Good |
| Orange | Requires improvement to be good |
| Red | Inadequate |

Source: Gov.UK LA Inspection outcomes as at 31 March 2024

- The former Cumbria County Council (Westmorland and Furness Council and Cumberland Council) demonstrates the benefits of disaggregation well - Ofsted inspection has moved from 'Requires Improvement' in Cumbria in 2022 to 'Good' in both new Councils by 2024.

- Ubico and other shared service platforms already provide tested vehicles to deliver great and well-regarded services and operational efficiencies without undermining local responsiveness. The intention would be to continue with these shared service arrangements across the county wherever they make practical sense to do so.

For residents, this proposal will bring:

- A genuine reset of failing services

- Simpler, more responsive access to services

- Stronger local accountability - residents know who is responsible and how to hold them to account

The GG + GU proposal ensures services are closer, better and fairer - designed around real communities and delivered with a frontline-first approach.

## Enabling Better Partnerships

One crucial foundation of this model is stronger partnership working that suits the place it serves. The two unitaries will work with the NHS, schools, policing, VCSFE organisations and parish councils to integrate delivery. This will reduce duplication, build trust and strengthen the culture of collaboration that is needed across the county. Most of the VCSFE organisations in Gloucestershire are hyper-local and are built and run bottom-up from the areas and communities in which people live. For too long, they have, through a lack of scale, been denied the opportunity to deliver valued services in their locality as commissioners have sought county-wide approaches. Why would a local community group based in Kingsholm in Gloucester be interested in working with the Council to provide a Meals On Wheels service in rural Forest of Dean? A more nuanced and localised approach to partnership working will enable a greater civil partnership and engagement in service delivery, which has been proven to deliver better and more sustainable outcomes.

Clearer and simpler strategic leadership across the full range of local services will better enable us to improve and manage the health and care of our local populations. There will be stronger links between leisure services, public health and local communities, to ensure there is a more joined-up and preventative approach between planning, housing, social care and education, enabling the delivery of better outcomes for all.

## Accessible and Inclusive

Our new councils will combine the best of modern digital delivery with a strong local presence. Residents will be able to access services online - but also through local hubs, face-to-face support and outreach, especially for those facing homelessness or vulnerability.

Simplicity, inclusion and user-focus will be at the heart of service design - making it easier for everyone to get the help they need, when they need it.

Examples of frontline services that could be transformed include:

| Area | Current Context & Pressures | Opportunity through this LGR Proposal |
|---|---|---|
| Adult Social Care | Adult Social Care faces rising and uneven demand: with high numbers of complex supported-living cases in Gloucester and the West of the county, and growing older people's residential and nursing care needs across the whole county. The 85+ population is projected to rise by 84% by 2043. Services remain fragile - rated "Requires Improvement" by CQC in 2025 — with workforce shortages and a £13.9m savings programme struggling to keep pace with demand. | LGR enables services to strategically restructure, to reflect place and to focus on prevention and promoting independence. GG will focus on complex supported living, safeguarding, and prevention where demand is most acute. GU will provide stability and scale, building Extra Care housing, strengthening domiciliary care, and investing in prevention to manage long-term demand. Together, the two councils will build an improved, integrated, place-based approach to commissioning for vulnerable adults. The new councils will reduce reliance on high-cost placements, improve resilience, and support adults to live independently. |
| SEND | Gloucestershire is on a focussed | LGR allows a needed reset in SEND delivery. |

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| | improvement journey. It is one of the least well-funded counties in England, a member of the F40.<br>The Area SEND inspection in Dec 2023 identified challenges, with the area achieving judgment 2. There is a Local Area SEND and Inclusion Improvement Plan in place, recognised as having impact by the DfE and NHS England.<br>The white paper coming in late 2025/early 2026 will detail national SEND reforms and changes to the schools national Funding Formula which will impact future plans and working. | GG will focus on intensive SEND support and inclusion in areas of highest demand, while GU will expand county-wide sufficiency through new specialist places and workforce planning.<br>Together, the councils can implement place-based models, which will simplify the process for children and families.<br>Local working will enable stronger partnerships with VCSFE groups, education providers and parent/child representative committees. A focus on co-production will enable children, young people and families – those most affected by these services – to have a voice in how they function.<br>This partnership model will enable improved place-based working which will reduce delays, strengthen inclusion, improve outcomes and deliver sustainable SEND provision. |
| Children's Services | Children's Services were previously rated inadequate in 2017, and have improved since, with the 2025 Ofsted report citing 'Significant progress' and highlighting a more confident and child-focused service, with better outcomes for children and families.<br><br>The latest inspection has delivered a positive outcome, but still comes on the back of years of rising referrals, significant capacity pressures, and fragile workforce capacity. Since 2015, there has been a 63% increase in children in care and around 8,000 referrals annually, with the highest safeguarding demand in Gloucester and the Forest of Dean. Education services face a £78m high needs deficit, long waits for EHCPs, and shortages in specialist provision. Progress is recognised but capacity challenges remain under the current county-wide model. | LGR enables services to reflect local needs, and the new unitaries will be able to build on recent positive results with more tailored localised approaches, in order to achieve consistently outstanding ratings.<br>GG will focus on safeguarding, youth services and Alternative Provision, with Family Hubs embedded as local prevention gateways.<br>GU will sustain statutory education and children's services across the county, ensuring school place sufficiency, fostering and adoption capacity.<br>Together, the councils will deliver earlier intervention, reduce out-of-area placements, contain costs, and improve outcomes for children and families. |
| Homelessness & Housing | Rising homelessness concentrated in Gloucester where most support services are concentrated, severe pressures in temporary accommodation, fragmented responsibilities between county and districts, future funding cuts and limited affordable housing supply. | Localised accountability for homelessness and Private Rented Sector enforcement in Gloucester; county-wide leadership on housing strategy, land use and affordable supply; prevention-first model to contain costs and improve outcomes. |
| Economic Development | Economic development functions are currently fragmented across county and district councils, with overlapping responsibilities for growth hubs, inward investment, regeneration and skills. Demand for business support, inward investment and decarbonisation funding is high, but capacity and resources are | Moving from seven councils to two unitaries will create clearer leadership and reduce duplication in strategy, governance and business support. GG can focus on regeneration, inclusive growth and inward investment in Gloucester City, while GU provides county-wide scale for business support, skills and sector |

| | | |
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| | stretched. Pressures include reliance on short-term funding streams (UKSPF, REPF), grid and infrastructure constraints and limited capacity in local teams. Delivery varies widely between districts, creating inequality of access. | development. A unitary model strengthens resilience, improves access for SMEs and enables coherent delivery of transport, climate and economic strategies together. This ensures both local responsiveness and county-wide consistency. |
| Waste collection, disposal and recycling | Waste services are split: the county manages disposal while districts lead on collection. Ubico creates a successful foundation and has created efficiencies and savings. All county and districts commission Ubico, creating shared resilience and continuity. The system faces rising costs from decarbonisation and fleet replacement, pressures on HRC capacity, variation in local policies and new legislative duties. Recruitment, retention and inconsistent resident experience add further strain. | LGR can unify waste and environmental services further under a more consistent larger scale model. Maintaining Ubico's broad footprint ensures smooth transition and operational resilience. A single framework enables harmonised policies, reduced duplication and stronger investment in decarbonisation. This creates a more efficient, integrated service aligned to countywide climate and sustainability goals while still allowing local flexibility. |
| Development and Regeneration | Delivery is fragmented across county and districts, with a mix of in-house, arms-length and external models. The remit spans highways and transport, housing, regeneration, economic development and strategic infrastructure planning. Pressures include rising build costs, housing demand, viability challenges and limited officer capacity. Statutory consultee functions (e.g. highways, flood, heritage) are stretched, while regeneration and housing projects face resource and financial constraints. | Moving from seven councils to two creates the chance to simplify planning, regeneration and infrastructure. A single strategic approach can streamline developer contributions, align policies and strengthen capacity to deliver complex regeneration and housing programmes. Integration reduces duplication, embeds consistent consultee roles and supports investment attraction through a strong county-wide identity. |
| Public protection, licensing & environmental health | Public protection services (environmental health, licensing, food safety, health & safety and pollution control) are delivered at district level, with the county providing oversight on specific areas (e.g. Trading Standards, Fire & Rescue). Councils face high demand for regulatory services, increasing complexity in licensing and enforcement pressures from issues such as food hygiene, private rented housing standards and community safety. Recruitment and retention of qualified staff (EHOs, licensing officers) remains a challenge, with workloads often reactive and shaped by legislative changes. | Moving from 7 councils to 2 new unitaries offers the chance to consolidate environmental health and licensing functions, creating stronger, more resilient teams. It reduces duplication, builds consistency in enforcement and licensing and allows specialist expertise to be shared across wider areas. The two-unitary model provides the scale to modernise digital systems and improve customer access, while keeping services close enough to communities to remain responsive to local issues. |
| Arts, culture and heritage | Arts, culture and heritage are split across county and districts. The county leads cultural education, while districts run museums, theatres, festivals and heritage assets. Provision is vibrant but uneven: major centres carry most of the infrastructure and visitor economy, while smaller districts struggle with capacity. | LGR can create a more resilient system for culture and heritage, rightly aligned to place. GG and GU can each create a unified framework to align arts with health, education and economic growth, reduce duplication and secure long-term investment. This will help sustain venues, protect historic assets, expand access in rural and urban areas and use heritage as a driver of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Venues face financial fragility, reliance on short-term funding and high maintenance costs for historic buildings. | inclusion, prevention and growth. |
| Sport, physical activity and wellbeing | Leisure and wellbeing services are fragmented across districts, with ageing facilities, high maintenance costs and inconsistent investment models. Funding pressures and rising demand for health and wellbeing services add strain. | LGR enables a unified leisure and wellbeing framework, aligning with public health, reducing duplication and supporting sustainable facilities. Integration offers clearer accountability, stronger prevention focus and better use of resources. |
| Digital, Data & Technology | Digital services are fragmented across seven councils with multiple systems, contracts and suppliers. Duplication in platforms (Microsoft 365, planning systems, ServiceNow, CRM/ERP) creates inefficiency, high costs and inconsistency for residents. Shared service models (e.g. Publica) add complexity. Cyber resilience is uneven, contract end dates misaligned and recruitment of skilled staff is difficult. | Moving to 2 unitaries allows consolidation of contracts and systems, cutting duplication and costs. GG and GU can each build modern, resilient digital estates, with standardised platforms for finance, HR, planning and customer services, collaborating where it makes sense to do so. For instance, a unified model strengthens cyber security, data sharing and digital inclusion, while giving scale for investment and supplier leverage. Residents benefit from consistent, accessible digital services, while local priorities are still reflected through flexible delivery. |
| Planning | Planning is split across county and district councils, with the county handling minerals, waste and transport and infrastructure planning, while districts deliver development management, local plans and building control. Services face recruitment shortages, housing delivery pressures, multiple statutory deadlines (e.g. Local Plans, Building Safety Levy) and fragmented IT/planning systems. Transition experience elsewhere shows challenges around harmonising policy frameworks, staff retention and avoiding duplication. | LGR offers a chance to integrate planning under two coherent units (GG and GU), streamlining local plan production, policy frameworks and building control functions. This would reduce duplication, enable stronger workforce resilience, align IT and digital planning systems and deliver consistent enforcement. It also strengthens the link between planning, housing and infrastructure delivery, while still maintaining local identity and responsiveness through area-based committees or boards. |

Case Study: Ubico Ltd

Ubico is a local authority owned company (Teckal) operating across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire. It delivers high quality, front line environmental services to over 300,000 households, which support and improve our local communities to remain clean, green and pleasant places to live and work.

The company was founded in 2011, by shareholder partners Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) and Cotswold District Council (CDC). The company achieved strong growth in its first ten years and now provides environmental services to all councils in Gloucestershire, and West Oxfordshire, with eight local authority shareholders since 2021.

Ubico works closely with its shareholder councils to realise environmental services that align with their objectives. Each service is designed around the council and communities it serves, while also offering our partners the benefit of learned experience that leads to realising synergies through greater standardisation. The individual character and requirements of local geographies are embraced and respected, meaning services are genuinely flexible in the face of evolving local authority needs.

The governance model associated with the teckal model ensures that explicit agreements on how services are run are in place; the councils as shareholders are in charge.

Ubico also adapts its approach to respect partners' appetite for delegated authority, and actively looks for partner benefits, as it is not motivated by driving company profit; as a teckal organisation, it is local authority owned and shareholder councils only pay the cost of operation, any savings being directly invested in improving frontline services for residents.

The growth in the number of local authorities partnering with Ubico since the company began service delivery in 2012 has consolidated its position as a resilient provider of environmental services, with a clear focus on long-term improvements. It means Ubico is able to leverage the full buying power of the network when sourcing products and services; improving the negotiating position for each local authority. It also provides a shared test-bed for investments in industry leading technology, equipment and working practices which raises standards across the region, influencing the scope of shared resources and service delivery.

## c. Delivering Value for Money

Creating two councils, in the place of seven, will save money, reduce duplication and ensure more of every pound is spent where it matters and spent well.

The GG + GU model is financially sustainable for the long term. Within a few years, GG would be larger in size than nearly a quarter of existing unitary councils across England, the vast majority of whom are successful and financially stable. GU will provide stability, with a population that will likely soon exceed 500,000

**Baseline data – current unitary by population quartile**

| Council | Population | Council | Population | Council | Population | Council | Population |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Isles of Scilly | 2,281 | Bath and North East Somerset | 195,618 | Plymouth | 266,862 | Wandsworth | 329,035 |
| City of London | 10,847 | Gateshead | 197,722 | Wolverhampton | 267,651 | Bromley | 329,578 |
| Rutland | 41,151 | Stockton-on-Tees | 199,966 | Rotherham | 268,354 | Wigan | 334,110 |
| Hartlepool | 93,861 | York | 204,551 | Kingston upon Hull | 268,852 | Brent | 341,221 |
| Darlington | 109,469 | Calderdale | 207,699 | Cumberland | 275,390 | Sandwell | 344,210 |
| Bracknell Forest | 126,881 | Portsmouth | 208,420 | Waltham Forest | 275,887 | East Riding of Yorkshire | 346,309 |
| Halton | 128,964 | Sutton | 210,053 | Sunderland | 277,354 | Coventry | 355,600 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 137,175 | North Tyneside | 210,487 | Brighton and Hove | 277,965 | Wakefield | 357,729 |
| Torbay | 139,479 | Westminster | 211,365 | Salford | 278,064 | Newham | 358,645 |
| Isle of Wight | 140,794 | Warrington | 211,580 | Sefton | 281,027 | Cheshire West and Chester | 361,694 |
| Blackpool | 141,574 | Merton | 214,709 | Medway | 282,702 | North Northamptonshire | 363,408 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 146,154 | Solihull | 217,678 | Walsall | 286,105 | Ealing | 369,937 |
| Middlesbrough | 148,285 | Peterborough | 217,705 | Hounslow | 290,488 | Leicester | 373,399 |
| South Tyneside | 148,667 | Camden | 218,049 | Greenwich | 291,080 | Dorset | 383,274 |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | 154,738 | North Somerset | 219,145 | Milton Keynes | 292,180 | Barnet | 389,101 |
| Blackburn with Darwen | 155,762 | Barking and Dagenham | 219,992 | South Gloucestershire | 294,765 | Croydon | 392,224 |
| Knowsley | 157,103 | Islington | 220,373 | Stockport | 297,107 | Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole | 401,898 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 157,754 | Luton | 226,973 | Lewisham | 298,653 | Cheshire East | 406,527 |
| Slough | 159,182 | Rochdale | 226,992 | Bolton | 298,903 | West Northamptonshire | 429,013 |
| West Berkshire | 162,215 | Westmorland and Furness | 227,643 | Central Bedfordshire | 301,501 | Kirklees | 437,593 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 168,302 | Tameside | 232,753 | Newcastle upon Tyne | 307,565 | Bristol | 479,024 |
| North Lincolnshire | 170,042 | Swindon | 235,657 | Hillingdon | 310,681 | Liverpool | 496,770 |
| Reading | 174,820 | Trafford | 236,301 | Redbridge | 310,911 | Wiltshire | 515,885 |
| Thurrock | 176,877 | Oldham | 243,912 | Doncaster | 311,027 | County Durham | 528,127 |
| Southend-on-Sea | 180,915 | Barnsley | 246,482 | Southwark | 311,913 | Bradford | 552,644 |
| Wokingham | 180,967 | Bexley | 247,835 | Lambeth | 316,812 | Buckinghamshire | 560,409 |
| St Helens | 184,728 | Southampton | 252,689 | Wirral | 322,453 | Sheffield | 566,242 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 185,238 | Stoke-on-Trent | 259,965 | Northumberland | 324,362 | Manchester | 568,996 |
| Bedford | 187,466 | Harrow | 261,185 | Dudley | 324,969 | Cornwall | 575,413 |
| Herefordshire | 188,719 | Hackney | 261,491 | Tower Hamlets | 325,789 | Somerset | 576,852 |
| Telford and Wrekin | 188,871 | Haringey | 261,811 | Shropshire | 327,178 | North Yorkshire | 623,501 |
| Bury | 194,606 | Derby | 263,490 | Enfield | 327,224 | Leeds | 822,483 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 194,894 | Havering | 264,703 | Nottingham | 328,513 | Birmingham | 1,157,603 |

Efficiencies will come from:

- Streamlining management and back-office functions, creating leaner organisations
- Reducing duplication across layers of governance
- Maintaining and drawing greater efficiencies from existing and proven shared service models like Ubico
- Unlocking savings from earlier intervention and prevention - to reduce high-cost demand in children's and adults services.

Transition costs will be carefully managed:

- We expect there to be lower transition costs than a single-county model, due to lower redundancy levels more than offsetting and disaggregation costs
- A frontline-first approach will enable transition to be achieved without over-reliance on expensive consultants

Evidence from elsewhere supports this model:

- Single-county unitary authority proposals have consistently under-estimated transition costs, over-promised efficiency and successor authorities have struggle to sustain improved outcomes
- Multi-unitary models like Dorset and Cumbria have achieved better outcomes in high-cost services such as children's and adults, alongside reduced costs

- The creation of two unitaries in Northamptonshire demonstrates that splitting responsibility can lead to more sustainable finances and improved focus on services

The result is councils that are simpler and financially sustainable, protecting frontline services, reducing bureaucracy and enabling reinvestment into priorities such as vulnerable children, healthier communities and unlocking growth.

## d. A Stronger Voice for Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire's current two-tier system, with seven councils, brings inefficiencies and restricts growth. Services are duplicated, accountability is blurred and decisions are slowed by competing priorities. The result is a county which is not able to have a clear and confident voice in regional and national forums.

The proposed model replaces seven competing voices with two strong, complementary councils that are clear, accountable and representative. Together, they will amplify Gloucestershire's influence locally, regionally and nationally.

- Greater Gloucester will give this ancient cathedral city the leadership role and growth capacity it has lacked. Today Gloucester is restricted compared to South West peers such as Bristol, Exeter and Swindon. A dedicated urban authority will ensure Gloucester has the same standing as other leading cities, able to advocate directly for housing, infrastructure, jobs and investment.

- A Gloucestershire Unitary Council will provide balance, scale and stability for the county's towns and rural areas. It will sustain prosperity and amplify the county's economic and cultural voice, while protecting nationally recognised heritage and assets, such as the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean.

This balance ensures that both the urban and rural strengths of Gloucestershire are represented clearly and ends the duplication and inefficiency caused by the current two-tier system.

### Joining a Mayoral Strategic Authority

Gloucestershire is actively exploring three strategic partnerships to the north, south, and east. Of these, we found each offer unique opportunities to accelerate growth and influence:

- West of England Combined Authority (WECA)
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Swindon and Oxford

**1. West of England Combined Authority (WECA)**

- **Why**: Existing governance, metro mayor, statutory compliance, strong sectoral fit (advanced manufacturing, cyber, green tech), and clear commuting / economic flows; existing regional partnerships across arts, culture, health, and the broadest range of services of all options; similar urban / rural profile, reflecting shared challenges in housing and transport planning.
- **Risk**: Gloucestershire risks becoming a junior partner unless it defines a distinctive role (e.g. agri-tech leader completing a 'whole of tech' future economy).

WECA provides the high-growth innovation engine, Gloucestershire complements the ecosystem with agri-tech and natural capital.

**2. Herefordshire and Worcestershire**

- **Why**: Close match in rural economy, heritage, and agri-tech; natural cultural legacy fit; scope for Gloucestershire to play a leading role in innovation and scaling up; slightly under population threshold, but culturally congruent and offers Gloucestershire leadership space.
- **Risk**: Limited digital / tech capacity in partners and weaker alignment with national reform priorities.

Rooted in shared rural economy and heritage, with Gloucestershire as a natural partner to inject innovation and scale.

**3. Swindon and Oxfordshire**

- Why: Strong in R&D, life sciences, AI, and clean tech; good synergies in advanced manufacturing and cyber, but requires completely new governance; has weaker cultural alignment, and less short-term integration with Gloucestershire's rural and health economies.
- Risk: Longer-time horizon to deliver; innovation is research-led and urban, less aligned with Gloucestershire's wider economic identity; very few established regional partnerships.

Offers long-term potential in global-facing R&D and science but less immediate and less place-congruent.

Gloucestershire has the assets and ambition to contribute strongly within any of the potential partnerships. WECA provides the most immediately deliverable and policy-aligned option, while the Herefordshire and Worcestershire option offers an alternative in which Gloucestershire could play a leading role. The partnership with Swindon and Oxfordshire remains a credible longer-term prospect, particularly for research-led collaboration, but is less immediately aligned to Gloucestershire's wider economic and governance priorities.

Why this matters:

Through LGR and further devolution, Gloucestershire can unlock the tools to drive a high-growth, resilience-focused economy and smarter services for residents.

- The government's clear policy direction is to extend deeper devolution deals through Mayoral Combined Authorities

- By joining a Mayoral Strategic Authority, Gloucestershire will access devolved powers over housing, skills, transport and economic growth - aligning with national priorities. This will provide the scale and credibility needed to secure investment and give Gloucestershire a stronger representation on the issues that matter to its residents

- A two-unitary model strengthens Gloucestershire's voice in these partnerships: coherent, financially sustainable councils with clear leadership. A single County unitary would potentially reduce the county's vote and voice in the Strategic Authority and would also mean that Gloucestershire was the largest constituent Council, which has the potential to unbalance existing or future relationships.

- Devolution would allow Gloucestershire to power growth through innovation: using devolved economic powers to create the Severn Resilience Corridor, bringing together cyber, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, and clean energy. This will attract major private investment, generate high-value jobs, and cement Gloucestershire's role as a national growth engine.

- Devolution would allow Gloucestershire to strengthen resilience for the 21st century: with greater control over housing, health, skills, and transport, Gloucestershire can deliver joined-up solutions

for climate resilience, energy security, and sustainable food systems.

- Devolution would allow Gloucestershire to put data to work for residents: allowing us to integrate transport, housing, health, and utilities in real time. This will reduce duplication, cut costs, and provide residents with more personalised, responsive services, from flood alerts to smart mobility and integrated healthcare.

With two councils, Gloucestershire will be stronger in its representation. GG will lead as a confident, ambitious city authority, sitting alongside Bristol and Bath; GU will sustain county-wide prosperity and protect heritage. Together they will give Gloucestershire the stronger, clearer and more confident voice it needs, ensuring that the county is not a bystander, but a leader with an equal say in shaping the future of the region.

## e. Unlocking Growth & Innovation

Gloucestershire has huge economic potential - but it is not yet being realised. Gloucester, in particular, is younger, more diverse and faces higher levels of need than the county average, yet has the greatest potential to drive inclusive growth. With the right leadership, geographic boundaries and tools, it can perform on a par with peer cities like Exeter and Bristol.

This model will unlock that potential:

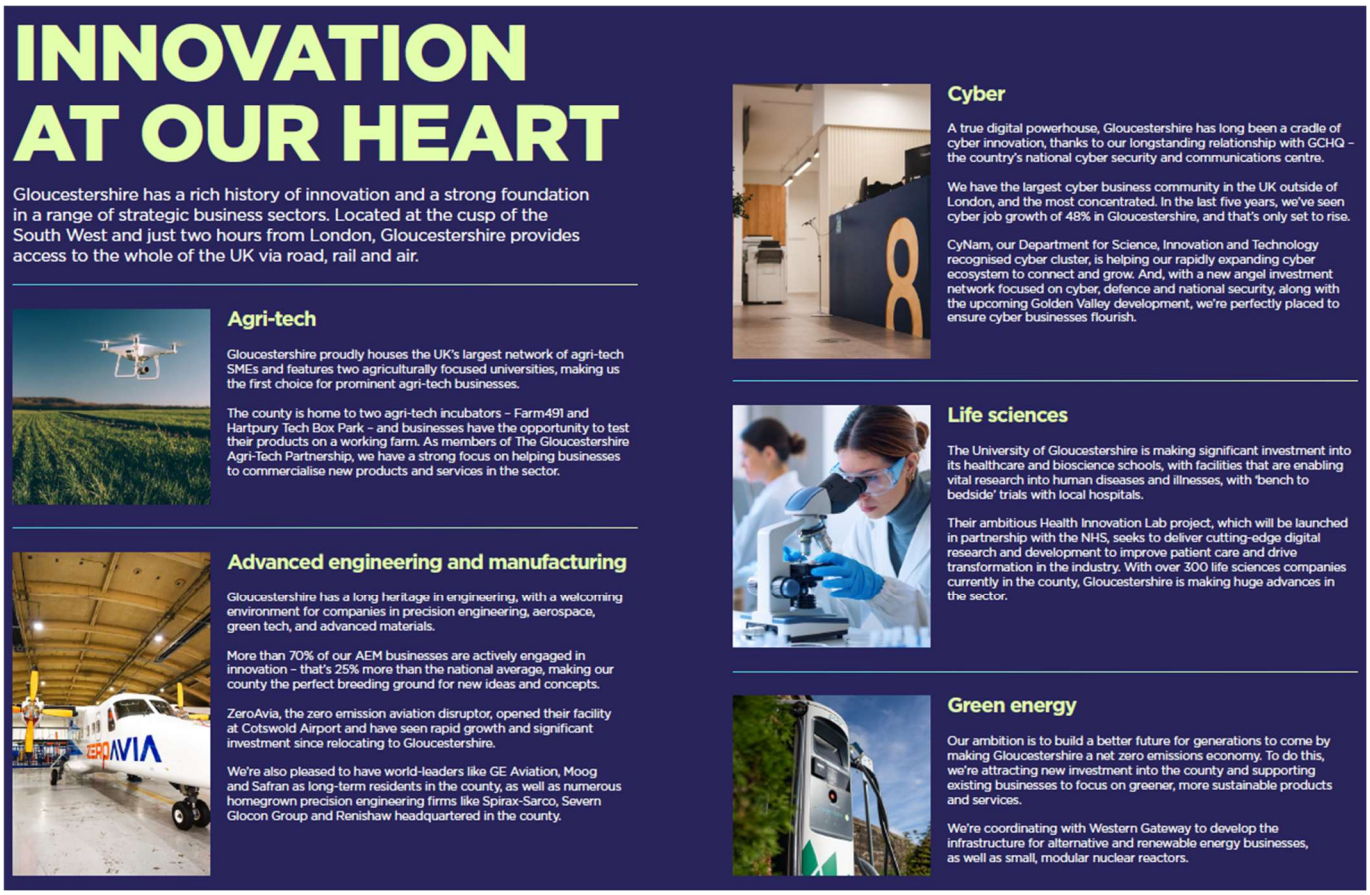
- Greater Gloucester will act as a growth hub for the county. Its assets - a cathedral city with world-class heritage, a strong cultural and sporting identity, regenerated docks and quays, its increasing prominence as a University City and a growing service economy - will be matched with governance able to deliver investment and growth at scale. Gloucester City Council has a reputation for being one of the most innovative areas in stimulating and delivering commercial and residential growth and regeneration.

- Hi-tech businesses such as Safran will be headquartered within the new Greater Gloucester area, whilst medical science research and opportunities being pioneered by the University of Gloucestershire will cover across both councils.

- A Gloucestershire Unitary Council will sustain and strengthen the wider economy: market towns, rural industries, green and visitor economy in the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean, bolstered by the UK's centre of cyber technology in Cheltenham. It will ensure balanced prosperity across the whole county.

This model aligns economic strategy with how people actually live and work. It connects housing, transport, planning and skills to business needs, removing duplication and enabling joined-up leadership.

Gloucestershire’s track record of innovation shows what’s possible:




The voluntary and community sector is also a growth partner. With over 4,000 organisations and strong networks like Know Your Patch, Gloucestershire's VCSFE sector connects communities and builds resilience and will play a central role in inclusive growth.

Evidence backs this approach. The Case for Cities report (In Appendix B) highlights the potential for Gloucester to achieve the same growth as its peers, while wider analysis shows that city-led growth drives regeneration, improved social outcomes and stronger local economies.

With two councils that are simpler, accountable and strategically aligned, Gloucestershire will be positioned to unlock innovation, attract investment and deliver growth that is both sustainable and inclusive.

## f. Building Healthy Communities

### Why Change is Needed

LGR is not only about fixing fragile services but about enabling healthier, fairer communities. Today responsibility for housing, leisure, culture and public health is split across seven councils, leaving no single body accountable for wellbeing outcomes and preventing a joined-up, localised response which facilitates true change.

Adults' and SEND services are struggling nationally, with rising demand and costs. Locally in Gloucestershire, an ageing population, rural isolation and workforce shortages stretch adult services, with

demand set to overwhelm budgets and capacity.

**The pressures are place-specific.** Gloucester has a quarter of the county's population but over a third of children's social care demand. Its younger, more deprived communities drive high levels of safeguarding need and homelessness. Rural Gloucestershire faces a different challenge: an accelerating ageing population, fragile care markets and entrenched health inequalities. The current county-wide structure is not designed around the very different needs of Gloucester City and the wider county.

Without reform, demand and costs will continue to rise, while families will continue to face poor outcomes and delays, health inequalities will widen and accountability will remain blurred. A reset and fundamentally different approach is needed.

## The Opportunity with Two Councils

Two new councils create the opportunity to integrate many of the wider determinants of health - from housing and planning to leisure, culture and environment - within a single local framework, alongside children's and adults services.

The proposed two councils, with the right size and focus, will build around the true needs of people and place. Unlike the current county-wide system, they can design services around fundamentally different communities, embed support locally and act earlier to stop problems before they escalate.

- Greater Gloucester with its younger demographic will have a great focus on children's and youth services, SEND, homelessness, health inequalities and regeneration - tailored to a younger, more deprived, high-growth urban population.

- Gloucestershire Unitary Council with its older and more rural demographic can have a real focus on adult social care and rural services, ensuring stability, resilience and sustainable care for an ageing population.

Both will embed prevention-first approaches in partnership with the NHS and ICS, ensuring that better health and wellbeing are designed into every service, not left as an afterthought.

**Together, they will deliver:**

- **Prevention-first mindset** - services embedded at family and neighbourhood level, reducing crisis demand.

    - **Family and community-level delivery** - shaped around distinct local needs, with support provided through schools, GPs, neighbourhood teams and local partners, reducing reliance on high-cost crisis interventions.

    - **Earlier help for children and families** - more effective early intervention will reduce the number of children entering care, improve SEND support and strengthen family resilience.

    - **Independence for adults** - closer links between housing, social care and health will expand supported living and Extra Care options, helping older and disabled people live

independently for longer.

- **Local accountability** - smaller councils are more responsive and residents know who is responsible for services in their area, strengthening trust and oversight.
- **Faster responsiveness** - councils able to react quickly to local issues and emergencies.

- **Integrated partnerships** - working with NHS partners, policing, schools, VCSFE organisations and parish councils ensures services are designed around people's lives and communities rather than institutional boundaries.

## A Prevention-First Model

A prevention-first approach is the only sustainable way to improve outcomes and protect resources. Without a shift to prevention, rising demand in both children's and adults' services will overwhelm budgets and workforce capacity.

Evidence from other reorganisations, or where district councils' functions have been used in a prevention-first approach, demonstrates this model can succeed.

## CUMBRIA: TWO SEPARATE CHILDREN'S SERVICES FROM DAY ONE

Westmorland & Furness Council

In 2023, six district councils and Cumbria County Council were reorganised into two unitary councils, **Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council**. Both councils are sparsely populated, covering very large areas.

**Westmorland and Furness** is the third largest authority in England and Wales by geographic area. It has a small population of whom 15% are children aged 0 to 15 across a rural geography. Key aspects of its approach is:

- **Strong alignment** between the **Children's Plan and council priorities**.
- Priorities are driven through **engagement with children and families**.
- Adoption of an **early intervention and prevention Family Help locality offer** implementing a **partnership model of delivery**, which includes Health partners, Police, Education, Local Authority, Voluntary and Community sectors working together to identify needs within families as early as possible.
- **Clear governance arrangements** through a Family Help programme Board, Safeguarding partnership, Strategic Education Alliance and a SEND partnership Board.

### LEARNING FROM THIS APPROACH IS:

- **Common purpose for children and families** across the council and with partners is essential.
- Build in **engagement with children and families** from initial planning onwards.
- **Respond to what you're hearing** from them.
- Understanding **constancy, focus and determination to drive forwards improved outcomes for children is critical**.
- Using **community and partnership support** to help deliver coordinated, connected and integrated family help through **place-based family help hubs** which include both a physical and virtual offer.
- **Communicate** constantly and effectively about plans and priorities.

