

## **Appendix 2:**

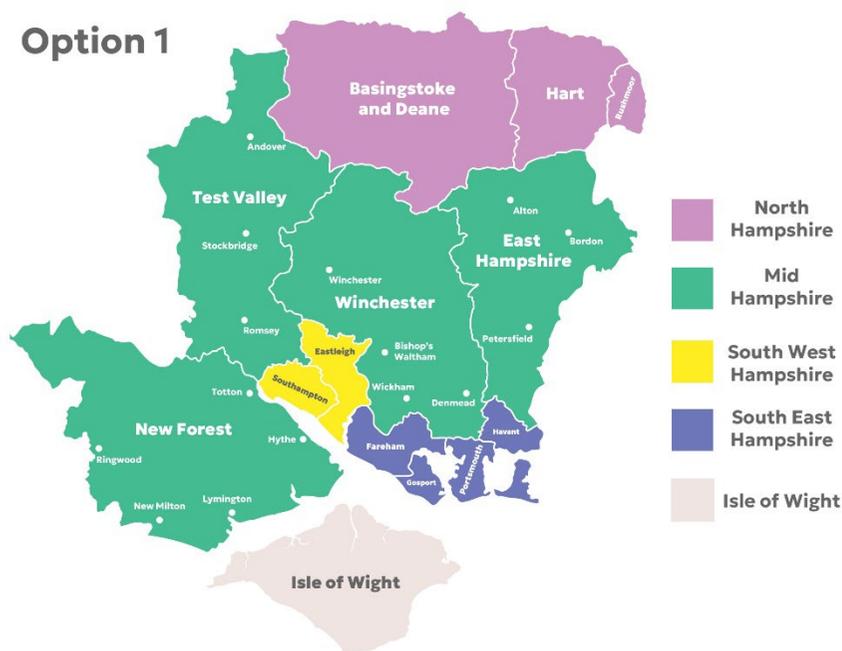
Option 1

## Appendix 2: Option 1

### The Power of Place: a transformative vision for local government in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

#### Introduction

This appendix builds upon the case for change and shows why Option 1, a new Mid Hampshire unitary authority, including the New Forest, is essential for the success of the overall proposal. Whilst Mid Hampshire is not a single place, its communities do share many similar characteristics and are economically and demographically highly aligned. Mid Hampshire is different from the mainly urban communities in the North, South East and South West of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.



#### How is this option different

Option 1 differs from Option 2 as it proposes to establish a Mid Hampshire unitary authority on the current footprint of New Forest District Council, Test Valley Borough Council, Winchester City Council and East Hampshire District Council. Option 2 removes the New Forest from this cluster and places it with the city of Southampton and Eastleigh borough.

The Isle of Wight unitary, the North Hampshire unitary and South East Hampshire unitary are unchanged between Option 1 and Option 2 and the benefits in these regions remain as set out in the main document.

Option 1 specifically differs from Option 3 in that Option 1 proposes to use existing administrative boundaries when the new authorities are formed, avoiding the complexity, disruption and costs involved in splitting existing districts.

Option 1 ensures a well-balanced mayoral combined authority of four mainland authorities plus the Isle of Wight where it can fulfil its strategic role in respect of the Freeport and the future of port development. It also allows the representation of wider local authority views, representing a greater geography in the development of key port infrastructure which is of national and regional economic significance where all strategic interests are represented.

In 2015, ONS produced travel to work areas (TTWA), based on 2011 census data for the whole country. Whilst these remain the latest available TTWA data set it does not reflect the changing nature of the economy and work patterns post Covid, and whilst commuting will inevitably still occur this shouldn't form the main basis for justifying proposals.

Our engagement exercise demonstrates that, in community terms, people look to their local facilities such as pubs and community buildings, before their location of employment and that's the basis of our preventative approach, directing services to the locations where people identify with, not their place of work. In fact, with populations (EIA Appendix 7) for those aged 55 and over of 28% and 21% for the New Forest and Test Valley respectively, and the population of 25 to 54-year-olds at 30.2% and 37.6%, compared with that of Southampton at 45.6% commuting numbers are a less relevant factor in community identity. Commuters will always only be a minority of the overall population and this, as a result, should not be the factor that shapes the new authorities.

Option 1 recognises and understands that the communities and economies of the building block areas share many similar characteristics and are ultimately very different to the mainly urban communities in the rest of mainland Hampshire. Option 1 provides four new mainland authorities that we are confident are right sized to deliver the annual estimated benefits and provide an excellent platform to build financially resilient and sustainable new unitary councils that can facilitate necessary public sector reform.

As such, this appendix focuses on the benefits of the proposed strong Mid Hampshire authority, including the entire New Forest, for the four new mainland unitaries with the Isle of Wight remaining independent, as set out in the Case for Change.

## **A summary of what this option delivers**

The economy of the area is distinct and a Mid Hampshire authority established on the current footprint of New Forest, Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire would be best placed to support the new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) to develop the unique economic potential of the area. The MSA will, as a result, benefit from a balanced membership of five constituent councils which collectively represent the full range of different economic interests in the region.

Establishing a single unitary authority to work with similar communities across Mid Hampshire and including the New Forest will enable an extension of our already strong place-based working with frontline local councillors supporting local communities to identify and deliver on their own aspirations and build their own resilience. This place-based approach will establish the conditions for transformative public service reform, that supports a preventative agenda to tackle demand, particularly in relation to adult and children's social care. This approach reflects the preferences of residents and local partners, who value strong local identity, coherent delivery, and collaborative governance rooted in place.

The proposal to create a Mid Hampshire Council brings together the unique natural geography of the New Forest, the Hampshire South Downs, the world-renowned chalk streams of the Test, Itchen and Meon, with, at its centre, the cathedral city of Winchester.

In summary, this option will:

- **Secure the benefits of devolution, including economic growth**, by ensuring that the MSA is set up for success with a balanced set of constituent authorities, with a united voice for the mid Hampshire communities which are distinctly different from the rest of the geography. This option is better able to represent the diversity of communities and place across the region.
- **Deliver a transformative vision for local government**, addressing the challenges within the Hampshire area by creating the conditions for a new council with a vision to move on from outdated models of service delivery towards more place and asset-based approaches with a focus on prevention and reducing demand, thereby enabling the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to all communities across the region.
- **Align closely with communities' views**, as expressed in our recent cross-Hampshire survey and wider insight gained from targeted deliberative engagement across the Mid Hampshire area and specific feedback from key Forest town and parish councils and communities including the Commoners.
- **Deliver new arrangements, and benefits to citizens, at pace** by avoiding additional risk and lengthy bureaucracy associated with boundary change and the disaggregation of key services at a district level such as housing, waste, revenues and benefits and elections.

## **Key reasons for support**

The main point of difference between this option and others in this Case for Change – and the option put forward by Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council – is the proposal to establish a Mid Hampshire unitary authority on the current footprint of

New Forest District Council, Test Valley Borough Council, Winchester City Council and East Hampshire District Council. This would operate alongside three new unitary authorities on the mainland to serve the more urban areas in and around the economic centres of Southampton, Portsmouth and Basingstoke in the South East, South West and North of the county. As such, this appendix focuses on the benefits of the proposed strong Mid Hampshire authority, including the entire New Forest, for the four new mainland and Isle of Wight unitary model set out in the Case for Change.

### **Securing the benefits of devolution, including economic growth**

This approach would establish a balanced group of five strong and collaborative unitary authorities able to advocate effectively for their communities and support the MSA to deliver on its new strategic functions. There is a track record of place-based leadership, public service reform, and economic delivery in the Mid Hampshire area, which a new Mid Hampshire unitary authority would build on to actively partner with and strengthen the MSA.

A Mid Hampshire unitary authority would bring substantial and complementary economic strength, and a strong platform for future growth to support the devolution agenda. With a GVA of £18.2bn, Mid Hampshire is a strategically positioned, high-performing economy that is already driving regional prosperity and national productivity. It forms the natural link between the Solent's coastal economy, anchored by Freeport tax sites in the New Forest, and the Midlands' industrial base, offering seamless access to regional and international markets. Its connectivity is underpinned by nationally significant infrastructure: the M3, A34, A303, and M27 form the backbone of freight and logistics across the region, while fast, frequent rail services connect key towns to London in around an hour, supporting labour mobility and access to talent. Proximity to Southampton International Airport and the Port of Southampton further enhances global reach. The rise of hybrid working patterns has also boosted the area's attractiveness to residents and businesses seeking high quality of life, digital connectivity, and proximity to major centres without urban congestion.

The area is home to global brands such as INEOS, IBM, Estée Lauder, Arqiva, and Stannah, alongside a vibrant ecosystem of high-growth SMEs in sectors such as green technology, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, and logistics. The Waterside area of New Forest, home of the internationally significant Fawley Oil Refinery, operated by ExxonMobil, anchors the area's strengths in energy as well as supporting service delivery in sparse rural areas through its tax base and business rate generation.

This diverse and resilient economic base offers significant headroom for further expansion, particularly in innovation-intensive, export-led industries. Nationally recognised higher education institutions and sixth forms contribute to a high-quality skills pipeline, while active public-private collaboration enables research, workforce development, and enterprise growth. The New Forest faces skills challenges that are aligned with Mid Hampshire councils, as opposed to an urban area. It recently produced with partners a Skills plan to tackle local challenges such as an ageing population, low-paid jobs, and limited access to training. It focuses on helping young people, women returning to work, over-50s, job changers, and aspiring entrepreneurs. The key goals of the plan include supporting lifelong learning and digital skills, helping people into better paid, higher skilled jobs, and strengthening sectors like health, tourism, and green industries, as well as promoting inclusive growth and equal access to training.

Option 1 enables bespoke economic infrastructure and skills solutions right for the area to be developed, enabling Mid Hampshire to accelerate economic development, attract inward investment, and support the wider growth ambitions of the Hampshire and Solent region.

This economic dynamism is deeply intertwined with the area's natural capital and landscape-led economy. Shaped by two National Parks and internationally protected environments, Mid Hampshire's geography enables sustainable economic development and housing growth that respects environmental constraints. Tourism is a cornerstone of this model, generating hundreds of millions in annual visitor spend, supporting thousands of jobs, and sustaining a thriving network of small businesses across hospitality, retail, food and leisure. Over eight million people visit the Winchester district every year, spending over £370 million and supporting over 5,760 jobs. The New Forest alone attracts over 15 million visitor days annually and underpins one of the UK's most valuable rural visitor economies. Its environmental role goes hand in hand with innovation in green tourism, decarbonisation, and nature-based enterprise. Keeping the district whole is not just about identity – it is about ensuring joined-up infrastructure, sustainability, and stewardship across one of England's most sensitive and economically vital landscapes.

In addition to its environmental and economic importance, Mid Hampshire plays a nationally strategic role in defence and security. It is home to British Army Headquarters and Middle Wallop Flying Station (home of the Army Air Corps Headquarters) in Test Valley, the Tri-Service Defence College in Winchester, and Marchwood Military Port in the New Forest. These nationally significant assets contribute materially to regional GVA, anchor long-term public investment, and provide high-value employment in defence and logistics sectors critical to UK resilience. Bringing them together in Option 1 will enable the future council to continue the long-established support for armed forces and the wider sector within Hampshire.

## **Delivering a transformative vision for local government**

As set out in the main Case for Change, all the unitary authorities have been assessed to identify the most financially viable option. This option would build on the supporting councils' history of financial stability and resilience, and their record of place-based leadership and public service reform. By leveraging the economies of scale derived from operating across similar areas and communities, particularly in more sparsely populated rural areas, a new Mid Hampshire unitary authority would build on an already strong place-based and preventative way of working amongst districts and extend it into the unitary context. Central to this is an operational culture that puts frontline councillors at the heart of the authorities work with communities, building on their representative role to empower people to shape their futures, strengthening resilience and trust in public services. There is a clear opportunity to reshape the operating model for local government, focusing on rebuilding the relationship between local people and public systems through neighbourhood-based, preventative delivery.

Across Mid Hampshire, councils are already working in partnership with the NHS, voluntary sector, and communities to reduce pressure on acute services, support independent living, and improve health outcomes. From the nationally recognised Andover Health Hub to discharge and reablement models in New Forest, Winchester, and East Hampshire, the area is delivering the kind of hyper-local, person-centred public services promoted by the NHS Long Term Plan. These approaches are not isolated and reflect a shared ethos across all four councils. From co-designed regeneration projects like Andover Vision and the Totton Regeneration Partnership to East Hampshire's Whitehill & Bordon transformation, where community-led design has delivered integrated housing, health and green infrastructure, there is significant evidence in this area of how services and places can be shaped with and for residents.

By establishing the new unitary authorities based on similar areas and communities, the conditions will be set for these ways of working to become the mainstream in the new authorities, grounded in community empowerment and environmental stewardship, reducing demand, and delivering better services more cost effectively. This approach is a blueprint for stronger democracy, offering effective, financially sustainable, and accountable governance. It is a success story to be protected.

## **Aligning with communities' views**

Transitioning to a unitary authority should protect local interests and identities. Our approach ensures that historical, cultural and community identity and the natural assets that matter to our communities are safeguarded.

Within the independent survey commissioned by the 12 councils this option is the preferred choice of those completing the survey, with 48% supporting or strongly supporting Test Valley, Winchester, New Forest and East Hampshire forming the building blocks of a new unitary authority.

Option 1 is strongly preferred by respondents from New Forest and Test Valley. Previous reorganisations have demonstrated that where there is community support for proposals this results in effective and sustainable governance.

## **Delivering benefits to citizens at pace**

This option is the only proposal that both avoids the disruption of boundary change and keeps the New Forest intact within a coherent Mid Hampshire geography. This is critical to maintaining the functional and operational fit of the area, preserving how communities live, work, and access services. Indeed, residents, local councils, and district elected representatives across the New Forest have expressed unanimous concern about the risks of boundary change or splitting Waterside from the rest of New Forest. Both New Forest MPs have indicated their support for Option 1.

Reorganising with similar councils as building blocks will be more efficient than merging diverse areas with very different communities, service delivery models, governance structures and population needs.

## **Assessment against MHCLG criteria**

**Criteria one: A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**

Option 1 provides the most coherent and deliverable route to establishing a single-tier structure for Mid Hampshire. It brings together Test Valley, Winchester, East Hampshire and the New Forest - four councils with closely aligned operational models, shared priorities, and high-quality public service delivery across similar mixed rural-urban geographies. This commonality in approach, particularly around neighbourhood services, housing, and environmental management, offers a strong foundation for integrated, place-based governance.

A key strength of Option 1 is that it preserves both the integrity of the entire New Forest district, including the Waterside, as well as retaining it within a coherent Mid Hampshire geography. Its use of whole districts as the building blocks of reform enables a rapid transition without boundary change, minimising disruption to services, preserving community identity, and providing a stable foundation for future transformation. By working with the grain of existing partnerships, Option 1 avoids the overhead of complex structural adjustments and supports faster, simpler implementation, particularly relevant given likely LGBC boundary reviews post-reorganisation. Equally, retaining the entire New Forest district, geographically, administratively, and strategically, within a coherent Mid Hampshire geography is not just a matter of community preference, but a public policy imperative: preserving a nationally significant landscape, furthering the purposes of the New Forest National Park Authority, and protecting ancient commoning practices and environmental stewardship.

This configuration also delivers significant strategic value to the MSA. With a balanced population of just under 600,000, Mid Hampshire provides democratic parity and operational alignment with other unitary partners. It links two National Parks, significant natural capital, and national growth corridors such as the Solent Freeport's Waterside tax sites and strategic freight infrastructure (M3, A34, A303). This supports delivery of MSA-wide priorities including net zero, sustainable housing, and rural economic growth. Option 1 ensures rural priorities are properly represented without compromising the city-region focus, providing a complete and more resilient MSA footprint.

One of the most recent LGR processes saw the creation of North Yorkshire Council, which could be seen as a forerunner to the proposals contained in Option 1. North Yorkshire Council has a population of over 600,000 which is a similar sized population to that proposed for Mid Hampshire. North Yorkshire brings together communities covering a very large geographical area which are similar in nature, rather than claiming to be single place. This is very similar to the Mid-Hampshire proposal. North Yorkshire is bordered by larger urban areas such as the city of York which, itself, has a population of 210,000. This is around half the size of the proposed new unitary authority for Southampton and Eastleigh. North Yorkshire is made up of two National Parks which cover 40% of its geography and has market towns running the depth and breadth of what is the largest unitary council by geographical size, in England.

Finally, this model supports the MSA to deliver on the Government's ambition to maximise sustainable housing delivery across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The Mid Hampshire footprint includes areas of significant housing potential, delivered through sensitive, landscape-led models supported by partnerships with universities, Homes England and statutory environment agencies. The geography reflects real-world patterns of housing, employment, and infrastructure, making it an effective delivery platform for growth that is both ambitious and sustainable.

**Criteria two: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**

With a projected 2028 population of 598,823, Mid Hampshire is the right size to achieve the government's ambitions for local government reform: big enough to deliver transformation and economies of scale, while local enough to remain responsive and rooted in place. Its scale supports efficiency, strategic capacity, and resilience to financial shocks, while its geography and design allow services to be tailored to the distinct needs of rural, urban, and semi-rural communities.

The Mid Hampshire proposal brings together councils already shaped by a shared understanding of how to deliver for communities across a mixed rural/town landscape. This enables the new authority to maintain local relevance while achieving organisational efficiencies. By retaining the boundaries of existing authorities, Option 1 avoids the complexity, cost, and service disruption that would result from lower tier disaggregation allowing for a more seamless transition.

The Hampshire County Council forecast deficit to 2028 of £281m represents an enormity of financial challenge that proves why a different approach and scale of local authority across the county area is needed. The financial advantages of the four new mainland unitary model have been robustly tested during the building of this case for change and shows significant net budget improvements for all recommended authorities. Option 1 provides four new mainland authorities that we are confident are right sized to deliver the annual estimated benefits and provide an excellent platform to build financially resilient and sustainable new unitary councils.

Collectively, these councils have shown strong financial governance while investing in future efficiency, through retrofit programmes, nutrient-neutrality mitigation, and developer-funded infrastructure. This prudent, future-focused approach provides a strong platform for a financially sustainable unitary authority.

Mid Hampshire's well-connected infrastructure, anchored by the M3, A34, A303, M27 and fast rail links to London, enables seamless movement of goods, people, and services. These routes are vital for national freight logistics and underpin the success of key industries

in the region. The area also benefits from excellent access to international gateways including Heathrow, Gatwick and Southampton International Airport, further enhancing its strategic connectivity for business, trade and travel.

The area's economy further reinforces its resilience and growth potential. Mid Hampshire is home to global companies such as INEOS, IBM, Estée Lauder, and Arqiva, alongside a thriving ecosystem of high-growth SMEs. Its economy is defined by both scale and momentum, anchored in key sectors like advanced manufacturing, logistics, agri-tech, environmental services, and green technology. These sectors are not only high value but strategically aligned with national economic and net zero priorities. This blend of multinational investment and entrepreneurial energy creates a dynamic environment for jobs, exports, and inward investment. Tourism also plays a vital role in the region's economy. With millions of visitors each year to the New Forest, Winchester, South Downs National Park, and market towns such as Lymington, Romsey, Petersfield, and Alton, the area supports one of the UK's most valuable rural visitor economies. Tourism sustains thousands of jobs across hospitality, retail, culture, and heritage, while also reinforcing local identity and landscape stewardship.

In summary, Option 1 is right sized to meet the government's ambition for resilient and efficient local government. It combines scale with subsidiarity, builds on commonality in service delivery, and avoids the risk and disruption of boundary change. Its structure supports stronger partnerships, maintains close connections with residents, and delivers the long-term efficiency that reform is intended to unlock.

**Criteria three: Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**

Mid Hampshire councils demonstrate a strong and consistent track record of delivering high-quality, sustainable public services, especially in housing, preventative health, and community infrastructure. They have a shared commitment to service models that are rooted in local communities, respectful of the natural environment, and responsive to the needs of rural and mixed geographies.

A particular strength of Option 1 is the design of services around the needs of rural populations, including isolated and less well served communities where deprivation is often less visible but no less acute. Mid Hampshire's model offers a credible, scalable route to tackling rural deprivation, one of the government's key priorities, through outreach-based public services, targeted investment, and inclusive community infrastructure. From mobile and outreach health provision to housing strategies tailored to smaller settlements, services are delivered at the scale of recognised community footprints. This ensures local relevance, service take-up, and social impact, while maintaining efficiency and accountability.

The area is also well positioned to deliver integrated adult social care. All four councils have invested in neighbourhood-based preventative models that promote independence, reduce pressure on acute services, and align with national NHS and social care objectives. These models provide a scalable blueprint for joined-up care:

- In the New Forest, initiatives like Independence Matters and Just Got Home support recovery at home, reduce delayed discharges, and enhance patient choice – especially in hard-to-reach rural areas.
- The Andover Health Hub is a nationally recognised example of multi-agency coordination, bringing together NHS services, local government, and voluntary sector partners to improve discharge, reablement, and early intervention. Winchester and East Hampshire deliver embedded neighbourhood support through voluntary and primary care networks. In Winchester, locality teams collaborate with GPs and VCSE partners to support frail and older residents, while East Hampshire integrates community development officers into local hubs, focusing on early intervention, carers, and those at risk of social isolation.

The broader Option 1 model allows for coordinated transformation of complex services, including adult social care. Shared NHS providers, overlapping community networks, and a culture of place-based practice enable a safe, phased disaggregation of county functions. Together, these new authorities can redesign services around local geographies, ensuring smoother transitions for residents and stronger alignment with primary care, mental health, and voluntary sector partners.

Support for children and families is also integrated. Across Mid Hampshire, shared community assets such as dual-use halls and children’s centres support early years and family development. Joint work with schools, GPs, and VCSE partners enhances delivery of mental health and early help services.

Housing and infrastructure strategies demonstrate sustainable public service innovation. Across the region, councils have worked together, and with the Civic University Network, to plan and deliver homes that meet rural community needs while protecting environmental assets. This includes:

- Exception site housing for local people.
- Retrofit programmes to reduce fuel poverty and emissions.
- Nutrient neutrality mitigation to unlock stalled housing sites.
- Developer-funded infrastructure to support long-term public service integration.

Importantly, this geography supports simplification of planning and environmental governance. The New Forest National Park currently intersects four local planning authorities—creating complexity and fragmentation. Option 1 reduces this to three, streamlining delivery and strengthening the statutory role of the NPA. It also aligns strategic housing delivery with ecological stewardship, enabling services and infrastructure to be planned in harmony with the protected landscapes that define this area.

Option 1 presents the strongest alignment with the New Forest National Park Authority’s statutory purposes and strategic priorities, undertaken in a recent assessment by the NPA. By retaining the integrity of the New Forest as a whole and combining it with other predominantly rural authorities - Test Valley, Winchester, and East Hampshire - the option safeguards vital landscape, ecological, and cultural heritage links. It supports collaborative delivery of national objectives such as nature recovery, climate resilience, and the 30x30 targets, while recognising the socio-economic value of the New Forest’s natural capital. Crucially, it avoids fragmentation of the Waterside area, preserving the commoning system essential to the Park’s management and identity.

This approach reinforces national policy duties under the Environment Act 1995 and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, supporting the statutory purposes of National Parks and preserving ancient commoning rights that are unique to the New Forest.

In summary, Mid Hampshire is already delivering high-quality services through preventative, environmentally respectful, and community-focused models. The proposed unitary would build on this foundation, scaling best practice, unlocking housing and health outcomes, and reducing the overheads associated with boundary reorganisation. Crucially, it offers one of the most coherent platforms to tackle rural deprivation and isolation, supporting inclusion, economic resilience, and improved outcomes in places often underserved by urban-led models.

**Criteria four: 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.**

While the four councils have not historically operated as a formal partnership, they each bring strong and complementary relationships with NHS partners, town and parish councils, community groups, and local businesses. Their shared strategic values and deep commitment to place-based working create a robust foundation for integration.

This option builds on community consensus. Each authority has engaged extensively with residents, town and parish councillors, and civic partners as part of the local government reorganisation process. This feedback consistently supports a model that:

- Retains existing district boundaries and avoids unnecessary structural change.

- Respects local identity and reflects the distinct character of rural communities.
- Maintains proximity between residents and the services they rely on.