A year after inception, Ofsted highlighted the effectiveness of its approach to delivery, with a particular emphasis on the:

- Firm establishment of **a unique identity** for the new unitary children's services.
- Council's **relentless drive for improvement**.
- **Shared vision for children across the workforce and with partners** which is supporting service improvements.
- Ways in which it **listens and acts on what children say matters to them and their families**.
- Swift action to **recruit to and stabilise the workforce**.

*Close, connected communities, coupled with strong, passionate and ambitious leadership, will give children the best possible start in life and provide good support and services to them and their families.*

Source: Building The Best Places For Children And Families: Children's Services In New Unitary Councils, Staff College/DCN report, 2025

## CASE STUDY: Leeds and hyper local ASC approach

Leeds City Council, in collaboration with residents and partners, is implementing a 'hyperlocal' approach to social care work by focusing on community engagement, personalised services, and co-design with local partners. This approach aims to create more effective, equitable and sustainable social care services that meet the unique circumstances of users and their locality. Key features of this approach are:

### Community-led support

- In Leeds, ASC has adopted the principles of community-led support, where local communities are actively involved in shaping and delivering services.
- This involves co-production, where people who use services, their families, and community members work together with professionals to develop and improve services.
- The focus is on building trust, empowering individuals, and focusing on their abilities.

### Strengths-based working

- Leeds emphasises strengths-based working, which focuses on building on people's existing strengths and abilities, rather than primarily focusing on their needs or deficits.
- This approach is aligned with the principles of community-led support and co-production.

### Thriving communities

- Leeds' approach emphasises the importance of thriving communities, which are characterised by good health, wellbeing, and strong social connections.
- This involves investing in community building, social infrastructure, and supporting people to access opportunities for education, employment and leisure.
- The goal is to create environments where people can live healthy and happy lives.

The hyperlocal approach has also been adopted by the Local Care Partnership (LCP) with a strong focus on bringing together health and social care providers, community organisations, and local people to work collaboratively on shared goals. The partnerships aim to improve outcomes, reduce inequalities, and respond to the unique needs of each locality. The programme is using local recruitment as a lever to engage local residents in working in the health and social care sector as a vital part of the local economy.

- The Leeds Health and Social Care Hub aims to make the region a natural destination for people seeking careers in health and social care, and for organisations looking to establish or expand.
- It focuses on making health and social care a career of choice for local residents, creating employment opportunities, and addressing health inequalities.
- The hub promotes collaboration between public, private and third sector organisations to achieve these goals.
- Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust has successfully recruited staff from local communities by directly engaging with them, rather than relying solely on online job postings.
- This approach has led to a more diverse workforce, including people who may not have previously considered joining the NHS.
- The trust has worked with local organisations and charities to reach individuals who may have barriers to accessing online job applications, such as digital poverty.

*Source: The power of prevention and place in new unitary councils, Impower, 2025*

This model will put prevention at the heart of service design - creating councils that are not only more responsive, but also more resilient and financially sustainable in the long term.

## Designing Services Around People, Not Structures

This reorganisation is not about centralisation - it is about resetting failing services and reshaping them around the realities of people's lives in Gloucestershire. Families need earlier support, young people with SEND need inclusion and older residents in rural areas need care that prevents isolation. The new councils will be built to meet those needs directly - not to preserve outdated 'at scale' structures.

This means:

- **Lifelong support designed as one system** - aligning children's and adults' services across life stages so that young people in care, SEND, or transition to adulthood do not fall through gaps

- **Clearer access to help** – providing a single front door for access, reducing duplication at key contact points, so residents know who to turn to and get faster support; enabling SEND, education and social care to work effectively together, leading to quicker and fairer outcomes for those most in need

- **Prevention in practice** - linking housing, early help and leisure/physical activity with social care, tackling the drivers of crisis before they escalate; as well as introducing innovative data use, to enable streamlined working, and improved outcomes for the vulnerable.

- **Independent lives for older and disabled people** - enabling housing, planning and adult care to work together on the right homes for everyone, with supported living, particularly important for rural Gloucestershire, where extra care is limited.

- **Healthier, connected communities** - joining up cultural, leisure and public health services to promote wellbeing, reduce loneliness and strengthen Gloucester's identity as a proud, diverse city.

- **Safer local environments** - coordinating public protection (Trading Standards, Licensing, Environmental Health) and other regulatory services to tackle issues such as unsafe housing conditions that disproportionately affect vulnerable communities.

- **Leadership rooted in place** - ensuring decision-making is close to communities, empowering parish and town councils, VCSE groups and neighbourhood partnerships to shape local delivery.

## Children's Services & Education

Children's services have made much needed progress on their improvement journey, with a welcome recent "Good" Ofsted judgement following many years of the service requiring improvement. However, SEND services are still in need of focus and improvement and the county-wide model struggles to respond to the very different needs of Gloucester and the wider county as well as a more bespoke structure would.

In Children's Social Care

- High and complex demand: 63% rise in children in care since 2015, with roughly 8,000 referrals annually and sharp rise in Child Protection Plans, particularly in Gloucester and the Forest of Dean.
- Placement capacity constraints: 69% of children are placed in-house, with the remainder dependent on high-cost external fostering and residential provision.
- Workforce fragility: Staffing stabilised since the 2017 inadequate rating, but Ofsted (2025) warns progress remains fragile, particularly in rural and complex case areas.

In Education Services

- Ofsted's 2023 SEND Area Inspection judged provision as "Requires improvement"
- SEND pressures: Over 350 new EHCP requests monthly, a 140% increase since 2015, with long waiting times for assessment and support
- Increasing Demand: growing need for Alternative Provision (AP) and increasing complexity of needs (autism, ADHD, trauma, mental health)
- Funding and infrastructure strain: A high needs budget deficit of £78m, compounded by workforce shortages (educational psychologists, specialist teachers) and schools constrained by physical capacity in growth areas.
- National policy shifts: Expanded early years entitlements, the forthcoming Schools and Wellbeing Bill and SEND reform create both new statutory duties and resourcing challenges.

This context highlights a system under intense strain, with significant geographic inequality (Gloucester carries a disproportionate share of safeguarding and education pressures) and persistent financial risk.

Progress has been made, with Family Hubs, a Social Work Academy, specialist school places, and a SEND Improvement Plan garnering national recognition. Yet these gains remain fragile because they are delivered through a county-wide model that cannot respond to the very different pressures in Gloucester and the wider county.

With a more localised structure, prevention and resource will be embedded where it is most needed.

## Opportunity for Children's Services

Local Government Reorganisation is the opportunity to reset the system so that progress takes root, spreads consistently and delivers sustainable, evidence-led improvement. Partnership working will be key in all areas, and co-production of services will be a central principle of forming the new models.

- In Greater Gloucester: there will be local accountability where demand is greatest
    - GG will focus relentlessly on safeguarding, SEND, youth services and Alternative Provision. Family Hubs will be fully embedded as community gateways to prevention and support. Local leadership will ensure the voice of children and families directly shapes services
- In Gloucestershire Unitary Council: there will be stability and scale across the county
    - GU will sustain statutory education and children's services across rural areas, focusing on sufficiency: new school places, fostering and adoption capacity and SEND provision. County-wide workforce planning will provide resilience and specialist expertise

This means:

- Outcomes will improve: children will be safer, families better supported and young people given a fair chance to succeed

- Costs will be contained: fewer out-of-area placements, more early intervention and sustainable SEND provision
- Accountability will be clearer: leadership rooted in place, aligned to local priorities
- Transformation will be unlocked: prevention-first, workforce resilience, education inclusion and stronger multi-agency collaboration

Together, this resets services around real need, improves outcomes, contains costs, and embeds prevention.

## Adult Services

The same approach applies in Adult Social Care, where fragile improvement cannot meet rising demand. Services are under intense strain, with rising demand, fragile improvement and persistent financial risk. At present, the county risks being locked into a cycle of reactive, high-cost provision that fails to deliver independence, dignity, or value for money.

Current Pressures:

- Rising and imbalanced demand: Over 6,400 adults are supported, with demand patterns sharply imbalanced, due to the demographic differences between city and rural areas
- Demographic pressures: The number of people aged 85+ is projected to rise by 84% by 2043 - placing unsustainable pressure on services
- Service fragility: In January 2025, CQC rated Gloucestershire's ASC service as *Requires Improvement* with a baseline score of 50/100, the lowest in England under the new regime.
- Financial challenge: A £13.9m savings programme is underway, focusing on shifting provision from residential care towards Extra Care and reablement, but current structures limit pace and sustainability
- Workforce fragility: Ongoing shortages across social work, mental health and occupational therapy constrain resilience
- Fragmented commissioning: Delegation of functions to NHS partners weakened strategic oversight. Although these functions are now being reclaimed, the system remains unstable

There are some signs of improvement, but services are still struggling to meet localised need. A £57m capital programme has expanded extra care housing, prevention pilots are underway and the workforce is stabilising after years of churn. However progress is insufficient, as the low CQC rating demonstrates. Adult Social Care will not be sustainable without a structure that supports prevention and resilience at scale.

## Opportunity for Adults Services

The creation of Greater Gloucester (GG) and Gloucestershire Unitary (GU) provides the platform to deliver a system designed around people, communities and place, rather than structures.

- In GG: local accountability where demand is greatest
    - Focus on complex supported living, residential care, safeguarding and prevention.
    - Local leadership accountable to communities facing the highest demand and most complex needs.

- In GU: stability and scale across the county
    - Sustaining statutory responsibilities across the rural areas
    - Expanding Extra Care capacity, strengthening domiciliary provision and investing in prevention to reduce long-term demand

This means:

- Outcomes will improve: more prevention, better safeguarding and support closer to home
- Costs will be contained: fewer high-cost placements, more community-based solutions, sustainable provision
- Accountability will be clearer: leadership rooted in place, aligned to local priorities.
- Transformation will be unlocked: prevention-first, workforce resilience, stronger commissioning and collaboration with NHS partners

Without reform, the pressures in Adults' Services will continue to drive unsustainable costs. A more localised model, driven by strategic and prevention orientated decisions, is the only option. Better care cannot come at ever-higher cost - reform must deliver both.

This is our opportunity to ensure that every adult in Gloucestershire - whether living with complex needs, older age, or long-term conditions - can live safely, independently and with dignity.

By embedding prevention locally, GG and GU can protect lives and protect budgets.

## Partnership Working and Integration

These reforms will only succeed with stronger partnerships and inclusive delivery. We will build on existing collaboration and invest in deep, meaningful partnerships. Partnerships are critical; statutory and non-statutory partnerships will be streamlined and strengthened, including, for each new unitary authority:

- New Safeguarding Children's Board
- New Safeguarding Adults Board
- Integrated Care Board and Place-based Commissioning Arrangements
- Youth Justice Strategic Partnerships
- Domestic Abuse Partnership
- SEND Strategy Partnership
- Community Safety Partnership
- Health & Wellbeing Board
- Schools Forum Board

These partnerships will form the fabric of a joined-up system of care and support that spans health, education, justice and community services - and ensure no one falls through the gaps.

## Workforce, Safeguarding and Governance

The future of services depends on investing in our people. We will:

- Retain and grow a permanent, skilled workforce, reducing reliance on agency staff
- Recruit high-quality leaders for the new directorates for Adults and Children's Services
- Establish the statutory Director roles for each council, including:
    - Director of Children's Services (DCS)
    - Director of Adult Social Services (DASS)
    - Principal Social Worker - Children's Services
    - Principal Social Worker - Adults' Services
- Appoint Independent Scrutineers for each Safeguarding Partnership
- Establish Safeguarding Adults Boards and Safeguarding Children Partnerships for both councils
- Develop a workforce strategy focused on recruitment, retention, wellbeing and continuous professional development
- Embed robust governance through local scrutiny and strengthened member roles

These appointments will ensure that services are safe, resilient and built to last - with professional leadership at the heart of every new system.

## A Broader View of Health and Wellbeing

The case for reform is not only about formal health and care provision, but also about tackling the wider determinants of health and enabling people to thrive in their communities.

In Gloucestershire:

- Physical inactivity is around 22%, slightly better than the England average
- Access to sports, green spaces and active travel options varies significantly between communities, contributing to long-term inequality
- Bringing housing, planning and care together will help us create more supported housing options that allow people to live independently for longer
- Integrated leisure, culture and public health strategies will enable more people to live active, connected lives - reducing loneliness and improving physical and mental wellbeing
- Community safety will be strengthened by aligning teams and partnerships, tackling shared priorities like domestic abuse, child exploitation and anti-social behaviour
- There is a disconnect between health, housing, leisure and planning - leaving untapped potential to design healthier places and systems

The new councils will be well-positioned to embed public health in everything they do - aligning planning, transport, housing, leisure and social care into a cohesive approach to wellbeing.

## Managing Risk, Realising Benefits

Disaggregating existing services will be complex, but it is manageable. Lessons from other areas, such as Cumbria, show it is possible to deliver the change safely, protecting services, while building for a stronger future.

We are committed to managing this process transparently and responsibly, with a focus on:

- Transitioning safely with minimal disruption to service users
- Protecting frontline delivery throughout the change process
- Realising financial efficiencies through leadership consolidation and service redesign
- Engaging our workforce and service users throughout the change
- Building a new vision collaboratively with staff, partners and communities

## Our Commitment to Children, Families and Adults

We're not simply carrying over what already exists. This is our opportunity to build something better - designed from the ground up to work for every resident, every community and every part of Gloucestershire.

We are committed to:

- Protecting and improving essential services - keeping children, families and adults supported, safe and well during and beyond transition
- Listening to local voices - involving communities, service users and frontline staff in shaping the future of care and support
- Looking after our people - investing in the workforce who care for our residents every day and ensuring their skills and wellbeing are valued
- Providing better access for all - making it simpler to get the help you need, with clear contact points, joined-up teams and support closer to home
- Using public money wisely - ensuring every pound makes a difference, with savings reinvested into the services that matter most
- Putting children and families at the heart - improving opportunities, inclusion and support for every child, whatever their starting point
- Delivering in partnership - working side-by-side with health, education, police, voluntary groups and others to create joined-up solutions that work
- Keeping decisions local - ensuring services reflect the needs of each place, with accountability rooted in our communities

This is more than just structural reform. It's a commitment to fairness, quality and care - and to ensuring that no matter where you live, you can expect the same high standards of support and opportunity.

Every resident, in every part of Gloucestershire, deserves services they can trust - and a council that puts people first.

# g. Councils that Work for All

The current two-tier system is complex and confusing. With seven different councils, responsibilities are split, decisions are duplicated and accountability is blurred. Residents often do not know who to contact and too many decisions feel remote from the communities they affect.

This model makes local government simpler, clearer and closer to the people it serves. With only two councils, every resident will know who is responsible and how to hold them to account. Services will be designed around lived reality, not historic, complex or multi-layered boundaries.

## Closer to Communities

Both councils will embed a locality-based model that brings decision-making and services closer to neighbourhoods, families and places The proposal will build on the existing strong relationship between the District Councils and Parish and Town Councils in rural areas and use them for effective engagement, supported by partnerships with voluntary and community groups and new neighbourhood forums. This will ensure local voices drive local priorities and services can be tailored to the distinct needs of urban and rural communities.

## Accessible and Inclusive

Services will be designed around residents, using customer insight and evidence to improve outcomes. Modern digital access will sit alongside local hubs and face-to-face support, ensuring that nobody is excluded. The focus will be on simplicity and inclusion - making it easier for everyone to get help when they need it. There will be a single phone number for all council services in each unitary, and a single website for each enabling people to access services without complication.

## Empowering Residents

The new councils will actively encourage co-design with communities, building trust and participation. Neighbourhood empowerment will give residents a stronger voice in shaping the services that matter to them. This will strengthen democratic engagement, accountability and transparency.

It is anticipated that in Greater Gloucester, relationships with parish Councils will be strengthened by establishing a formal committee of Parish Council Chairs. This innovative community engagement model will ensure that those residents who live in the wider urban area surrounding the city have, for the first time in decades, democratic representation and influence and a second voice, alongside their unitary Councillors, to ensure that their particular voices and needs are heard.

## Simple, Clear, Accountable

With two councils, local government in Gloucestershire will be easier to understand, simpler to navigate and stronger in its representation. This simplicity will cut bureaucracy, save money and deliver councils that genuinely work for all: accessible, responsive and accountable to every resident and business.

# 5. Future Devolution

Local Government Reorganisation presents a pivotal moment to unlock Gloucestershire's full potential, both within its borders and in respect of its offer to the wider United Kingdom. As Government implements England-wide Strategic Authority coverage, Gloucestershire offers a significant contribution to a regional 'at scale' economy, whether it joins an existing Strategic Authority or forms a new one.

Gloucestershire is a rare economy, as it is notably resilient to national and global economic shocks[2]. It has existing significant strengths in Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering and Food Security innovation (a combined 23.7% GVA)[3] and is exceptional in the high-growth sectors with a focus on the securing of emerging technologies[4]. Our sectors of strength almost completely align with the priority sectors of the 2025 Industrial Strategy. Building on a strong industrial heritage particularly in Gloucester, carried through into aerospace and engineering, and an evident culture of innovation catalysed by the presence of GCHQ in Cheltenham, we outperform our neighbours on productivity, business start-ups and entrepreneurship.

Where innovation is so evident in our culture, it follows that it must originate in our people. We host a skilled population, supported by strong universities, colleges and research networks that have proactively reached out into regional networks.

Inherent to Gloucestershire is our natural capital. From the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean to the Severn Vale, Gloucestershire's landscapes give us the space and resources to lead on the challenges of the 21st century. As part of the Severn Estuary corridor, we can offer clean energy, sustainable food, water management and climate adaptation. Few places can match the combination of the industrial heritage of Gloucester, the high tech growth around the urban centres, and the natural assets that define Gloucestershire's offer.

Gloucestershire blends its landscapes, cultures and economy into a unique identity that draws on west country heritage and lifestyle to inform future thinking. From the invention of the jet engine near Gloucester to pioneering hydrogen flights at Cotswold Airport[5]; from the Wheatstone Bridge to the Golden Valley; from being home to the invention of the lawnmower to hosting one of the deepest water research sites in the world in Tidenham[6], Gloucestershire's regional positioning under new devolution offers an at scale future economy that constitutes an offer to the UK, and indeed the wider world.

Devolution is key to realising this potential. With greater funding flexibility, joined up services and empowered local decision-making, Gloucestershire can play its full role as a regional engine of growth at the crossroads of the south-west, midlands, south-east and Wales.

Gloucestershire is actively exploring strategic partnership to the north, south and east. It should be emphasised that these three options are not an exhaustive list, rather three were selected according to the shared length of boundary with Gloucestershire and consideration of whether agreements had been made for bordering counties to join alternative partners. Of these three, we found each offer unique opportunities to accelerate growth and influence:

- West of England Combined Authority (WECA) – Offers alignment with high growth sectors like cyber,

[2] Economic Strategy Evidence Base.
[3] Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry, ONS
[4] Gloucestershire's Economic Strategy 2024–2034 Summary
[5] ZeroAvia completes initial Dornier 228 flight test campaign - Pilot
[6] DEEP - Engineering Wonder

green tech and advanced manufacturing. Existing formal and informal regional partnerships suggest high ease of implementation. Strongest alignment against 'areas of competence' outlined in the Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill.

- Herefordshire & Worcestershire – Shares cultural and rural economic strengths with potential for innovation and scale up, also a strong cultural connection in respect of heritage.
- Swindon & Oxford – Opens doors to long term collaboration in R&D, clean tech and AI.

Gloucestershire is at an important juncture. By pursuing reform and deeper devolution, the county can strengthen its contribution to regional prosperity and national growth, while remaining grounded in the communities and landscapes that define its character.

## Options Considered

Based on the above, Gloucestershire is able to offer significant capacity for growth in a regional economy. This is underpinned by its economic strengths, strategic location and alignment with Government/public sector reform. A range of metrics were therefore assessed against economic, legislative, cultural and implementation criteria to identify which partnership could deliver the greatest impact in line with national devolution goals. The full details of these assessments can be found in the annexed reports to this document. What follows is a summary of those findings. These metrics were assessed against three options:

### *Option 1 – West of England Combined Authority (WECA)*

**Geography & Governance:**

- Existing combined authority with metro mayor which is fully compliant with the Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill 2025 and December 2024 Devolution White Paper.
- Combined population (Gloucestershire + WECA *with North Somerset* rises above the minimum 1.5 million threshold guidance for Strategic Authority formation).

**Strategic Authority Alignment:**

- Highest degree of alignment across the Bill's seven statutory areas of competence – particularly health & care integration, transport and infrastructure, economic development, environment and public safety.
- Pre-existing governance, transport corridors, NHS integration, and multi-agency delivery capacity provide a rapid implementation route.

**Economic Geography Alignment:**

- Strong alignment in advanced manufacturing, digital/cyber, green technologies and creative industries. Strong worker migration pattern across the borders.
- Potential to position Gloucestershire as an agri-tech leader within a wider innovation economy, offsetting WECA's urban focus.
- Gloucestershire however may become a junior partner in the highest growth R&D sectors without a clearly defined role in bringing forward its strengths (e.g. agri-tech)

In essence, WECA holds the path to the most immediately deliverable option with high policy readiness, strong sectoral synergy and cultural compatibility. WECA offers the broadest alignment with national reform priorities and fastest route to full Strategic Authority status.

### *Option 2 – Swindon & Oxfordshire*

**Geography & Governance**

- No current Combined Authority membership so would require Local Government Reorganisation

and Mayoral Combined authority formation.

- Joint population threshold met with 1.6 million combined.

**Strategic Authority Alignment:**

- High capability in economic development, skills and net zero, but weaker in health, care and integrated public service reform.
- Existing regional partnerships are largely informal or nascent.

**Economic Alignment:**

- Significant longer-term potential in R&D partnerships (AI, life sciences, clean tech).
- Synergy in advanced manufacturing and cyber, but less alignment with agri-tech and rural economy. Greater focus on life sciences than securing emerging technologies in the innovation sectors.
- Lower short-term economic integration due to weaker commuting links and business interdependencies.

Swindon and Oxford offers a strong innovation and research collaboration potential for the long term, but slower to establish full statutory competencies with less immediate integration in health (WECA) and rural (Herefordshire & Worcestershire) sectors.

### *Option 3 – Herefordshire & Worcestershire*

**Geography & Governance:**

- No current combined authority and therefore would require Local Government Reorganisation and Mayoral Combined Authority formation.
- Population slightly below the threshold so may require additional partners or special consideration.

**Strategic & Policy Alignment:**

- Medium alignment across statutory competencies with strengths in environment, rural transport and agri-tech but limited in digital innovation and large-scale economic growth.
- Less alignment with national reform agendas' focus on integrated care and high-growth sectors.

**Economic Alignment:**

- Closest match in current rural economic strengths and historical cultural context.
- Gloucestershire would likely lead on scale and innovation, but partners offer limited capacity in high-growth digital and tech sectors.

### *Summary*

**1. West of England Combined Authority (WECA)**

- Why: Existing governance, metro mayor, statutory compliance, strong sectoral fit (advanced manufacturing, cyber, green tech) and clear commuting/economic flows. Existing regional partnerships across arts, culture, health and the broadest range of services of all options. A key similarity is shared in urban/rural splits, reflecting shared challenges along housing and transport planning.
- Risk: Gloucestershire risks becoming a junior partner unless it defines a distinctive role (e.g. agri-tech leader completing a 'whole of tech' future economy).
- WECA provides the high-growth innovation engine, Gloucestershire complements and then completes the ecosystem with agri-tech and natural capital.

**2. Herefordshire & Worcestershire**

- Why: Close match in rural economy, heritage, and agri-tech. Natural cultural legacy  fit and scope for Gloucestershire to play a leading role in innovation and scaling up. Slightly under population threshold, but culturally congruent and offers Gloucestershire leadership space.
- Risk: Limited digital/tech capacity in partners and weaker alignment with national reform priorities.
- Rooted in shared rural economy and heritage, with Gloucestershire as a natural partner to inject innovation and scale.

**3. Swindon & Oxfordshire**

- Why: Strong in R&D, life sciences, AI, clean tech. Good synergies in advanced manufacturing and cyber, but requires completely new governance, has weaker cultural alignment and less short-term integration with Gloucestershire's rural and health economies.
- Risk: Longer time horizon to deliver; innovation is research-led and urban, less aligned with Gloucestershire's wider economic identity and very few established regional partnerships.
- Offers long-term potential in global-facing R&D and science but less immediate and less place-congruent.

Gloucestershire has the assets and ambition to contribute strongly within any of the potential partnerships. However, the assessment indicates that **the West of England Combined Authority provides the most immediately deliverable and policy-aligned option**, while Herefordshire & Worcestershire offers a culturally and economically resonant alternative in which Gloucestershire could play a leading role. Swindon & Oxfordshire remains a credible longer-term prospect, particularly for research-led collaboration, but is less immediately aligned to Gloucestershire's wider economic and governance priorities.

## Gloucestershire's aims for devolution

Through Local Government Reorganisation and further devolution, Gloucestershire can unlock the tools to drive a high growth, resilience-focused economy and smarter services for residents.

Devolution would allow Gloucestershire to:

- **Power growth through innovation.** Using devolved economic powers to create the Severn Resilience Corridor, bringing together cyber, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech and clean energy. This will attract major private investment, generate high-value jobs, and cement Gloucestershire's role as a national growth engine.
- **Strengthen resilience for the 21st century**. With greater control over housing, health, skills and transport, Gloucestershire can deliver joined-up solutions for climate resilience, energy security and sustainable food systems. Tackling the challenges of the future head on.
- **Put data to work for residents**. A county-wide Data Trust, anchored in Golden Valley's cyber infrastructure would integrate transport, housing, health and utilities in real time. This will reduce duplication, cut costs and provide residents with more personalised, responsive services from flood alerts to smart mobility and integrated healthcare.

Gloucestershire's full vision and ambition sets out a comprehensive programme for inclusive, innovation led growth, drawing on the county's industrial heritage, highly skilled population and rich natural capital. With the right devolved powers and resources, Gloucestershire is well positioned to act as a national testbed for high-growth sectors, resilient communities and data driven public services. Delivering benefits

not only for local residents, but for the wider UK economy.

## Conclusion

Gloucestershire is well placed to play its full part in the next phase of English devolution. Our strengths in advanced manufacturing, securing emerging technologies, agri-tech and clean energy, combined with our strategic location and cultural identity, position us as a valuable partner in building a balanced and high-growth regional economy. To achieve this, we seek objective input and active cooperation from Government that both align with the interests of our residents and ensure that the region's innovation potential is fully realised. In partnership, we can demonstrate how devolution unlocks local potential for the benefit of communities here and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

# 6. Options Appraisal

## Summary of Options Considered

A full appraisal of options was carried out to determine the best model for Gloucestershire. Each was tested not only against Government criteria, but also against what matters most to our people: clear, local accountability, value for money and councils that reflect local identity and needs.

The GG/GU model scores strongly on service improvement, identity and devolution potential. While a single county model scores higher on size/efficiency, evidence from Cumbria and Dorset shows multi-unitary models can deliver better outcomes in high-cost services.

The Options Appraisal is undertaken by assessing each of the following options against the Government criteria:

- Single County Unitary (Single Unitary)
- East/West Split (East/West)
- Greater Gloucester and Gloucestershire Unitary Councils (GG& GU)

The scoring on each sub criteria is as follows:

| Score | Definition |
|---|---|
| **3** | Fully Meets Government Criteria |
| **2** | Largely Meets Government Criteria (or strong rationale as to why not) |
| **1** | Partially Meets Government Criteria |
| **0** | Does Not Meet Government Criteria |

The scores are then totalled up for each sub-criteria and a theme score is calculated (which forms part of the final options table). The overall scores are an accumulation of all theme scores.

## Options Appraisal against Published Criteria

## Criteria 1

**1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**

a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base
b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply
c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence
d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area

## Options Appraisal - Criteria 1

| | Single Unitary | East/ West | GG + GU | Commentary and rationale for scoring |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Council Tax Base** | 3 | 3 | 2 | • The Council Tax base in both the Single Unitary and East and West option are balanced and robust<br>• The Greater Gloucester proposal has greater disparity in Council Tax base<br>• All proposals provide an ability to improve planning criteria, support regeneration and deliver the Governments housing growth objectives<br>• The Greater Gloucester proposal involves amending existing District boundaries, but this is underpinned by strong evidence to enable the City to drive growth in the region. |
| **Sensible boundaries supporting housing supply** | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **Robust evidence base** | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **Clearly describe the proposal for the whole area** | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **TOTAL** | **12** | **12** | **11** | |

## Criteria 2

**Unitary Local Government must be of the right size to achieve efficiencies**

a. Population of around 500,000 or above
b. Strong rationale as to why 500,000 is not appropriate if it does not make sense for an area
c. Focus on understanding how the new model will drive efficiencies
d. The proposal will manage transition costs

## Options Appraisal - Criteria 2

| | Single Unitary | East/ West | GG + GU | Commentary and rationale for scoring |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **500k or more population** | 3 | 2 | 1 | • The single unitary is the only option to meet 500,000 or greater population<br>• There is a strong rationale for both the East/West and Greater Gloucester proposals and how the geography will support the local area<br>• Financial modelling demonstrates the greatest level of |
| **Clear rationale if not** | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **Drive efficiencies** | 3 | 2 | 2 | |
| **Managed transition costs** | 3 | 2 | 2 | |
| **TOTAL** | **12** | **9** | **8** | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | savings are available through the single unitary model, with transition costs of £20.8m, ongoing savings of £20.7m by yr3 and a payback period of 3 years<br>• The East/West model has transition costs of £26.9m, ongoing savings of £11.2m by yr3 and a payback period of 4 years.<br>• The Greater Gloucester model involves greater transition costs of £26.9m, will deliver annual savings of £10.8m by yr3 and demonstrates a payback period of 4 years |

## Criteria 3

**Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**

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

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

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

## Options Appraisal - Criteria 3

| | Single Unitary | East/ West | GG + GU | Commentary and rationale for scoring |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Improve Service Delivery** | 3 | 3 | 3 | • The context in Gloucestershire is that crucial social care services have historically been rated requires improvement or inadequate<br>• The recent (June 2025) Ofsted inspection rating Children's Services as "good" demonstrates welcomed improvements in the trajectory of social care services<br>• However other crucial services are still not at the required level, with the most recent inspections of Adults Services by the CQC (July 2024) rating as inadequate and OFSTED SEND inspection demonstrating "inconsistent experiences"<br>• It is noted that there is a cost and risk in breaking up Social Care services, but there is demonstrable evidence of focused, place-based models enabling authorities to deliver |
| **Public Service Reform** | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **Crucial Services** | 2 | 3 | 3 | |
| **TOTAL** | **8** | **9** | **9** | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | improvement to crucial services e. g. in areas such as the former Cheshire, Cumbria, Dorset and Northamptonshire. Given the disparity of need across Gloucestershire there is a particular opportunity to improve outcomes through more localised working<br>• There are significant opportunities across all models to align the existing two-tiered services and secure ongoing service improvements |

## Criteria 4

**Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.**

a. It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
b. Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
c. Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

### Options Appraisal - Criteria 4

| | Single Unitary | East/ West | GG + GU | Commentary and rationale for scoring |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Meaningful engagement** | 3 | 3 | 3 | • The Greater Gloucester proposal is the only proposal that fully embraces the heritage and culture of both Gloucester and Gloucestershire<br>• The GG unitary authority embraces the heritage of the City and will provide it with the tools to build on that heritage to secure ongoing growth<br>• All proposals have utilised engagement with residents, partners and other stakeholders and that engagement has helped shape their proposals |
| **Heritage and culture** | 2 | 2 | 3 | |
| **Address concerns from engagement** | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **TOTAL** | **8** | **8** | **9** | |

## Criteria 5

**New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**

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

applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA / Mayor. Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.

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

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

## Options Appraisal - Criteria 5

| | Single Unitary | East/ West | GG + GU | Commentary and rationale for scoring |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Combined Authority Governance** | 2 | 3 | 3 | • All proposals offer the opportunity to unlock devolution, with the current favoured model joining the West of England Combined Authority (WECA)<br>• Should WECA be the preferred model then there are a number of issues of democratic balance to consider in the different options<br>• The single unitary would create the largest imbalance in if the county were to join WECA as the population is nearly 200,000 more than the next largest authority and a multiple of 3.5 of the smallest. This disparity could lead to issues of governance in the Combined Authority<br>• The East/West model is in the middle of the range for population sizes within the existing WECA model and would support the easiest and most balanced governance position<br>• The Greater Gloucester model is within the range of the population sizes within the authority but does create one authority at the top end of population and the other would be the smallest |
| **Unlocking devolution** | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| **Population sizes** | 1 | 3 | 2 | |
| **TOTAL** | **6** | **9** | **7** | |

## Criteria 6

**New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

a. Proposals will need to explain plans to 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.

## Options Appraisal - Criteria 6

| | Single Unitary | East/ West | GG + GU | Commentary and rationale for scoring |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Explain how communities are engaged** | 2 | 2 | 3 | • A multi unitary model for Gloucestershire will enable greater levels of democratic |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Explain any existing arrangements** | 3 | 3 | 3 | accountability and support communities in being engaged with decision making<br>• The development of Neighbourhood Area Committees will mitigate the loss of a number of local Councillors in all options and provide a forum for communities to engage in democratic process<br>• The Greater Gloucester model will provide the optimal opportunity to engage communities, with elected Members in the City focused on the local area, and opportunities for engagement via forums such as the Committee of Parishes |
| **TOTAL** | **5** | **5** | **6** | |

## Options Appraisal - ALL SCORES

| | Single Unitary | East/ West | GG + GU |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Theme 1** | 12 | 12 | 11 |
| **Theme 2** | 12 | 9 | 8 |
| **Theme 3** | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| **Theme 4** | 8 | 8 | 9 |
| **Theme 5** | 6 | 9 | 7 |
| **Theme 6** | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| **TOTAL** | **51** | **52** | **51** |

The options appraisal demonstrates that there is not one clear option that meets the published government criteria, but that all three options are viable choices for a strong future for local government in Gloucestershire.