There is a clear desire for governance that keeps decision-making local, responsive, and grounded in how communities already live, travel, and access support. Option 1 reflects these preferences. It is designed around natural functional geography, reinforced by travel-to-work flows and social connections between New Forest, Test Valley, East Hampshire and Winchester, and avoids boundary reorganisation that would weaken the alignment between local identity and governance.

This model also reinforces people's connection to rural life. It recognises that rural residents value distinct things, such as access to local services, landscape stewardship, and direct influence over neighbourhood priorities. There are key communities within the New Forest including the New Forest Gypsy, Romani and Traveller communities some of whom were historically resettled from roaming freely across the Forest to settled areas including Totton within the waterside area, Fawley Parish, and Hythe.

Also, the Commoners who have a demonstrable historical continuity in the New Forest going back over a thousand years in unbroken continuity and have maintained a sociocultural identity and traditional way of life which is distinct from any other group in the UK. The continuation of our traditional way of life including culture, identity and practice is vital to maintaining the New Forest's internationally important ecology and landscape.

By retaining whole districts and established footprints, Option 1 ensures that this relationship with place is maintained and strengthened into the future.

Mid Hampshire's geography also includes a network of vibrant towns, from Andover and Alton to Romsey, Lymington, Petersfield, Bordon, Stockbridge and Bishop's Waltham. These towns are more than service hubs; they are identity anchors for surrounding rural communities. The Mid Hampshire approach explicitly acknowledges their distinct needs and builds governance and delivery around them. It supports targeted economic growth, transport investment, and social infrastructure designed for market-town scale, something not always achievable in more urban-dominated unitary models.

Crucially, this proposal also protects and strengthens the role of town and parish councils. These local bodies play an essential role in shaping services, supporting vulnerable residents, and holding decision-makers to account. The councils within Mid Hampshire already operate highly localised governance structures, such as area planning committees, neighbourhood forums, and ward-led investment

models, that empower local voices and ensure that frontline councillors are at the centre of all work with communities. Under a Mid Hampshire unitary, these mechanisms would not only be retained but elevated, embedding neighbourhood democracy in the new authority's governance model.

Independent deliberative engagement commissioned from Thinks Insight & Strategy found that “most New Forest residents see the New Forest as their local area, including towns in the area such as Lymington, Lyndhurst and New Milton. While many travel to Southampton to access services and amenities, people are reluctant to identify it as part of their local area.”



In summary, Option 1 is rooted in what communities have asked for. It:

- Builds on community consensus around boundaries, identity and local delivery.
- Supports people's connection to rural life and distinctive places.
- Recognises and empowers market towns and their surrounding settlements.
- Strengthens collaborative working with town and parish councils.
- Reflects lived experience and patterns of movement across Mid Hampshire.

It is not just a configuration that works on paper, it is a model shaped by people, place, and local ambition.

**Criteria five: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**

Mid Hampshire is well-positioned to support future devolution. Its size, strategic coherence, and delivery capability make it an ideal partner for taking on devolved powers and functions, ensuring that decisions are made at the most appropriate level, aligned to the needs and aspirations of communities and businesses.

The region already demonstrates the capacity and credibility required to operate at a devolved level:

- Major regeneration leadership at Andover and Winchester, driven by local ambition and strong delivery capability.
- Strategic influence on the Solent Freeport Board, particularly through New Forest's Waterside sites with successful working through the Waterside Steering Group ensuring the business case delivers for local residents for example co-producing the New Forest Skills Plan.
- Collaborative housing and environmental planning, including joint solutions to challenges like nutrient neutrality and sustainable land use, with projects such as Whitehill & Bordon in East Hampshire exemplifying landscape-led regeneration and a proactive planning approach to Solent Freeport tax sites including Solent Gateway and Fawley Waterside.
- Successful attraction and deployment of Levelling Up Fund, UKSPF, Homes England, and DEFRA investment across all four districts, including targeted rural and market-town interventions in Petersfield and Alton.

In particular, the transformation of Andover, led by Test Valley through a nationally recognised co-design process, demonstrates Mid Hampshire's readiness to lead place-based change. The emerging health and wellbeing campus integrates health, planning, and infrastructure in a way that exemplifies the area's ability to align local innovation with regional priorities.

A Mid Hampshire unitary authority would also be well placed to maximise the economic and environmental opportunities available across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Its geography connects high-potential growth corridors with exceptional natural capital assets, such as the New Forest and South Downs National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and internationally renowned chalk rivers. These areas are not only environmental treasures but economic engines: supporting land-based enterprise, eco-tourism, and green innovation.

The scale and coherence of Mid Hampshire enable it to act as a strategic delivery vehicle, harnessing this natural capital to drive inclusive, environmentally responsible growth. This includes:

- Sensitive delivery of housing and infrastructure in protected and constrained landscapes.
- Investment in sustainable transport and clean energy.
- Stewardship of ecosystems and biodiversity in ways that also support economic resilience.

Option 1 ensures that this unique blend of landscape and economy is governed in an integrated, place-sensitive way, aligning environmental responsibility with productivity and growth.

As a partner within the MSA, Mid Hampshire would provide geographic and functional balance. It complements more urban unitary areas by representing the rural and town perspective, ensuring strategic priorities, such as housing, health, and net zero, are delivered across a full spectrum of places. Its presence would help shape a more balanced regional offer, grounded in diverse strengths and shared ambition.

In summary, Mid Hampshire including the New Forest:

- Has the scale and leadership maturity to absorb devolved powers.
- Offers a strategic geography that links coastal, rural, and inland economies.
- Maximises the potential of natural capital to deliver green growth.
- Supports balanced, inclusive regional development in partnership with the MSA.
- Keeps governance rooted in place, while aligning delivery with national policy.
- This is not just a unitary proposal, it is a ready-made platform for meaningful devolution, designed to unlock the full potential of the area and contribute to the prosperity and sustainability of the wider South East.

**Criteria six: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

Mid Hampshire councils are national exemplars in neighbourhood-based engagement. Their democratic and community development models go beyond consultation, they are embedded in how places are shaped, and services are delivered. This collaborative, neighbourhood-first approach strengthens local democracy, resilience, and ownership, and provides a robust platform for future innovation.

Crucially, Option 1 builds on the strength of having well-established parish and town councils across the entire geography. These structures already provide a direct, trusted link between residents and governance, especially in rural areas. Under this model, Neighbourhood Area Committees would be established to bring together representatives from the new unitary authority and existing town and parish councils. This approach ensures continuity of local representation, while enhancing capacity for coordinated, responsive delivery.

This configuration maintains people's connection with rural life and supports the distinctiveness of market towns, which often require a different service focus from more urban centres. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model, Option 1 enables locally bespoke governance that reflects the diversity of communities across Mid Hampshire, empowering residents to shape solutions that meet their unique needs.

Option 1 fulfils the LGBCEs requirement for effective and convenient local government. A unified governance model ensures coherent service delivery, environmental regulation, and planning policy, all of which would be compromised by fragmentation. For example, in ecological stewardship the Waterside forms a vital corridor between the Forest and the Solent. Fragmenting governance would disrupt biodiversity management and climate resilience strategies. In terms of planning for the area the Waterside Vision, A326 upgrade, and Freeport development are coordinated through cross-agency partnerships rooted in the New Forest context. Across the geography, councils are already empowering communities to shape their futures and Option 1 brings together place-based partnership delivery:

- Test Valley's Andover Vision and Romsey Future partnerships are long-standing, community-led programmes that shape regeneration priorities and build consensus across sectors.
- Winchester's neighbourhood forums support the development of new communities by giving voice to residents, ensuring new places are shaped from the ground up.
- The Totton Regeneration Partnership in the New Forest exemplifies collaborative place-shaping involving councillors, residents, and local organisations.
- East Hampshire District Council, through the Whitehill & Bordon regeneration, has engaged residents via community forums and placemaking governance schemes, ensuring public input shaped health infrastructure, environmental design, and sustainable master planning.

These initiatives have been enhanced through award-winning engagement methods, such as citizens' assemblies and digital consultations, which reach a broader and more inclusive audience. Winchester's lockdown-era consultation won two national awards for its impact and reach, while Test Valley has built a national reputation for deliberative public engagement.

In addition to engagement, formal governance structures are already close to communities. Ward-level funding, area-based planning committees, and dedicated community support teams extend the council's presence and visibility on the ground. In New Forest,

councillor budgets along with a £350,000 annual grants scheme enables residents to lead on local priorities. In East Hampshire and Winchester, community governance is adapted to reflect the needs of growing settlements and new developments.

The new Mid Hampshire unitary authority would not only maintain these structures, but it would also scale and strengthen them, combining the local accountability of parish and town councils with the strategic capacity of a larger, financially resilient UA. The introduction of Neighbourhood Area Committees would enhance joined up working across tiers of governance and deepen the reach of local democracy.

In summary, Option 1 empowers local communities, protects local identity, and reinforces the structures that already support responsive, democratic governance. It delivers on the Government's ambitions for neighbourhood empowerment by rooting decision-making in place and extending trust and influence on the communities themselves.

#### **Leaders' and other key stakeholder endorsements**

Cllr Jill Cleary, Leader, New Forest District Council

*“Option 1 delivers reorganisation that works for the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, creating a governance model that is efficient, locally responsive, and positioned to maximise our shared economic and environmental potential.*

*“The district of the New Forest is more than a location, it is a connected community with a shared identity and a clear sense of direction. Our residents have told us they want governance that reflects that reality. And our communities have spoken with clarity and conviction, speaking up for governance that feels rooted in who they are, where they live, and how they connect with one another. For the New Forest, Option 1 builds on existing partnerships, aligns areas with complementary priorities, and creates the conditions for stronger, more resilient public services.*

*“This is about building on the very best of what we have; harnessing the Waterside's economic potential within the wider region, championing the Forest's role in environmental leadership, and ensuring a strong voice in decisions that shape our future.”*

*“Option 1 is the only configuration that can deliver LGR with community backing, regional coherence, and the credibility to make it work. It unlocks the full potential of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight while keeping the Forest whole.”*

Cllr Phil North, Leader, Test Valley Borough Council

*“Our communities are very supportive of Option 1. Whilst nobody is claiming that Mid Hampshire is a single place, its communities and economies share many similar characteristics. Ultimately it is very different to the mainly urban communities in the rest of mainland Hampshire.*

*“As a result, it will provide the conditions for public service reform to succeed and offers hope of a sustainable future for all our communities. It will ensure a well-balanced mayoral combined authority where all strategic interests are represented.”*

## **Conclusion: Why Option 1 offers the strongest path forward**

Option 1 presents the most coherent, deliverable, and future-ready model, with a coherent and strong Mid Hampshire unitary authority at its centre. It builds on existing boundaries as building blocks, bringing together similar areas currently governed by councils with aligned priorities, shared delivery models, and a strong culture of place-based innovation, creating the right conditions for better services, stronger communities, and long-term financial sustainability for all councils.

It brings forward a geography that reflects commonality, ensuring a rural voice in strategic decisions and avoiding placing a predominantly rural area into a governance structure designed around a city. It is designed to support an effective Mayoral Strategic Authority, bringing together two National Parks to provide environmental leadership across the region.

Crucially, Option 1 is the only configuration that both preserves the integrity of the entire New Forest district, including the Waterside, and retains it within a coherent Mid Hampshire geography. This ensures that rural identity, operational coherence, and environmental stewardship remain intact, vital in one of the UK’s most sensitive and nationally significant landscapes. It produces coherent and effective local governance and builds on local identity, two key principles for shaping council boundaries.

Option 1 avoids both disruption and compromise. It offers:

- **No boundary change**, making it the least disruptive and most immediately deliverable option.
- **Continuity in public service delivery**, building on strong cross-sector partnerships already in place across health, housing, environment, and community services.
- **Economic strength and connectivity**, rooted in a high-performing £18.2bn GVA economy, key national infrastructure, and growing innovation clusters.

- **Balanced population and tax base**, enabling resilience and fair contribution within the MSA.
- **A strong public mandate**, reflecting resident and partner preferences for identity, coherence, and local empowerment.

Option 1 meets every one of the MHCLG criteria, not just on paper, but in practice. It supports national policy goals, aligns with how people live and work, and provides a credible, low-risk foundation for transformation. It is the option that delivers reform with consent, not disruption; a model that strengthens Mid Hampshire and contributes fully to the success of the wider Mayoral Strategic Authority.