**Single Unitary - Assessment**
The single unitary authority for Gloucestershire demonstrates the lowest cost and shortest pay-back period. However, this option is the most challenging to unlock Government's crucial priority of devolution for every area of England and risks resulting in an imbalanced combined authority.
The options appraisal notes the welcomed improvement in Children's Services, but there remains a strong rationale for a more place based, focused approach to the delivery of other crucial services such as Adult's social care and SEND.

**East/West Alignment - Assessment**
The East/West split scores marginally the highest across the options appraisal and presents the lowest risk path to devolution - particularly if WECA is the preferred combined authority. However devolution is the only theme where the East/West alignment scores the highest outright, reflecting its position as it scores in second place across many of the themes. This model is the hardest to justify in terms of heritage and identity, as Gloucester and Stroud do not even share a land border with the Forest of Dean, and their identities as places are all quite different.

**The Greater Gloucester model - Assessment**

The Greater Gloucester model is supported by evidence sources of cities as the driver for economic growth, meaning that while it does not align with Government criteria around population size and does create a population imbalance within the County, it is the only option that puts the historic City of Gloucester at the heart of the region's growth plans. The options appraisal demonstrates that this option scores highest against the heritage and local place and community engagement criteria, reflecting the place-based focus of this proposal.

# 7. The New Councils

## a. Future Operating Model

### Creating Strong Councils that Deliver

Creating two new councils is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to design modern, effective organisations - built around local needs, guided by best practice and powered by insight and collaboration.

Each council will operate at scale, but with place-based teams embedded in the communities they serve. Their purpose will be to deliver excellent, responsive services and work with partners to improve outcomes across health, housing, skills, care and more.

To support decisions made by the new councils we have designed a Target Operating Model (TOM) for the two councils. The TOM will:

1. Enable us to deliver on our vision for Gloucestershire
2. Define how the organisations support the place as well as the resident experience
3. Make it real for residents, by getting the supporting structures right

We are proposing a clear set of operating model principles.

### Operating Model Design Principles

- These design principles are **grounded in best practice** - both within Gloucestershire and across other previously successful LGR areas - and reflect our shared ambition for high-quality, sustainable services across the county.
- **Focus on outcomes** - Services will be designed around the outcomes that matter for individuals, families and communities, measured through evidence-based, family and community-level impact.
- **Shift to prevention** - We will act earlier to prevent issues, improve lives and reduce long-term pressures on public services.
- **Balance scale with local responsiveness** - Services will be consistent and efficient across the county, while engaging closely with local needs and priorities.
- **Join up experiences** - By connecting access points and data, we'll design services around people, not bureaucratic boundaries. Services will be easier to use, quicker to respond and better at supporting whole-person needs.
- **Grow stronger partnerships** - Councils will work closely with the Mayoral Strategic Authority, NHS, police, voluntary sector and communities - not just delivering services, but coordinating, enabling and

empowering.

- **Embed high performance cultures** - The councils will support a skilled, motivated workforce, focused on collaboration, values-based practice and career progression.

- **Strengthen commissioning** - Strategic, insight-driven commissioning will ensure services are efficient, co-designed and tailored to local realities.

- **Leverage data and digital** - Digital technology will be used to enhance services, improve efficiency and support inclusive engagement.

- **Optimise land and assets** - A smarter approach to public estate will support access, sustainability and regeneration.

- **Ensure financial sustainability** - Robust governance and sound financial management will underpin every decision and every service.

Although the operating models will be a decision to be made by the new shadow authorities, appendix F sets out the assumed service delivery model for each key service area, where these will be aggregated or disaggregated or both.

## b. Democratic Arrangements

**We're creating two strong, focused councils, each with a clear vision for their area, championing local priorities while working together in Gloucestershire's wider interest.**

**Local members will be strong representatives and true community leaders**, deeply connected to local priorities and aspirations, clearly accountable for services, and powerful convenors who bring people and partners together to deliver real impact.

**Merging the county and district councils into two new unitary authorities** will simplify local government, making it easier for residents to engage with the council, with local members at the heart of that relationship.

While some services will be shared, members on each council will ensure **services are tailored to local needs** and will hold services to account.

Right now, electoral arrangements across seven councils mean that every year sees a council election in at least one part of the county. **This new model brings coherence, clarity, and a stronger voice for every part of Gloucestershire.**

| Council | Number of Councillors | Electoral cycle | Next election |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucestershire County Council | 55 | All out every 4 years | May 2029 |
| Cheltenham Borough | 40 | Elected in halves every 2 years | May 2026<br>May 2028 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cotswold District | 34 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Forest of Dean District | 38 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Gloucester City | 39 | All out every 4 years | May 2028 |
| Stroud District | 51 | All out every 4 years | May 2028 |
| Tewkesbury Borough | 38 | All out every 4 years | May 2027 |
| Total | 295 | | |

Current electoral arrangements

**Creating two unitary councils will streamline local democracy, reduce councillor numbers, and create a more stable political landscape for Gloucestershire. But this isn't just about efficiency, it's about strengthening local voices.**

We're committed to **enhancing democracy**, not diluting it. Both new councils will be built around a culture that empowers local members to lead, listen, and act on what matters most to their communities.

To ensure **representation that reflects our communities** from day one, having determined the areas that identify with an enlarged Gloucester Council, the new councils' wards will be formed using a mixture of existing boundaries.

Recognising that electoral arrangements should reflect local circumstances, rather than striving for a 'one size fits all' approach, council size in each of the two unitary authorities will reflect the balance of need in each area to ensure that democratic representation meets the requirements of its constituents and enables strong and accountable local government.

The result? **A simpler, stronger, and more accountable system, that reflects the makeup and needs of communities across Gloucestershire.**

The Greater Gloucester Council will meet the needs of its residents by looking to existing boundaries at local level to form wards that maintain natural communities, with council and ward sizes that reflect the circumstances and need. Benefiting from the recent boundary review for Gloucestershire County Council, the Gloucestershire Unitary Council will largely make use of existing division boundaries and, in every ward but one, will elect two Councillors.

**This approach delivers:**

- A **Gloucester council with 52 members** and a **Gloucestershire council with 81** - a total reduction of **162 councillors**.
- Elector ratios of **1:2,478 in Gloucester** and **1:4,489 in Gloucestershire** – reflecting the difference in need across the two council geographies.

Our councillor-to-elector ratio ensures:

- **Capacity to lead through transition** while staying closely connected to communities.

- Both **representation across large, rural divisions** with multiple parishes and **representation for urban settlements** that delivers based on what these diverse communities need.
- **Clear democratic accountability from day one**, with councillors who are visible, accessible, and responsive.

In time, a boundary review could help **streamline representation further**, reducing electoral inequality across the two councils in a manner that truly reflects local circumstances and isn't based solely on numbers.

**Council governance will be built on four core principles:**

- A clear, unified voice for Gloucestershire
- Seamless collaboration across the public sector
- Strong transparency and accountability
- Community needs at the heart of every decision.

**We'll deliver strong, responsive governance through clear leadership, local empowerment, and deep community connection.**

We'll deliver this through:

- **Bold, visible leadership** from a Leader and Cabinet in each council - driving collaboration and playing a leading role in the future Combined Authority.
- **Engaged, flexible scrutiny** that brings together all political groups - and where needed, external voices - to shape policy and hold decisions to account. We will use creative, constructive approaches to scrutiny, working at both a strategic and a local level to make sure we're meeting the needs of our communities.
- **Proud civic leadership**, preserving the heritage of Gloucester and Cheltenham while elevating their roles at the heart of each new unitary council. At the countywide level, the Chair of the Gloucestershire Unitary Council will lead the relationship and strong ties with the Lord Lieutenancy to uphold county-wide identity and tradition. For the historic City of Gloucester, maintaining the roles of Mayor and Sheriff that have existed for many centuries, and the relationship with the Cathedral, will be led by the Greater Gloucester Council.
- **Local decision-making power** through area planning committees - handling planning and other place-based matters where local knowledge matters most.
- **Neighbourhood partnerships** that reflect real communities and local priorities - shaping services, guiding funding, and driving community-led development.
- **A stronger role for existing Town and Parish Councils**, backed by a jointly owned charter, new opportunities to take on devolved powers, tailored to each council's appetite and capacity. The Greater Gloucester Council is committed to establishing a committee of Town and Parish Council chairs to engage directly with unitary council decision-makers, but would not seek to parish the rest of the City of Gloucester, making it the only option that does not include a financial risk in relation to the establishment of new precepting authorities, not to mention the additional administration and complications associated with an even higher number of Town and Parish Councils than already exists.
- **A culture of participation**, with co-production and engagement embedded in how we work - reaching every community, including those in non-parished areas.

# c. Locality Arrangements

## Bringing Power Closer to Home

Gloucestershire is a county defined by its heritage and diversity - thriving market towns, renowned natural beauty, agricultural landscape and rural villages, as well as proud local identities, distinct community priorities and deep civic pride.

The new councils will reflect this reality - building on the strengths of existing relationships and shaping decisions around the places people call home. Local engagement will be central to how services are delivered, decisions are made and public resources are prioritised.

This proposal is not about replicating existing structures - it's about designing a system that works for the future. It takes the best of what already works in Gloucestershire - from parish council leadership to district-level community teams - and gives it a platform to grow.

Since the publication of the English Devolution White Paper, the seven councils in Gloucestershire have worked together with community partners to reimagine how the system can be changed, with our local places at the centre. The result is a proposal to vest much greater power and agency in neighbourhoods, to reset our culture towards co-production with residents, to liberate our strengths in our dynamic community organisations, and to exploit the preventive potential of empowered communities.

The step-change we are seeking resonates across Gloucestershire's public sector and civil society, and amongst Gloucestershire councillors, from all parties and councils. Leaders are united in a view that unitary status offers a significant opportunity to shift the scale and extent of community empowerment in the county. The smaller scale, localised good practices already delivered by our current councils and key partners like Police and Health can now develop into a more systematic focus on place and empowerment, which will be central to 'how we work' as new councils.

## Assessing what works

Throughout 2025 to date, the seven Gloucestershire councils have worked intensively, with key local associations and organisations, to understand what works in empowering communities, and the assets inherent in our current system. We have researched and spoken to over 20 unitary councils which have experimented with area-based arrangements. In addition, we have conducted a review of key literature and thinking in the field. Our early conclusion was that an area-based approach would be essential given the size and scope of unitary GG and GU Councils. This conclusion anticipated almost precisely the guidance recently received from MHCLG on the creation of area-based committees. Our research strongly suggests that establishing a structure is no guarantee of delivering the participation outcomes intended, but it provides a framework within which change can be achieved.

Among many learning points, the following have been most prominent:

- **The value of long-term trust and consistency.** Many new unitary councils have found it challenging to deliver the promises as set out in their proposals or business case. The result has sometimes been a loss of trust, particularly with local councils and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE), and the need to rebuild key relationships with local organisations where priorities have changed and resources diverted elsewhere.
- **The extent to which community empowerment is truly understood, embodied and visibly acted upon by the new council councils**. We have been clear that area-based arrangements are not an

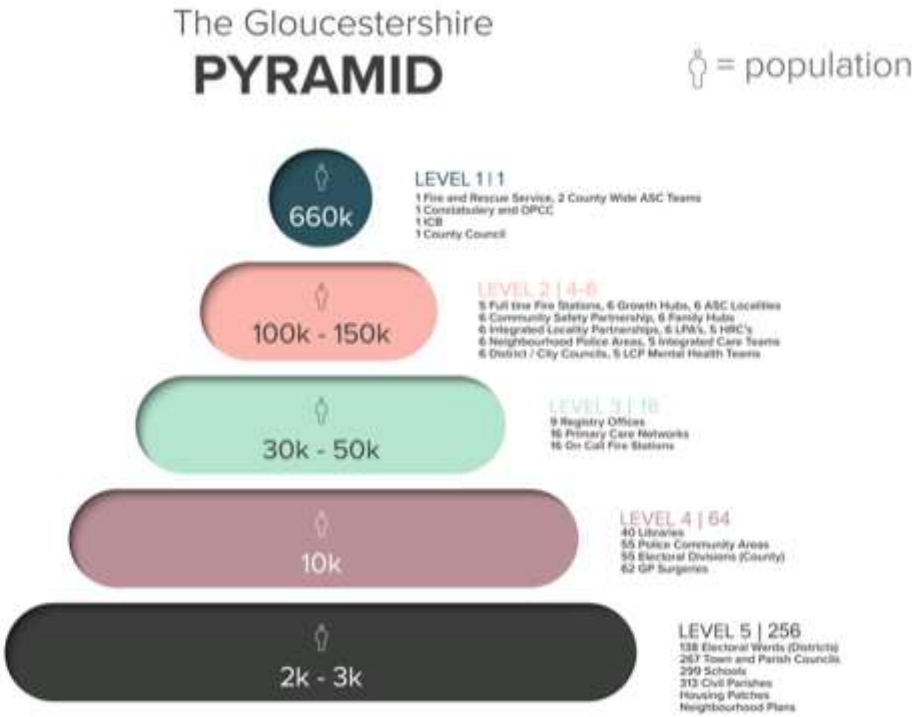
'add-on'. For value in prevention, participation, and cohesion to be delivered, co-production cannot be confined to a neighbourhood model. The way in which the council is councils are organised, lead, and delivers deliver services needs to be based on the same values and approaches. Without this authentic joining-up, trust and credibility will be quickly eroded.

- **Focus on community development.** Our analysis suggests that unitary councils have often used area-based arrangements well in acting on visible economic and environmental issues in localities. A harder challenge in other parts of England has been to tackle health, inequalities, and social factors with communities. We believe strongly that resources and focus applied to community development, working with the VCFSE, is a means of managing this risk. Equally we have seen elsewhere that the crucial relationships between local government and the health system are less developed than needed to deliver on well-being, health, and social outcomes. In our model, the role of Public Health is central; in part to help bridge priorities and capacities of the health and local government systems.
- **An area-based approach can be powerful in strengthening communities.** The evidence is clear that this approach can act to both to represent the council's responsibilities and also to work across sectors and issues. We have seen risks elsewhere of an overly prescribed approach from the centre of the council, with insufficient emphasis on test and learn, and on shaping the agenda for areas based on communities having the agency and resources to develop local solutions to the issues they face. We have also learned that to maximise inclusivity, we need to be careful about use of formal language and structure such as 'committee'. The task of empowering communities requires the council councils to engage in ways that maximise inclusion of all our residents and is not perceived to be miniaturisation of the council councils in a locality.

These learning points have been crucial in shaping our model and associated proposals.

## Building on local structures and good practices

Our mapping of neighbourhood approaches has revealed a range of geographic scales where services are provided by councils and partners. It is noticeable that many services already deploy some form of area-based working. As the footprint of current district boundaries disappears for most purposes, the focus of organisation will shift from populations of around 100k to smaller populations of under 50k. This shift offers a new potential for Gloucestershire's ambitions for community empowerment, organised around natural communities, which feel more local to residents




There is significant diversity in approaches to current place-based working across the seven councils and partners. Examples of positive difference include:

- The community hub approach developed in Stroud District during the pandemic which has endured and developed subsequently, working with local voluntary organisations, parishes, and housing providers to address social isolation and health and wellbeing
- The integrated locality partnerships led by the NHS that have brought together health and other partners at a local level, currently based on district footprints
- The wealth of community-centred regeneration and economic initiatives, including the award-winning Gloucester Forum and the Golden Valley development in Cheltenham
- The innovative partnership between the Forest of Dean District Council and the Forest Voluntary Action Forum which has developed a dynamic approach to a range of needs, including youth services.
- The recent successful launch of Gloucestershire's Family Hubs and associated Family Hub Networks. Therse are organised in five locations across the county but with an emphasis on wider outreach. Partners include the Gloucestershire Gateway Trust which has developed a whole neighbourhood and community led approach to supporting children and families in Gloucester and the Forest of Dean.
- The area-based community development approach pioneered in Tewkesbury and closely tied to the rapid housing and business growth in the area
- The active approach taken by Cotswold District Council in its unique geography to supporting its 115 parish and town councils, including the showcase annual 'Cotswold Parish and Town Summit'

Our proposals for neighbourhood working aim to strengthen this diversity where local needs are different, while recognising that much of our good practice has yet to be exploited or scaled beyond current boundaries.

## Neighbourhood Area Committees: A new focal point for communities

Another defining feature of this proposal is the creation of Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) - partnership-led groups aligned to local geographies and priorities.

The scope of each partnership will be widely framed but allowing sufficient room for our diverse places to set agendas and priorities which are locally meaningful. The five key roles each partnership will perform are set out below:



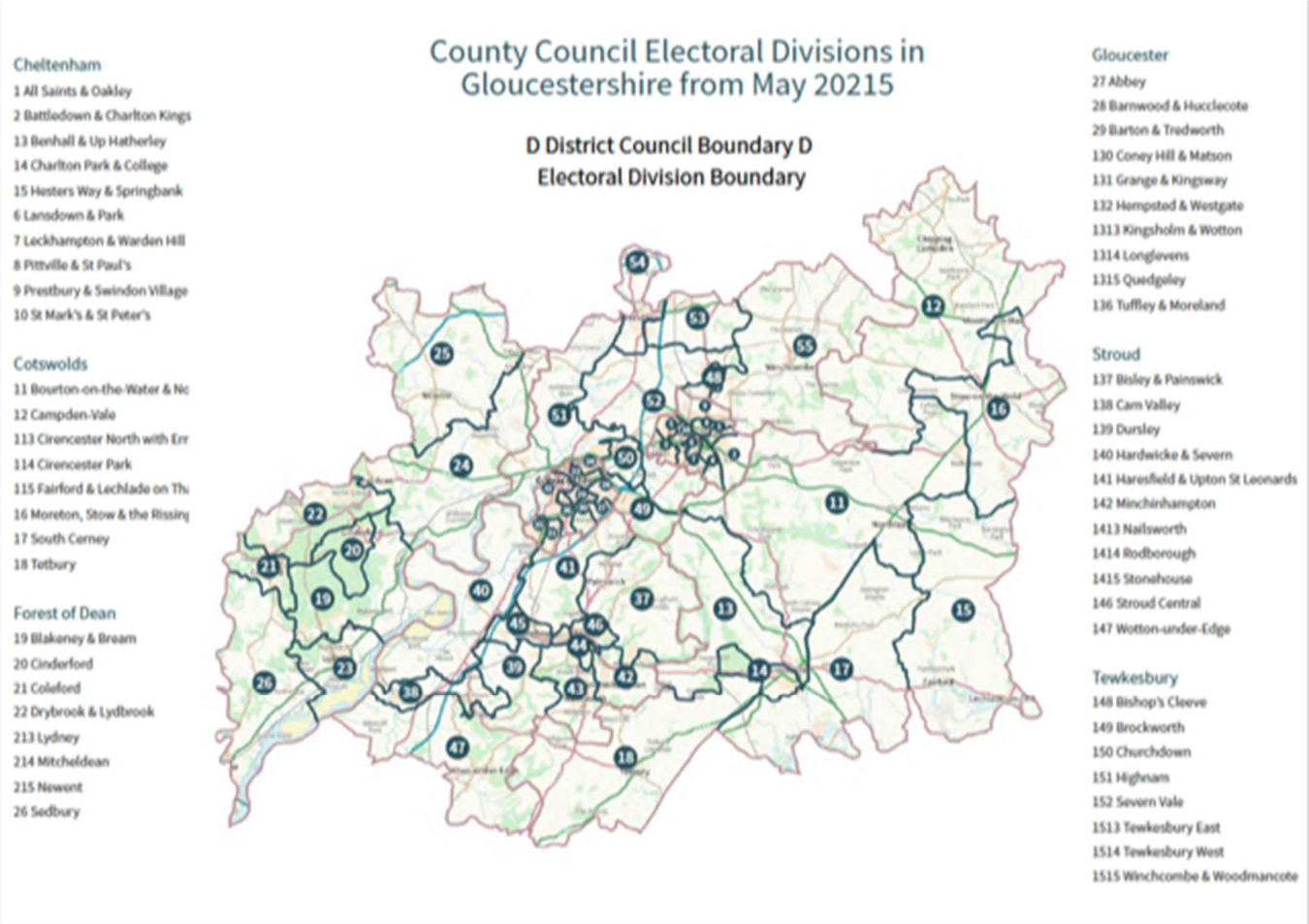

These are not administrative overlays, but locally embedded governance units built on the footprint of Primary Care Networks (PCNs), creating sensible, data-informed boundaries that reflect real communities. Neighbourhood Area Committees will partner with and provide a voice for Gloucestershire's existing strong communities, such as Gloucestershire's 4,000 voluntary and community organisations and the Know Your Patch networks.

Decisions will be shaped by robust local data and customer insight, ensuring NACs focus on real community priorities. Powers and budgets may vary between committees, reflecting local population, deprivation, opportunities and growth - but all will operate within a clear, consistent framework set by the new councils.

This structure recognises that different areas have different needs. The size and boundaries of each neighbourhood will be subject to thorough consultation, but our research suggests populations will need to be big enough to allow the councils and partners to work with and for the neighbourhoods. However the partnerships will also need to be small enough to reflect natural communities, typically comprised of a main town and surrounding villages or a recognisable neighbourhood of a major town. Populations of between 30k and 50k will be guided, and options set out within the consultation process. The result will be between 15-20

### Neighbourhood Partnerships for the Gloucestershire Unitary Council

The map below sets out the current county electoral divisions which we propose are the main 'building blocks' of neighbourhoods for the Gloucestershire Unitary Council, although there might be some boundaries where a precise use of these divisions would not fully reflect natural communities. The consultation would therefore be open to adaptation where evidence suggests it is necessary. Based on our governance proposals, each area would comprise a committee of between five and seven unitary councillors, in addition to co-optees.




### Neighbourhood Partnerships for the Greater Gloucester Council

As an interconnected urban centre, where the ward geography creates a strong sense of neighbourhood, the role of neighbourhood partnerships is harder to define, and conversations with communities will be needed as part of the transition process to clarify what geographies make sense, and how people would like to see them operating alongside their democratic representatives.

## Using other local geographies and representative approaches

Not everything the councils do will fit neatly into our structure of Neighbourhood Partnerships. For example, we would expect the shadow authorities to consider the case for area-based development control committees. The number of proposed Neighbourhood Partnerships, however, would be too many to be practical and democratically accountable for this purpose, and so the new councils will be cognisant of existing Local Plan structures until such time as they are revised.

Working in place is a major part of our plans, but co-production is not confined to geographic affinity. Communities of interest and experience, including vulnerable groups such as care leavers, deserve councils that can enable and support their voices. Working with services which have been recognised for their good practice (such as children's social care) will enable the offer to residents and organisations to be consistently strong, and for the new councils to continue to innovate in shifting the balance of power towards communities of interest, identity and experience. The new councils will take the opportunity to make a step change in the quantity and quality of citizen participation. They will invest in consultation technologies and tools that strengthen citizen engagement both locally and across the authorities' footprints. Policies and strategies will be developed which mandate co-production or other forms of meaningful engagement, and enabling of all voices to be heard.

To further strengthen our 'contract' with residents and the c.4,600 VCFSE organisations in Gloucestershire that work on their behalf, we intend to develop a Civil Society Covenant which will be developed in partnership with the Gloucestershire VCS Alliance. A Covenant, accompanied by an action plan, will set out the way in which local government will work with the VCFSE, and the underpinning principles which will guide action on both sides. The Covenant could continue as a shared project for both new councils, with councillors from both councils represented on a joint governance body with VCFSE partners, to be established over the Shadow Authority period. An alternative option for the two authorities respectively would be to progress separately.

## Equipping Neighbourhoods with the capacity and resources to deliver

Expert staff teams will be built around our Neighbourhoods. We anticipate the following roles:

- The Chair of the Neighbourhood Partnership: An elected councillor, nominated by councillors in the Neighbourhood
- Neighbourhood Partnership Manager: Together with the Chair, this role will form a crucial leadership partnership in making the neighbourhood work successfully.
- Council Neighbourhoods Teams: With officers assigned to each neighbourhood, these will be a mix of practically-focused managers, town, and parish liaison officers, and community development specialists
- Departmental council officers: Located in family hubs, housing patches, planning, public health, or social care, these officers will have a strong relationship / dependency with Neighbourhoods
- VCSFE: The VCFSE sector will play a crucial role in the grass roots work for each Neighbourhood, some potentially working with the councils in managing and facilitating a whole neighbourhood, or providing expert community development capability, building on existing VCSFE strengths in Gloucestershire
- Partner organisations: Organisations such as Health, Fire and Rescue, Police, Schools, and Housing Associations will be a vital part of work with Neighbourhoods. Over time we expect to see much stronger alignment of wider public sector boundaries with Neighbourhoods
- New Councils' Performance Teams: Evidence and data are needed to support Neighbourhoods in identifying needs and monitoring effectiveness. Allocated time and services from the new councils' performance teams will be assigned to the overall neighbourhood structure. It is expected that key data from different sources will be brought together to provide clear and actionable insight for each Neighbourhood Partnership.
- Public Health: In their communities role, Public Health will provide an important professional oversight and function in supporting Neighbourhoods to use data, policy, and evidence effectively.
- Director-Level Officer Champion: Each Neighbourhood will be assigned a director-level officer champion to provide problem-solving and opportunity identification support to Chairs and Neighbourhood Partnership Managers.
- External-facing services: To ensure the neighbourhood approach works across all council functions,

all external-facing service areas will be required to develop a neighbourhood offer as part of their service planning.

- Budget: We anticipate providing a budget for each Neighbourhood to fund projects and activities which contribute to the core roles of Neighbourhoods. In addition to this core funding, we envisage that Neighbourhoods will be able to strongly influence other funding, both from council departments such as Highways and Transport, and as part of bids for central government programmes.

## The new role for councillors in Neighbourhoods

The shift from two-tier to unitary local government results in a significant reduction in the number of councillors from principal authorities, as our governance proposals set out. Fewer councillors will be covering more service areas, bigger geographies, and more electors.

A more significant role for councillors in Neighbourhoods is one way these challenges can be addressed. Neighbourhoods provide the crucial local member role with much needed structure, capacity, and convening authority. In practical terms, Neighbourhoods can bring partners, including parishes, around the table, helping councillors address issues collectively and with expert support, including for local casework. This joined-up approach will help reduce duplication and allow meaningful two-way engagement between elected members and local residents and organisations.

## How we will work with local councils (parishes and towns) - A Stronger Role for Parish Councils

While not the direct subject of changes to the structure of principal councils, Gloucestershire's 267 parish and town councils will be significantly affected by reorganisation. For those unparished areas, notably major parts of Gloucester and Cheltenham, reorganisation raises important questions about their status and governance as the county's major urban settlements. Parish and town councils are an essential, vibrant part of our community fabric, and we see their development individually and as a sector as a vital part of our future civil society. We have seen elsewhere in England that, where trust and respect between principal councils and local councils is damaged, opportunities are missed and the achievement of outcomes is hampered.

We will therefore engage in a charter development process with the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) and the Gloucestershire Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), to be made available to the shadow authorities for adoption and implementation. The charter will codify the working relationships expected between principal authorities and local councils, the rights and responsibilities of each, and the governance arrangements that help maximise collaboration and good two-way communications. We expect the charter to frame everything we do in terms of outcomes for people and places, and include best value and equality considerations.

Given the Neighbourhood Partnership model will be a new linchpin for locality working, we also expect to describe how local councils can play a valuable role in these structures. It is anticipated the charter process will be developed for Gloucestershire as a whole, and that the respective GG and GU shadow authorities will decide whether to maintain a joint arrangement, or move forward separately.

Uniquely among the Local Government Reorganisation proposals being worked on for Gloucestershire, this option is the only one which is unlikely to lead to the creation of a new Parish Council for Gloucester city, avoiding the associated precepting costs that this risks creating for residents of the City. Instead, with its much higher Councillor to Elector ratio across the City, democratic engagement and community empowerment in decision making will be driven at a more local level, with the additional input of Local Parish

and Town Councils engagement and involvement in decision-making through a Committee of Parish and Town Council Chairs.

There are many parishes in the county which have an appetite and good rationale to develop their offer. At this stage, and mindful of best value considerations, we propose to work positively with local councils to optimise the value delivered to local people and places. There will be equality of opportunity in terms of the scope of the potential services and assets to be devolved between the larger settlements and any other smaller town or parish.

As Ministers have made clear, we agree and support the differentiation between what towns and parishes can offer and the role of council-led neighbourhood arrangements. In no circumstances would a strong parish arrangement replace the need for a neighbourhood offer by the local authority. We have substantial and valuable local capacity in our towns and parishes, and we will therefore seek to maximise collaboration at the neighbourhood level.

## Making it happen

Seven key activities will shape our work over the pre-shadow and shadow authority period:

1. We expect each council to deliver a formal consultation on Neighbourhood Partnerships in the shadow authority period, enabling implementation in Year 1 of the new unitary councils. We also hope to have tested much of our thinking through engagement in the pre-shadow period. Our engagement and consultation will include the following elements:

- The geographies and boundaries for Neighbourhood Partnerships
- The core roles for Neighbourhood Partnerships
- The services, issues, and needs of most importance in different parts of the authority areas
- Work with partner organisations to align approaches and geographies
- How Neighbourhoods may wish to develop their role over time (there is evidence from elsewhere that successful area-based working takes time to evolve and develop)
- How we propose to support, enable, and facilitate Neighbourhoods, including creating the capacity and resources most needed (bearing in mind constraints).

2. We will develop a Civil Society Covenant during the pre-shadow period (with the VCS Alliance and other partners). A draft covenant will be available for the shadow authorities to consider and consult on in readiness for Year 1 of the new councils.

3. A draft Local Councils Charter will be developed with GAPTC and SLCC and be made available to the shadow authorities for consultation. The GG and GU shadow authorities will have the option of progressing the Charter (and associated action plan) with a joint body of councillors and local council representatives, or separately. In addition, the seven principal councils will work together in the pre-shadow period to ensure common communications and policies are in place for working with local councils.

4. We will engage all county and district services in the pre-shadow period to identify options for working with Neighbourhoods. This work will feed into service planning for the new councils and help establish a ‘services and assets offer’ to each area.

6. A range of policy development work will be set in place to ensure:

- Neighbourhood approaches are supported by good evidence

- Frameworks and models are established for different types of activity (for example, community development, project funding, Neighbourhood Action Plans)
- The governance of each Neighbourhood is robustly framed
- Data and data insight tools are developed

7. We will continue to work closely with all our statutory partners to integrate our proposals with their frameworks and priorities. We believe our Neighbourhood structure will provide a powerful channel for partners to engage. For example, we share the excitement and interest in how the NHS 10 Year Plan will translate into action in Gloucestershire, particularly with reference to proposals for a 'Neighbourhood Health Service' and the attendant emphasis on prevention. We will continue to be working in close collaboration with our health partners and other statutory partners to ensure the local geographies and approaches we respectively utilise are as aligned as possible in the best interests of Gloucestershire's residents.

These seven key activities form part of our road map within this proposal.

## d. Leadership Structure

The creation of two new councils for Gloucestershire presents a unique opportunity to establish leadership structures that are transparent, resilient and designed to serve residents well from day one.

These new arrangements will be grounded in democratic accountability, clear decision-making and a renewed focus on partnership. While final decisions on political and managerial leadership will be determined by the new authorities, this section sets out an indicative model, drawing on best practice from recent local government reorganisations.

### A Model Shaped by Residents and Elected Members

Each council will be led by a democratically elected Leader and Cabinet, reflecting a model familiar to residents and used successfully in existing Gloucestershire authorities. This approach is consistent with recent local government reforms in areas such as North Yorkshire and Westmorland & Furness.

The proposed structure includes:

- A Leader elected by the full council
- A Cabinet of Executive Members appointed by the Leader
- Scrutiny and accountability arrangements through cross-party committees, including within the Greater Gloucester unitary, a Committee of Parish and Town Councils
- A Chief Executive providing overall organisational leadership
- A Corporate Leadership Team comprising statutory officers and directors of key service areas

These leaders will act as convenors across health, schools, police, voluntary and community partners - building the collaborative culture needed to deliver whole-system change. They will ensure the new councils are capable of leading transformational change while remaining closely connected to the needs and ambitions of Gloucestershire's diverse communities. They will also provide strong alignment with the Mayoral Strategic Authority, supporting joined-up leadership across the whole area.

## Creating Capacity and Capability

To ensure both councils are well-equipped from day one, each will appoint:

- Statutory officers, including Directors of Children's Services, Adult Social Services and Public Health, along with a Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer
- Senior directors across functions such as housing, regeneration, community services, corporate operations and place-based delivery
- Programme leads responsible for managing the transition, organisational development and service integration

These appointments will provide the professional leadership required to support continuity, drive performance and uphold the highest standards of public service.

## Supporting a Smooth and Secure Transition

Consistent with lessons from other areas, transition will be delivered frontline-first, minimising disruption, avoiding excessive consultancy costs and protecting continuity for residents. Leadership structures will be introduced in parallel with robust transitional arrangements, including:

- Shadow leadership roles established early in the implementation phase
- Interim programme and service leads drawn from existing organisations
- A phased and well-managed handover of responsibilities from current authorities to new leadership teams

To ensure service continuity, safety and public confidence, early appointments will be made to key statutory leadership roles - particularly the Directors of Children's Services, Adult Social Services and Public Health. This early recruitment will enable these statutory leads to shape operating models, oversee workforce planning and build strong professional teams to lead transition and delivery.