# Appendix 3:

Option 2

## **Appendix 3: Option 2**

### **Introduction**

Simple, balanced and locally supported. Option 2 delivers a coherent and balanced set of authorities for the mainland. It has strong local identity and does not require any boundary changes, thus ensuring it is simpler to implement, while configured to better deliver services and ensure devolved power with a community focus.

This proposal creates four new mainland councils built around sensible, proportionate, place-based geographies.

The proposed unitary configuration balances shared local identity and existing service, economic and transport links. Each council is designed to deliver effective leadership, streamlined services and improved accountability, while remaining recognisably local and at a scale that is manageable and effective.

### **How is this option different**

Option 2 differs from Option 1 in one respect: New Forest district forms part of the South West Hampshire unitary instead being located in the Mid Hampshire unitary.

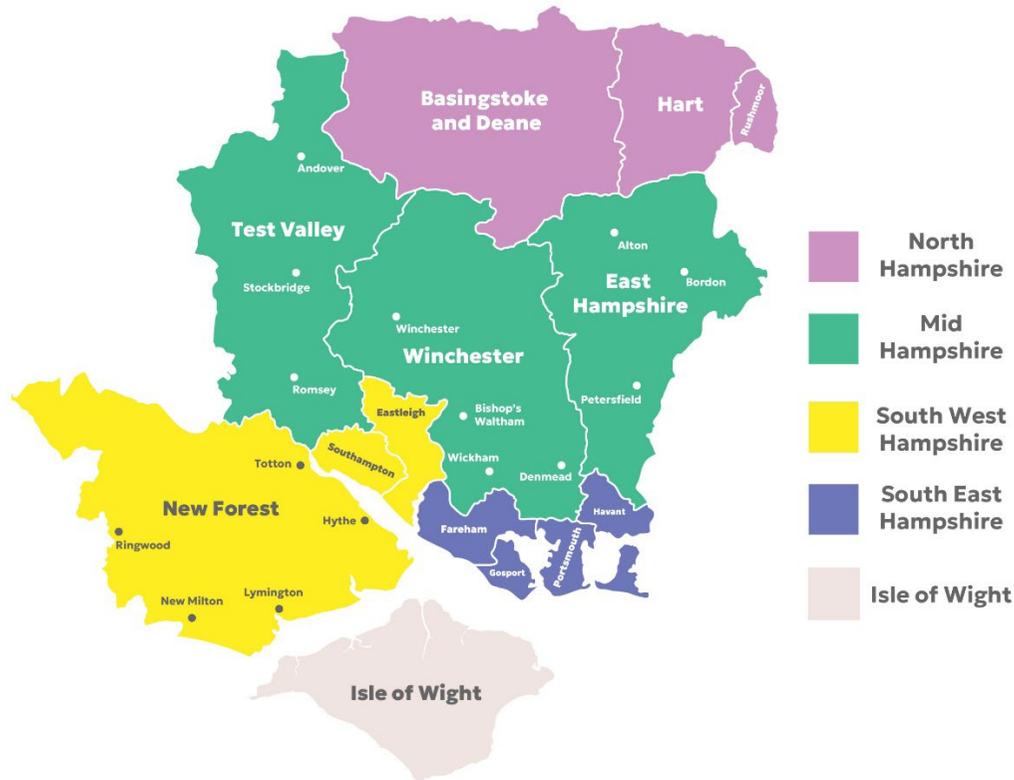
It differs from Option 3 in in that there are no boundary changes or splitting of existing district building blocks when the new authorities are established (we remain open to boundary adjustments at a later stage via Principal Authority Boundary Review).

The Isle of Wight unitary, the North Hampshire unitary and the South East Hampshire unitary are unchanged between Option 1 and Option 2 and the benefits in these regions remain as set out in the main document.

Option 2 also offers substantially similar features to Option 1 in terms of a balanced population and viable financial assessment for example but enables a more balanced approach to geography and tax base across the whole geography.

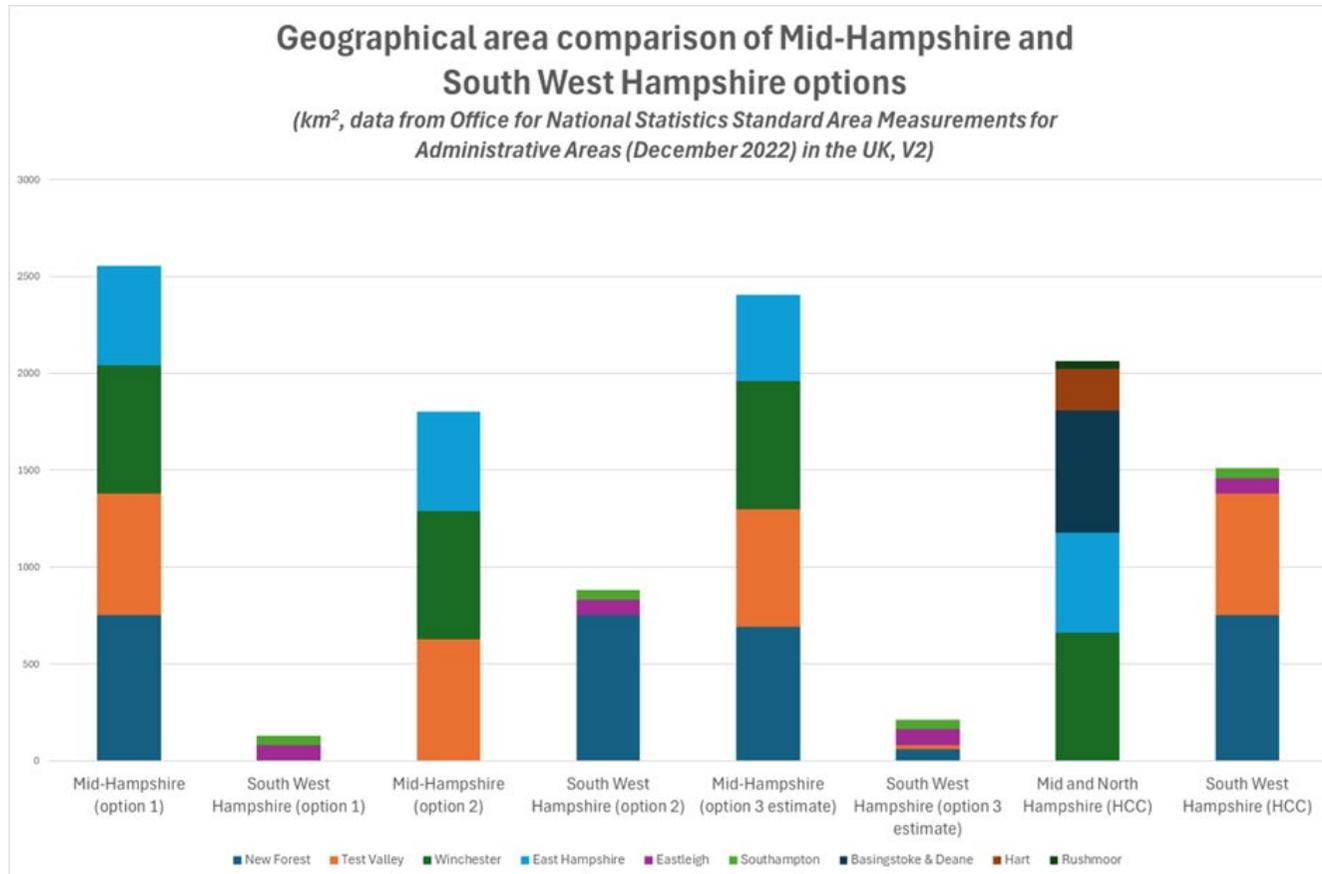
This is coupled with the benefits in Option 3 of having the New Forest waterside area in the South West unitary – while continuing to ensure a strong and sustainable Mid Hampshire authority.

The image below shows the proposed geography of unitary councils in Option 2.



The key additional benefit of Option 2 is that it offers the most balanced geographical unitary configuration for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. It creates four new mainland unitaries of similar size and scale, avoiding the risk of excessively large geographies or constraining the county's largest settlement, Southampton, in the smallest unitary.

The chart below shows that under Option 2, Mid Hampshire is only twice as large as South West Hampshire, rather than 20 times larger as in Option 1.



## Creating a coastal economic powerhouse

As well as being the most geographically balanced, Option 2 also offers substantial economic benefits to the South West Hampshire Unitary. Including the New Forest and its waterside area in the proposed South West Hampshire unitary offers a strategic opportunity to align governance with the region’s real-world economic and social dynamics. The area has strong industrial and maritime links with Southampton, including major employers like the Fawley oil refinery and significant commuting flows to Southampton and Eastleigh. By

integrating this area into a single authority, the proposal supports more coherent planning across transport, housing, and infrastructure, enabling better service delivery and sustainable growth.

This unified approach would also bring together key economic assets, such as Southampton city centre, the docks, Southampton Airport, and Freeport investment zones, under one governance structure. This would streamline investment decisions, enhance coordination of skills and innovation strategies, and strengthen the region's ability to attract funding. Overall, the proposal aims to unlock the full potential of the Solent corridor and establish the South West as a coastal economic powerhouse.

### **Strong coherent and effective central authority for Mid Hampshire**

Creating a Mid Hampshire authority from the area of Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire avoids the challenges and associated costs of service delivery that comes with excessive geographic size while bringing together authorities and services with similar challenges, demography and experience of delivery in a mixed rural area. It integrates communities which self-identify as rural around the principal settlements of Andover, Winchester, Romsey, Petersfield and Alton – and their associated market towns and villages – with an economy and housing market defined by professional services, technology, creative enterprises, tourism – combined with a continuously developing rural economy and a strong commitment to sustainability.

The net effect is a Mid Hampshire Unitary that is well-placed to transform and localise its services and ensure that its residents and businesses achieve maximum benefit from local government reorganisation in an effective unitary geography for the Mayoral Combined Authority.

### **Practical to deliver**

Option 2 is practical to deliver, being constructed using existing district boundaries, with each new unitary clustered around the main settlements. This places likely service bases at the geographic centre, bringing services nearer to local people and improving access for vulnerable residents who may depend on being closer to support. Natural pyramids of schools will be retained, trust built between schools and community and the new council maintained effectively supporting those with special educational needs.

Although existing district boundaries will only ever be an approximation, there is good evidence to suggest that Option 2 offers the best approximation to the functional economic areas of Mid Hampshire and South West Hampshire, with New Forest being more closely aligned with Southampton than Winchester. A number of other public services already operate on similar geographies, such as the

criminal justice system, with the magistrate's court in Southampton covering Eastleigh and New Forest, and the crown court in Winchester covering the whole county.

### **Support for this option**

- Respondents to a geography wide and local engagement exercise showed clear resistance to large, remote council models. Option 2 delivers the approach that best avoids this risk and is the only one delivering four mainland unitaries which are all geographically smaller than those proposed by Hampshire County Council.
- Although East Hampshire District Council withdrew from this proposal, the design of Option 2 has been mindful of the needs of the communities in East Hampshire as far as possible. It has been informed by the public engagement exercise undertaken, to which over 200 East Hampshire residents responded.
- Feedback prioritised local identity, access to decision-making, and visible leadership.
- Winchester City Council will make a decision as to its preferred option at its Council meeting on 25 September.
- Eastleigh Borough Council will make a decision as to its preferred option at its Council meeting on 25 September.

### **Leader's endorsement**

Winchester strongly shares with the other councils the desire to create new unitary councils for our region that are close enough to be local and big enough to stay strong.

This four new mainland and Isle of Wight unitary option delivers this and is:

- simpler to implement
- geographically and economically coherent and balanced
- creates strong councils that will deliver.

In this option, all five councils are constructed from existing district and unitary footprints without any boundary changes and all five councils make sense in their own right.

Our region's two great ports partner with their neighbours to create strong councils in the South East and the South West.

This proposal creates a coherent - and manageably sized – Mid Hampshire authority with its focus on the rural economy and professional services.

As with all other options, it supports a Northern council connecting together the high-tech industries of the M3 corridor and enabling close connection with similar economies in Surrey and Berkshire.

Finally, the unique and special nature of the Isle of Wight is reflected the continuation of its own separate council.

This option is right for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and all the councils created are coherent and make sense for the future.

Cllr Martin Tod – Leader of Winchester City Council

## **Assessment against MHCLG criteria**

**Criteria one: A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**

**Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.**

### **Financially sustainable**

Option 2 has the same financial benefits that have been demonstrated in the core case for change. The four new mainland and Isle of Wight unitary model in this variant continues to offer a streamlined governance model and opportunities to redesign and transform services to achieve significant efficiencies and savings through a place focused approach. The main case for change document quantifies the financial impact of the reorganisation model and demonstrates financial viability. It also demonstrates that Option 2 enables councils to pay back within 3 years, delivering annual savings of £63.8 million.

Specifically, Option 2 offers the most balanced financial position (based on current data and financial positions) across the mainland authorities.

Metric	Option 2				
	North	Mid	South-west	South-east	Variance
Combined Business rates & council tax per capita (£)	858	871	853	913	60
Proportion of NRE funded by business rates and council tax	42%	43%	43%	48%	6%

The table above shows combined business rates and council tax per capita and proportion of NRE funded by business rates and council tax position for Option 2.

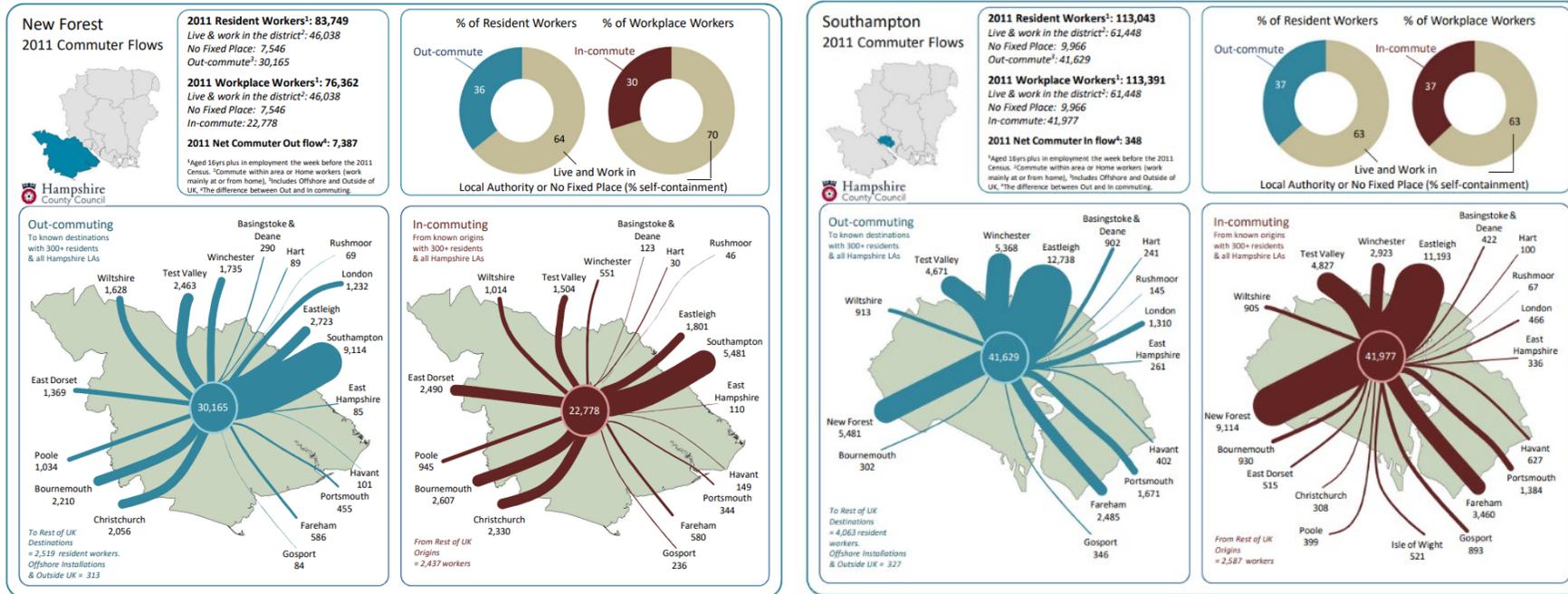
### **Economic alignment**

Option 2 aligns the new council areas to reflect the functional economic areas and travel-to-work zones.

Hampshire County Council's Economic Intelligence Reports show a very strong relationship between Southampton, New Forest and Eastleigh in particular (shown in the figures above).

The same data for Test Valley, New Forest District's only neighbouring authority other than Southampton, indicates a stronger commuting relationship with Wiltshire, Winchester, Eastleigh and Southampton than with New Forest.

As such, the key transport data confirms that the best approximation of sensible economic geographies using existing district boundaries is to bring New Forest into the same unitary area as Southampton and Eastleigh, but to leave Test Valley in Mid Hampshire, as is done under Option 2.



The images above show the New Forest and Southampton 2011 commuter flows. It is noted that post pandemic hybrid working may have reduced the absolute numbers commuting but there is no data to suggest the work orientation between the New Forest to Southampton and Eastleigh has changed.

## Economic sectors

As set out in the introduction, the Port of Southampton is a critical piece of national / international infrastructure, and the opportunities for growth spread across both sides of Southampton Water. The Port and marine-related industries extend across Southampton and the New Forest, including Solent Gateway / Marchwood Military port, Fawley refinery and the land identified in the Port Masterplan for

expansion at Dibden Bay. The Solent Freeport has its centre of gravity around Southampton Water, with key sites in New Forest, Southampton and Eastleigh.

There is a clear link between the largely urban Waterside and Southampton in economic, labour force and transport terms, but Option 2 reflects that wider rural area of New Forest also provides an attractive residential environment for many who work in the Waterside, Southampton and Eastleigh areas, contributing to the range of skills available to the city's economy, while also providing a significant recreational resource for residents of more urban areas. There are strong socio-economic links between urban and rural areas, reflecting the fact that cities are interdependent with their hinterlands of towns and villages.

In more general terms, Southampton is clearly a sub-regional centre which is the economic, retail / leisure, cultural and transport hub for the wider area, urban and rural. Geographically, all parts of the New Forest are closer to this hub than to any other hubs within Hampshire, such as Winchester.

**Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.**

#### **Alignment to Housing Market Areas**

The government has defined official local housing market areas (these date from 2010 but are still in use). The final report recommended the use of map 6 on page 25, which clearly shows the Southampton housing market area stretching across most of the rural New Forest.

#### **Effective blending of urban and rural within unitary councils**

The existing New Forest district benefits from a mix of rural national park and urban-fringe, industrially developed areas. This blend would be extended in Option 2, combining the current New Forest district with the predominantly urban and suburban areas of Eastleigh and Southampton. This avoids arbitrary urban/rural segregation and supports the mix of existing urban areas, market towns and parishes.

In planning terms, while rural New Forest is a very different type of area to Southampton, under Option 2 the National Park Authority would still undertake its local planning function, providing a continued focus for addressing the unique planning issues faced by rural areas. The National Park Authority would work closely with the wider unitary, with the new council providing the economic / housing / transport functions across the area, aligned to the direction provided by the mayoral strategic authority.

## **Housing Delivery Targets**

Option 2 supports delivery of much-needed housing supply across the whole of the Hampshire and Solent area by balancing housing targets across the new unitary councils. Option 2 avoids having two National Parks in one single unitary authority (as in Option 1), which would create pressure on the amount of available land for development, thus threatening capability of the new unitary council to successfully deliver housing growth.

**Criteria two: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**

**Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.**

Option 2 has a more balanced geographical areas than Option 1 – therefore promoting greater agility and responsiveness and benefits of existing partnership working can be leveraged. Asset rationalisation in Option 2 is more deliverable due to moderate travel distances, offering a range of council hubs across the area in principal towns at reasonable cost to the tax payer.

Similarly with no boundary change required, this configuration of councils can move forward without additional work to redefine service boundaries, allowing immediate progress on integration and the early realisation of the benefits of unitary status.

Established partnership working can be amplified at pace to reap efficiencies, building on a strong track record of collaboration.

### **Mid Hampshire Council: Test Valley, Winchester, East Hampshire**

- Joint Planning approaches already in place (e.g. East Hampshire and SDNPA co-plan).
- Strong record of cross-border housing delivery: £12m funding secured jointly for affordable housing at the Winchester/Test Valley border.
- Shared geography for waste, leisure, countryside, and environmental services, including green space and depot planning.
- Opportunity to build on exiting, established shared services (such as the integrated IT service between TVBC and WCC) as well as historical shared service arrangements.
- Costs for large scale services such as waste can vary by **up to 50%** between urban and rural areas — geographic tailoring is essential for efficiency and can be best delivered by Option 2.

- And in addition, location of the New Forest with the South West council brings additional efficiency benefits.

### **South West Council: New Forest, Eastleigh, Southampton**

- By including all of the New Forest, Option 2 ensures there are no areas at risk of geographical isolation from centralised services.
- Opportunity to place operational service hubs at the geographical centre of the new unitary, following the example of municipal waste from all three areas being disposed of at the Marchwood Energy Recovery Centre at the north end of the Waterside.
- Shared leisure partnerships with NHS and Active Partnerships across the footprint.
- Aligned ICS/health geography covering major hospital and community care services.
- All councils work together through Partnership for South Hampshire to deliver homes for the local South West housing market, while Eastleigh and Southampton have shared resources to deliver Local Plans for both authorities.
- Shared services between Eastleigh and Southampton include building control and licensing. Including all of the New Forest will add scale and resilience to these partnerships.

**Criteria three: Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**

**Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services**

### **Opportunities to deliver public service reform**

#### **A Balanced Model for Public Service Reform**

Option 2 offers highly practical geographies for public services, bringing together the most balanced combination of councils and residents for the efficient delivery of coordinated services. Distances to access services in the four main service and economic hubs are lower in Option 2.

This is important for continuing effective delivery of social care services with the present Hampshire adult social care domiciliary care zoned contracts coordinated by contract relationship managers CRM. Those zones and CRM do not map onto Option 1, requiring fragmentation of existing contracts and management and threatening vital services for vulnerable people. Option 2 offers a geography

that supports existing care contracts; whilst still positioning the unitary councils to transform care services as set out in the core document.

### **Children’s and Adults’ Social Care – Local Offer Examples**

Delivering high-quality, sustainable care requires a deep understanding of the unique needs and dynamics of local communities. Smaller, place-based unitaries are better placed to:

- Tailor early intervention and safeguarding models around local schools and families.
- Build integrated health and care pathways with local NHS partners (e.g. Solent and Hampshire ICS geographies).
- Invest in trusted community hubs and voluntary sector partnerships.

For example:

- Jointly commissioned local supported living schemes, enabling transitions from residential care for example Chesil Lodge in Winchester.
- Top quartile performance in Homelessness prevention working with the third and voluntary sector to support early discharge from HMP Winchester and support asylum applications.
- Stock holding experience in Winchester, and integrated care services supported by the social care authority to maximise ‘at home’ care packages.

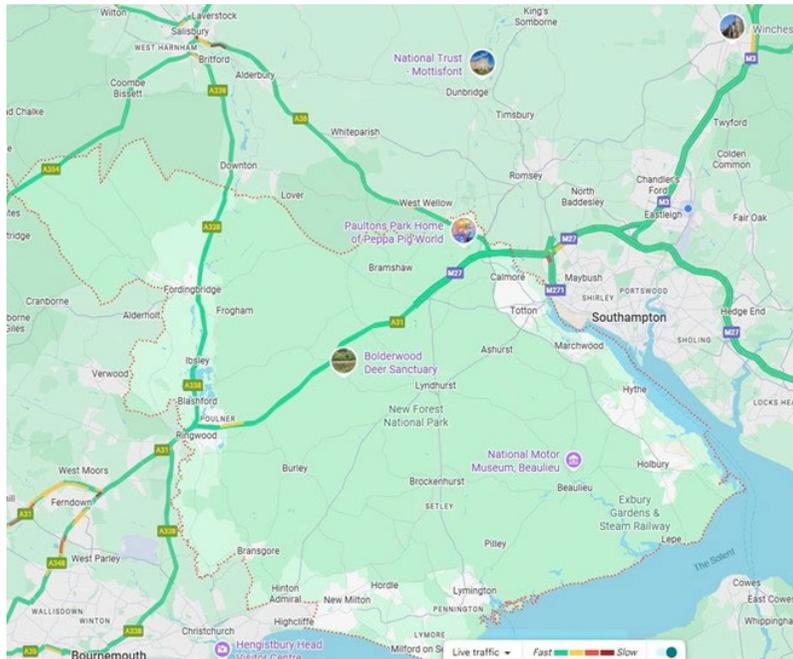
This model ensures that the Mid Hampshire Authority in Option 2 can amplify current approaches that that reflects its population profile, geographies, and partner landscape. If unitary councils were to cover vast, disparate geographies, they risk losing touch with specific community needs, especially in social care.