They will also maintain continuity of critical safeguarding and care responsibilities, with established relationships with regulators, partners and safeguarding boards remaining intact. These officers will work within robust governance frameworks, ensuring risk is effectively managed and services remain safe, stable and compliant throughout the transition period and beyond.

This approach reflects our commitment to deliver change responsibly - with residents' wellbeing, service integrity and public trust at the centre of everything we do.

# e. Workforce

## The New Councils: Workforce

The workforce approach builds directly on our vision and ambition and operating models (TOMs). The new councils' TOMs provide an opportunity to reimagine what it means to work for our councils and to invest in continuing to develop **diverse, valued and multi-skilled workforces.**

By reshaping how we attract, develop, and empower staff, we unlock **greater mobility, clearer career pathways, and the chance to embed a culture of innovation and continuous improvement** across services.

## Gloucestershire's workforce challenges

**Our workforce is talented and dedicated**, but we're not immune to the pressures facing local government. LGR is our chance to tackle these challenges head-on and build a workforce that's resilient, inclusive, and future-ready.

- **Recruitment and retention**: Stability is impacted by competition for talent, especially in social care, education, and technical roles. To attract and keep the best, we need to offer more than just a job. Flexible working is increasingly expected, and career pathways could better reflect diverse progression routes.
- **Diversity and representation:** There are gaps in workforce diversity, with underrepresentation in some roles and areas. Promoting Gloucestershire's strengths more widely can help attract a broader range of talent.
- **Wellbeing and change fatigue:** Staff are under pressure, particularly in middle management and specialist roles. A stronger focus on wellbeing and open communication can help build a culture that embraces change and supports growth – ready for what comes next.
- **Skills for the future:** Rapid technological change means we must invest in digital and data skills across all roles. Updating job structures and expanding access to learning will help build a confident, adaptable workforce ready to lead transformation.

## Unlocking new opportunities for our workforce

LGR creates a unique moment to reshape how councils engage, support, and develop their workforce. By aligning people strategies with the broader transformation agenda, councils can unlock new potential and build future-ready organisations.

Through LGR the councils can:

- **Reset organisational culture** by embedding inclusive values, energising teams, and empowering staff to shape services. This fresh start unites colleagues through adoption of new behaviours, attracts new talent, and creates real ownership and pride - across every corner of Gloucestershire. By putting wellbeing and resilience at the centre, we'll tackle change fatigue and build a workforce that's more connected, motivated, and driven by a shared mission.

- **Strengthen recruitment and retention** by reducing internal competition for talent, enabling more flexible resource sharing, and creating clearer pathways for retraining and upskilling. Structural changes, such as refining spans of control and smarter job design, can improve efficiency and clarity

- especially important in high-demand areas like social care, education, planning, and technical services. LGR allows councils to become more attractive employers, offering rewarding careers and development opportunities.

- **Build skills and capability** by investing in digital literacy, data competence, and shared training – raising standards and opening-up new career routes. We'll close skills gaps in areas like AI, development operations, data analysis, and data engineering – competing with the private sector and positioning the councils as forward-thinking employers, ready to meet future challenges with confidence. And by sharing these skills with wider partners and the community, we'll boost employment prospects and deliver real social value.

- **Support diverse career pathways** by recognising the value of both specialists and generalists and creating structures that reward horizontal and vertical progression equally. Through investing in specialist skills – like commissioning, contract management, market shaping, and quality assurance – we'll help staff feel more valued for their unique strengths and open up fulfilling career journeys within each organisation.

- **Promote workforce diversity and representation** by setting the standard for an inclusive workplace. Addressing persistent gaps in representation and removing cultural and structural barriers in recruitment and progression, we'll build a workforce that better reflects the communities it serves – and where everyone can thrive.

## Gloucestershire's workforce priorities

Through collaboration across all seven councils, we've identified opportunities to shape workforces that can deliver on Gloucestershire's bold vision and ambitions in the two new unitary councils:

| |
|---|
| 1. **Create a 'fresh start' for the new organisational cultures: Marks the opportunity to reset organisational identity and behaviours following reform, creating a more inclusive and energising environment.** |
| LGR offers a valuable opportunity to reset organisational cultures. It's a chance to reaffirm shared values, refresh our identities, and foster more dynamic, inclusive workplaces. By moving beyond legacy behaviours and empowering staff to shape the new culture, we'll boost morale, strengthen engagement, and inspire pride in each council's future. |
| 2. **Accelerate digital confidence and capability: Reflects the commitment to equip staff with the digital skills and tools.** |
| We're embedding digital, data and technology (DDaT) at the core of the new councils, backed by real investment in upskilling our people so that they have the tools and support they need to thrive. By expanding graduate schemes and digital apprenticeships, we'll build workforces that are digitally confident, ready to innovate, and equipped to deliver modern, responsive public services. |
| 3. **Design inclusive career pathways: Reflects the commitment to support both specialist and generalist progression by creating flexible, transparent career routes that value diverse skills and aspirations.** |
| We're committed to clear, flexible career pathways that let both specialists and generalists thrive, without |

being pushed into unsuitable management roles. Current structures often lack the flexibility to support dual career tracks, which can limit the development of specialist expertise. By valuing every route equally, supporting career exploration, and being transparent about role expectations, we unlock talent at every level. And for regulated professions, we'll keep the depth and accreditation that excellence requires.

4. **Championing diversity of thought and inclusive behaviours: The importance of embedding equity and inclusion in recruitment, leadership, and everyday practice.**

LGR is our platform to embed inclusive practices and celebrate diversity of thought at every level. We're tackling underrepresentation head-on – making sure all staff feel seen, heard, and valued. Our priorities include inclusive recruitment, diverse leadership pipelines, and open dialogue across teams. By championing different perspectives and lived experiences, we'll strengthen decision-making, build community trust, and create workforces that truly reflect the population they serve. This is particularly important given the different demographics of the resident populations of Gloucester City and the rest of Gloucestershire.

5. **Building leadership capability: Refers to the qualities, skills, and support needed for leaders to guide teams effectively through change and deliver high-quality services.**

Strong leadership is key to navigating change and delivering high-quality services. LGR creates valuable opportunities to grow leadership at every level. Through shared training, mentoring, and clear development pathways, the councils can support leadership growth while defining the qualities needed for the future. By investing in our leaders, we'll boost confidence, enhance engagement, and equip managers to lead with clarity, empathy, and purpose – amplifying the strengths already thriving across our teams.

6. **Creating anchor institutions for the wellbeing of our communities**

The 2021 Gloucestershire Director of Public Health's Annual Report "Sources of Strength"[1] described how 'anchor organisations' can support community health and wellbeing and help tackle inequalities in their places. Anchor organisations like the new unitary councils will take direct action in areas like employment policies, procurement, buildings, the environment, and place-shaping – leveraging our assets and influence for local benefit. As two of Gloucestershire's largest employers, we'll lead by example.

7. **Supporting staff who may not continue in the new unitary councils**

LGR is also about looking after our people. For those not transitioning into new roles within the new organisations, we'll offer tailored support – including CV writing, interview preparation, and access to redeployment resources – so that everyone feels respected, empowered, and ready for their next step. This compassionate approach values individual contributions and helps maintain positive organisational cultures throughout the change.

# f. Technology & Data

## Designing a digitally-enabled organisations for Gloucestershire

Since the announcement of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), we have proactively engaged with the LGA and other councils that have already navigated this process, with a view to understand the realistic opportunities and learn from their experiences in Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) transformation. This collaborative approach has enabled us to identify opportunities, challenges, and best practices, ensuring that DDaT aspirations in Gloucestershire are informed by real-world experience and are also closely aligned with the government's recently launched digital blueprint.

Putting residents and communities first is at the core of our DDaT approach. Our ambition is to design and deliver services that work for everyone – regardless of age, ability or access to technology. While we are investing in digital, data and technology to improve outcomes and experiences, we recognise that not everyone will choose or be able to access services online. That's why we will continue to offer alternative ways to get support and information, ensuring that no one is left behind. Supporting the proposed locality arrangements, our commitment is to deliver accessible, responsive and inclusive services, shaped by the needs of the people and communities we serve.

Our Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) vision is to transform the experience of local public services in Gloucestershire by designing organisations truly fit for the digital age: innovatively, but efficiently, meeting the expectations and needs of our local people, communities and staff.

Importantly, we would not be starting from scratch. Instead, we would have two continuing authorities: Gloucestershire Unitary Council and Greater Gloucester Council. This approach offers significant advantages from a technology perspective, as it allows us to expand and redefine existing IT infrastructure rather than create entirely new systems. For Gloucestershire Unitary Council, core IT services such as email and website will continue to operate on the County Council's platforms, absorbing data and services from the merging districts. For Greater Gloucester Council, existing City Council systems will be maintained and extended to cover the newly included areas, ensuring residents and businesses in those locations are seamlessly integrated.

Further to this, we can build on already sector-leading examples of digital approaches delivering great customer experience and innovative service delivery. By bringing together county and district services across two unitaries – Greater Gloucester Council and Gloucestershire Unitary Council – it gives us the chance to simplify and standardise how services are delivered so customers receive a consistently good experience – no matter where they live or which service they use. For residents, this means easier access to services, less confusion, and no need to repeat information or navigate multiple systems. It allows us to focus resources where they are needed most, respond more quickly to local issues, and deliver support that is joined-up and reliable. Ultimately, this approach will help us build councils that are more efficient, more responsive, and better able to meet the needs of our communities.

## What do we mean by digital, data and technology?

### Digital:

This is about creating empowering and user-centred organisational cultures across both Gloucestershire Council and Greater Gloucester Council. We will invest in the right skills and use the right tools to deliver end-to-end online services that meet our residents' and users' needs, regardless of which authority they interact with. The goal is to make these services so simple and effective that people choose to use them.

Data:
This covers how we strategically and ethically use data to better manage our services and understand our residents, communities and place, enabling evidence-based decisions and the delivery of more personalised support. At the heart of our data use will be secure and ethical data sharing, improving interoperability across systems—both within and between the two authorities—and using insights to redesign services around real need.

Technology:
This refers to our approach to robust, secure, and flexible technology, from cloud and low-code platforms to open-source tools and responsible use of AI. Our goal is to deliver resilient, scalable services that support innovation and feel seamless to the user, with systems, tools and platforms working together so smoothly that the experience feels joined-up and intuitive, whether delivered by Gloucestershire Council or Greater Gloucester Council.

## What difference will designing digitally-enabled organisations make?

Our residents and businesses across Gloucestershire will be able to access services that are consistent, proactive, accessible and responsive - joined up across both councils and their partners. By using data (where it makes sense to rather than 'just because'), to understand needs, we can deliver the right support at the right time, removing the need for customers to repeat information or navigate multiple systems. Whether people contact us online, by phone, by email or face-to-face, they will receive the same reliable service. We recognise that digital exclusion remains a challenge, with an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 adults in the county effectively offline and a further 80,000 to 100,000 adults missing out on the full benefits of the internet. Our commitment is to ensure that everyone - regardless of how they choose to engage - can access the support and services they need.

We also recognise that the demographic profile varies significantly between the two authorities. Gloucester has a higher proportion of young people, while the wider county has more older residents. This presents distinct challenges and opportunities for service design. Our digital, data, and technology solutions must be flexible and inclusive - supporting younger people's expectations for digital-first services in Gloucester, while ensuring older residents in the wider county can access support in ways that suit their needs, including non-digital channels. Alongside this, we are acutely aware of the impact of digital poverty, which affects both younger and older residents. Our commitment to accessibility and inclusion means we will work to address barriers such as lack of access to devices, connectivity, or digital skills, so that everyone, regardless of age, background or circumstance, can benefit from the support and services they need.

Our communities will have more opportunities to tell us what they think and participate in shaping services—our digital-focussed approach to service delivery will enable fairness, empowerment, responsiveness and trust. Digital platforms will make it easier to access data, share views, respond to consultations, and work in partnership with us. Through this approach we will enable communities to respond to local issues themselves, as well as target support and resources where they are needed most, strengthening local resilience.

Our staff will be equipped with the right tools and connected systems, working in organisations with a clear culture that values learning and collaboration. Routine tasks will be automated where possible, freeing time to focus on more complex issues and collaborating within and outside the organisations. Staff will also be trusted to experiment, learn and adapt - as well as being supported to develop new skills.

Our leadership will have access to high-quality, real-time information that enables confident decision-making. The opportunities that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) offers in enabling joined-up data will

make it easier to see across systems, anticipate future needs, and direct resources to where they will have the greatest impact.

Our new unitary authorities will be better equipped to manage demand, streamline processes, and evolve services in innovative ways. By harnessing digital and data capabilities, we can break away from traditional models of local government service delivery, enabling more targeted support and adaptive operating models. At the same time, we're committed to becoming an employer of choice, attracting and retaining talented people by fostering a modern, inclusive, and purpose-driven workplace where staff feel empowered to make a real difference.

Our partners will be able to benefit from shared platforms, ethically aligned data and collaborative delivery models, making it easier to work across organisational boundaries. We will reduce duplication, remove barriers, and create seamless experiences for people who use multiple services across different agencies.

## Strategic components of our approach

DDaT is central to making a real difference for Gloucestershire. We've identified seven key areas that will help us turn our ambition into action, each focused on delivering better outcomes for residents, communities and businesses.

### Transformative leadership

Leadership in the new councils will encourage innovation that boldly challenges traditional ways of delivering local government services. Leaders will champion joined-up services across teams, organisations and sectors, adopting an agile, user-centred mindset that meets the expectations of an increasingly online society. This includes encouraging experimentation, removing barriers, and using data to inform decision-making. Leaders will be comfortable with 'build, test, learn' approaches, embracing continuous improvement over perfection at the first iteration. They will ask the right questions, equip staff with the tools to answer them, and act confidently on what data reveals.

### Adaptive operating model

Our DDaT operating models will be flexible and responsive to changing needs. We will adopt reusable common components wherever possible, ensuring data portability and a consistent user experience across services. All services will be online by default (with alternative channels available), underpinned by a single digital process regardless of contact channel. This will remove unnecessary hand-offs, reduce duplication, and allow residents to get what they need more quickly and easily. Services will also join up with partners in the public and voluntary sectors, providing a simple and consistent experience across the whole system.

Reflecting the two continuing authorities, Gloucestershire Council will build on the County's existing IT infrastructure, absorbing the five districts, while Greater Gloucester Council will expand its current systems to cover new areas. This approach allows us to avoid creating new technology instances and instead focus on expanding and redefining what already works. Importantly, Greater Gloucester's scale and agility present a unique opportunity to act as a proving ground for new digital solutions and ways of working. By testing and refining approaches in Greater Gloucester, we can accelerate innovation and share successful models across both councils.

### Data-informed decisions

Traditionally, local government has faced challenges with fragmented datasets, both within and between organisations, which has often made early intervention difficult. LGR offers a real opportunity to break down these silos, joining up services and data to enable earlier intervention, faster responses, and more effective prevention. By embedding evidence-based decision making and investing in analytics, predictive modelling

and AI, we will be better equipped to anticipate demand and continually improve our services.

Alongside this, we will prioritise robust data governance to ensure that information is used safely, securely, and ethically. Data should only be joined up across services and with partners where consent is given and where there is a strong use-case to do so. Clear principles and accountability will guide how we use AI and data in public services, helping us build trust and deliver value responsibly.

The unitary authorities, for example, will enable the implementation of a joined-up predictive analytics platform across adult and children's services, education, housing, and health. By pooling data that used to be locked in districts and county silos, the system will help identify early warning signs of safeguarding risks, such as school absence, housing instability, or repeat A&E visits, and trigger coordinated interventions when needed. An example of this type of benefit could be within our Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, enabling real-time data sharing across agencies, standardised data formats and dashboards, predictive analytics to identify risk earlier, standardisation of risk thresholds and automation of routine processes (e.g. triage, referrals).

Our data approach will be underpinned by a clear blueprint for how we collect, store, transform, and analyse data, helping to embed a culture where decisions are consistently informed by data at every stage.

### Customer-centred services

For the new organisations to effectively meet the needs of residents, businesses and communities, customer experience and our approach to digital must go hand-in-hand. Our aim is to deliver intuitive, accessible and consistently high-quality online services for all residents and customers; putting them at the heart of our service design will be essential. This will be facilitated by a single phone number, website and integrated digital services, incorporating tools like live chat and chatbots for 24/7 availability. With digital tools and AI capabilities, our customer services will be able to oversee cases and track progress more effectively across the organisations. By automating routine processes and communications wherever possible, we can free up staff to focus on supporting people with more complex needs, enhancing their impact and value. Whether online, by phone, or face-to-face, we're committed to delivering a consistent, joined-up experience for everyone, supported by a collaborative approach across all teams.

To build public trust in the councils, we will provide open access to our performance through dashboards, enabling residents to understand service levels and our reliability, and demonstrating our commitment to high standards. By connecting information across services, we can build a fuller picture of our residents' and communities' needs and respond in a more coordinated, thoughtful and person-centred way.

There will be an organisational-wide commitment to user-centred design principles and continuously improving the resident and customer experience. Testing will play a crucial role in this process: we will regularly test new services and features with real users, gathering feedback to ensure they are intuitive, accessible and genuinely meet people's needs. This approach will help us to identify and address issues early, refine our services, and make sure that what we deliver works well for everyone.

We also recognise that the population make-up varies between the two authorities, with Gloucester having a higher proportion of young people and the wider county more older residents. Our service design will reflect these differences, ensuring digital solutions are flexible and inclusive, and that digital poverty is addressed for all age groups.

### Learning culture

To achieve our DDaT vision, we will need to create a culture that celebrates curiosity, is open to change, and encourages learning from others. We will retain the best of our existing organisational cultures while

fostering experimentation, collaboration and continuous learning.

We will work with national initiatives such as the Local Government Association and the Government Digital Service to improve digital consistency across the sector. We will think innovatively around how we learn from each other and others that have gone through LGR already (such as Innovation Greater Manchester, and Data Mill North) and look to launch a Gloucestershire innovation approach to pilot new ideas, bringing together the councils, the NHS, universities, technology start-ups and other partners.

We will also invest in organisation-wide digital skills and capabilities, including digital apprenticeships, to build a workforce that can deliver and sustain transformation.

### Listening to our residents and stakeholders

To build online services that are truly inclusive and genuinely responsive to our residents' expectations and needs, it is important that we actively listen to them and recognise the challenges with digital exclusion across the county.

We plan to develop a digital engagement approach where Gloucestershire's residents and communities can easily provide feedback, join citizens' panels, and co-design services directly with us. Aligned to our proposed locality arrangements, we would make appropriate data and insights available so that our communities are empowered to design their own solutions to local concerns and issues. We would also look to collaborate with key partners, including the Gloucestershire VCSFE and parish councils, to deliver meaningful digital engagement and enhance digital skills within our communities.

We will use data and digital platforms to tailor engagement efforts based on factors such as location, interest, or demographics. Implementing robust feedback loops, embracing co-design practices, and openly sharing our approach will all contribute to improving inclusive service delivery and building trust with our residents. We are committed to ensuring those with limited or no digital access receive support through alternative channels that meet their needs, such as over the phone or through in-person appointments.

Regardless of the contact channel, the process and experience must feel consistent, joined up, and fair, ensuring that no one is left behind in our digital transformation.

### Robust infrastructure

The success of the new councils will fundamentally rely on robust and dependable technology foundations. We will ensure that our infrastructure, devices, applications, and data are all up-to-date, secure, resilient, and dependable.

Where appropriate, we will migrate to cloud-based platforms to enhance resilience, but we will avoid simply replacing legacy systems in the cloud. Instead, we will look for opportunities to transform services using flexible, open-source technologies to promote transparency, efficiency and innovation.

New investment in technology infrastructure must be designed to be reliable, scalable, sustainable, and cyber-secure. Supporting this, we will develop clear design principles that will help to prioritise standardisation and interoperability. In addition, environmental sustainability will be a key consideration in all technology decisions, ensuring that our digital infrastructure supports the councils' broader climate and carbon reduction commitments.

Supporting our vision and the government's digital blueprint, we will invest in the right digital tools and capabilities to support agile service design, enabling teams to develop and iterate solutions more quickly,

consistently, and at a lower cost. Addressing 'shadow IT', where tools, software, apps or systems are procured without the approval of the central DDaT, will also be an important priority. Importantly, we will establish robust governance so that technology decisions are made centrally and are fully aligned with the councils' DDaT ambitions.

Our DDaT investments must go beyond devices and platforms to include connectivity. While 98.2% of properties in Gloucestershire now have access to superfast broadband, gaps remain, particularly in rural areas and among digitally excluded groups. As unitary councils, we will be better placed to coordinate infrastructure investment, work with national programmes, and ensure that all communities, regardless of geography, can benefit from modern, reliable and inclusive digital services.

## Summary

The ambition to design digitally-enabled councils for Gloucestershire is both bold and necessary. By clearly defining what digital, data and technology mean in practice, and setting out a compelling vision supported by strategic components, we are laying the foundations for modern, responsive and inclusive organisations.

The risk of not embedding DDaT from the outset is significant. Without a clear digital strategy and robust DDaT foundations, the new councils risk building upon fragmented systems, inconsistent data, and outdated processes. This would not only increase costs and complexity—due to reliance on legacy infrastructure—but would also limit our ability to innovate, collaborate, and meet rising expectations.

Our approach is rooted in transformative leadership, adaptive operating models, and a culture of learning and collaboration, all underpinned by robust infrastructure and a commitment to understanding and delivering meaningful outcomes for Gloucestershire's residents and communities.

Case studies from across the county demonstrate the real-world impact of digital in improving outcomes, streamlining services, and supporting those who need us most. Yet we believe the true opportunity lies in working together across both councils to deliver consistent, high-quality outcomes for people living, working and visiting Gloucestershire.

As we move through the phases of LGR, our strategy will balance innovation with stability, ensuring that our customer focus is embedded from the outset with a clear roadmap for future transformation. The ability to test and iterate new approaches at pace in Greater Gloucester will support this ambition, helping us to refine solutions before scaling them across the wider system.

Ultimately, our DDaT focus will enable us to become proactive councils that deliver meaningful outcomes—making a real difference to our communities, to the people living and working in Gloucestershire, and to our own workforce. Our new councils will feel modern, human and trustworthy - designed around the people we serve and powered by the best of digital, technology and data insight.

# 8. The Overall Financial Case

## Financial modelling and assumptions

**Purpose** - To summarise the assumptions and outputs from the financial modelling undertaken to inform the Local Government Reorganisation options appraisal.

**Assumptions** - All options were modelled on Revenue Outturns 2023/24, with all figures inflated so that the total Council Tax requirement for all councils was equal to the Council Tax requirements agreed by each council as part of the 2025/26 budget setting processes.

Within this report, 3 options are considered as follows:

- Option A - A single County-wide Unitary Council
- Option B - 2 Council model - split geographically East/West
- Option C - 2 Council model - split between an expanded Greater Gloucester City and Gloucestershire (the remainder of the County)

Throughout this options appraisal, all savings are considered against a 'stand-still' position. Savings are projected against current needs, current costs and current allocations of grants. None of the options considered include assumptions relating to changes in levels of reserves, levels of future needs or changes to resource allocation; these factors are assumed to have the same impact on each option. This approach is required to demonstrate the varying performance of each option to generate efficiencies and realise savings. Similarly, this options appraisal is focussed on appraising structural proposition, rather than appraising detailed system wide, organisational and service level designs. As such, broad but evidence-based assumptions have been used to inform the financial models for each option, including findings from previous LGR programmes, projections from successful recent LGR proposals and Interim LGR Plan proposals for other two-tier areas.

**General efficiencies** - Areas for savings were calculated as categories of service department expenditure where there is an overlap of spending between Districts councils and the County Council, split between staffing, other expenditure and fees and charges income and other income. There are no assumed efficiencies within Adults or Children's Social Care, nor in Education services. The following table sets out the modelled saving targets for each option:

| | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Staff saving | 3.25% | 2.50% | 2.50% |
| Non-staff saving | 3.25% | 2.50% | 2.50% |
| Fees & Charges Income | 2.00% | 1.50% | 1.75% |

The saving assumptions are based on there being greater efficiencies the more authorities that are combined (and potentially offsetting efficiencies with additional costs for splitting services for options including multiple councils). Fees and charges income can be increased through alignment of fees and charges across the county - the lower the number of councils, the greater the opportunity to rationalise these charges.

**Ongoing additional costs / savings** - The next consideration was to look at whether the specifics of any

individual option gives rise to ongoing additional costs (such as costs for more members) or leads to ongoing savings (for example through prevention). The following table sets out the net ongoing costs and savings (£m's) assumed in each option. These are taken to adjust the general level of savings as suggested above.

| | A (£m) | B (£m) | C (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Duplicated Management Teams | (4.734) | (4.734) | (4.734) |
| Additional Management Teams | 0.00 | 1.750 | 1.750 |
| Member savings | (1.850) | (1.850) | (1.850) |
| Additional Member's allowances | 0.000 | 0.400 | 0.400 |
| Savings from existing shared services | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Ongoing service disaggregation costs | 0.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Enhancing local democracy | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.966 |
| **TOTAL additional costs / (savings)** | **(5.584)** | **(2.684)** | **(1.718)** |

Duplicated Management Teams savings are calculated on the basis that the number of senior posts for a single authority are likely to be comparable to the current County Council structure (albeit the responsibilities will be different with the combining of County and District services). Thus base savings are taken by combining the salaries of all District Councils in the county, based upon the latest Senior Officers' Pay Report or latest Pay Policy Statement) with an allowance for oncosts. Where options include more than one new council, costs are calculated based on costs of 1 Chief Executive, 4 Service Directors and 10 Assistant Directors for each new Council.

Members savings are based upon a base position of moving to a single Council with 100 Members (we understand that in both options A and B the current aggregate proposal is for 110 Councillors, which would result in an additional annual forecast cost of £0.12m per year in each option). Using the existing Gloucestershire County Council rates, allowances are given for 1 Leader, 3 Group Leaders, 9 Cabinet Members, 20 Committee Chairs and 67 Members without additional responsibilities. These costs (£1.20m) are compared against the total allowances for Members across all County and District Councils in Gloucestershire based upon the latest available published details (£3.05m) - the difference is the projected saving. For each additional Council, there will be the need duplication of all the responsibility roles (Leader, Group Leaders, Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs) totalling £0.40m.

For Option C there is an additional cost already built in to the model for Enhancing Local Democracy. These are costs associated with a policy approach to increase expenditure on democratic representation at a local level, through both additional Councillors and additional working and resourcing at a more local level.

Savings from existing shared services are savings that have already been achieved through partnership working between councils in the county. £1m is the projected savings already made by these joint arrangements, thus they are subtracted from the expected efficiency savings to avoid double counting, as they have already been achieved.

Service disaggregation costs are on-going additional costs based upon splitting services currently provided at a county-wide level, such as requiring duplicate ICT systems and licences for maintaining records and potentially additional staff due to inefficiencies in splitting these services.

**Long-term impact of these savings combined** - Combining the impact of these two sets of savings shows the potential long-term savings from each of these models, based upon these over the various categories of

income and expenditure - at this stage in the process, figures are presented for all new Councils combined; for the purposes of this analysis no attempt is made to apportion costs and savings to specific newly formed authorities.

*Option A - Single Authority*

| Category | 2023/4 Outturn inflated (£m) | General efficiency (£m) | Further specific costs / (savings) (£m) | Projected expenditure / (Income) (£m) | Ongoing saving (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Costs | 502.100 | (3.502) | (6.334) | 492.264 | 9.836 |
| Running Expenses | 989.692 | (8.341) | 0.750 | 982.101 | 7.591 |
| Fees & Charges | (165.837) | (3.317) | 0.000 | (169.154) | 3.317 |
| Other Income | (155.666) | (0.000) | 0.000 | (155.666) | 0.000 |
| Non-Dept (Inc) / Exp * | (704.051) | (0.000) | 0.000 | (704.051) | 0.000 |
| Council Tax Req | 466.237 | (15.160) | (5.584) | 445.494 | **20.744** |

*Option B - East / West split*

| Category | 2023/4 Outturn inflated (£m) | General efficiency (£m) | Further specific costs / (savings) (£m) | Projected expenditure / (Income) (£m) | Ongoing saving (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Costs | 502.100 | (2.694) | (4.184) | 495.222 | 6.878 |
| Running Expenses | 989.692 | (6.416) | 1.750 | 985.026 | 4.666 |
| Fees & Charges | (165.837) | (2.488) | 0.000 | (168.325) | 2.488 |
| Other Income | (155.666) | (0.000) | 0.000 | (155.666) | 0.000 |
| Non-Dept (Inc) / Exp * | (704.051) | (0.000) | 0.000 | (704.051) | 0.000 |
| Council Tax Req | 466.237 | (11.597) | (2.434) | 452.206 | **14.031** |

*Option C - Greater Gloucester & Gloucestershire Unitary*

| Category | 2023/4 Outturn inflated (£m) | General efficiency (£m) | Further specific costs / (savings) (£m) | Projected expenditure / (Income) (£m) | Ongoing saving (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Costs | 502.100 | (2.694) | (3.218) | 496.188 | 5.912 |
| Running Expenses | 989.692 | (6.416) | 1.750 | 985.026 | 4.666 |
| Fees & Charges | (165.837) | (2.902) | 0.000 | (168.740) | 2.902 |
| Other Income | (155.666) | (0.000) | 0.000 | (155.666) | 0.000 |
| Non-Dept (Inc) / Exp * | (704.051) | (0.000) | 0.000 | (704.051) | 0.000 |
| Council Tax Req | 466.237 | (12.012) | (1.468) | 452.757 | **13.480** |

* This includes all other elements of Council Income and Expenditure, including Housing Benefits, Levies, Capital Financing, Non-service grants and appropriations / use of reserves (elements considered outside service reporting on Government - Revenue Outturn forms)

The following table sets out the ongoing savings as a percentage. This is calculated in three ways:

- As a percentage of gross service costs (ie employee costs and running expenses)
- As a percentage of net service costs (ie employee costs and running expenses less service income)
- As a percentage of Council Tax requirement (ie all costs including non-service specific grants, financing costs, precepts and use of reserves)

| Category | A (£m) | B (£m) | C (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ongoing saving | 20.744 | 14.031 | 13.480 |
| **Savings as a percentage of:** | | | |
| Gross Service Cost (£1,491.792m) | 1.4% | 0.9% | 0.9% |
| Net Service Cost (£1,170.289m) | 1.8% | 1.2% | 1.2% |
| Council Tax Requirement (£466.237m) | 4.4% | 3.0% | 2.9% |

**One-off costs and time to realise savings** Each option was considered for one-off costs and how quickly savings could be achieved. The breakdown of these costs varies from option to option and can be seen within the model. For most costs these were given a direct cost. The exception was redundancy costs that were calculated as a percentage of employee costs saved (this forecast includes both the direct costs and any pension strain). A summary of these one-off costs per model are as follows.

| | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Redundancy (%age of employee costs saved) | 120% | 120% | 120% |
| Other one-off cost (£m) | 10.950 | 20.100 | 20.100 |

Although an indicative breakdown of transition costs is given, it is considered that the overall quantum is more important that the specific categories. Local decisions will determine how much of this work is carried out in-house compared to with external support, which in turn may adjust the allocation of these budgets. These costs are broken down as follows:

| Category | A (£m) | B (£m) | C (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Redundancy Costs (A) | 9.883 | 6.813 | 6.813 |
| | | | |
| Rebranding / Comms | 0.250 | 0.500 | 0.500 |
| Public consultation | 0.200 | 0.400 | 0.400 |
| Transition support / remodelling costs | 3.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 |
| Programme Management | 1.000 | 2.000 | 2.000 |
| Legal costs (contract novation, new constitutions) | 1.000 | 1.250 | 1.250 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ICT costs | 2.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 |
| Contingency | 2.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 |
| Shadow operations | 0.500 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Additional agency year 1 | 1.000 | 0.750 | 0.750 |
| HR Support for transition / TUPE etc | 0.000 | 1.200 | 1.200 |
| Sub-Total Non-Redundancy Costs (B) | 10.950 | 20.100 | 20.100 |
| | | | |
| Total One-off Costs (A+B) | 20.833 | 26.913 | 26.913 |

Consideration was also given to how quickly expected savings would be realised. Greater disaggregation of existing county-level services results in a longer projected time to fully realise savings, with the assumptions and impact on early-year savings projected below:

| | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| %age saved - Year 1 | 33% | 30% | 30% |
| %age saved - Year 2 | 67% | 60% | 60% |
| %age saved - Year 3 | 100% | 80% | 80% |
| %age saved - Year 4 | 100% | 90% | 90% |
| %age saved - Year 5 | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | | | |
| Saving before one-off costs | £m | £m | £m |
| Ongoing saving - Year 1 | 6.915 | 4.209 | 4.044 |
| Ongoing saving - Year 2 | 13.829 | 8.419 | 8.088 |
| Ongoing saving -Year 3 | 20.744 | 11.225 | 10.784 |
| Ongoing saving - Year 4 | 20.744 | 12.628 | 12.132 |
| Ongoing saving - Year 5 (and ongoing) | 20.744 | 14.031 | 13.480 |

**Summary of financial modelling -** The following table sets out the key metrics from each of the options:

| | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| One-off costs (£m) | 20.833 | 26.913 | 26.913 |
| Ongoing annual savings (£m) * | 20.744 | 14.031 | 13.480 |
| 10 Year Savings (£m) | 165.859 | 93.757 | 89.015 |
| Payback period (years) | 3 | 4 | 4 |

* Annual savings once fully ramped up

## Financial Sustainability Assessment

***Steady State Assessment***

To assess the financial sustainability of this proposal we assessed what the 'steady state' position would be after savings had stabilised.