### **Transport Links**

Transport links for service delivery are more clearly defined for Option 2.

As can be seen from the image below, the main road network in the New Forest area forms a triangle pointing towards three large settlements outside the district: Salisbury in Wiltshire, Bournemouth in Dorset, and Southampton in Hampshire. This illustrates the critical economic and social links between the district and its neighbours in other counties.

From a Hampshire and Solent perspective, the district is primarily oriented towards Southampton, with onward traffic progressing to the rest of the county and beyond. All rail traffic through the New Forest also passes through Southampton.



Likewise, the transport links in the Mid Hampshire area are focussed around the M3, A34, A303, A31.

**Criteria four: 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.**

From the geography wide engagement work, 54% of Winchester respondents and 51% of East Hampshire respondents favoured Option 2 - stating support or strong support for this configuration, compared to 29% and 24% supporting Option 1.

Only 20% and 17% of Winchester and East Hampshire respondents supported a boundary change option, with 60% and 51% against changing boundaries.

Option 2 was the second favoured preference for Test Valley residents at 31% support for this option, and there was a clear lack of support for boundary changes at 70% against this proposal.

Option 2 is felt to be a more manageable size of council, which respondents say is beneficial. Respondents expressed concern that services could become too stretched and decision making too far removed over a large geography. However, respondents said the merging of more rural councils would bring benefit.

In July 2025, a deliberative workshop was held with sample of residents across the Winchester district. A similar workshop was also held in Test Valley and a range of deliberative workshops took place in the New Forest.

In Test Valley, participants supported simplification and efficiency but emphasised the need for local decision-making and responsiveness. They valued the rural character and community spirit of their towns and villages.

This is similarly reflected in Winchester participant's feedback who expressed a need for a connected joined up approach, efficient services, ensuring local voices are meaningfully heard and that services are designed and rooted in the local area, to best serve local communities.

Local identity and culture, and community spirit in their local area was highly valued. Winchester participants support a centralised and simplified approach as long as local needs were met and community voices were heard in decision making.

Through a range of qualitative methods, New Forest residents, including those in Waterside, expressed a strong Forest rooted local identity.

And across all areas concerns were raised that services may not be tailored specifically enough for local populations in larger councils.

Several of the local parish councils in Winchester affected by boundary changes also sought the views of their members and residents in respect of potential boundary changes and potential geographies and their views have been incorporated.

This option supports community feedback and alleviates concerns that councils which are spread over too large a geography to be able to respond to local needs and local identity. It also alleviates the concerns that have been expressed about boundary changes as this option is based on existing boundaries.

**Criteria five: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**

**Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.**

Option 2 provides the best platform for successful devolution in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight:

- The five unitary authority model provides a stable platform for a pan-Hampshire devolution model.
- Option 2 presents the most equal balance of population and geography, ensuring fair representation for all at the strategic authority.
- With financial stability and maintenance of district boundaries in the Option 2 proposal there will be a stable set of partners for the elected Mayor from day 1.
- The two largest unitaries cover the two largest cities, enhancing the attractiveness of the area for investment in growth coupled with each new council large enough to participate in future Combined Authority arrangements.

Importantly Option 2 avoids the risk to growth posed by a very large rural unitary or the county’s biggest settlement being constrained in a small unitary without sufficient additional land capacity.

**Criteria six: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

Local representation at a community level is of critical importance. There are 49 town and parish councils in the Option 2 South West unitary and 144 in the Mid Hampshire unitary. This enables ready and effective community engagement at the most local level.

Option 1 would lead to 181 town and parish councils in the Mid Hampshire and only 12 in the South West Unitary comprising Eastleigh and Southampton. Neighbourhood and community engagement is the bedrock of the new unitary councils, therefore a more even split of towns and parish councils to best resource support and share expertise and experience is preferable.

**Number of Parish Councils:**

	Mid Hampshire Unitary	South West Unitary
--	-----------------------	--------------------

Option 1	181	12
Option 2	144	49

Cultural factors that tend to support Option 2 include features of daily life such as the geographies served by the Southern Daily Echo, which lists the New Forest as one of its [districts](#), and the Hampshire Chronicle, which lists [Winchester, Romsey and Hampshire](#).

Public sentiment through a geography wide and local engagement exercise showed clear resistance to large, remote council models. Respondents prefer governance structures that retain local identity and clarity of purpose. This option avoids the creation of excessively large, remote unitaries and instead offers a more balanced population split across councils, making them more relatable and connected to the communities they serve.

Option 2 delivers the approach that best avoids this risk and is the only one delivering four new mainland unitaries which are all geographically smaller than those proposed by Hampshire County Council.

Option 2 enables each unitary to develop a single corporate plan shaped by local priorities and grounded in neighbourhood knowledge. This is particularly important in services like social care, housing, leisure, and public health, where local understanding, true connection and familiarity with communities allows for more targeted and responsive delivery in local place based on community needs and aspirations.

Locally focused councils are better equipped to:

- Integrate services with local NHS and VCS partners.
- Build trust through consistent presence and familiarity.
- Tailor their strategies to reflect coastal, urban, or rural needs.

In this way, community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment are not simply principles, but daily practices embedded in the design of this proposed structure.

For social care, this is vital: priorities for early years, SEND or elder care differ widely between coastal, rural and urban places. Locally rooted services for families, carers and vulnerable adults reinforce trust in the authority, increasing engagement with formal structures such as area boards and participatory budgeting with effective engagement with pyramids of schools.

Feedback prioritised local identity, access to decision-making, and visible leadership. This model delivers meaningful community engagement not as an afterthought, but as a central design principle. By keeping councils recognisable, place-based, and locally scaled, it empowers residents to participate, influence, and shape the places they live.

## **Conclusion: Option 2 offers the strongest path forward**

Option 2 delivers a coherent and balanced set of authorities for the mainland. It has strong local identity and does not require any boundary changes, thus it is simpler to implement; is configured to better deliver services; and ensures devolved power with a community focus.

This proposal creates four new mainland councils built around sensible, proportionate, place-based geographies. With the unitary configuration balancing shared local identity and existing service, economic and transport links.

- **Balanced geography and population** across new mainland authorities.
- **Practical to deliver**, with no boundary change and close proximity to services.
- **Continuity and efficiency in public service delivery**, with practical geographies, building on strong cross-sector partnerships already in place across health, housing, environment, and community services.
- **Focused on natural economic areas**, good local connectivity and ability to focus housing delivery on a natural local market
- **Balanced tax base**, with a financial assessment as good as the other options, enabling resilience and fair contribution within the MCA.
- **A varied and natural local community**, with a vibrant combination of urban, suburban and rural areas and many shared cultural and economic interests.

# Appendix 4:

Option 3

## Appendix 4: Option 3

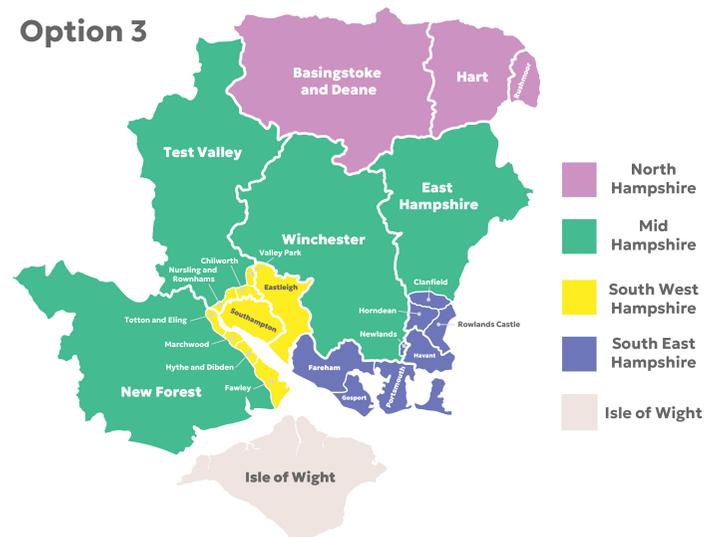
### Introduction

This proposal establishes two dynamic new unitary authorities along the south coast designed to unlock growth, strengthen local leadership, and better reflect the way people live, work, and travel today. The carefully considered boundary changes are minimal yet meaningful, aligning with real communities and economic geographies rather than outdated historic lines. This is a forward looking plan, growth-oriented that builds stronger, more resilient councils better equipped to tackle future challenges and seize new opportunities with confidence.

The proposed **South West unitary** boundary brings together Southampton, Eastleigh, the Waterside parishes of the New Forest as well as two parishes from Test Valley. This unifies the county's main trading gateways, key transport arteries, docks and industrial and related infrastructure both sides of Southampton Water.

The proposed boundary for the **South East unitary** option brings together Portsmouth, Havant, Gosport, Fareham and adjacent Parishes currently in the districts of Winchester and East Hampshire, but where the clear economic and social centres of gravity for those areas are the city regions, rather than those areas where the characteristics are more obviously rural.

Communities in the parishes that would become part of the new unitary authorities would benefit from remaining with their aligned urban centres, with much more common community interests reflecting where they live their lives, rather than being part of a new large rural authority.



Please note: The boundaries shown on this map are illustrative and not to scale. They are intended as a visual guide only and may not accurately represent exact geographic borders.

## How is this option different?

Option 3 is a final proposal that uses the current districts as building blocks with a specific modification order from Option 1 or Option 2 with minimal but critical boundary changes; and in parallel as part of the submission, asks the Secretary of State to use their statutory powers to modify the boundaries as proposed to build stronger, more balanced unitary authorities that are set up to drive economic growth across the region.\*

The Isle of Wight and North Hampshire remain the same in all three options as supported by the rationale outlined in the core document.

\*Precise wording still subject to review

## Support for option

This option is supported by:

Table to be completed following committee meetings	
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*“The creation of new unitary authorities on these proposed boundaries is more than an administrative change; it is a change to bring together a coherent economic area, remove long-standing barriers to growth, and enable better services. It is sensible to integrate places that are already economically and socially linked, and this proposal provides a platform to drive investment across existing city regions, deliver infrastructure more effectively, and plan services that reflect real-life”.*

Councillor Alex Winning – Leader of Southampton City Council

Cllr Keith House - Leader of Eastleigh Borough Council

Cllr Steve Pitt – Leader of Portsmouth City Council

Cllr Phillip Munday – Leader of Havant Borough Council

(Others tbc)

## **Key reasons for support**

### **Driving growth through bold reform: a vision for our region’s future**

Economic growth is central to the government’s national vision, and it is equally central to our vision for the future of our county. This proposal sets out what we believe to be the most effective local government arrangements to unlock and accelerate economic and housing growth across our region. Option 3’s strategic vision for city-region growth clearly meets the threshold set by Government for changes to administrative boundaries.

Southampton and Portsmouth are the beating hearts of our regional economy, historic cities with thriving communities and dynamic industries. Building on their strengths, our proposal for Option 3 outlines the creation of two new coastal powerhouse unitary councils. These councils will be rooted in economically and demographically connected communities, supported by a small number of targeted boundary changes to ensure coherence and impact.

We believe Option 3 is the preferred boundary configuration to deliver councils which:

- Deliver services across a geography that reflects practical realities of local people.
- Have balanced populations and council tax distribution.
- Are designed to deliver economic and housing growth.

This option reflects the real-world patterns of how people live, travel, and work today (not how they did when the current boundaries were drawn in 1972), and aligns with the existing economic footprint of our communities. The split between rural and primarily urban areas reflects the differing priorities and challenges for each. It is a pragmatic yet ambitious approach that supports both local identity and regional prosperity.

Option 3 also represents the most balanced in terms of population numbers, council tax base and business rates per capita across the county. This will ensure new unitaries are set up to succeed with sustainable finances to build from.