This modelling followed the following steps:

- Income and expenditure from 2023-24 RO forms are split between new authorities based upon population, except children's social care, which was split on number of supported cases
- General efficiencies applied as described above
- Judgement used to split and allocate ongoing additional costs / savings specific between the authorities
- Comparing the Council Tax Requirement at 2025/26 prices against the ability to raise that funding from the current Council Tax base (adjusting for proposed boundary changes)

The outcome from this analysis was that based upon the levels of savings generated and the allocations made, both authorities could more than raise the required level of funding from their Council Tax base within existing Council Tax rates.

***Transition Assessment***

After this initial assessment, the costs of getting to this overall 'steady state' were assessed. These were calculated as the following:

- One-off costs (as described above)
- Ongoing savings shortfall – these are defined as the difference between the maximum annual savings and the annual projected savings, due to the time for change to occur and new systems and processes to bed in

For this proposal [Option C] the total costs are calculated as follows:

| | Year 1 (£m) | Year 2 (£m) | Year 3 (£m) | Year 4 (£m) | Year 5 (£m) | Total (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Projected saving* | *4.044* | *8.088* | *10.784* | *12.132* | *13.480* | *48.528* |
| *Steady state saving* | *13.480* | *13.480* | *13.480* | *13.480* | *13.480* | *67.400* |
| Difference | 9.436 | 5.392 | 2.696 | 1.348 | 0.000 | 18.872 |
| One-off costs | 26.913 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 26.913 |
| TOTAL | 36.349 | 5.392 | 2.696 | 1.348 | 0.000 | **45.785** |

To assess how easily this total cost of transition could be borne across the county, this figure is compared to the total reserves held by existing councils within the county. The stated position based upon 1st April 2025 submitted Revenue Outturn reports are presented below:

| Reserve type | £m |
|---|---|
| Unallocated Financial Reserves | 44.193 |
| Earmarked reserves: Planned future revenue and capital spending | 187.095 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Total reserves potential available | **231.288** |

Note that reserves held for schools, public health, existing contractual commitments, risks or budget stabilisation were not considered. The reserves figures have not been updated for GCC following the updated outturn positions, this is not material in the overall figures presented. All figures are calculated based on assumptions.

There are several assumptions and factors underpinning this assessment:

- It assumes current levels of external support and splitting on a population basis
- No assessment is made of future needs, changes in demand, levels of reserves or changes to funding methodologies
- It assumes a shared pool of reserves and transition costs are met from this pool before allocation decisions

Based on these assumptions, the costs represent less than 20% of relevant reserves, suggesting overall costs of transition could comfortably be contained, without even considering disposal of excess assets such as surplus properties. Thus this proposal [Option C] is sustainable long-term and transition to that point can be contained within existing resources.

**Conclusion** - A single authority is projected to generate the most significant efficiencies and lead to the quickest payback of transition costs. These savings should however be considered alongside wider economic benefits and disbenefits to the county (such as changes to health, investment, job creation / retention, culture and tourism) to get a fairer overall reflection of the impact of changes to the county.

**Differences in outputs compared to models used in other submissions -** The key differences between assumptions in this modelling compared to other published local submissions are:

- Redundancy costs are much greater within this model for all options (120% of employment costs saved compared to much less in other observed models) - our assumption is based upon experience at previously combined authorities and includes pension strain for people taking redundancy.
- Lower additional ongoing costs for social care following disaggregation - informed by the findings of the Impower report commissioned by DCN (https://www.districtcouncils.info/wp-content/uploads/Impower-DCN-ASC-LGR-Report-2025-FINAL-compressed-version.pdf) - which states "*There are no economies of scale in delivering social care and in some cases, there is evidence that larger systems introduce diseconomies*"; although allowances have still been made for additional leadership roles and ICT relating to running an additional ICT system.
- Lower ongoing savings modelled across all options and a longer time to realise these - informed by findings in previous merged authorities showing that savings took longer to achieve than anticipated and were overestimated. As an example: https://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/your-council/finance/westmorland-and-furness-council-productivity-plan is projecting £1.293m of unitary specific efficiencies after 4 years of operations (this being one of two new unitary councils formed in Cumbria).
- This model includes a modest increase in income based upon reviewing and aligning fees & charges; this increase is consistent with previous reviews of fees & charges in single authority situations (i.e. there should be a greater ability to raise income as there is already differential in fees charged across the existing councils).
- This model makes explicit adjustments for savings already realised in terms of shared services and makes an expenditure allowance for enhanced localised democracy across all options; other submitted models do not make such allowances.
- This model does not attempt to make assumptions about any of the following:

  - Changes to future service demands, which cannot be projected with any degree of certainty
  - Realisation of future savings plans
  - Changes to Council Tax collection rates, which cannot be projected with any degree of certainty
  - Re-distributional impact of Fairer Funding reforms, which cannot be projected with any degree of certainty
  - Ceasing any specific grant support that is currently allocated within the county (such as floor payments, specific grants)
  - Changes to debt and associated debt costs, that could be offset via sale of surplus assets, which cannot be projected with any degree of certainty
- This model assumes greater transition costs across all options, again based upon experience of costs from previous reorganisation; although the split of these costs is different between models, this split is highly dependent upon how the new organisation(s) choose to resource the required transformation and the reliance on internal versus external support (Westmorland and Furness, as one of two new councils in the region were themselves allocated £10m to facilitate transformation in Cumbria as referenced in the same report as linked above). Grant Thornton referenced an example of transformation costs reaching over £50m (see box 1 below):

*Box 1: Example of under-estimation and transformation costs associated with LGR*

> Transformation needs to be fully costed and those costs kept under control. For example, in one council the estimated transformation programme costs increased significantly from £29.5 million in November 2019 to £52.12 million by February 2024. Transformation programmes need effective programme management and regular progress reporting in public to elected members is essential. Elected members need enough evidence to challenge delivery and ensure officers are taking corrective action if needed.

*Source:* https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/globalassets/1.-member-firms/united-kingdom/pdf/publication/2024/report---learning-from-the-new-unitary-councils_v08.pdf

# Economic Case

## Wider Economic Benefit Model

**Purpose** - To summarise the assumptions and outputs from the benefits modelling undertaken to inform Local Government Reorganisation in the options appraisal. This builds on the work undertaken within the financial modelling and combines the results from this with estimates of wider economic benefits and disbenefits from various LGR options.

**Options modelled** - Within this report, 3 options are considered as follows:

- Option A - A single County-wide Unitary Council
- Option B - 2 Council model - split geographically East/West
- Option C - 2 Council model - split between an expanded Greater Gloucester City and Gloucestershire Unitary (the remainder of the County)

**Identifying wider economic impact** - Economic benefits have been based upon local expected outputs, converted to financial outputs through established models. The following approach has been used consistently in developing the benefits estimation:

- Limited to one broad measure per key area to avoid duplication (or removal of any overlapping figures)
- Implicit optimism bias included within figures, with greater allowance where national data is used (see below for further details)
- Where local baseline data was unavailable, no economic benefit has been calculated and any such expected benefits have been included in the non-monetised impact instead
- When a range of outputs were forecast, then Monte Carlo analysis was undertaken, multiplying each outcome with the estimated probability of that outcome - due to the uncertainty implied via this approach an increased optimism bias / deadweight weighting is used (see Additionality factors section below)

An exercise was undertaken with commissioning council officers to consider strategic factors that are likely to be influenced by the future structure of local government and where those outcomes are likely to be materially different between the options. Table 1 presents these outcomes, the linked measure used for calculating the economic impact and the justification for their inclusion:

*Table 1: Measures used for calculating economic impact*

| Outcome | Output measure | Reason for inclusion |
|---|---|---|
| Job creation | Gross Value Added for jobs created | A combination of impact of public sector losses in county from re-organisation + impact of an enhanced economic strategy tailored to urban/rural needs in each unitary |
| Small business survival | Gross Value Added for increased start-up / SME survival rates | Greater aligned economic development with local strengths and needs - where tighter focus on specific areas |
| Investment within area / region | Investment within area | Gloucester City has a strong track record of working to engage partners in regeneration within its boundaries - there is a risk that this is |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | diluted without a specific council carrying out these duties |
| Cultural engagement | Change in people engaging in cultural activities | The closer the link between each council and its residents will allow for more engagement and celebration of cultural identities - conversely the more distant, the more likely for there to be disengagement from current activity levels |
| Crime & disorder | Change in recorded crime | Exceptional prevention focused work currently taking place within Districts - risk of this being diluted through merging into larger councils |
| Visitor economy | Visitor spend in region | Risk of loss of promotion of urban areas if integrated into wider areas including the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean - the appeal of the area is very diverse, making it harder for a council with a mix of urban and rural areas to market the appeal to those different visitor groups |
| Homelessness prevention | Number of homelessness applications | Solutions to homelessness (or the factors that help prevent it) are often household-specific and reliant on a high degree of flexibility, creativity, local connections and partner organisations, which are easier to build and sustain on a smaller footprint. |
| Children social care | Costs of looked after children | Nationally evidenced report showing links between average cost of provision and size of councils |
| Adult social care | Costs of residential and nursing care | National evidenced report showing links between average cost of provision and size of councils |

**Impact calculation** - For each output measure above, a baseline figure was determined, the range of outcomes likely to be achieved and an economic impact of each output produced. The detailed calculations for this can be seen in Appendix C. Once the impact is assessed these are adjusted in line with factors included within the Additionality Guide. These adjustments ensure that naturally occurring increases are considered part of the benefits for this project.

The following factors elements were considered for each benefit:

- Leakage - benefits going to people outside the target area (e.g. health benefits from people coming from overseas participating in leisure activities generated by a scheme).
- Displacement - benefits lost because individuals swap from another activity which would also have provided similar benefits (e.g. when a job created is taken by someone already in full time employment and their previous role is not re-filled).
- Substitution - benefits lost because companies change their decisions because of the scheme (e.g. they don't repair a building themselves, because they can get a grant to support it).
- Economic Multiplier - the wider supply chain and regional impact of the benefit (e.g. construction work having a beneficial impact on the local supply chain).
- Deadweight - what would happen even if the project didn't go ahead (e.g. general rises in commercial or house prices).

Each economic impact was assessed forthe likely impact of each factor, using the reference cases set out in the Additionality Guide and HCA Additionality Guide as starting points, supplemented with local knowledge and sector specific research. Appendix C sets out for each benefit the values used for each factor and the reasoning behind this.

All benefits were then combined with the direct calculated impact from the financial model (both the ongoing savings and transition costs). All results are then discounted by the Government's Green Book value of 3.5% per year. Discounting is used to reflect the fact that a benefit today should be valued higher that the same benefit in the future. The overall economic impact of each option is presented in table 2 below:

*Table 2: Economic impact of options*

| **Category** | **Option A** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic impact category** | **Gross impact (£m)** | **Additionality adjustment (£m)** | **Discount (£m)** | **NPV of impact (£m)** |
| **Economic benefits** | | | | |
| Ongoing savings | 186.696 | 0.000 | (33.993) | 152.703 |
| Sub-total economic benefits **(A)** | **186.696** | **0.000** | **(33.993)** | **152.703** |
| **Economic disbenefits** | | | | |
| Transition costs | (20.833) | 0.000 | 0.000 | (20.833) |
| Job Creation | (67.640) | 30.165 | 6.309 | (31.167) |
| Small Business Survival | (106.195) | 86.841 | 3.258 | (16.096) |
| Investment in area / region | (17.845) | 3.102 | 2.482 | (12.262) |
| Cultural Engagement | (57.686) | 36.379 | 3.587 | (17.720) |
| Crime & Disorder | (19.060) | 4.765 | 2.406 | (11.888) |
| Visitor Economy | (12.421) | 5.539 | 1.158 | (5.723) |
| Homelessness Prevention | (120.069) | 37.942 | 13.825 | (68.302) |
| Sub-total economic disbenefits **(B)** | **(421.749)** | **204.733** | **33.025** | **(183.991)** |
| **Overall economic impact (A+B)** | **(235.052)** | **204.733** | **(0.967)** | **(31.288)** |

| **Category** | **Option B** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic impact category** | **Gross impact (£m)** | **Additionality adjustment (£m)** | **Discount (£m)** | **NPV of impact (£m)** |
| **Economic benefits** | | | | |
| Ongoing savings | 120.667 | 0.000 | (22.459) | 98.208 |
| Children Social Care | 88.091 | (35.237) | (9.688) | 43.167 |
| Adult Social Care | 106.181 | (42.472) | (11.677) | 52.032 |
| Sub-total economic benefits **(A)** | **314.939** | **(77.709)** | **(43.823)** | **193.407** |
| **Economic disbenefits** | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Transition costs | (26.913) | 0.000 | 0.000 | (26.913) |
| Job Creation | (33.820) | 15.082 | 3.154 | (15.583) |
| Small Business Survival | (53.097) | 43.420 | 1.629 | (8.048) |
| Investment in area / region | (8.923) | 1.551 | 1.241 | (6.131) |
| Cultural Engagement | (28.843) | 18.190 | 1.793 | (8.860) |
| Crime & Disorder | (9.530) | 2.382 | 1.203 | (5.944) |
| Visitor Economy | (6.210) | 2.770 | 0.579 | (2.862) |
| Homelessness Prevention | (60.034) | 18.971 | 6.913 | (34.151) |
| Sub-total economic disbenefits **(B)** | **(227.371)** | **102.366** | **16.513** | **(108.492)** |
| | | | | |
| **Overall economic impact (A+B)** | **87.568** | **24.658** | **(27.311)** | **84.915** |

| Category | Option C | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic impact category** | **Gross impact (£m)** | **Additionality adjustment (£m)** | **Discount (£m)** | **NPV of impact (£m)** |
| **Economic benefits** | | | | |
| Ongoing savings | 115.928 | 0.000 | (21.577) | 94.351 |
| Children Social Care | 30.776 | (12.310) | (3.385) | 15.081 |
| Sub-total economic benefits **(A)** | **146.704** | **(12.310)** | **(24.961)** | **109.432** |
| **Economic disbenefits** | | | | |
| One-off costs | (26.913) | 0.000 | 0.000 | (26.913) |
| Adults Social Care | (31.026) | 12.410 | 3.412 | (15.024) |
| Sub-total economic disbenefits **(B)** | **(57.939)** | **12.410** | **3.412** | **(42.117)** |
| **Overall economic impact (A+B)** | **88.765** | **0.100** | **(21.549)** | **67.316** |

Note: Where a category is contained in one option and not in others, then it is assumed performance remains at current (pre-reorganisation) levels; therefore, a neutral or zero impact.

An overall summary is presented as table 3, combining the "Ongoing savings" and "One-off costs" as the Net Savings and combining all the other factors as the Other Economic Impact, to split the direct savings to the Council and the wider economic impact to residents.

*Table 3: Overall Economic Impact (NPV)*

| | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Net Savings NPV (£m @ 3.5%) | 131.870 | 71.295 | 67.438 |
| Other Economic Impact NPV (£m @ 3.5%) | (163.158) | 13.620 | (0.122) |
| **Overall Economic impact NPV (£m at 3.5%)** | **(31.288)** | **84.915** | **67.316** |

This would suggest that while the single unitary authority option has the greatest direct financial savings to the councils, when combined with the wider economic impact on the region, then Option B, the East/West split provides the best overall economic impact.

**Non-Quantified Benefits / Opportunities**

Not all benefits are quantifiable; some may lack baseline information, others (such as satisfaction ratings) may be very difficult to translate into an economic impact. Table 4 sets out other identified opportunities or benefits and which model(s) most benefit.

*Table 4: Summary of Non-Quantifiable Benefits*

| Area | Description | Option(s) benefitting |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strategic Authority changes | Options including a split of councils would facilitate governance arrangements for joining different combined authorities, which in turn could support job creation, green travel and education opportunities | B & C |
| Local democracy | Decisions taken at a more local level may lead to more engagement in local government, leading to increase voter turnout and satisfaction with performance | C |
| Engagement for other public bodies | With a single council, other public bodies (such as NHS and police) will have to engage and consult with fewer bodies and would be less likely to get contradicting responses | A |
| Health via Sport | Research based upon previous rounds of local government reorganisation shows an inverse relationship between size of authorities and sport and leisure performance metrics[7] | B & C |

**Conclusion** - Whilst a single local authority may provide the greatest degree of direct savings, there many wider economic disbenefits of such an approach. Recent research carried out by Peopletoo on behalf of the District Councils Network shows a diseconomy of scale for both Adult and Children Social Care residential placements, with higher unit costs incurred by councils with greater than 500,000 population. Furthermore, the greater number of public sector jobs at risk and the risk of lack of focus upon major urban areas creates further risks to job retention, social and cultural identity and tourism.

Carrying out an overall economic impact assessment, in line with Government best practice in major projects would suggest that the wider economic impacts more than offset this bigger direct financial saving and that the greatest overall economic impact is Option B, the East/West model, followed by Option C, with the single county unitary being the least beneficial overall to the area.

[7] "Unitary Local Government", House of Commons Library, March 2025 (page 31) "a linear negative scale effect for road maintenance and sport participation" https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9056/CBP-9056.pdf

# 9. Listening to Gloucestershire

## Engagement to Discover and Improve

Our engagement approach has been shaped by the guidance within the invitation to submit proposals: it's been rooted in genuine discovery and learning, not campaigning for any particular outcome. This focus on open engagement has been enabled by:

- **Unified, option-neutral engagement:** We agreed that the engagement around all three unitary options would be developed collectively, without using the activity to campaign or advocate for preferences
- **Strong political leadership:** Gloucestershire's Leaders set the tone – driving a shared engagement plan across councils
- **Clear accountability:** A lead Chief Executive was appointed to oversee all communications and engagement activity
- **Joint working:** Every council played an active role through a joint communications and engagement workstream
- **Prioritised investment:** We prioritised MHCLG LGR funding to support joint engagement activities.

These early actions, underpinned by a clear sense of purpose, enabled us to deliver a wide range of non-partisan engagement activities – each designed to listen, learn, and feed real insights back into the development of our proposals.

## Our key engagement activity

Our joint engagement activity from March 2025 – September 2025 is summarised in the table below:

| Engagement type | Key activities |
|---|---|
| **Public** | • Option-neutral Future Gloucestershire microsite[8] presenting clear, factual information<br>• Online survey, designed to discover values, concerns and ambitions of local people (3,112 completed surveys, including 1,480 open-text responses)<br>• In-person community events, enabling over 500 one-to-one conversations (12 events in total, two in each district, plus two additional events in and around Gloucester)<br>• Two county-wide public webinars<br>• Information leaflets and display banners (used principally at council offices and community events)<br>• Regular social media information updates and paid advertising for wider promotion of the survey. |
| **Place** | • Engagement webinar for VCFSE (hosted by Gloucestershire VCS Alliance) with over 100 attendees<br>• Engagement webinar for Town and Parish Councils hosted by GAPTC with over 100 attendees |

[8] https://futuregloucestershire.org.uk

| Engagement type | Key activities |
|---|---|
| | • Additional initial awareness-raising meeting on the Greater Gloucester proposal for potentially affected neighbouring Parish Councils<br>• Representation on Place Model workstream from NHS (ICB and providers), GAPTC, OPCC, SLCC, and VCS Alliance. |
| **Staff** | • Regular LGR staff communications and briefings<br>• Senior officers from principal councils represented on all LGR workstreams, with different Chief Executives acting to lead and chair<br>• Specialist service officers engaged in structured, cross-council aggregation and disaggregation workshops. |
| **Council members** | • Interactive all-member webinars<br>• FAQs and other written briefings<br>• Bespoke briefing and democratic processes delivered by individual councils. |
| **MPs**[9] | • Gloucestershire County Council Leader and Chief Executive monthly engagement with Gloucestershire MPs<br>• Other district ad hoc engagement with local MPs |
| **Other** | • In addition to Place (above), workstreams conducted bespoke engagement as relevant. For example, the Vision and Ambition workstream conducted a range of briefings with senior district leaders to develop an understanding of place-based perspectives. |

The online survey and in-person community events were co-designed and facilitated by an external specialist engagement organisation, *Cratus*. Their independent report can be found in Appendix E.

### Our learning and insights

Our learning themes synthesise the responses from a variety of methods and types used. As far as possible, we have avoided significant focus in this proposal on feedback on the relative merits of structural options, since the primary aim of engagement was to discover common concerns and ambitions of local people and organisations. However, some of this data, from the public survey and stakeholder interviews is shown for transparency. It should not be read as representative data on the preferences of the public and partners.

Three big themes have emerged:

1. Belonging in Gloucestershire
2. Service improvement
3. Vulnerable people and communities

[9] At a meeting of all Principal Authority Leaders on 09/10/2025 it was agreed that Gloucestershire Councils would collectively engage with all local MPs to understand their preferences and comments in the light of the published proposals. This process will be conducted to develop an objective understanding of MP views to inform both Gloucestershire Councils and Ministers.

### Theme 1: Belonging in Gloucestershire

Our engagement revealed something powerful: people in Gloucestershire feel a strong sense of belonging - whether that's to a village, an estate, a district, or the county as a whole. Local identity runs deep, and it's clear that "home" means different things to different people.

This insight is crucial. It shows that the new council must enable participation and engagement at every level - recognising and supporting the many overlapping communities that make Gloucestershire unique.

| **Key actions to shape our proposals: Belonging in Gloucestershire (Theme 1)** | |
|---|---|
| **Place Model** | Proposals for our locality arrangements have avoided prematurely drawing 'lines on maps'. We will deliver a carefully designed engagement and consultation process to develop the spatial scale, competency, and differentiation (by Place) of our Neighbourhood Partnerships. This commitment is reflected in our implementation roadmap. |
| **Future Operating Model (FOM)** | The differentiation of Gloucestershire's places is recognised in both the design principles and key features of the Future Operating Model. We have reflected place and identity strongly in engagement, commissioning, and service delivery features. |

### Theme 2: Service Improvement and Efficiency

Our survey captured a wealth of feedback on council services. Most areas scored well, with the majority of residents rating services as 'good' or 'very good'. However, roads, pavements, and streetlights stood out as clear concerns.

When asked what should shape future council services, 'community' - meaning representation, voice, and engagement - was the top priority. 'Transport' (including public transport, road maintenance, and connectivity) also featured strongly.

Stakeholder interviews reinforced this theme, highlighting the need for simpler, more efficient services and better integration with partners.

The message is clear: while there are specific areas to address, any improvement must be rooted in local context and connectivity - making sure services work for people and places across Gloucestershire.

| Key actions to shape our proposals: Service Improvement and Efficiency (Theme 2) | |
|---|---|
| **Vision and Ambition** | Our vision and ambition includes a specific focus on the use of data to transform transport and wider public services. The feedback we have received on public transport in particular has assisted with shaping this ambition.<br>Our vision and ambition also reflects the excitement and energy in the Gloucestershire business community to drive growth. We pay particular attention to the economic opportunities in Gloucestershire, and the desire to use LGR to accelerate our trajectory of breakthrough innovation in economic clusters, such as cyber, clean energy, and agri-tech. |
| **Future Operating Model (FOM)** | Our strategic enablement feature within the FOM is specifically designed to create capacity and capability to drive improvement and transformation. |
| **Place and FOM** | Our neighbourhood model is linked to service delivery within the FOM, with a proposed specification to tailor on a locality basis, addressing some of the feedback about different satisfaction and experience in different parts of Gloucestershire. |
| **Financial Case** | Our financial case shows our desire not simply to reorganise, but to transform. We will reinvest structural and transformation savings into services that people want to see improve. The councils will feel local and responsive but be powered by scale and efficiency for the benefit of everyone. |

### Theme 3: Vulnerable people and communities

A key theme from our engagement with partners was the opportunity for the new council to do more for Gloucestershire's most vulnerable people and communities.

- **Community development and local engagement must be front and centre.**
- **There's real appetite for public sector reform.** From the emerging Neighbourhood Health Service to new powers for neighbourhood working, they see LGR as a chance to join up regeneration, health, and community development - especially where VCFSE organisations are already leading the way.
- **Tackling deep-rooted inequalities is essential.** We know there are sharp divides between urban and rural areas, and that data and lived experience is important to drive local action and smarter service design. This is a particular strength of the Gloucester/Gloucestershire option, where the creation of distinct unitary councils to tackle the significantly different socio-economic challenges faced in Gloucester to those experienced in most of the rest of the county.

Respondents have made it clear that LGR offers a huge opportunity to address these challenges and opportunities.

| Key actions to shape our proposals: Vulnerable people and communities (Theme 3) | |
|---|---|
| **Vision and Ambition** | Our vision makes it clear that we want to use LGR to spark a transformation in community empowerment. We can be closer to communities and people than before, e.g. utilising better and more widely the 'hub' approach to delivering preventive, community-led activity, as well as more tailored services for vulnerable people, families, and communities.<br>We are also clear in our vision that we will more consciously link with partners on wellbeing, housing, climate action, and nature recovery – feedback is showing these are connected issues for local people. |
| **Data, Digital and Technology (DDaT)** | Our proposals are clear there are major opportunities to use DDaT to drive better environments, interventions, and services for vulnerable people. We have set out a bold ambition to develop joined-up predictive analytics platforms across adult and children's services, education, housing, and health. |
| **Place** | Our place research has revealed a wealth of current good practice in evidenced-based community development. We have hard-wired into our neighbourhood proposals a focus on community development, supported by data insight, the skills of our public health team, and dedicated staff and other resources. |

### Feedback from engagement activity with Town and Parish Councils on the Greater Gloucester model

Gloucester City Council co-designed and co-facilitated with GAPTC an initial engagement event for the twenty or so town and parish councils within and surrounding the city of Gloucester (which along with Cheltenham, is largely unparished) and who would be most affected by the proposed boundary modifications that are being sought through this proposal. About three-quarters of the town/parish councils invited attended the event.

The event was highly interactive, with four key topics or themes that the Parish and Town Councils discussed:

1. Identity
   a. What do think drives a community's sense of place?
   b. What area, other than the parish, do you/your residents most strongly identify with?
   c. To what extent do you/your residents see themselves as part of Gloucester?
   d. What specifically informs the answers to (b) and (c)?
   e. Do you think you share a greater sense of place with neighbouring parishes?
2. Service Delivery
   a. Which council services are currently the ones that interest you and your residents the most?
   b. What services do you currently deliver and, thinking about the opportunities Local Government Reform may present, what services might you like to deliver in the future?
   c. What principles should underpin effective service delivery in a new unitary council structure and how can they be realised?
   d. If the Greater Gloucester model is not selected, what are your views on neighbourhood level service delivery within a larger unitary structure? Is there a place for a Gloucester Parish Council or Councils to deliver localised services on behalf of neighbouring parishes?
3. Community Engagement
   a. What do you think are the biggest challenges around Councils engaging with our communities today and how can we overcome them?
   b. What would meaningful community engagement look like in a unitary council model?

| | |
|---|---|
| | c. How should we engage with you and your residents about Local Government Reform and the 'Greater Gloucester' unitary authority concept?<br>d. Are there any specific local groups, stakeholders or organisations we should be directly targeting?<br>e. How will we know if we have effectively engaged with residents? |
| 4. Governance | a. What opportunities and what concerns should be at the forefront of designing new governance structures?<br>b. How do you envisage parish councils successfully influencing decisions in a new unitary council structure?<br>c. Noting that parishes vary in size, do you have any preliminary thoughts about if/how your parish could be grouped with neighbouring areas when the ward boundaries and number of councillors for a unitary is decided?<br>d. What involvement would you like in the further development of the Greater Gloucester option? |

As can be expected, there was a wide spectrum of opinion expressed across these themes.

Some key messages were as follows:

- Many different factors influence people's sense of identity: natural features (e.g. River Severn, Cotswold escarpment), man-made features (e.g. roads), urban vs rural, where they shop or use leisure facilities, schools and GP surgeries, places of employment, even public transport routes.
- Senses of identity can change over time and with different population cohorts (e.g. youth).
- Many felt a strong identification with Gloucester, for the above reasons. Most of their residents shop in Gloucester and use facilities there. Some felt a stronger cultural identification with Forest of Dean, even though they were only 4 miles from Gloucester and 20 miles from Coleford. Similarly with Stroud. Some felt a shared sense of identity between Gloucester and Cheltenham.
- Planning and housing growth were key matters of importance for them and their residents. Being part of a Greater Gloucester area might allow them to have greater involvement in some planning decisions that affect them, but over which they currently have no control as they occur within the city boundaries.
- Parishes raised concerns about the impact from LGR on local plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs). The potential dilution of parish influence in planning was a key concern, particularly where no NDP is in place.
- Harmonisation of council tax rates was also raised as a matter of importance. Other service priorities mentioned were:
    - Education
    - Waste and recycling
    - Roads and verges
    - Flood management
- There was some support for parishing for Gloucester, to be preceded by an engaging Community Governance Review. But also acknowledgement this might only make sense if Greater Gloucester was not the chosen option for reorganisation.
- LGR provides an opportunity to engender trust across areas of Gloucestershire which are demographically and geographically different, and also to improve communication and relationships between authorities.

- Possible role for parish councils in taking on some powers and functions, providing there is sufficient funding and resource. There is already a wide disparity in infrastructure, assets and service provision e.g. one parish council runs eight parks whilst others have no parks at all.
- Participants noted the importance of first engaging with their own communities to determine local service needs. This would enable parish councils to better assess what they can realistically deliver under a devolved model.
- Several councils requested:
    - A clear, accessible menu or list of potential services that parish councils might take on, from which they could select based on local capacity and interest.
    - An accessible walk-in office for the new authority, providing direct public access to raise service delivery concerns.
- Whichever LGR option is chosen, local knowledge is essential for both Members and Officers.
- Concerns about finding sufficient volunteers to stand as Councillors if Gloucester became parished.
- Concerns about Unitary Councillor-Elector ratios being too high (i.e. representing too many people) with new larger unitary councils – democratic deficit and loss of representation: the gap between Parishes and the next tier of government above will be too large and communications will be poor.
- Important that outlying rural areas don't miss out on investment, and this doesn't all go on urban areas.
- High levels of enthusiasm for ongoing substantive consultation and engagement throughout LGR process, though some still grappling with the implications of LGR and not yet ready to engage more fully.
- Support for the proposal to have a committee of parish councils for the Greater Gloucester unitary council.

This feedback has been used to shape several aspects of this proposal, and a programme of sensitive engagement will continue through the transition phase to new unitary councils.

# 10. Implementation Roadmap

We believe that establishing these two Unitary Councils for Gloucestershire – Greater Gloucester and Gloucestershire Councils - constitutes the best option for our residents, communities, businesses and partners.

Implementing the proposal in a straightforward way with carefully considered governance arrangements as well as the programme planning required to deliver a successful transition, will enable the strength of the proposal to be realised by communities with minimal disruption.

We recognise the new councils will need to take their own decisions about the pace and scale of change, the plans set out here provide a clear indication of our commitment to be safe and legal from day one, to accelerate implementation and secure the maximum benefits possible during the transition phase.

## Safe and legal services from day one

Our most important priority for reorganisation is that the services from the new councils are “safe and legal” from day one. We will not allow the disaggregation of county council services to impact on anyone receiving these services and as we transition to the new councils, we will ensure that everyone currently receiving support from services continues to do so and will not fall through any gaps during this period of change. We say more on how we will do this below.

## a. The Roadmap to Vesting Day

There are four key phases in the roadmap running through to vesting day in 2028. These phases are:

**Phase 1:** Business case and mobilisation
**Phase 2:** Preparation for implementation
**Phase 3:** Shadow authorities
**Phase 4:** Launch and transformation

The diagram below demonstrates the timings of key events and the overall road map through to vesting day.

## Implementation Plan & Workstreams

Delivering a new model of local government for Gloucestershire will require careful planning, collaboration and leadership.