We acknowledge the complexities involved in altering existing district boundaries. However, we firmly believe that these changes are essential to unlock the full potential of our region that can better support the new Mayoral County Combined Authority for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

## **How this proposal meets government LGR criteria**

**Criteria one: A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**

Option 3 proposes four new unitary areas on the mainland plus the Isle of Wight remaining as an independent council:

1. **South West:** Southampton, Eastleigh and the Parishes of Totton and Eling, Marchwood, Hythe and Dibden, Fawley (New Forest) and Chilworth, Nursling & Rownhams and Valley Park (Test Valley).
2. **South East:** Portsmouth, Gosport, Fareham, Havant, and the Parishes of Newlands, Clanfield, Horndean and Rowlands Castle.

3. **North Hampshire:** Basingstoke and Deane, Rushmoor and Hart.

4. **Mid Hampshire:** Winchester, Test Valley and the New Forest, excluding the Parishes specified above.

**5. Isle of Wight**

This proposal reflects how the community and demographic geography of our area has changed since the current councils were established in the 1970s. For example, the growth of Southampton, Hedge End, Chandler's Ford, Totton and other settlements has meant more people in the surrounding areas developing close links with the city, whether through work, leisure, shopping, education or accessing local services. The same is true for the area around Portsmouth where the investment in local transport and highways infrastructure over the last 50 years has led to new developments, across the wider area, which are better linked to the urban centre of Portsmouth. As a result, many of the communities in our proposal already have a close relationship with the cities and have similar challenges and ambitions for the area.

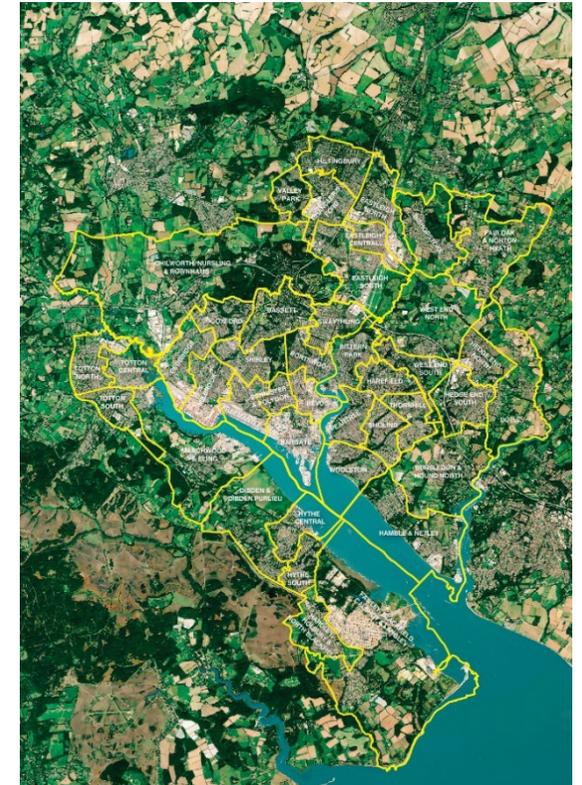
## South West Unitary

In addition to Southampton and Eastleigh, this proposal includes wards from both the Waterside area of the New Forest, and the lower Test Valley area.

To the West, the A326 forms a clear physical boundary between Totton and Waterside and the rest of the New Forest. An economic study commissioned by New Forest District Council sets out that the New Forest economy can be sub-divided into three sub-areas, Totton and Waterside, Core Forest and Coastal Towns and Avon Valley. Totton and Waterside is the smallest area of the forest geographically, but also the largest by population reflecting its significantly higher population density.

The Waterside is also the most industrialised part of the current district, hosting manufacturing and marine activities in Totton and Hythe and the Fawley oil refinery which is a major industrial employer. As such, the area has strong economic ties to Southampton through industrial and maritime industry either side of Southampton Water, and significant out-commuting from the area, primarily to Southampton and Eastleigh to the east and Dorset authorities in the west. The area's economic profile is more reflective of the more urban area within the South West unitary, compared with the more rural makeup of the wider New Forest and proposed Mid Hampshire unitary.

To the north, the M27 marks a significant physical boundary for the proposed South West unitary. On a practical level, the urban areas of Rownhams and Nursling are directly connected to the Southampton city urban geography. Similarly, the Valley Park Parish is a continuation of the Chandler's Ford urban area. While much of the population Chilworth is part of the Southampton urban area, the rest of the existing Chilworth, Nursling & Rownhams Parish also has close links.



## **South East Unitary**

Parishes of East Hampshire proposed for inclusion in the South East unitary are those which lay south of the Butser Hill nature reserve, with all three parishes part of the continued urban geography along the A3(M) / A3 corridor.

The Parish of Newlands, currently located in Winchester, identifies strongly with Waterlooville as the closest town area, and serves two relatively new development areas with a strong connection to Waterlooville. Growth has meant that Newlands is a physical continuation of the Waterlooville area, giving a strong argument for bringing this Parish into the new South East unitary to ensure the local authority structure is harmonious and respects the local identity of those residents based around the Waterlooville area. Newlands Parish Council has stated that it is important that for any future unitary authority they should be in the same new authority as Havant Borough Council because of their natural links to Waterlooville.

The Parishes areas south of Butser Hill that have been proposed to be included in the new South East unitary authority align closely with the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire area. This is true for housing market area, for travel to work, for accessing major retail centres, accessing the health economy, education or the leisure and cultural offer. The characteristics of the area are much more similar to urban South East Hampshire than they are to the rural Mid Hampshire linked by the railway line and the A3(M) / A3 corridor.

### **Criteria two: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**

A more equitable distribution of population across new council areas is an integral element of ensuring financial sustainability of new unitaries and relative parity of representation both locally and on the new Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA).

Excluding the proposed North Hampshire unitary as it is the same across all options, the Option 3 proposal offers the smallest population differences between the three remaining councils and aligns most closely with the government's stated criteria of councils of around 500,000.

The table below shows the population projections for proposed unitary councils for the three options.

	Option 1		Option 2		Option 3	
	2023 population	2028 population	2023 population	2028 population	2023 population	2028 population
North	394,648	407,465	394,648	407,465	394,648	407,465
Mid	570,739	598,823	395,341	417,159	461,194	484,636
South West	397,060	423,221	572,458	604,885	473,332	502,273
South East	532,519	554,741	532,519	554,741	565,792	589,876
<b>Difference between the largest and smallest council populations</b>	173,679	175,602	177,117	187,732	104,598	105,240

Creating unitaries with greater population parity also increases financial stability across the region by creating more equal tax bases and opportunities for economies of scale.

Analysis of council tax projections identifies Option 3 as the most balanced with the lowest variance between the council tax bases of the proposed unitaries. Similarly, Option 3 is projected to have the smallest difference in average band D council tax.

Together this means Option 3 provides the most equal council tax rates for local residents, and the most equal council tax base for each new council.

The same is true for business rates, with business rates funding per capita projected to be the most equal in Option 3.

Metric	Option 1					Option 2					Option 3				
	North	Mid	South West	South East	Variance	North	Mid	South West	South East	Variance	North	Mid	South West	South East	Variance
<b>Council tax base</b>	146,508	233,472	116,921	174,170	116,551	146,508	160,117	190,276	174,170	43,768	146,508	188,072	148,605	187,886	41,564
<b>Council tax base per capita</b>	0.37	0.41	0.29	0.33	0.11	0.37	0.41	0.33	0.33	0.08	0.37	0.41	0.31	0.33	0.09
<b>Estimated Average council tax band D 28/29 (£)</b>	2,078	2,060	2,050	2,083	33	2,078	2,051	2,051	2,083	32	2,078	2,060	2,060	2,072	18
<b>Business rates funding per capita (£)</b>	65	75	170	187	123	65	73	142	187	123	65	74	150	180	115

**Criteria three: Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**

This proposal builds on the principles and detail of public service delivery set out in the main business case. As existing unitary councils both Southampton and Portsmouth City Councils’ have the experience of the delivering the full range of high quality and sustainable public services. Underpinning both the existing councils is a commitment to driving local economic growth, not just to provide new skills, employment and housing for residents, but also to contribute to the financial sustainability of the cities and councils.

The proposed South West and South East unitaries are built on geographies with clear economic and social links with the existing cities and are designed to drive financial sustainability better able to withstand financial shocks.

## South West

The South West unitary geography offers a strategically located, high-performing economic hub, uniquely positioned to drive growth across the wider region, while balancing the distinct needs of communities across the area. It benefits from a series of competitive advantages:

- Europe's busiest cruise port and the UK's second-largest container port.
- A maritime sector with 1.8 times the national average job concentration.
- An emerging life sciences hub centred around University Hospital Southampton.
- A coastal-industrial corridor delivering energy, advanced manufacturing, and green innovation.
- Access to two universities and a range of specialist training providers, underpinning a skilled workforce and innovation ecosystem.

The proposed South West boundary brings together several strategic economic nodes under one authority. These nodes are currently split across administrative lines in Southampton, Eastleigh and the New Forest, limiting their impact and complicating investment and planning decisions. These include:

- **City Centre & Docks**

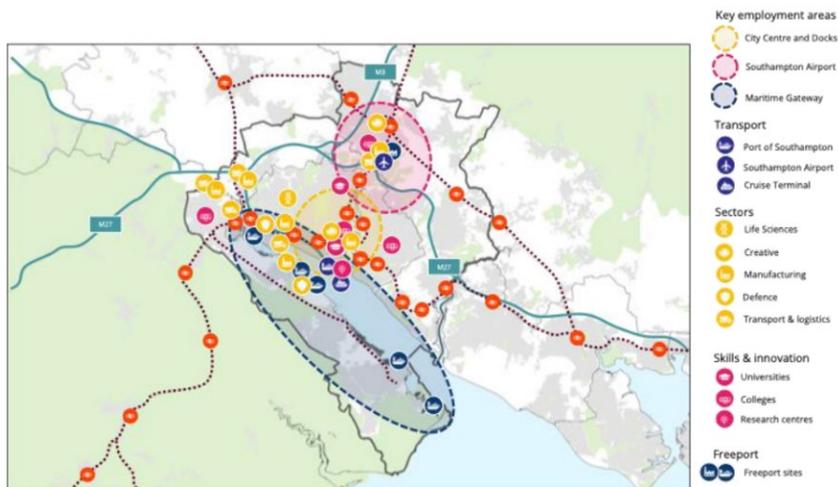
Southampton's docks are the UK's leading port for cruise and container freight, contributing over £2.5bn GVA annually to the UK economy. They support around 45,600 jobs nationwide, including significant supply-chain impacts in the West Midlands automotive sector. Bringing the port and its hinterland into one governance structure will unlock new efficiencies and growth.

- **Southampton Airport**

A key regional gateway and growth zone, the airport contributes £96m GVA and supports 1,390 jobs (2023). Its direct link to the Navigator Quarter Freeport site means improved coordination could unlock thousands of new jobs and millions in retained business rates.

- **Maritime Gateway**

Anchored by the Solent Freeport, this hub drives 26,000 jobs and £2bn into the local economy, with significant spillover benefits nationally. Over £1.35bn in private investment has already been committed, with plans to double cruise traffic to 4 million passengers by 2030. Importantly, the Freeport's footprint spans across the proposed geography; bringing these sites under a single unitary would resolve fragmented oversight, enabling a more joined-up approach to planning and delivery of innovation corridors and infrastructure.



The image above shows the key employment areas, assets and transport infrastructure across the Option 3 geography.

## South East

The proposed boundary for the South East option brings together Portsmouth, Havant, Gosport, Fareham and adjacent Parishes currently in the districts of Winchester and East Hampshire, but where the clear economic and social centres of gravity for those areas are the city regions, rather than those areas where the characteristics are more obviously rural. The key benefits for the South East arrangements anchored around the Portsmouth region are:

- Bringing together a strong functioning economic cluster, and associated travel to work area.
- Following the natural geography of the region, linking those areas south of Butser Hill.
- Creating a region with opportunities for growth.
- Following the transport infrastructure corridors associated with the A3(M) / A3.
- Creating a cohesive area for local communities, linked in with provision of services including health services.
- Reflecting education catchment areas including for example the University Technical College and also with significant access to the University of Portsmouth.

The proposal for Option 3 reflects the extent to which Portsmouth functions as the engine-room of the local area with people in the surrounding areas developing close links with the city - whether through work, leisure, shopping, education or accessing local services.

As a result, many of the communities in our proposal already have a close relationship with the city and have similar challenges and wishes for the area.