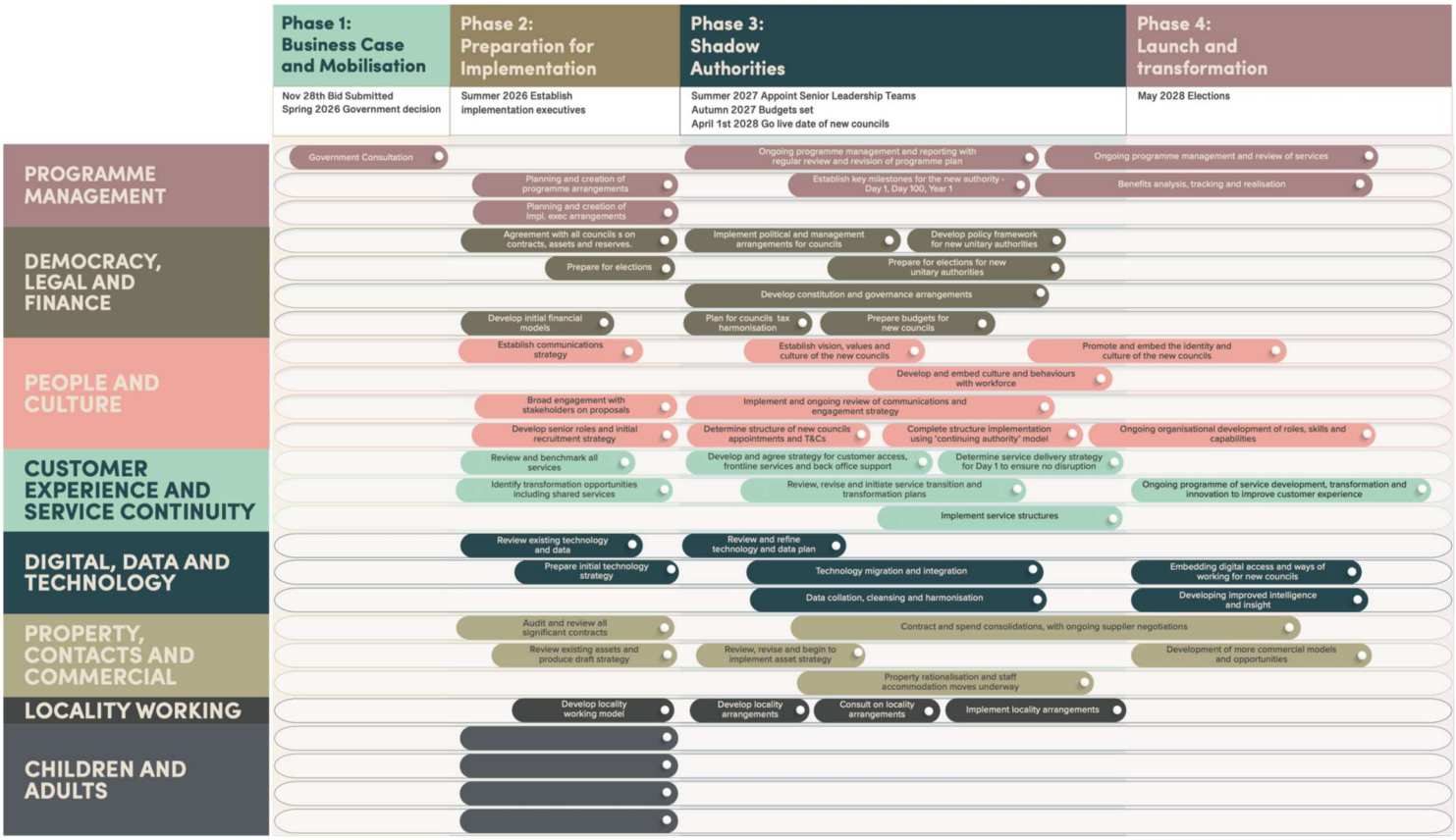
The implementation plan below sets out how the two new unitary councils would be established by Vesting Day in April 2028. Each phase is designed to ensure continuity, minimise disruption and deliver a smooth and successful transition to the new councils.

To oversee and drive the successful delivery of this change, we propose the creation of two dedicated Programme Management Office (PMO) and multi-disciplinary change teams (for each new authority), jointly supported by all current Gloucestershire councils.

A collaborative programme will ensure consistent oversight, transparent governance and the most efficient use of resources. Where possible, we will identify activity within current councils that can be paused or re-scoped, to free up capacity for implementation. It is recognised that additional capacity may be required at specific stages, depending on complexity and resource availability.

## Key Features:

- PMO structure: A core team including a Programme Director, Programme Managers, Business Analysts, PMO specialists and Change Managers will coordinate delivery for a minimum of two years.




- Subject Matter Experts (SMEs): Seconded or recruited as needed to support planning and transition across specific workstreams - such as finance, HR, ICT, legal and service design.

- Flexible capacity: While the core programme will rely primarily on internal resources, future councils may choose to invest in additional specialist support to strengthen delivery.

- Workstream alignment: Cross-cutting workstreams will support implementation, initially led by current councils (Phases 1 and 2) and later transferring into and between the shadow authorities (Phase 3 onwards).

The following table shows the key workstreams for the programme:

| | |
|---|---|
| Programme Management | Democracy, Legal and Finance |
| People and Culture | Children's and Adults |

| | |
|---|---|
| Customer Experience and Service Continuity | Digital, Data and Technology |
| Property, Contracts and Commercial | Locality Working |

## Phase 1: Business Case & Mobilisation

This phase will see the submission of this proposal to government by the end of November 2025.

Following submission, government is expected to consult on this and any alternative proposals over spring/summer 2026. During this period, we will continue to engage proactively with local residents, partners and stakeholders to build understanding and support.

At the same time, we will:

- Establish the Local Government Reorganisation Programme Management Office (PMO) and programme structure
- Begin technical information gathering (budgets, staffing, contracts, IT systems)
- Mobilise internal teams and prepare governance, communications and early engagement planning

We will engage with stakeholders on an ongoing basis in this phase, to raise awareness of the coming change and to build cooperation and consensus between key stakeholders across central and local government.

This phase lays the groundwork for effective delivery and early collaboration across all councils involved.

## Phase 2 - Preparation for Implementation

Once government confirms the new structure for Gloucestershire - expected by Summer 2026 - this phase will begin the detailed preparation for delivering two new unitary councils.

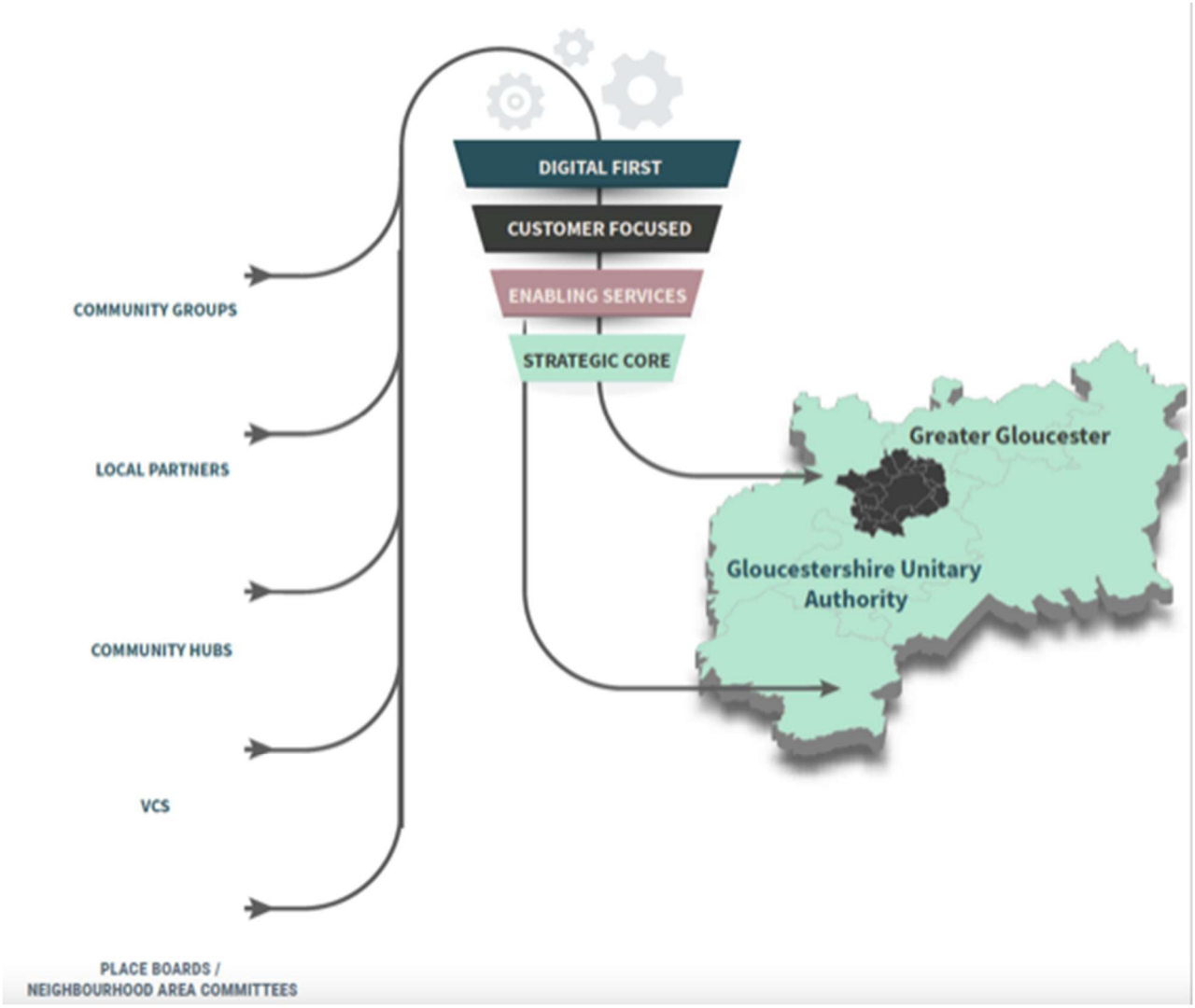
A new Gloucestershire Leaders' Implementation Oversight Group will be established to guide this work, ensuring political balance and representation from all seven existing councils. Cross-council coordination will be key during this stage, with a clear focus on delivery, readiness and continuity.

Work will begin on designing the new authorities and putting in place the governance, resources and infrastructure needed for a smooth and successful transition.

Key activities in this phase include:

- Establishing formal governance arrangements and programme management structures that will continue into the next phase and underpin the work of shadow authorities
- Developing a detailed implementation programme, mapping out delivery milestones and interdependencies

- Confirming future service requirements and target operating models, including both disaggregation of county services and aggregation of district-level functions
- Designing leadership, team structures and operating models, aligned to the proposed geography and identity of the new councils
- Planning for transition of key services, including those that need to be separated (e.g. social care, highways) and those brought together across current boundaries
- Aligning existing change activity across the current authorities to avoid duplication and ensure effort is focused on future delivery
- Reviewing baseline IT architecture, with early preparation for systems migration, including access to shared systems, email and building Wi-Fi for day one readiness
- Baselining property portfolios and initiating asset planning for the new councils
- Agreeing an external communications strategy, with clarity on engagement for residents, staff and partners
- Launching staff and trade union communications, including early workforce planning and shared HR principles
- Agreeing high-level HR transition plans, focused on continuity, fairness and retaining critical skills
- This phase will ensure all councils are aligned in their efforts, that momentum is maintained following government's decision and that the foundations are laid for a confident transition into the shadow authority period




## Phase 3 - Shadow Authorities

The creation of shadow authorities will mark a key milestone in the journey to establishing two new unitary councils for Gloucestershire.

These shadow authorities will be formed around one year prior to Vesting Day in April 2028. Their purpose is to ensure continuity, clarity and confidence in the transition - both for those working within councils and for the residents and partners we serve.

Elections to the shadow councils will be held, supported by appointed officers. Together, they will oversee the complex planning and delivery required to launch the new authorities successfully.

During this phase, the shadow authorities will take responsibility for:

- Detailed integration planning and service transition, including the disaggregation of county services and aggregation of district and borough responsibilities, as well as integration of any existing shared or common services across current councils

- Organisation and operating model design, refining and finalising structures developed during Phase 2 to ensure the new councils are fit for purpose from day one

- Recruitment of senior leadership teams, including the appointment of Chief Executives, Statutory Officers and Directors to lead each of the new councils

- Staff transition and workforce planning, ensuring that the right people are in the right roles, while maintaining continuity of service and embedding the culture and values of the new organisations. TUPE processes will be carefully managed to support a skilled and motivated workforce

- Staff and trade union communications and engagement, including ongoing dialogue with employees throughout the transition to support morale, clarity and retention

- Budget setting for the new authorities, including development of consolidated financial plans and determining approaches to issues such as council tax harmonisation and business rates collection

- Look across all back-office support functions to ensure smooth continuation of employment arrangements, pensions and pay

- Data management and IT transition, including the safe migration of systems and records to ensure operational readiness and a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) for each new Council from day one

- Stakeholder engagement, reinforcing current partnerships and establishing new ones where needed to support strategic delivery and local impact. This includes engagement with NHS partners, police and emergency services, business groups and the voluntary sector

This phase is crucial for operational confidence, democratic continuity and service assurance. It is where the plans made earlier in the programme begin to take practical shape - setting the stage for the formal launch of the new councils and their future success.

## Phase 4 - Launch of the New Councils

At the point that new authorities formally come into existence on vesting day in April 2028, greater focus can be placed on the long-term strategy for the future authorities.

In April 2028, the new unitary authorities will formally come into existence. Vesting Day will mark the point at which the two new councils assume full responsibility for delivering all local government services in their areas. Optimisation of aggregated services - particularly where integration creates the opportunity to enhance consistency and efficiency.

From this point forward, the focus will shift from transition to transformation. Each new council will shape and deliver its own long-term vision - built around local priorities, empowered communities and better outcomes for residents.

To do this, each unitary authority will establish a dedicated transformation programme, responsible for delivering the agreed target operating model and embedding new ways of working.

Key areas of focus are likely to include:

- **Resident contact** - delivering modern, responsive and accessible services through digital channels, local hubs and joined-up customer experience models
- **Service transformation** - reshaping service delivery models to be more efficient, effective and tailored to local needs
- **Back office and enabling services** - streamlined to deliver better value and smarter support for frontline delivery
- **IT and data strategies** - supporting secure integration, improved automation and evidence-based decision-making
- **People, organisational development and culture** - fostering a strong public service ethos and shared organisational identity, focused on delivering for residents
- **Estates and assets** - reviewed and optimised to ensure buildings and infrastructure reflect the new councils' structures, workforce and accessibility goals
- **Optimisation of aggregated services** - particularly where integration creates the opportunity to enhance consistency and efficiency
- **Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems** - including implementation of new platforms or the further consolidation of existing systems to ensure seamless operations
- **Detailed review of existing contracts and third-party spend** - with a focus on consolidation, rationalisation and achieving best value through economies of scale
- **Consolidation and alignment of fees and charges** - reviewed to ensure a fair, transparent and sustainable approach across the new councils
- **Review and harmonisation of pay, terms and conditions** - ensuring fairness, equity and support for staff retention
- **Ongoing change management and communications** - delivered as a dedicated workstream, with continued engagement of staff, partners and residents throughout the transformation process

This phase is when vision becomes reality: two strong, forward-looking councils are now functioning that are simpler, more strategic and better connected to the people and places they serve.

## Implementation Costs

Delivering change at this scale requires investment - not only in systems and infrastructure, but also in people, partnerships and preparation.

Our proposed implementation model is deliberately pragmatic and collaborative. It assumes that most of the delivery work will be led by councils themselves.

We will build a multi-disciplinary change team that includes representatives from all councils and is empowered to drive delivery efficiently and effectively. This collaborative approach keeps costs proportionate, reduces duplication and ensures that expertise from across the system is embedded from the outset.

| Category | (£m) |
|---|---|
| Redundancy Costs (A) | 6.813 |
| | |
| Rebranding / Comms | 0.500 |
| Public consultation | 0.400 |
| Transition support / remodelling costs | 5.000 |
| Programme Management | 2.000 |
| Legal costs (contract novation, new constitutions) | 1.250 |
| ICT costs | 4.000 |
| Contingency | 4.000 |
| Shadow operations | 1.000 |
| Additional agency year 1 | 0.750 |
| HR Support for transition / TUPE etc | 1.200 |
| Sub-Total Non-Redundancy Costs (B) | 20.100 |
| | |
| Total One-off Costs (A+B) | 26.913 |

Our modelling includes all potential costs associated with the transition to two new unitary councils - from systems and branding to staff time and technical delivery. This includes:

- Creating and launching the two new councils
- Closing down legacy council structures
- Establishing branding and communications infrastructure
- IT systems migration and licensing
- Programme governance and delivery

- HR and legal transition processes

Estimates are based on a prudent approach. We have modelled both baseline and stretch scenarios and a 20% contingency has been included (excluding redundancy and early retirement). Staffing-related costs are benchmarked against current average redundancy costs in Gloucestershire County Council and are directly linked to workforce savings in the model.

This investment will enable a strong and stable transition, while unlocking long-term savings and better services for every community in Gloucestershire.

## b. Managing Delivery

The disaggregation of county-level services - and the consolidation of district and borough functions - is one of the most complex and critical aspects of local government reform.

Our approach is rooted in service quality, resident outcomes and local delivery. We will work closely with service teams to ensure that change is owned by those best placed to lead it - supported by robust governance and clear communication at every stage.

Within this, there is some important nuance - especially when it comes to highly specialist services. For example, Emergency Duty services and Approved Mental Health Professionals in Adult Social Care may require transitional or alternative delivery arrangements to ensure safe, legal and effective service on Day One.

Similarly, the disaggregation of the county's contact centres for social care and learners will require careful planning and coordination.

These teams are often the first point of contact for Gloucestershire's most vulnerable residents and play a critical safeguarding role. Until sufficient capacity is built up in both new authorities, there is a risk of uneven demand distribution, which could lead to service backlogs or safeguarding concerns if not proactively mitigated.

Three enablers of success will underpin this work:

1. Service-led transition: Teams with day-to-day knowledge will lead the design, planning and change implementation, supported by the wider LGR Programme Team, ensuring continuity and clarity. This ensures the right skills and capabilities are in place while recognising that those with the most knowledge and experience are best placed to shape the future operating model

2. Strong governance and oversight: Cross-council boards will provide assurance, challenge and strategic direction, supported by expert advice

3. Resident and stakeholder engagement: Our communications will be transparent and proactive, helping residents, partners and frontline teams understand what's changing and why

Key transition activities will include:

- Reviewing the current locality structures and workforce to identify appropriate allocation to future authorities
- Agreeing future organisational design and delivery structures with shadow authorities and delivery partners
- Refining service operating models to reflect new geographies and population needs
- Reviewing policies, systems and processes to ensure consistency and compliance
- Restructuring governance, board memberships and local representation frameworks
- Developing detailed service transition plans to ensure service continuity and quality

## Social Care and Safeguarding

Some services - such as social care, highways and waste - will require special attention due to their complexity and infrastructure requirements.

We recognise the significant potential risks associated with disaggregating Children's and Adults' social care. Transitions will be carefully phased and informed by risk assessments and workforce planning; we remain open to exploring models that mitigate any negative impacts.

While shared service models have been trialled elsewhere, evidence suggests they often increase complexity and reduce accountability. We do not believe this is the right solution for Gloucestershire.

However, for certain highly specialised functions - such as Emergency Duty and Approved Mental Health Professional services - transitional arrangements or federated delivery models may be considered to ensure safety, legality and continuity on Day One.

Single point of access contact centres for vulnerable residents will also need careful management to avoid service backlogs or safeguarding risks. Additional capacity may need to be built into early plans to ensure safe and timely delivery.

To ensure clarity and confidence in delivery, we have set out a high-level implementation plan for Adult Social Care, highlighting the key actions, leadership responsibilities and governance arrangements required through transition.

## Implementation Plan for Adult Social Care:

| **ACTION** | LEAD OFFICER | COMPLETION DATE | GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Recruit Senior Leadership Team (including Director of Public Health) Establish a vision and priority** | Chief Executive and Recruitment Agency - Members Appointment Panel. | Three months from date of approval of new arrangements. | Cabinet and Corporate Management Team. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **objectives** | | | |
| **Appoint Lead Member Adults and Health.** | Political Appointment - Leader of the Council.<br><br>Monitoring Officer. | Within first week of creation of the shadow authority | Cabinet |
| **Establish Key Partnership Boards. Adults Safeguarding Board / Health & Wellbeing Board / Joint Commissioning Board.** | DASS and Senior Leadership Team of Adults Social Care. | First Three months of shadow authority | Adults and Health Leadership team / CMT / Cabinet. |
| **Transition to Single Point of Access (SPA). Confirm arrangements for s42 / Hospital Discharge / ASC client workflow.** | Adult Social Care Leadership Team | Effective first month | Adult Social Care DMT and CMT. |
| **Understand provider / commissioning arrangements. Make decisions on contract provision continuity from go live date.** | Adult Social Care Senior Leadership Team | On-going | ASC Leadership and Cabinet. |
| **Understand the early support and prevention and amend where necessary against need** | DPH and Adult Social Care Senior Leadership Team | On going from shadow authority arrangements | ASC DMT / CMT / HWB & Cabinet. |
| **Establish updated QA and performance data for the new directorate.** | Adult Social Care Senior Leadership Team | Within first three months of shadow authority go live date. | Adult Social Care DMT / CMT / Adults and health Scrutiny / Cabinet |
| **Establish links with key partners - Carers Forum / Care Providers (home care & residential care). VCS Network.** | Adult Social Care Leadership Team | Within first month of shadow authority go live date. | Adult Social Care DMT / Health Committee & Cabinet |
| **Develop the ASC model - Family Network / Community support services / supported living and extra care housing / use of technology & adaptations.** | Adult Social Care Leadership team. | Within first six months of shadow authority go live date. | |
| **Undertake financial assessment of cost of care and benchmark with statistical** | Adult Social Care Senior Leadership team and LGA. | Within first six months of shadow authority arrangements | Adult Social Care DMT / CMT / Adults & Health Committee / Cabinet. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **neighbours and national** | | | |
| **Profile of Workforce** | Adult Social Care Senior Leadership team / PSW & HR Lead. | Within first three months of shadow authority go live date. | Adult Social Care DMT / CMT / Health & Social Care Committee. |
| **Prepare for CQC Inspection and create a Self-Assessment** | Adult Social Care Senior Leadership Team & HoS | Within first six months of shadow authority go live date. | Adult Social Care DMT / CMT / Adults & Health Committee and Cabinet. |

## Implementation Plan for Children's Services:

A similar approach will be taken for Children's Services, where safe transition and continuity of care are paramount. A high-level implementation plan for these services will follow, capturing the actions, leadership roles and governance required to deliver a smooth transfer.

| ACTION | LEAD OFFICER | COMPLETION DATE | GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Recruit Senior Leadership Team** | Chief Executive / Lead Member and Leader of the Council | First three months of creation of shadow authority | CMT / Cabinet |
| **Appoint Lead Member for Children's Services** | Leader of the Council / Cabinet | First three months of creation of shadow authority | Chief Executive / Cabinet |
| **Establish Arrangements for MASH (Multi-agency safeguarding Hub / Front Door)** | Children's Services DMT & Safeguarding Children's Partnership | First three months of creation of shadow authority | CS DMT / CMT / Children's Committee / Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SCP) |
| **Create new partnership Boards - SCP / Youth Justice / SEND / Schools Forum / Secondary and Primary Heads meetings.** | Children's Services DMT / Lead Member for CS | First Three months of shadow arrangements | CS DMT / CMT / CS Committee / Cabinet |
| **Review the profile of the workforce and understand agency rates - develop a social worker recruitment campaign for new authority.** | Children's Services DMT / CMT | First three months of shadow authority being established. | CS DMT / CMT / CS Committee. |
| **Review Budgets - Revenue and HNB of the DSG. Commit to existing savings plans.** | CS DMT / Schools Forum | First three months of shadow authority being created. | CS DMT / DMT / CS Committee. |
| **Review the** | CS DMT | Within first three | CS DMT / CMT / |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **arrangements for in-house provision (children's homes)** | | months of shadow authority being established. | Children's Services DMT. |
| **Develop updated CLA and SEND sufficiency strategies.** | CS DMT | Within first three months of creation of shadow authority. | CS DMT / CMT / Schools Forum / Children's Services Committee. |
| **Review practice methodologies across the LA's and commit to integration of one with an accompanying training and workforce plan.** | Principal Social Worker / CS DMT | Within first three months of creation of new authority | CS DMT / CMT / Children's Services Committee |
| **Review the IT systems and if appropriate plan to integrate into one system.** | CS DMT / Resources IT Lead. | First three months of creation of new shadow authority. (Could be a long term change programme.) | CS DMT / CMT / Children's Services Committee / Cabinet. |
| **Develop performance management and quality assurance arrangements including case audit.** | Principal Social Worker / Corporate performance Lead / CS DMT | First three months of creation of shadow authority | CS DMT / Children's Services Committee / Cabinet. |
| **Develop a self-assessment for service and prepare for ILACS / SEND Area Inspection / Include also the OFSTED Annual Conversation.** | Children's Services DMT | Within first six months of creation of shadow authority being created. | CS DMT / CMT / Children's Services Committee / Cabinet / ICB for SEND Area Self-Assessment. |

## Cultural and Heritage Services

Gloucestershire's history, culture and heritage is a vital part of our identity and community infrastructure. Several cultural services - such as libraries and heritage sites - currently operate on a county-wide footprint or receive shared funding. These services will require bespoke planning and may benefit from lead authority models or continued partnership structures - ensuring that our cultural assets continue to inspire pride, learning and connection across all our communities.

These services rely heavily on infrastructure that is not evenly distributed across the county. For example, we propose that Gloucestershire Archives remains as a single countywide service, regardless of how many unitaries are created. Similarly, countywide registration service (registrars), coroners, and support for the Lord Lieutenancy would also remain countywide. Similarly, waste services depend on assets like community recycling centres, some of which may need to be shared temporarily post-vesting.

For the early implementation period, we will explore fair and transparent models - such as service agreements or 'pay to use' arrangements - to avoid disruption while longer-term options are developed.

The goal is simple: services must remain safe, effective and locally responsive, throughout the transition and into the future.

## Managing Risks & Interdependencies

Change on this scale comes with risks, but also with clear rewards.

We will adopt a formal risk management approach, based on best practice from across local government and aligned to existing frameworks within Gloucestershire councils.

Our risk strategy will:

- Identify and assess risk at corporate, programme and service level
- Put in place clear mitigation strategies and ownership
- Regularly review and report risk through governance structures
- Capture and respond to cross-cutting risks that could impact multiple services or authorities
- Use risk insight to shape delivery timelines and investment decisions

| Workstream | Risk Theme | Description | Impact | Likelihood | Mitigation / Control Measures | Accountable Owner |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Programme Governance & Delivery** | Programme coordination and delivery capacity | Weak governance or unclear accountability could cause timetable slippage and reduce confidence in programme delivery | High | Medium | Establish Programme Board and PMO with clear roles; detailed milestone plan; independent gateway reviews; escalation process for issues and decisions | Programme Director |
| **2. Finance & Benefits Realisation** | Financial pressure and delayed savings | Transition or redundancy costs may exceed forecasts, delaying savings and affecting early budgets | High | Medium | Build contingency into financial model; conduct regular budget and benefits reviews; independent audit assurance; benefits realisation framework integrated into reporting | Section 151 Officer / PMO Lead |
| **3. People & Workforce** | Workforce stability and retention | Uncertainty may lead to staff loss, capability gaps or institutional knowledge loss, weakening service delivery | High | Medium | Early and transparent communication; retention incentives; career pathways in new unitaries; joint HR and trade union engagement forum; clear TUPE plan | HR Director |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4. Systems, Digital & Data** | ICT integration and data migration | System failure or data loss during integration could disrupt services and breach compliance | High | Medium | Develop a comprehensive digital transition plan; dual running of critical systems; robust data governance and testing; external assurance on migration readiness | Chief Information Officer |
| **5. Service Continuity & Design** | Service disruption during transition | Disaggregation or redesign of People and Place services (e.g., social care, housing, waste) may cause disruption to critical care or local services during transition | High | Medium | Create service continuity teams; map statutory services; phased implementation; maintain interim shared services; align with regulatory expectations (e.g., Ofsted, CQC) | Service Transition Leads (People & Place) |
| **6. Legal & Governance** | Statutory approvals and governance design | Delay or amendment to legal orders may disrupt timetable or create uncertainty | Medium | Low | Early engagement with government departments and legal counsel; scenario planning for order timing; interim governance arrangements agreed between partners | Monitoring Officer / Legal Lead |
| **7. Communications & Engagement** | Clarity and stakeholder confidence | Unclear or inconsistent communication could confuse residents, partners, and staff | Medium | Medium | Develop comprehensive communications plan; branded GLFA transition portal; staff FAQs; regular updates to elected members and stakeholders | Communications Lead |
| **8. Partnerships & Devolution Alignment** | Alignment with MCCA and key partners | Lack of coordination with the Mayoral Authority, NHS, PCC or VCSE sector could create duplication or weaken outcomes | Medium | Medium | Establish joint planning forums; shared leadership representation; quarterly alignment reviews; active collaboration in devolution planning | Partnership Lead |

This robust risk strategy will help maintain momentum, avoid duplication and deliver the new councils with confidence and clarity.

# 11. Conclusion

Our plan for Local Government Reorganisation in Gloucestershire represents both a practical and a visionary step forward. By moving from the current two-tier and mixed unitary structure to two new unitary councils - Greater Gloucester and Gloucestershire - we will simplify local government, strengthen accountability and create a system fit for the future.

The new councils will deliver financial sustainability by reducing duplication, achieving efficiencies and reinvesting savings into frontline services. This is essential to address current budget pressures and to ensure long-term resilience. At the same time, the new structure will provide stronger leadership, clear, local accountability and services designed around the lives of our residents.

Change must be managed carefully. A phased transition, guided by strong governance and robust engagement with staff, partners and communities, will ensure continuity of services and a safe handover into the new arrangements.

This reorganisation is also about unlocking potential. With empowered councils working alongside the Strategic Mayoral Authority, Gloucestershire will be positioned to secure new investment, attract good jobs and lead in areas such as green technology, food security and healthy ageing.

Our ambition is clear: to create a fairer, greener and more prosperous Gloucestershire for all - rooted in our proud identity as a “place of places,” and driven by the needs and hopes of the people who live and work here.

# Appendices

# Appendix A | Submission (unmodified): Gloucester City/Gloucestershire County Proposal

## Introduction

**In response to the invitation made by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on the 5 February 2025, Gloucester City Council (GCC) is submitting the following proposal under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.**

GCC believes that the solution that will deliver a long term sustainable solution for Local Government in Gloucestershire, delivering better outcomes for residents and business and best value for money for the tax-payer, is built on the heritage of an urban, growth focused Gloucester City and largely rural Gloucestershire County area.

The model we have developed will enable all parts of Gloucestershire to achieve their potential.

The Gloucester City authority will foster economic growth. It will be able to focus on the issues that matter to its unique population: higher social needs, homelessness and improving children's services, along with protecting its heritage.

The Gloucestershire County authority will represent its very different demographic and need: sustaining scale, stability and rural heritage, whilst also focusing on the challenges of an ageing rural and market-town populations. This council will have capacity to manage growth in market towns, secure rural transport and sustain prevention in adult care.

Our vision is that these two authorities, with unique focus and identities that will serve their communities, will build on the effective partnership working that has taken place across Gloucestershire over the past 15 years. Our model offers the opportunity to strengthen those partnerships, developing a system of local government for the area that optimises value for money and delivers the best outcomes for residents and businesses.

Our proposal provides the basis for: -

1. **Improving outcomes for residents:** by addressing imbalance in demand for services - through early intervention, local place-based delivery and simpler access to services

2. **Reforming failing services:** enabling each authority to focus on the needs of their population, across the diversity and younger population of Gloucester City, and the older and rurality of Gloucestershire County.

3. **Unlocking growth:** giving Gloucester the tools of a unitary council to match the performance of peer cities while Gloucestershire focuses on delivering prosperity across towns, villages, and the rural

economy

4. **Creating financial sustainability**: simplifying governance, reducing duplication will unlock operational savings; while prevention-first delivery will improve outcomes in children's and adults' services bringing long-term savings.

5. **Preserving historic identity:** strengthening Gloucester's heritage as an historic cathedral city, and Gloucestershire protecting the internationally recognised heritage of the Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, and wider county.

**A vision for change -**

Our submission is built from our fundamental belief and understanding that:

1. Gloucestershire is not a single area and has vastly different opportunities and challenges between the only city – Gloucester - and the largely rural rest of the county. These differences will not be best served through a single and remote Council.

2. Growth across Gloucestershire will come through a thriving City of Gloucester which is the economic driving force for Gloucestershire. Unitary status for Gloucester will unlock its significant potential.

3. Building on the multiple unique characteristics of Gloucestershire will create growth and the best future for residents. The characteristics and heritage are diverse – an historic cathedral city, the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean. This diversity is best served with the focus that two Unitary Councils will bring: one for Gloucester and one for the rest of Gloucestershire.

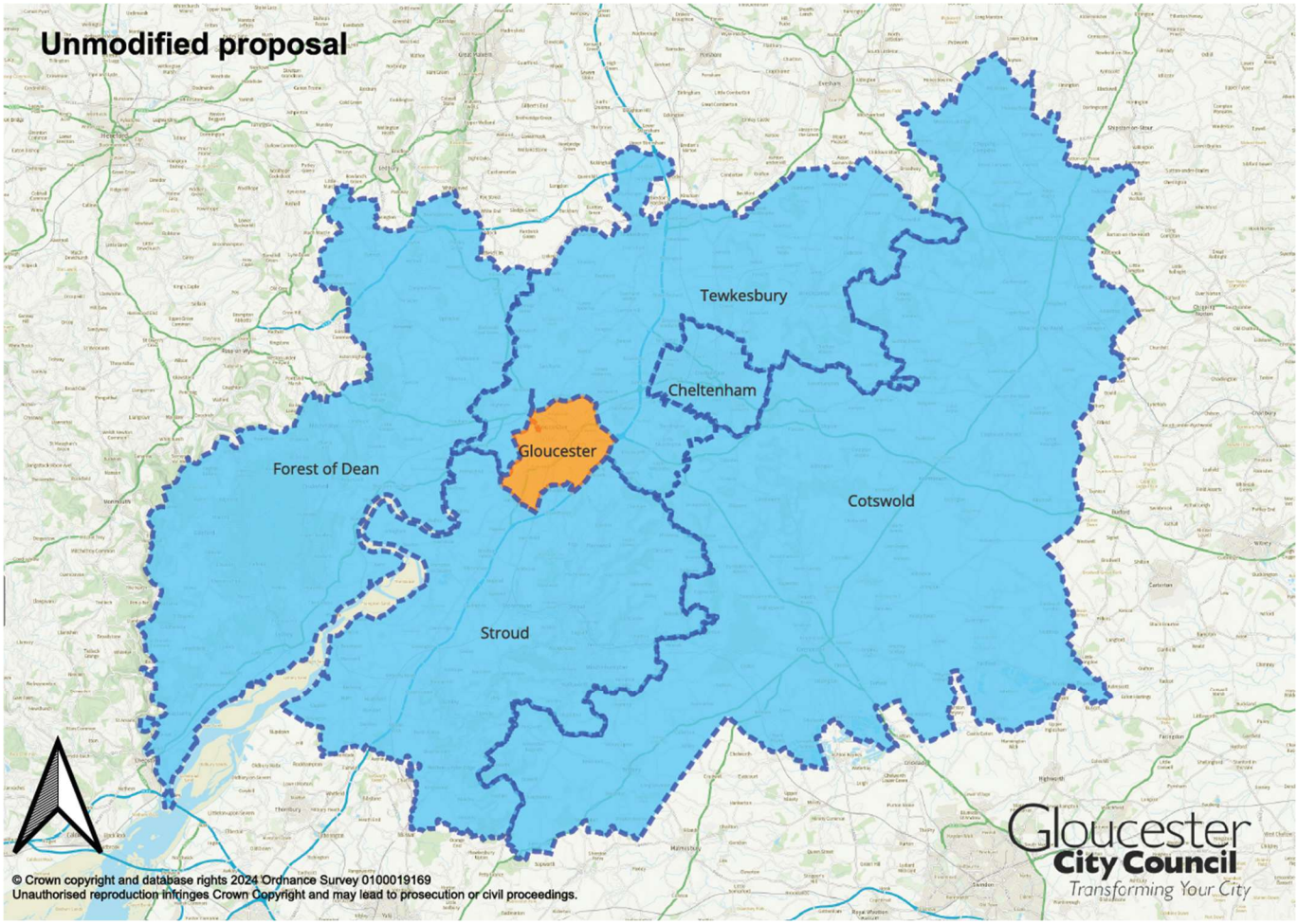
4. Outcomes for residents need to be improved to tackle failing services. This reform is most effectively delivered at a local level, with services tailored to neighbourhood need and focused on partnership, early intervention and prevention.

5. Devolution is best supported by multiple strong unitary Councils aligned to distinct local economic geographies. A single county unitary council won't match the size of existing neighbouring unitary councils leading to unbalanced democracy in the region.

## Proposal

We formally submit the following 'Type B' submission (as set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) for two new Gloucestershire Unitary Councils.

*Figure 1. Unmodified Unitary Map – using district boundaries as the building blocks*




As set out in the diagram above, our proposal, based on unmodified local government district boundaries, is for two new unitary Councils designed around distinct social, economic and place geographies covering:

| New Unitary | Comprised of (full Districts) | Population (2021) | Population Projection (2040) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gloucester City | • Gloucester City Council | • 132,500 | • 143,300 |
| Gloucestershire Unitary Council | • Stroud District Council<br>• Cotswolds District Council<br>• Tewkesbury District Council<br>• Forest of Dean District Council<br>• Cheltenham Borough Council | • 121,104<br>• 91,500<br>• 98,900<br>• 89,100<br>• 120,300 | • 143,500<br>• 106,300<br>• 120,000<br>• 97,000<br>• 128,100 |

## Policy Alignment

We believe our approach represents a strong fit against all criteria set out in the invitation for LGR submissions:

| Criteria 1: Establishing of a single tier of local government for the whole area concerned | ✓ |
|---|---|

The two-unitary model creates a single tier of local government across Gloucestershire. The proposed structure of local government is based on geographies that align with economic areas and embraces the opportunity to stimulate both urban and rural growth in the County.

There are huge areas of economic and housing growth potential in the Gloucestershire Unitary including a step change in housing delivery to achieve the 3000 homes per year that the County needs and embracing area-specific opportunities such as the Golden Valley in Cheltenham and the Ashchurch garden town.

Gloucester City requires its own solution: as one of the key cities in the South West Region, it has the potential to achieve significant housing growth, with the goal of increasing housing delivery by over 50%, while unlocking the economic potential of the City.

The proposed model provides both new authorities with the tools and focus required to deliver sustained growth and improve opportunities for residents across the entire region.

| Criteria 2: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shock | ✓ |
|---|---|

Both authorities are within the population range of existing unitary authorities in England, the Gloucestershire unitary council with a population of 512,600 would be within the top 15 largest unitary authorities in England (based on current configuration). Gloucester City Council with a population of 132,500 is larger or similar to a number of unitary councils including Hartlepool, Darlington, Herefordshire and Halton.

Although the Council Tax base is imbalanced between the two authorities there are a number of unitary authorities with similar Council Tax bases to Gloucester City Council, which have demonstrated sustainability and resilience to financial shocks. The Gloucestershire Unitary Council Tax base is extremely robust and provides the authority with the resilience to withstand unforeseen events.

| Criteria 3: Prioritising the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens | ✓ |
|---|---|

The design and delivery of public services around specific local needs and demands is central to the two-unitary proposal and will build on the existing culture in Gloucestershire of strong partnership working to optimise both the quality and value for money of the services delivered. The model embraces the existing service delivery company Ubico, jointly owned by the Councils, as a model for delivering best value for residents and in this model we would seek to deliver more services through this route wherever sensible to do so.

The proposed model includes two distinct authorities, who will be accountable for delivering key services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services and housing. Existing data demonstrates that the demand in different parts of the county vary greatly, with the Gloucester City Council area having a demand for children's services that is significantly greater than its population. Whereas the Gloucestershire Unitary area consists of a much older population, with 25% higher proportion of the population being over 65.

Our model will enable both new unitary authorities to focus on the interventions that the people and places they serve require.

In the proposed model the vision is that both authorities will unlock the potential of their local places and build a strong partnership based culture, working closely with public and voluntary sector partners and embedding a prevention based approach.

| Criteria 4: Showing how Councils have worked together, considered local views and embraces heritage | ✓ |
|---|---|

The proposed model embraces the diverse heritage of Gloucestershire, building on the heritage of the historic City of Gloucester and the rurality and key towns of the Gloucestershire Unitary.

Councils in Gloucestershire have a strong history of working collaboratively for the benefit of their residents, delivering value for money services through shared assets and delivery vehicles – our model enhances that.

The model is informed by feedback that was collectively commissioned by all seven councils and the development of the Gloucester City and Gloucestershire Unitary unlocks new opportunities to engage with residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders to ensure both Councils deliver for the people they serve and play a central role in enabling other public services to deliver most effectively within the area.

| Criteria 5: Supporting devolution arrangements | ✓ |
|---|---|
| The development of the Gloucester City and Gloucestershire Unitary will support devolution in the area by creating two strong voices at the devolution table for Gloucestershire, giving the county more proportionate voting rights in the governance of the Combined Authority than a single unitary would. A strong City voice, to sit alongside the voices of other key cities such as Bristol and Bath in the WECA sub-region, or Hereford and Worcester, or Oxford and Swindon, and to drive growth more equitably across the sub-region, standing alongside a Gloucestershire County voice to balance the rural areas of the Mayoral Authority.<br><br>Our initial preference is that the two authorities will join the West of England Combined Authority, however we are also exploring other options with existing or potential new Strategic Mayoral Authorities. | |

| Criteria 6: Stronger community engagement and empowerment | ✓ |
|---|---|
| The two unitary approach ensures that local democracy is accessible to all and retains strong democratic accountability in decision making. The model is founded on an enhanced approach to neighbourhood working and place-based governance which will embrace the roles of Parish and Town Councils.<br><br>Alongside formal neighbourhood governance there is a vision to develop a number of informal mechanisms that will enable communities to engage at the most local level to ensure that the Councils are able to understand, engage with and respond to the people they are there to serve.<br><br>The model for the Gloucester City and Gloucestershire Unitary Councils will make local democracy simpler, easier to understand and more accessible to residents. | |

**Request for modification –**

**The preceding proposals are submitted following the invitation and the terms of section 2 of the Act. They follow a considerable amount of work completed within our partnership and with our partners.**

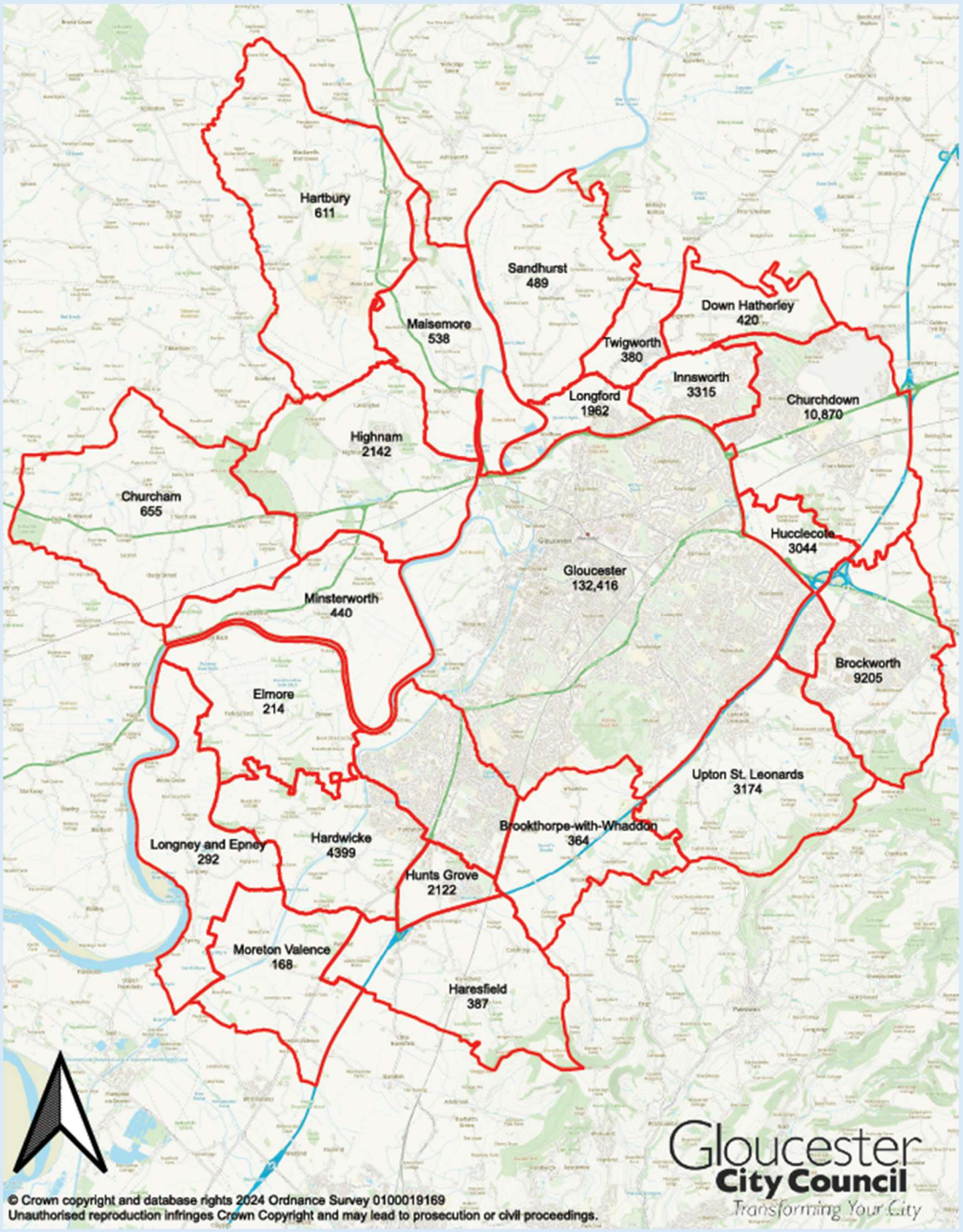
**Pursuant to the Act, in particular section 7, the Secretary of State can, by order, implement proposals with modifications. Following our extensive workings, local knowledge, and analysis we are requesting that modifications are made to our proposals in order to substantially improve the overall benefits to be gained by reorganisation.**

This approach follows the indications set out in the Interim Plan submissions for Gloucestershire and is considered to be essential to achieve best outcome for residents, communities and businesses through substantial enhancement of the benefit case. The modified proposal delivers a local government structure fit for the next fifty years.

**The specific modification we are seeking is that –**

- The boundaries of the Gloucester unitary set out above are extended to encompass the true economic geography of Greater Gloucester, by including the Civil Parishes of: Churcham, Highnam, Maisemore, Hartpury, Sandhurst, Longford, Twigworth, Down Hatherley, Innsworth, Churchdown, Hucclecote, Brockworth, Upton St Leonards, Brookthorpe and Whaddon, Haresfield, Hunts Grove, Moreton Valance, Hardwicke, Longney and Epney, Elmore and Minsterworth
- The boundaries of the Gloucestershire unitary set out above are reduced through the removal of these same civil parishes.

*Figure 2. Modified Unitary Map -*




**We request this on the basis that –**

- This would allow a substantial enhancement to the proposal set out above, and in particular our ability to better meet the LGR criteria, as set out in our modified submission (attached) and enable the creation of a new Greater Gloucester authority to form the model for local government alongside the Gloucestershire Unitary Council.
- There is a very strong public service justification, on the basis that our core service models are rooted in the establishment of new prevention and neighbourhood focused services, aligned around the demographic differences found across the county, which are not considered to be achievable via other means. This modification provides the scale for Greater Gloucester and also better reflects the way people in Gloucestershire live their lives, and the people and places they engage with.
- Whilst we model a significant reorganisation one-off cost, estimated at around £26.913m, these are proximate to estimates for other forms of reorganisation and still self-financing within 4 years of vesting day.

**These boundary changes are –**

- The most effective way to develop a new unitary that accurately reflects the true geography of Gloucester, creating a new Greater Gloucester unitary which addresses historic under-bounding and has the scale and potential to achieve the growth the city, county and country needs.
- The optimal way of mitigating any unintended consequences of boundary change with Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council and Gloucester City Council contained entirely within one unitary and small changes to the boundaries of Forest of Dean Council and Stroud District Council, with only the boundary of Tewkesbury District Council changing substantially

**Discounted options**

We do not believe it practical to achieve the same via other means – particularly a future Principal Area Boundary Review (PABR). The significant downside of a PABR approach would be the substantially increased transition and service disruption time, alongside the significantly – and unnecessary – increased costs to implement. In effect, as the size and shape of authorities are materially different a PABR would mean:

- Requiring, effectively, two rounds of reorganization, impacting on both authorities.
- Transition period significantly extended, with substantial additional disruption for staff and service users.
- Transition costs growing by a further 20-30% driven, in particular, by duplication of transformation elements and additional ICT costs accrued.
- Payback being delayed substantially due to additional costs and benefits being deferred.

On this basis we believe immediate modification is the only practical route forward.

We request this be taken into account, and our modified submission, as attached, be the version presented for consultation.

# Appendix B | Inner Circle Report: A Case for Cities

*[circulated as separate file attachment]*

# Appendix C | Economic Impact Calculations

**Purpose**

Appendix C sets out in a step by step process the calculation of the economic impact (benefits and disbenefits) of each of the three options considered within the option appraisal.

**Process**

The initial steps were:

- Identifying the appropriate measures
- Identifying the baseline for each measure (from national statistics or local reports)
- Identifying the value of each unit of the measure (from research)
- Agreeing the relative impact each option may have in movement from that baseline (based upon local knowledge and previous examples / pilot studies)

The calculation steps then follow:

- Multiplying the forecast change by the respective value (to get the Gross Impact)
- Applying an 'Additionality Adjustment' - a series of factors adjusting for what might have happened anyway without the change (see below for a detailed description)
- Discounting future (dis)benefits to reflect a benefit now, all things being equal is more desirable than the same benefit in the future

This approach then gets to a calculated net present value per option for the impact per measure and overall impact.

**Appropriate measures**

As detailed in the main report, a series of potential outcomes were presented, which were eliminated down to those where the option selected was likely to have a material impact on that outcome achieved. Then to avoid duplication, a single measure was chosen to measure the impact of that change per outcome. Table A.1 sets out the selections.

*Table A.1: Measures used for calculating economic impact*

| Outcome | Output measure | Reason for inclusion |
|---|---|---|
| Job creation | Gross Value Added for jobs created | A combination of impact of public sector losses in region from re-organisation + impact of an enhanced economic strategy tailored to urban needs in options focussed on such |
| Small business survival | Gross Value Added for increased start-up / SME survival rates | Greater align economic development with local strengths and needs - where tighter focus on specific regions |
| Investment within area / region | Investment within area | Gloucester City has a strong track record of working to engage partners in regeneration within its boundaries - there is a risk that this is diluted without a specific council carrying out these duties |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cultural engagement | Change in people engaging in cultural activities | The closer the link between each council and its residents will allow for more engagement and celebration of cultural identities - conversely the more distant, the more likely for there to be disengagement from current activity levels |
| Crime & disorder | Change in recorded crime | Exceptional prevention focused work currently taking place within Districts - risk of this being diluted through merging into larger councils |
| Visitor economy | Visitor spend in region | Risk of loss of promotion of urban areas if integrated into wider councils - the appeal of the area is very diverse, making it harder for a council with a mix of urban and rural areas to market the appeal to those different visitor groups |
| Homelessness prevention | Number of homelessness applications | Solutions to homelessness (or the factors that help prevent it) are often household-specific and reliant on a high degree of flexibility, creativity, local connections and partner organisations, which are easier to build and sustain on a smaller footprint. |
| Children social care | Costs of looked after children | Nationally evidenced report showing links between average cost of provision and size of councils |
| Adult social care | Costs of residential and nursing care | National evidenced report showing links between average cost of provision and size of councils |

**Baseline for each measure**

Table A.2 sets out the baseline position and source for each measure used for calculating the benefits.

*Table A.2 Baseline Position and Source for each Output Measure*

| Measure | Baseline (per year) | Source / justification |
|---|---|---|
| Job creation | 4,294 | Number of new workers required per year in Gloucester (Gloucestershire's Economic Strategy - Economic Evidence Base 2023)[10] |
| Small business survival | 3,155 | UK Business Count of Micro Enterprises within Gloucester (2024)[11] |
| Investment within area / region | £50m pa | Over £1 billion invested in Gloucester over last two decades (averaged)[12] |
| Cultural engagement | 78,000 | Number of people attending local cultural events where numbers were recorded[13] |

[10] https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/bzle1nc5/evidence-base-2023-executive-summary.pdf (page 39)
[11] https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157375/report.aspx (in businesses section)
[12] https://www.investgloucester.co.uk/regeneration-in-gloucester/
[13] https://democracy.gloucester.gov.uk/documents/s62656/Appendix%201%20Review%20of%20Festivals%20and%20E

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Crime & disorder | £105.375m | Total number of instances of crime[14] multiplied by the published figures on cost of crime by type[15] (inflated to current day costs) |
| Visitor economy | £124.207m | 3-year average of visitor spend (prior to Covid years) in Gloucester[16] |
| Homelessness prevention | 275 | Average number of people per year prevented from becoming homeless due to action from Gloucester City officers[17] |
| Children social care (cost of children in care) | £82.599m | Proxy for cost of children in care, by multiplying number of Children in Care in Gloucestershire (815) by national average weekly cost of placement in an authority over 500,000 population (£1949 pw), multiplied by 52 weeks[18] |
| Adult social care (cost of residential and nursing care) | £116.465m | Proxy cost by multiplying number of Residential and Nursing placements in Gloucestershire (1,317 and 655 respectively) multiplied by the national average weekly cost of placement in an authority over 500,000 population (£1,160pw and £655pw), multiplied by 52 weeks |

**Impact per unit**

Unit values for each (dis)benefit were also determined by a research review, using Government approved figures where possible, peer assessed national or internation research if not, then local pilots if neither of these were available. The figures used and their sources are contained within Table A.3.

*Table A.3: Unit values used to calculate gross economic impacts [EXAMPLES]*

| Assumption | Value | Justification |
|---|---|---|
| GVA per job created / per micro business surviving | £67,640 | Average GVA in region 2023 [19] |
| Value per person engaging in cultural activity | £1,498.35 per person | DCMS Commissioned report calculating welfare benefit of sports and cultural activities |

vents%20Activity%202024-25.pdf

[14] https://www.plumplot.co.uk/City-Gloucester-crime-stats.html

[15] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-crime

[16] https://www.visitbritain.org/research-insights/england-domestic-tourism-regional-and-subregional-data

[17] https://www.gloucestershirelive.co.uk/news/gloucester-news/300-new-homelessness-cases-each-9199888

[18] Local Government Reform - An Adult and Children's Service's Lens, Peopletoo, presented to Chief Executives Forum of District Council's Network in July 2025

[19] https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/datasets/subregionalproductivitylabourproductivitygvaperhourworkedandgvaperfilledjobindicesbyuknuts2andnuts3subregions (table b3 - Column Y)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | (inflated for years since published at 3.5% pa)[20] |
| Crime & Disorder | %age change | Measure is already direct economic impact, therefore forecast %age change by each option is appropriate to use to measure the impact |
| Visitor Economy | %age change | Measure is already direct economic impact, therefore forecast %age change by each option is appropriate to use to measure the impact |
| Cost impact on a homelessness application | £218.307 per person | Research by Xantura on costs of homelessness including both direct costs and welfare impact on individuals affected[21] |
| Children Social Care | %age efficiency difference | Percentage difference between average unit costs for a 500,000+ size council compared to the relevant size council(s) |
| Adult Social Care | %age efficiency difference | Percentage difference between average unit costs for a 500,000+ size council compared to the relevant size council(s) |

**Estimate of Impact per Option**

For each option, the relative impact was measured. Ranges were modelled unless fully based upon external data (i.e. the savings associated with social care), although for reporting purposes these were combined using Monte Carlo analysis - essentially multiplying the value of each outcome by the estimated probability of it happening to get a single figure, rather than a range.

**Value of benefits**

Table A.4 shows the range for each output measure and the expected value within that range for each option. Each is presented here as a percentage change away from the current baseline.

*Table A.4: Estimates of the range and expected value for each output measure per option compared with current position (low = greatest disbenefit or smallest benefit)*

| Measure | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jobs Created (absolute number see below) | | | |
| Micro businesses sustained | -5% | -2.5% | 0% |
| Investment change | -10% | 5% | 0% |
| Cultural engagement | -5% | -2.5% | 0% |
| Crime rates | 2% | 1% | 0% |
| Visitor economy | -1% | -0.5% | 0% |
| Homelessness prevention | -20% | -10% | 0% |
| Children Social Care | 0% | 11.85% | 4.14% |
| Adult Social Care | 0% | 10.13% | -2.96% |

* 1% Across the wider Gloucestershire geography rather than Gloucester specific

[20] https://www.sportengland.org/media/11240/moves-v2-se-final-nov16.xlsmhttps://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304899/Quantifying_and_valuing_the_wellbeing_impacts_of_sport_and_culture.pdf (Table 6 - p9)

[21] https://xantura.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Risks-and-Costs-of-Homelessness.pdf

Multiplying the percentage to the baseline got the absolute change fed into the benefits model to calculate the gross economic impact. Table A.5 shows the calculated figures for each option - in this context it is the change away from the current model, so a zero would be no expected change from the current two-tier model.

*Table A.5: Figures used to calculate economic impact per model (per annum)*

| Measure | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jobs Created | (100) | (50) | 0 |
| Micro businesses sustained | (157) | (78.5) | 0 |
| Investment change | (£5m) pa | (£2.5m) pa | 0 |
| Cultural engagement | (3,850) | (1,925) | 0 |
| Crime rates | 2% inc | 1% inc | 0 |
| Visitor economy | (£1.242m) | (£0.621m) | 0 |
| Homelessness prevention | (55) | (27.5) | 0 |
| Children Social Care | 0 | £9.788m | £3.420m |
| Adult Social Care | 0 | £11.798m | (£3.447m) |

* Fed into each individual crime rate

**Gross economic impact**

The gross economic impact for each measure can be taken by multiplying the change in units by the benefit per unit (except in the case of physical activity where a specialised model is used to calculate the expected impact). These figures are combined with the financial projected savings (as additional benefits) and transition / one-off costs (as additional disbenefits). These gross economic impact of these benefits modified by two additional adjustments:

- An additionality adjustment
- A time-discounting factor

*Additionality Adjustment*

The following factors elements were considered for each benefit:

- Leakage - benefits going to people outside the target area (e.g. health benefits from people coming from overseas participating in leisure activities generated by a scheme)
- Displacement - benefits lost because individuals swap from another activity which would also have provided similar benefits (e.g. when a job created is taken by someone already in full time employment and their previous role is not re-filled)
- Substitution - benefits lost because companies change their decisions because of the scheme (e.g. they don't repair a building themselves, because they can get a grant to support it)
- Economic multiplier - the wider supply chain and regional impact of the benefit (e.g. construction work having a beneficial impact on the local supply chain)
- Deadweight - what would happen even if the project didn't go ahead (e.g. general rises in commercial or house prices)

Each economic impact was assessed by the project to assess the likely impact of each factor, using the reference cases set out in the Additionality Guide and HCA Additionality Guide as starting points, supplemented with local knowledge and sector specific research. Appendix D sets out for each benefit the

values used for each factor and the reasoning behind this.

*Time discounting factor*

All benefits were then combined with the direct calculated impact from the financial model (both the ongoing savings and transition costs). All results are then discounted by the Governments Green Book value of 3.5% per year. Discounting is used to reflect the fact that a benefit today should be valued higher that the same benefit in the future.

*Overall position per option*

The combination of all these factors combined, gives the calculated Net Present Value of Benefits for each option. These are presented in the Table A.7 - A.9 below.

*Table A.7: Overall economic impact calculation of Option A*

| **Category** | **Option A** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic impact category** | **Gross impact (£m)** | **Additionality adjustment (£m)** | **Discount (£m)** | **NPV of impact (£m)** |
| **Economic benefits** | | | | |
| Ongoing savings | 186.696 | 0.000 | (33.993) | 152.703 |
| Sub-total economic benefits **(A)** | **186.696** | **0.000** | **(33.993)** | **152.703** |
| **Economic disbenefits** | | | | |
| Transition costs | (20.833) | 0.000 | 0.000 | (20.833) |
| Job Creation | (67.640) | 30.165 | 6.309 | (31.167) |
| Small Business Survival | (106.195) | 86.841 | 3.258 | (16.096) |
| Investment in area / region | (17.845) | 3.102 | 2.482 | (12.262) |
| Cultural Engagement | (57.686) | 36.379 | 3.587 | (17.720) |
| Crime & Disorder | (19.060) | 4.765 | 2.406 | (11.888) |
| Visitor Economy | (12.421) | 5.539 | 1.158 | (5.723) |
| Homelessness Prevention | (120.069) | 37.942 | 13.825 | (68.302) |
| Sub-total economic disbenefits **(B)** | **(421.749)** | **204.733** | **33.025** | **(183.991)** |
| **Overall economic impact (A+B)** | **(235.052)** | **204.733** | **(0.967)** | **(31.288)** |

*Table A.8: Overall economic impact calculation of Option B*

| **Category** | **Option B** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic impact category** | **Gross impact (£m)** | **Additionality adjustment (£m)** | **Discount (£m)** | **NPV of impact (£m)** |
| **Economic benefits** | | | | |
| Ongoing savings | 120.667 | 0.000 | (22.459) | 98.208 |
| Children Social Care | 88.091 | (35.237) | (9.688) | 43.167 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adult Social Care | 106.181 | (42.472) | (11.677) | 52.032 |
| Sub-total economic benefits **(A)** | **314.939** | **(77.709)** | **(43.823)** | **193.407** |
| **Economic disbenefits** | | | | |
| Transition costs | (26.913) | 0.000 | 0.000 | (26.913) |
| Job Creation | (33.820) | 15.082 | 3.154 | (15.583) |
| Small Business Survival | (53.097) | 43.420 | 1.629 | (8.048) |
| Investment in area / region | (8.923) | 1.551 | 1.241 | (6.131) |
| Cultural Engagement | (28.843) | 18.190 | 1.793 | (8.860) |
| Crime & Disorder | (9.530) | 2.382 | 1.203 | (5.944) |
| Visitor Economy | (6.210) | 2.770 | 0.579 | (2.862) |
| Homelessness Prevention | (60.034) | 18.971 | 6.913 | (34.151) |
| Sub-total economic disbenefits **(B)** | **(227.371)** | **102.366** | **16.513** | **(108.492)** |
| | | | | |
| **Overall economic impact (A+B)** | **87.568** | **24.658** | **(27.311)** | **84.915** |

Table A.9: *Overall Economic Impact Calculation of Option C*

| **Category** | **Option C** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic impact category** | **Gross impact (£m)** | **Additionality adjustment (£m)** | **Discount (£m)** | **NPV of impact (£m)** |
| **Economic benefits** | | | | |
| Ongoing savings | 115.928 | 0.000 | (21.577) | 94.351 |
| Children Social Care | 30.776 | (12.310) | (3.385) | 15.081 |
| Sub-total economic benefits **(A)** | **146.704** | **(12.310)** | **(24.961)** | **109.432** |
| **Economic disbenefits** | | | | |
| One-off costs | (26.913) | 0.000 | 0.000 | (26.913) |
| Adults Social Care | (31.026) | 12.410 | 3.412 | (15.024) |
| Sub-total economic disbenefits **(B)** | **(57.939)** | **12.410** | **3.412** | **(42.117)** |
| | | | | |
| **Overall economic impact (A+B)** | **88.765** | **0.100** | **(21.549)** | **67.316** |

Note there is no discount factor applies within the overall model for physical activity impact as the specialised model already applies a 3.5% discount factor within its output

# Appendix D | Additionality Adjustments

All benefits were assed to determine if and how much of these would have been achieved if the project did not go ahead. This follows the principles of the Additionality Guide and ensures that naturally occurring increases are removed before considering the wider economic impact of an option. The formula used is as follows:

$$AI = [GI \times (1-L) \times (1-Dp) \times (1-S) \times M] - [GI^* \times (1-L^*) \times (1-Dp^*) \times (1-S^*) \times M^*]$$

Where:

AI = Net additional impact
GI = Gross impact
L = Leakage
Dp = Displacement
S = Substitution
M = Multiplier

* denotes reference case and hence deadweight

- Net additional impact - the final value of the benefit after the calculation
- Gross impact - the total benefit, the starting point before adjustments for this formula
- Leakage - benefits going to people outside the target area (e.g. health benefits from people coming from overseas participating in leisure activities generated by a scheme)
- Displacement - benefits lost because individuals swap from another activity which would also have provided similar benefits (e.g. when a job created is taken by someone already in full time employment and their previous role is not re-filled)
- Substitution - benefits lost because companies change their decisions because of the scheme (e.g. they don't repair a building themselves, because they can get a grant to support it)
- Economic Multiplier - the wider supply chain and regional impact of the benefit (e.g. construction work having a beneficial impact on the local supply chain)
- Deadweight - what would happen even if the project didn't go ahead (e.g. general rises in commercial or house prices) - this formula is often simplified to be a percentage of the overall benefits where a reference case is not directly calculated

The values for each of these components were considered on a benefit-by-benefit basis. The following table sets out the values used for each, per benefit.

*Additionality Components per Quantified Benefit*

| Area / measure | Value | Justification |
|---|---|---|
| **Jobs created** | | |
| Leakage | 10% | Low leakage - Some jobs may be filled by people that choose to live elsewhere and commute, but most benefits of jobs created are expected to remain in the region |
| Displacement | 10% | Low displacement - any jobs filled by people already employed are likely to be advertised and filled themselves |
| Substitution | 10% | Low substitution - it is relatively unlikely that the public sector jobs will prevent similar jobs in the private sector |
| Multiplier | 1 | No wider benefit considered as the Gross Value Added element already considers the impact the employment has on the wider economy |
| Deadweight | 24% | In line with City Challenge Regeneration schemes average (Table 3.3 of Additionality Guide) |
| **Micro-business sustained** | | |
| Leakage | 10% | Low leakage - likely to be very small for micro-businesses as their nature they are hyper-local |
| Displacement | 10% | Low displacement - if someone finds another job after their micro-business fails then they are probably in competition with others, who will themselves lose out on employment instead |
| Substitution | 10% | Low substitution - generally micro-businesses fill niches that other businesses are unwilling or find uneconomic to fill |
| Multiplier | 1 | No wider benefit considered as the Gross Value Added element already considers the impact the employment has on the wider economy |
| Deadweight | 75% | Very high due to the limited direct impact the council has on the wider economic impact |
| **Investment in the area** | | |
| Leakage | 10% | Low leakage - some supply chain and materials may be sourced internationally and therefore leak out of the economy |
| Displacement | 25% | Moderate displacement - limit overall capacity in construction industry, so any major work will have somewhat of an impact on other developments taken forward |
| Substitution | 0% | The private sector is already carrying out this work, so there is no substitution effect |
| Multiplier | 1.7 | 2.7 is average for new build projects based upon the HCA additionality guide - 1 is removed as the direct benefit of the building is not considered here |
| Deadweight | 28% | Average for major construction schemes |
| **Cultural Activities** | | |
| Leakage | 40% | Moderate - Figure based upon survey findings of number of attendees from outside the region |
| Displacement | 10% | Low - some people will choose council run events which would otherwise have chosen alternative cultural events, but it is |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | expected this number will be relatively low |
| Substitution | 10% | Low - some public events might crowd out private sector events, but the nature of the events are likely to limit the degree that substitution takes place |
| Multiplier | 1 | Multiplier impact already included with the valuation of the benefit |
| Deadweight | 24% | In line with City Challenge Regeneration schemes average (Table 3.3 of Additionality Guide) |
| **Crime levels** | | |
| Leakage | 0% | Impact of crime is focussed within region |
| Displacement | 25% | Potential for some crime to be displaced rather than stopped |
| Substitution | 0% | No private sector investment will be offset by having a more localisation crime prevention approach |
| Multiplier | 1 | Multiplier impact already included with the valuation of the benefit |
| Deadweight | 0% | No deadweight as measure and value already calculated through research taking into account any such factors |
| **Visitor spend** | | |
| Leakage | 10% | Low - Small leakage from visitor spend |
| Displacement | 10% | Low - Advertising may displace customers from one location in the region to another |
| Substitution | 10% | Low - Some advertisement / tourism strategy may reduce the advertising private companies would otherwise have to undertake |
| Multiplier | 1 | Kept low conservatively to avoid double counting (especially with GVA for employment) |
| Deadweight | 24% | In line with City Challenge Regeneration schemes average (Table 3.3 of Additionality Guide) |
| **Homelessness Prevention** | | |
| Leakage | 0% | Impact is all within region |
| Displacement | 10% | Low - reflecting the fact that not all homelessness applications are accepted, so some work will be on unsuccessful applications |
| Substitution | 0% | No private sector provision impact |
| Multiplier | 1 | Multiplier impact already included with the valuation of the benefit |
| Deadweight | 24% | In line with City Challenge Regeneration schemes average (Table 3.3 of Additionality Guide) |
| **Adult & Children Social Care** | | |
| Leakage | 0% | Impact is all within region |
| Displacement | 0% | No displacement impact |
| Substitution | 0% | No private sector provision impact |
| Multiplier | 1 | Multiplier impact already included with the valuation of the benefit |
| Deadweight | 40% | Significant factor built in due to usage of national average unit data rather than actual local data, plus risks that some elements of the calculations maybe affected by external factors, such as smaller |

local authorities being more prevalent in areas where costs are lower

## Appendix E | Cratus Public Engagement Report

*[circulated as separate file attachment]*

# Appendix F | Aggregation and Disaggregation Tables

| Service Area | Current delivery model | Recommended Delivery Model | Level of change required | One off Transition Costs | Additional ongoing recurring costs | Aggregation Benefits |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3.1 Corporate Services** | | | | | | |
| Digital & ICT | Different delivery models across the Councils.<br>County / Tewkesbury / Glos City / Stroud - In-House<br>Cotswold / Forest of Dean / Chelt - Publica | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary.<br>(Noting that some specialist functions e.g. cyber security, hardware and software may be jointly outsourced / shared across the two) | High | High | Low | Medium |
| Asset Management & Property | All councils currently deliver property and asset services largely in-house. However, there are external consultants and framework partners utilised for specialist services by councils.<br>Note services previously delivered by Publica were brought in house with the exception of one health and safety advisor. | Hybrid: In-house strategic teams with some shared services of technical functions under an SLA and hosted arrangement.<br>*Strategic ownership and direction would remain local to each authority.*<br>*Note: This excludes commercial property* | High | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Pensions | Operated and administered in-house via the Gloucestershire Pension Fund within GCC for all councils in Glos | GU is designated as the administering authority for the Gloucestershire Pension Fund; GG becomes a scheme employer within the fund (similar to current arrangements with district councils). | Low | Low | N/A | Low |
| Strategic Finance | In-house | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary. | High | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Insurance & Counterfraud | CFEU - Counter fraud and enforcement unit<br>ARA - Shared service hosted by County Council for itself and Gloucester City Council and | Shared Countywide Service – Hosted in GU with traded services | Low | Low | N/A | Low |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stroud<br>SWAP - South West Audit Partnership | | | | | |
| Democratic Services | In-House across all councils | Two separate in-house , one per unitary with local delivery teams. Also combined Democratic services and elections teams into one team. | Low | Low | Low | Medium |
| Elections | In-House across all councils | Two separate in-house , one per unitary with local delivery teams. Also combined Democratic services and elections teams into one team. | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Legal Services | Mixed – One Legal between 4 councils, quasi shared service between 2 councils and in-house for county | Hybrid: shared services or hosted on day 1 – with some functions independent and traded services. Will need 2 monitoring officers | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Comms | In-house | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary | Low | Low | Low | High |
| HR | Different delivery models across the Councils.<br>Most - In-House<br>Some - Publica | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Transactional Services incl. Payroll, AP / AR | Different delivery models across the Councils.<br>Most - In-House<br>Some - Publica | Shared service – hosted by GU with traded services | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Planning, Performance & Insight (Data) | In-house | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Information Governance | In-house | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Transformation | In-house | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Customer Management | In-house | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary | Low | Low | Low | High |
| Internal audit | Tewkesbury – In-House Cheltenham, Cotswold and Forest of Dean – South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Gloucestershire County – In-house service which is also provided to Gloucester City Council and Stroud. | Delivery model to be determined following an options analysis of the different options. | Low | Low | Low | High |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3.2 Front-Line Upper Tier Services (Only County Council currently)** | | | | | | |
| Public Health | In-House management & advisory with a range of commissioned services | Two separate in-house, one per unitary (disaggregated). Noting that there is still likely to be joint working in some limited areas where it makes sense to retain county wide provision and economies of scale e.g. sexual health.<br>Will need 2 DPH<br>Could be joint commissioning of supply chain e.g - out of hours | High | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Adult Social Care | ASC is delivered in-house by GCC, and the care market is managed centrally, with countywide contracts and provider relationships | Two separate in-house , one per unitary with its own DASS. (disaggregated) delivered locally. Noting: commissioning may take between 3 - 5 years to fully disaggregate. Commissioning jointly on areas e.g - tech enabled care | High | High | High | Medium |
| Childrens | Mixed Delivery Models<br>The service is managed overall in-house but there are also a number of elements of the service commissioned out e.g. Family and Youth Hub development | Two separate in-house , one per unitary (disaggregated) each undertaking their own commissioning and statutory partnership arrangements<br>Will need 2 DCS and become 2 members of Adoption West | High | High | High | Medium |
| Education | In-house<br>Note: Cross-authority music service | Two separate in-house , one per unitary *(disaggregated)* | High | High | High | Medium |
| Archives | In-house | Shared Countywide Service -<br>Hosted by GG given this is where the Heritage Hub is (Gloucester) | Low | Low | Low | N/A |
| Transport & Highways | In-House<br>With outsourced service delivery | Two separate in-house , one per unitary (disaggregated) Commissioning but flexibility on supply chain (over the long-term) but on day 1, may have to have the service hosted in one authority and providing services to the other. | High | High | High | Low |
| Fire & Rescue | In-House - GCC currently holds the governance and service responsibilities. | Independent Fire and Rescue Authority | High | High | N/A | N/A |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trading Standards | In-house | Two separate in-house teams, one per unitary | Medium | Low | Low | N/A |
| Coroners | In-house | Shared Countywide Service (Hosted) - Hosted by GG as the Coroner's court is located in Gloucester | Low | Low | Low | N/A |
| Libraries | In-House | Two separate in-house , one per unitary (disaggregated) Joint Library Management System | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Registrars | In-House | Shared Countywide Service - Hosted TBD which authority would be the host with shared Proper Officer | Low | Low | Low | N/A |
| Employment and skills | In-House | County wide, Hosted by one authority | Low | Low | Low | N/A |
| **3.3 Front-Line Lower Tier Services OR Both (Only Districts OR both County and Districts currently)** | | | | | | |
| Public Protection | Mixed. Most services are delivered in-house by district councils though Publica provides services for Forest of Dean and Cotswold with some local differences. There are also some services (in some councils) contracted out e.g stray dogs, contaminated land. | Two separate in-house teams but with some specialist functions shared e.g. contaminated land. | High | Medium | N/A | High |
| Emergency Planning | In-House across all councils currently | Two separate in-house teams with opportunity for joint working | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Revenue & Benefits | In-House<br>Cotswold and FoD via Publica | Two separate in-house teams<br>Consider merging customer services | High | High | N/A | Medium |
| Cemetery and crematorium | In–house across all 7 councils | Two separate in-house teams | Medium | Medium | N/A | Medium |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Housing Strategy, Maintenance & Homelessness | Mixed - All councils have some elements in-house but note:<br>Stroud and Chelt have in-house DLOs and their own housing stock.<br>FoD and Cotswold have shared housing staff in Publica (shared with West Oxfordshire too)<br>Glos City host the Strategic Housing Partnership which is countywide across all 7 councils.<br>All councils commission some services externally | Hybrid - Each UA would operate some services in-house and some under shared arrangements (hosted by one authority) | High | High | Medium | High |
| Climate & Sustainability | In-House teams in each council but there is also a county-wide Climate Leadership Gloucestershire Team managed by Glos City. | Two in-house teams, with a shared partnership forum for collaboration | High | Medium | Low | Low |
| Economic Development | All councils have in-house ED capabilities noting variations in terms of scope of services, structures and extent of partnership working | Two in-house teams but with countywide partnership working (where needed) | High | Medium | N/A | High |
| Tourism & Visitor Economy | All Councils have small in-house local tourism teams but they are all also part of (and put varying amounts of funding towards) the Cotswolds Plus Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). | Strategic Countywide Visitor Economy Function with Local Place Marketing<br>Not yet been determined if the strategic element would be in-house or as a separate organisation | Low | Low | N/A | High |
| Leisure | Stroud - In-House model<br>5 of the 6 councils outsource provision (3 to Freedom Leisure; CBC to the Chelt Trust and Tewkesbury to Places Leisure) | Harmonisation of current contractual positions over time to move to a sustainable and aligned model | High | Medium | N/A | Medium |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Culture & Heritage | Mixed<br>A number of councils have this in-house; Cotswold outsource running of museum to Freedom Leisure; A lot of partnership working e.g. Glos City have a strategic partnership with Gloucester Culture Trust | Codesigned future delivery models with the sector and communities with a consideration of future implications related to devolution | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen | TBD based on delivery models that are chosen |
| Planning | In-house | Two separate in house teams | High | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Building Control | Mixed - Some in-house and some with shared arrangements e.g - Gloucester City and Stroud partnership / Cheltenham and Tewkesbury | Delivered as a shared service across both UAs, with joint governance, shared systems, and local operational teams | Medium | Medium | N/A | Medium |
| Development & Regeneration | In-house | Two separate in house teams | Medium | Medium | N/A | Medium |
| Waste & Environmental Services: Waste disposal and HRCs | Mixed Delivery - Through in house teams and contractors such as Ubico and FCC (Javelin Park) | Ubico co-owned and co-commissioned by two UA's<br>HRCs: Ubico continue to manage HRC Operations<br>FCC: GU would provide due to Javelin Park location | Low | Low | N/A | Medium |
| Waste & Environmental Services: Waste collection | Delivered via Ubico | Remain delivered by Ubico, commissioned by two UA's | Low | Low | N/A | Low – *Consistency and standardisation* |
| Waste & Environmental Services: Environmental Services | Mixed Delivery - in house team with some elements contracted out, some delivered by Ubico e.g tree planting | Ubico commissioned by GG. Two separate in-house teams, GU model would be mixed | Medium | Medium | N/A | Medium |
| Parking | Mixed. Most services are delivered in-house by district councils though Publica provides services for Forest of Dean and Cotswold with some local differences. | Two separate in-house teams for management and notice processing. Outsource physical enforcement | High | Medium | Low | Medium |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All enforcement activities at GCC are outsourced | | | | | |

# Appendix G | Equality Impact Assessment

| | |
|---|---|
| Directorate: All | Service: All |
| Accountable Officer: Ruth Saunders | |
| Date of assessment: 30.09.25 | Who was involved in completing this assessment? One Legal, Managing Director, Head of Transformation and Commissioning, Policy and Governance Manager |
| Name of service/function/policy/strategy or process: Greater Gloucester/Gloucestershire proposal for LGR | |
| Is this new or existing? New | |
| Why has this change been proposed? Government policy change | |

## Part 1 – Screening

**1.1 Please provide an Executive Summary of this service/function/policy/strategy or process, including the reasons behind the proposed change and who will deliver this service. Remember to demonstrate how you have shown due regard to both negative *and* positive aspects,** for example:

Negative

- Discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct (state how you will eliminate this)
- Prejudice and lack of understanding (how will you foster good relations between people to tackle prejudice and promote good understanding?)
- Which protected characteristics could be negatively affected by this change? Use the table in question 2 to explain these fully

Positive

- Who is to benefit from this change, and what positive opportunities does this offer to Gloucester (residents, GCC and partner agencies)
- Advance equality of opportunity: (remove or minimise disadvantage; meet people's needs; take account of disabilities; encourage participation in public life). (Does not apply to marriage and civil partnership or pregnancy and maternity)
- How might ABCD approaches be implemented?

The main purpose of local government reorganisation is to create simpler governance structures that deliver better outcomes for residents, enhance local accountability and achieve efficiency savings that can be reinvested in public services.

The English Devolution White Paper outlines central Government's plans to replace the current two-tier system of district and county councils with a single tier of local government. This would establish larger, unitary authorities that are responsible for delivering all local government services within an area.

For Gloucestershire there are three proposals being developed and Gloucester City Council is leading on the 'Greater Gloucester/ Gloucestershire' 2 unitary proposal. The work is outlined in the interim report to Cabinet in March 2025 and the report to Council in September 2025.

This EIA focuses on the Greater Gloucester/ Gloucestershire two unitary proposal, not LGR itself as that is a decision which has already been taken by Central Government and is outside of our control. This EIA informs and supports the case for Greater Gloucester/Gloucestershire and responds to the needs and concerns of Gloucester city residents and stakeholders, including those captured within the expanded Greater Gloucester footprint; it also complements the wider two-unitary model for Gloucestershire, as part of a joined-up examination of resident and stakeholder needs across the county.

**1.2 Which groups could be affected by this change, in either a negative or positive way?** Please include the evidence (i.e. consultation/research) as to how you reached this decision.

**(Positive** – it could benefit, **Negative** – it could disadvantage, **Neutral** – neither positive nor negative impact or **Not sure?)**

| 'Protected Characteristic' | Type of impact (Positive, Negative or Neutral) | Reason | Evidence base for decision |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | Negative (short-term), Positive (long-term) | Short-term risk of confusion and disruption for older people due to changes in service access; long-term opportunity for integrated, person-centred services. | Experience from previous reorganisations (e.g. Somerset, Dorset) shows initial disruption, but also demonstrates that joined-up services can improve outcomes for older people. Local engagement highlights concerns about transition, but also support for the ambition of better, more accessible services. |
| Disability | Negative (short-term), Positive (long-term) | Short-term disruption and risk of digital exclusion; long-term improvements through integrated service design and data sharing. | National and local evidence (including feedback from disability groups) indicates that change can be unsettling, but that well-designed, joined-up services can significantly improve accessibility and outcomes for disabled residents. |
| Gender | Neutral | No direct impact identified. | No evidence of differential impact from local data or engagement. |
| Marriage & Civil Partnership | Neutral | No direct impact identified. | No evidence of differential impact from local data or engagement. |
| Pregnancy & Maternity | Neutral | No direct impact identified. | No evidence of differential impact from local data or engagement. |
| Race (including Gypsy & Traveller) | Neutral | Larger footprint of the Greater Gloucester area may improve ability to identify and provide sites for Gypsy & Traveller communities. The reduction of footprint of the remaining | Local data shows previous difficulty in site provision; expanded area increases opportunities for the more urban centre. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Gloucestershire area so the impact is therefore neutral. | |
| Religion/Belief | Neutral | No direct impact identified. | No evidence of differential impact from local data or engagement. |
| Sexual Orientation | Neutral | No direct impact identified. | No evidence of differential impact from local data or engagement. |
| Transgender | Neutral | No direct impact identified. | No evidence of differential impact from local data or engagement. |
| Community Cohesion | Neutral | No immediate impact identified; long-term potential for stronger local identity and engagement in the Greater Gloucester area but this may be reduced for the wider area. | Evidence from other unitarisations suggests improved community engagement over time. |
| Other Socio-economic Groups (e.g. Single Parents) | Positive | Opportunity to address inequalities through targeted, joined-up support. | National research and local data suggest integrated services better support vulnerable groups so reducing from 7 Councils to 2 is likely to show benefits. |
| Any Human Rights implications? | None | No direct impact identified. | No evidence of human rights implications from local or national sources. |

**1.3 Is any part of this policy/service to be carried out wholly or partly by contractors?**

If yes, please consider equalities impact through procurement.

☐ Yes ☒ No

**1.4 Is a Full People Impact Assessment required?** If you have identified any potential or actual negative impact you will need to complete a Full People Impact Assessment (Part 2 below)

☐ Yes ☒ No Date it is to be completed: N/A

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# Strong Places, Stronger Gloucestershire: The case for East and West Gloucestershire. One county, two unitary councils.

# Foreword from the Leader of Cheltenham Borough Council

Gloucestershire is a proud and diverse county, home to historic towns, vibrant cities, and thriving rural communities. As local leaders, our responsibility is not only to protect what makes each place special, but to build a future in which all parts of Gloucestershire can flourish.

Leadership in local government is about serving people in ways that make sense to them. We did not ask for local government reorganisation. But if reform is to happen, it must be done once and done right – not for the next few years but for the next fifty years. How we reform matters just as much as whether we reform.

At this critical moment, the question should not be *"how do we merge councils to maximise efficiency?"* but *"how do we redesign local government so that it works better for residents over the long-term?".* This is about building resilience and impact that lasts – not just structural tidiness that saves money but weakens over time.

A two unitary model offers a smarter way forward: targeted governance and investment that foster innovation and growth in both Gloucester and Cheltenham. Two distinct authorities, each with its own urban centre and rural reach, provide balance, clarity and scale. This is a place-based response to reform, designed to endure. It creates a flexible system that supports ageing well, improves skills, expands digital access, and links housing growth with job creation – unlocking productivity and opportunity for decades to come. A single-unitary approach risks short-term cost savings at the expense of long-term resilience.

Public trust is local government's most valuable currency. It is earned through connectedness, visible results, reliable services, honesty, and representation at the right level for each place. If reform is to happen, we should get it right once and for good: decisions made as close to residents as possible and mission focused teams to deliver outcomes. This is not a case against change, it is a case for reform that reflects Gloucestershire, built to last.

Rowena Hay
**Leader, Cheltenham Borough Council**

# 1. Introduction: Redesigning for the long-term

Gloucestershire is not one place: it is a collection of places each with its own identity, economy and challenges: two urban centres driving growth in Cheltenham and Gloucester; historic market towns and Cotswold villages, post-industrial and rural communities. This diversity is Gloucestershire's strength and the reason a single model cannot serve it well.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is often presented as a tidy exercise: unitaries of 500,000 residents or more, streamlining services, and delivering savings. But these are short term goals. The decisions made now will shape Gloucestershire for a generation.

A single unitary serving 659,000 people would flatten Gloucestershire's diversity into county-wide averages. Forcing trade-offs between fundamentally different priorities: Gloucester's regeneration or Cheltenham's tech growth; clean energy or cyber security; rural isolation or rapid ageing. It risks creating distance between residents and decision-makers and centralising power in ways that weaken accountability.

Two unitaries, one serving the West (Gloucester, Stroud, and the Forest of Dean) and one serving the East (Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Cotswolds) offer a better alternative: councils that are both strategic and connected, large enough for capability yet small enough for trust and focused enough to drive economic growth in distinct sectors.

Financially, a single authority performs marginally better on narrow metrics, largely because it avoids disaggregation costs, an unavoidable short-term feature of any county split. But financial efficiency without democratic legitimacy, economic focus, or community connection is a false economy. The two-unitary model delivers substantial savings (£56m over 10 years) while preserving what makes reform sustainable: trust, agility, and connection.

This document sets out 5 strategic reasons why a two-unitary model is the right reform for Gloucestershire, a model designed to work not just today, but for the next fifty years:

1. **Distinct place identity and economic opportunity**: Gloucestershire's unique two centres of gravity, Cheltenham and Gloucester, and their contrasting geographies demand distinct leadership to unlock their full economic potential.
2. **Getting scale right**: Councils of 310–350,000 residents balance capability with connection; the 500,000 benchmark misunderstands modern devolution.
3. **Redesigning how local government works**: Two councils enable scaled prevention, strategic housing delivery, and growth rooted in place.
4. **Building democratic legitimacy**: Two councils reflect Gloucestershire's political diversity and maintain representation that people can reach and trust.
5. **Reform that endures**: A structure designed to last agile, connected, and sustainable, avoiding unnecessary complexity or future restructuring.

# 2.Five Strategic Arguments for Two Unitaries

## 2.1 Distinct Place Identity and Economic Opportunity

**Gloucestershire has two natural centres of gravity**, Gloucester in the west and Cheltenham in the east, each surrounded by distinct communities with different needs, opportunities, and civic cultures. **They are not competing priorities to be balanced, but complementary strengths that need focus.**

**The West**

Gloucester, Stroud and the Forest of Dean are positioned to lead Britain's clean-energy and sustainable industry transition. There is a strong environmental and voluntary community group presence alongside heritage rooted in manufacturing, forestry and waterways. There is rural deprivation alongside urban opportunity. A western unitary would unite these strengths under one coherent approach to clean energy, land use, and sustainable innovation, that together drive regional prosperity.

**The East**

Cheltenham anchors the UK's cyber-security ecosystem, complemented by fast emerging agri-tech and advanced engineering. With the world-class asset of GCHQ alongside the Golden Valley Development, the eastern economy fuses cyber security, engineering and digital technology. An eastern unitary would cement Cheltenham's position as a critical part of the UK's technology and security industry while building digital capability.

**Why two clusters need two unitaries**

**These are real economies with distinct institutions, supply chains and investment narratives. Economic clusters succeed through proximity, specialisation and clarity.** One large authority would blur these strengths, slow decisions and risk Gloucestershire's growth potential. Two unitaries would instead:

- Provide dual engines of growth and specialist strategies and leadership
- Deliver faster, clearer decisions on investment opportunities.
- Strengthen relationships with employers, universities and investors
- Position Gloucestershire as a powerhouse of innovation, skills and sustainable growth.

## 2.2 Smarter Scale: Right Sized for Connection and Capability

Each proposed unitary would serve 310,000 and 350,000 people, large enough for strategic capability and financial resilience, small enough to remain connected and agile. **Scale is not neutral. Too small and councils lack the capacity, too large, and they lose connection. Public trust is earned through proximity and responsiveness.**

The Government's notional 500,000 resident threshold is not a legal requirement nor a measure of success. Uniform thresholds ignore what modern devolution demands, agility, partnership and a sense of place. For Gloucestershire, right-sizing means structures that reflect:

- **Dual growth centres**: in Gloucester and Cheltenham, few other areas have that potential.
- **Contrasting geographies**: cathedral cities to national forests, Regency spa towns to Cotswold villages with contrasting opportunities and challenges.
- **Nationally important** but fundamentally different **economic clusters** with clean energy in the West and cyber security in the East.
- **Diverse communities** with different challenges, from deprivation, ageing and rural isolation in differing combinations.

**Two unitaries strike the balance – big enough to work, small enough to be connected, delivering:**

- **Faster, clearer decision-making:** Fewer layers between problem and solution—decisions made faster, locally.
- **Councillors rooted in their communities:** Reflecting Gloucestershire's political diversity.
- **Strategic housing delivery at the right scale:** Growing homes where they're needed, in ways that make sense to local communities and build support.
- **Staff who know their communities:** Front-line teams connected to place, able to spot needs early and intervene with prevention.
- **Services tailored to local need:** Not diluted into large-unitary compromises.
- **Stronger, more responsive partnerships** with local enterprise and civic networks.

A 659,000-resident single authority would require additional or strengthened local governance arrangements to preserve local voice thereby adding layers rather than removing them. **Scale must serve connection, not replace it.** The two unitaries achieve that balance, keeping accountability strong without adding complexity.

## 2.3 Redesigning How We Work: Prevention, Housing, and Local Impact

**LGR must be about how to redesign councils, so they work better for residents over the long term.** Reform must create the conditions to rethink service delivery in three critical areas for Gloucestershire prevention, housing and economic growth.

- **Prevention:** Proximity enables it. When councils know their communities deeply, data is visible, teams empowered and relationships trusted, staff can intervene early without having to navigate a large unitary structure and process, reducing demand and building resilience.
- **Housing done strategically:** Communities back housing that meets local need, connects to jobs and comes with the right infrastructure. Two unitaries make that possible through credible engagement and balanced planning.

- **Growth rooted in place:** Economic opportunity depends on agility and trust. Councils that know their patch can partner effectively, move at pace, and attract investment that reflect local strengths.

**This is what redesigning and reform really means. It's not about administrative tidiness; it's about creating the conditions for councils to deliver visible outcomes, locally and sustainably over the long-term.** Two unitaries make that vision deliverable, councils that are agile, trusted and designed for modern public service.

## 2.4 Democratic Legitimacy and Political Deliverability

Gloucestershire's political geography mirrors its diversity. The east and west of the county have distinct political profiles, each with its own civic culture and community priorities. **A single authority would concentrate representation and risk reducing local accountability.** Two unitaries would preserve balanced democracy, allowing each area to reflect its electorate and priorities.

Two unitaries provide a path that is **politically viable, locally credible, and commands trust**. A single unitary authority:

- Reduces local representation, with fewer councillors covering larger areas with less political diverse representation.
- Requires sweeping democratic reorganisation and likely more local governance, adding to the complexity and creating a strategic gap between a big single unitary and communities.
- Concentrate power in ways that feel distant, technocratic, and unaccountable.
- Create a legitimacy gap from day one.

**By contrast, the two-unitary model:**

- Builds on existing legitimacy and established civic relationships.
- Ensures balanced representation reflective of Gloucestershire's political diversity.
- Keeps decisions closer to communities, with councillors rooted in the places they represent.
- Commands broad-based support from those who know Gloucestershire best.
- Gives staff and members confidence that change is being led with care.
- Creates two strong voices to speak up for Gloucestershire at the regional and national level, doubling our presence and influence in devolution and government discussions.

**In an era of fragile public trust, legitimacy cannot be an afterthought, it must be designed in.** The two-unitary model starts with credibility – rooted in connection, clarity and with representation people can reach.

## 2.5 Reform that Endures: Choosing the Council We Want to Become

LGR invites Gloucestershire to choose what kind of councils it wants to build. **The opportunity is to design organisations that are:**

- **Prevention-first, data-driven and locally accountable.** Intervening early, using data to predict need, designing services around outcomes and answerable to the communities they serve, not distant oversight.
- **Mission-focused, with fewer layers and empowered teams.:** With clear roles, fewer layers, and autonomy for teams close to delivery.
- **Coherent, connected and financially strategic:** Intervening where it matters.
- **Agile and adaptive:** Able to grow and adapt to what communities need over time, stay flexible to national changes, and local need

**The risk of focusing on scale and short-term efficiency is creating councils that are:**

- Larger but slower.
- Structurally tidy but functionally weaker.
- Distant from residents and less responsive to need.
- Overwhelmed by integration complexity and legacy systems.

A single unitary of 659,000-resident authority would almost certainly require extra civic infrastructure – new parish councils, new precepts, more tiers of governance, and prolonged disruption.

**The two-unitary model keeps reform simple, purposeful and human. They build on trusted structures, deliver genuine change without bureaucratic overreach and channel energy into service improvement rather than structural integration.**

**Boldness in reform is not about size,** it is about leadership, about clarity, honesty and confidence that different can be better and a focus on the long-term**. The two unitary model embodies that choice: i**t prioritises connection over scale and designs a system built to last.

# 3. The Financial Context: Efficiency with Legitimacy

On headline business case figures, a single unitary delivers marginally higher savings, because it avoids disaggregation costs, particularly for children's and adult services. These transition costs are not a flaw in the two-unitary proposal, they are a feature of any reform creating more than one council. Other large counties such as Essex are also exploring multi-unitary councils for precisely this reason: **place-based legitimacy should not be ruled out over structural simplicity.** The recent decision in Surrey County also underlines the fact that any costs of disaggregation should not simply over-ride the need for reform.

The financial analysis by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) shows that the net recurrent savings from the 2 unitary model is 1.3% of total expenditure in 2028/29 compared to 2.5% for the 1 unitary model. This is a marginal difference given the opportunities for economic growth and the forthcoming Fair Funding Review changes.

Every local government reorganisation business case contains financial modelling that attempts to project accuracy but is ultimately a collection of assumptions and estimates. Even the most comprehensive financial model can never fully reflect the financial reality of an established council, nor capture the impact of the way members make decisions shaped by the needs and views of the residents they represent. In this context it is important to put forward the limitations of the financial modelling completed by PwC thus far:

- The **model is heavily focused on financial efficiencies** through economies of scale, particularly in back-office functions and service delivery
- This **mechanistic, spreadsheet-driven logic** overlooks the **complex, relational nature** of local government services, especially those involving social care, housing, and community engagement
- Activities like **early intervention, prevention, and community support**—often delivered more effectively by smaller authorities—are **difficult to quantify** and thus underrepresented in the model
- The **model makes no allowance for a reduction in performance on in-year council tax collection** rates, which can be anecdotally evidenced. Gloucestershire districts collectively have an in-year collection rate of council tax of 97.8% (based on 2024/25) which compares favourably to recently created unitaries like Somerset 96.67% and North Northamptonshire 94.92%. A 1% reduction would equate to £4.7m. It is highly likely that bringing six districts together to deliver transformation would create at least some drop in collection performance.
- The **model is limited in that it is only able to profile the timing of savings at a high level on a year-by-year basis**. The two-unitary solution will be quicker and simpler to bring together services from three district councils rather than six. The on-going savings will therefore be delivered quicker and will provide a platform for further transformation savings.
- The **model does not include any additional costs for supporting neighbourhood working which would be required in a single larger unitary** which is more remote from its population and would reduce annual savings.

The analysis in business case assumes one of the two new councils (the West) could begin with a modest deficit due to existing cost distribution, but that position would not be allowed to stand. Transition

planning would include resource equalisation and smoothing mechanisms to ensure both new councils start sustainably. Moreover, the modelling cannot account with confidence, for the forthcoming Fair Funding Review, which will rebalance national allocations to reflect deprivation, rurality, and demand. This will strengthen the financial sustainability of both authorities, particularly the West, **making the current figures a conservative baseline rather than a forecast of real risk.**

Under the two unitary financial position:

- Net annual savings are estimated at **£10.8m, compared with £21.1m for a single authority. The difference is marginal on an annual budget of over £850m, (1.3% v 2.5%) and reflects the estimated disaggregation costs rather than ongoing inefficiency; it does not account for the model limitations set out above.**
- Transitional pressures are manageable, and both authorities would be financially sustainable.
- Cost is only one **part of the equation; reform that sacrifices legitimacy, service resilience or staff morale for marginally higher savings is a false economy**.

In short: **the two unitary authority model, achieves comparable financial benefits with far stronger legitimacy, accountability and resilience.**

**What financial models miss**

Financial modelling focuses on structure, not strategy. It can calculate the cost of merging teams or closing offices, but it cannot quantify the value of agility, trust, or economic opportunity or the cost of getting reform wrong. **Four areas are routinely underestimated:**

1. **Economic opportunity costs:** A large, slow-moving authority, risks losing investment opportunities the foregone GVA would dwarf any structural savings.
2. **The prevention dividend:** Smaller, connected councils can intervene early and reduce long-term demand pressures, something large authorities can struggle to do.
3. **Delivery risk:** A council that saves slightly more on paper but faces, staff attrition, and integration problems will erode those gains quickly.
4. **Democratic disengagement:** When residents don't feel heard, opposition to plans and consultations increases cost and delay.

Taken together, these risks could easily outweigh the £10 million difference between the one and two unitary options, running far higher if reform falters or legitimacy is lost.

**The Real Question**

**The choice before Gloucestershire is not between cheap and expensive reorganisation, as the financial difference is minimal.** It is between:

- A single large authority that maximises short-term structural savings but risks losing local connection and the ability to maximise opportunities; or

- Two focused authorities that deliver substantial saving while preserving legitimacy, agility and economic leadership for the long-term.

**Efficiency without effectiveness is false economy. The two unitary model delivers both:** responsible savings and resilient structure, aligning financial prudence with democratic strength and long-term sustainability.

# 4. Conclusion: What This Achieves for Gloucestershire

A two-unitary model delivers reform that is credible, connected and built to last, a design that serves Gloucestershire not just for the next few years, but for the next fifty.

✓ **Right sized for agility and connection:** large enough for strategic capability and savings, small enough to stay close to people and place and adapt to changing needs over time.

✓ **Financially strategic**: investing where it matters, managing money carefully rather than simply cutting cost.

✓ **Redesigned services, not just merged structures**: reform that rethinks delivery, not administration.

✓ **Scaled-up prevention**: early intervention made possible by proximity, data and trust.

✓ **Strategic housing delivery**: homes that make sense locally, supported by the right infrastructure.

✓ **Locally rooted economic growth**: investment and jobs driven by councils that know their patch and can move at pace. Reflecting Gloucestershire's dual economic centres and nationally important clusters.

✓ **Stronger local democracy:** councillors who live closer to the people they represent, political diversity, decisions made faster, and communities with a genuine voice.

✓ **Two strong voices for Gloucestershire**: doubling the area's influence in regional and national partnerships.

✓ **Mission-focused teams**: energy and resources flowing to the front line, not lost in bureaucracy

✓ **Reform that works with the grain of Gloucestershire:** aligned with its geography, identity, and civic culture without adding complexity and democratic gaps.

The question is not whether we change, but how we change and whether that change reflects the reality of the communities served. **The two-unitary model is a principled choice, not a compromise. It rejects the "lift and shift" structural reform in favour of real service redesign.**

**It is a choice for long-term ambition over convenience.** It challenges the assumption that bigger is always better and frames ambition within Gloucestershire's geography, identity and civic culture.

Leadership in local government is about making principled choices. We can design structures that bring decisions closer to residents, connect staff to impact, and earn public trust through visible, reliable, honest service. Or we can settle for an administrative merger that risks creating larger but weaker organisations disconnected from place and people. The two unitary model embodies that leadership – reform done once, done right, and built to last.

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