### **Delivering high-quality public services in the South West and South East**

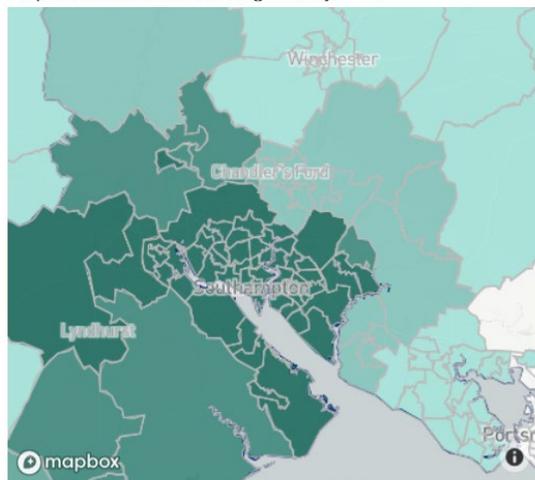
Both the proposed South West and South East unitaries incorporate an existing unitary authority (Southampton City Council and Portsmouth City Council) with experience of delivering adult social care, children's services and planning for changes in population and demand. Southampton and Portsmouth Children's Services were both rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2023. This experience will be directly transferable to the new unitaries, building on strong foundations to establish new services tailored to the needs of their communities.

### **Health**

Across the region there are significant health inequalities, driven by similar determinants including poverty and deprivation. There is good evidence that residents in the proposed footprints already look to the major cities to access many public services, including the NHS. For example, analysis by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) (data from 2020) shows that in the South East unitary area, 84-88% of patients in proposed additional wards attend Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust. This compares to 70% for the MSOA immediately to the north, 39% for the parish to the west, and 24% for the MSOA bordering to the east.

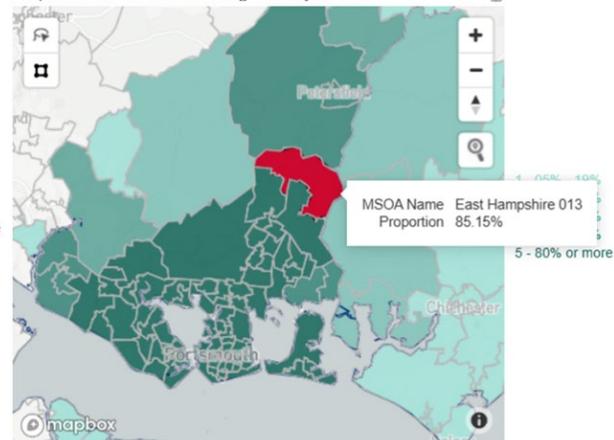
In the South West the same data suggests over 90% of patients in all of the Test Valley and New Forest wards proposed for inclusion in the new unitary attended the University Hospital Southampton NHS Trust, with lower levels in wards outside of the new proposed unitary boundary.

Proportion of Patients Attending Trust by MSOA



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Proportion of Patients Attending Trust by MSOA



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The two images above show the NHS Acute (hospital) Trust catchment populations – Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID).

## Education

Close relationships between the areas also exist in further and Higher Education provision. For example, 31.5% of 16 or 17 year-olds living in Southampton currently in education, employment or training are studying at a college outside the city but within the proposed South West proposed unitary, and these young people are using well established public transport links to do so. The link between the proposed geographies and existing service use demonstrates how people in proposed additional wards already access services within the new unitary boundaries.

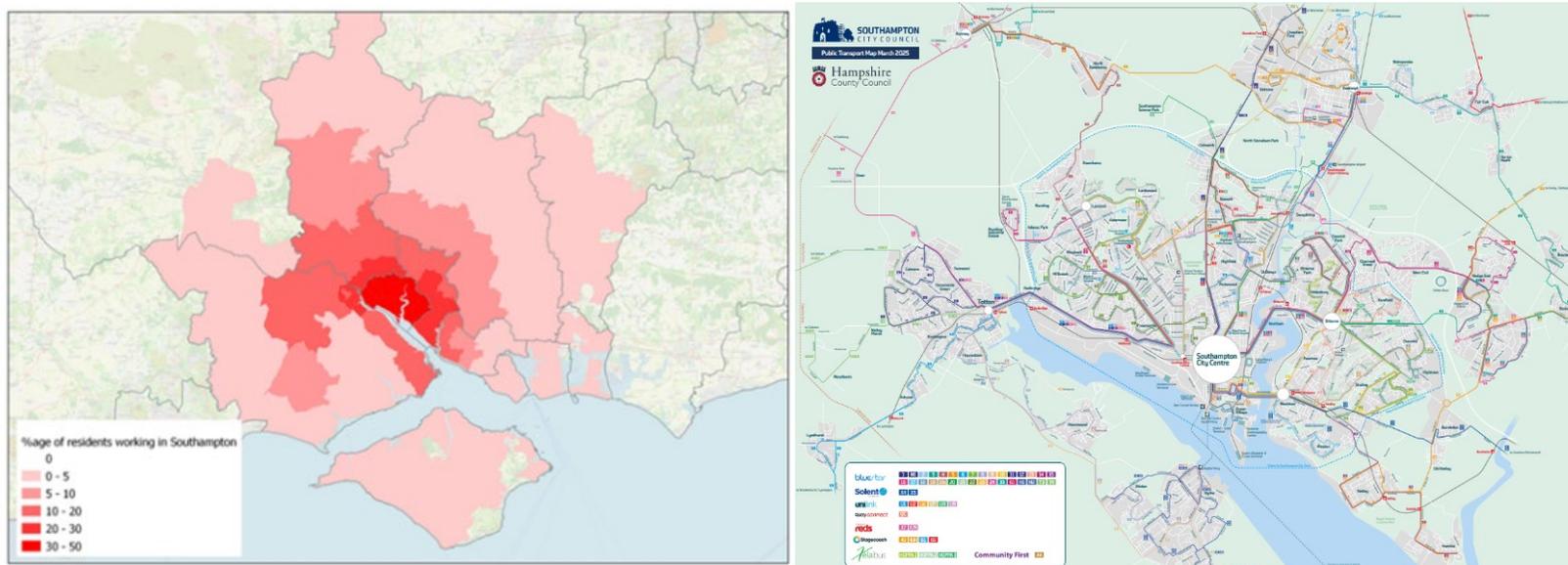
The closest Further Education College for students from the three East Hampshire Wards and Newlands are the two southern campuses of the Havant and South Downs Colleges which also have high student numbers from the rest of the South East Unitary area.

## Travel

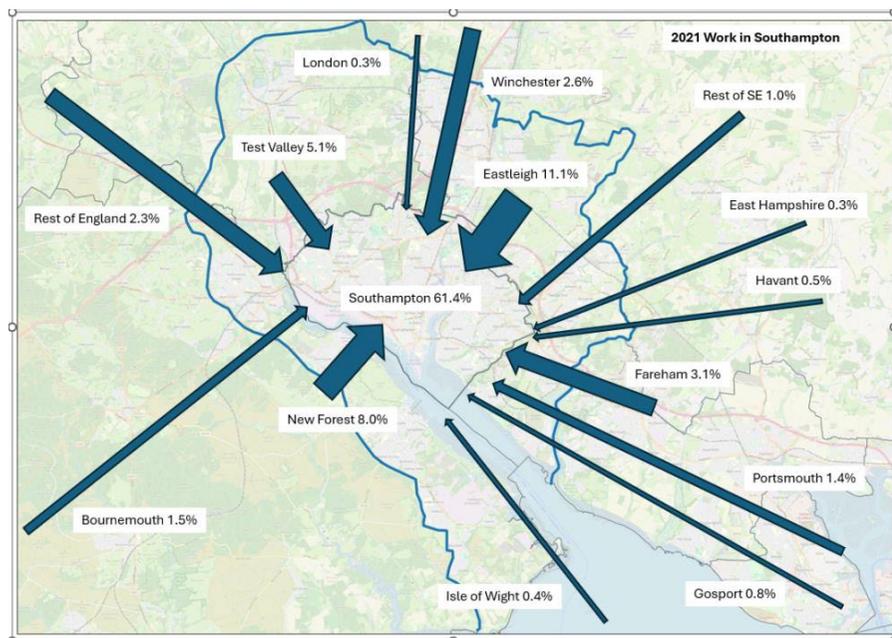
While new unitaries will seek to provide services close to communities, the availability of strong transport links across the proposed South East and South West unitary footprints, ensures residents are able to access services across the proposed unitaries. Strong travel to work patterns also drives economic and employment growth.

For example, in the South West, the existing bus network links all the proposed South West area configuration as shown below. Travel to work data also highlights close transport connectivity across the proposed South West unitary footprint.

The 2021 Census shows that 62.7% of people who commuted into Southampton travelled from the New Forest, Eastleigh, or Test Valley, reflecting close economic geography and location of jobs. While based on 2011 census data, the map below shows that there is a higher concentration of people from the relevant Waterside and Test Valley parishes travelling into Southampton than from the wider districts.



The images above show the travel to work patterns in Southampton, Map of existing bus network in South West covering all of the proposed new unitary area.



The image above shows travel to work patterns in Southampton.

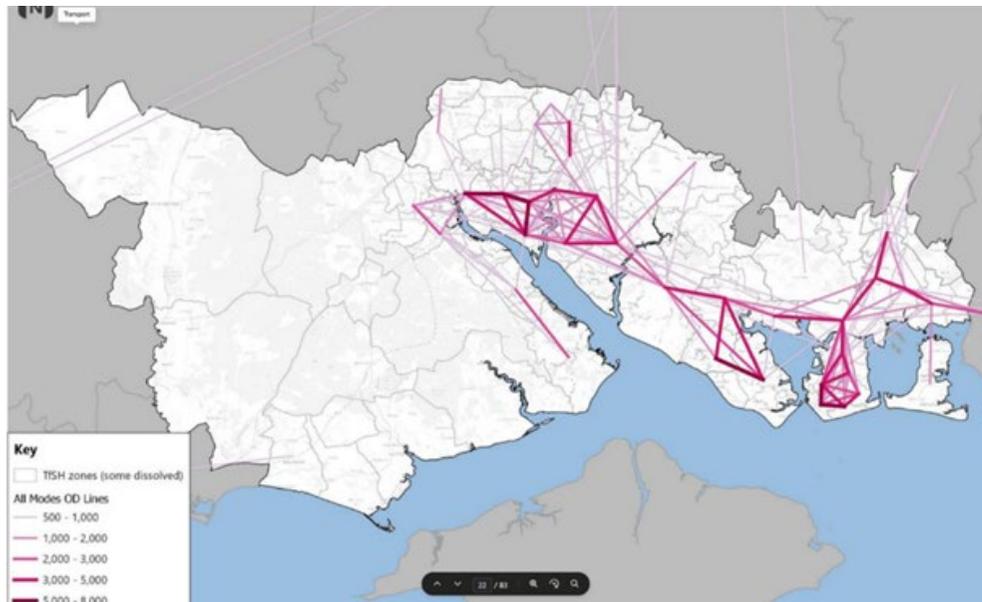
Similarly in the South East, overall patronage on routes bus routes (Portsmouth - Wecock Farm) and 8 (Portsmouth - Clanfield) linking the city with parishes proposed for inclusion in the new unitary, is in the order of 100,000 journeys per month (+/- 10-15k per month depending on seasonal demand etc) on each route, equating to around 200k journeys per month combined. Those originating at the far end of the route and travelling into Portsmouth is estimated to be 5-10% of this total, equating to around 20k journeys.

From the 2021 census that looked at the issue, we can also see that the typical daily commute flows (outbound journeys only, i.e. starting from census zones in the fringes of Waterlooville) to Portsmouth itself, and to the wider areas of Havant, Fareham & Gosport are around half of all journeys made.

The map below illustrates the largest overall travel flows and highlights significant travel demand from areas proposed for inclusion in the South East unitary. For example, there are an estimated 1,000-2,000 trips a day from Horndean/Cowplain to northern Portsmouth

and 400-600 highway trips a day from the Clanfield area. These areas also have higher interaction with central Havant and Waterlooville, which in turn have significant interaction with Portsmouth.

The image below shows a map of trip matrix from Solent Sub Regional Transport Model (Solent Transport).



**Criteria four: 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.**

The engagement activities outlined in criteria four of the core document outline the breadth of activity that that has been undertaken across the South East and the South West to date, recognising there is more to be done as we move forwards to understand and address concerns from across our communities and to articulate the benefits of the new unitary structures.

A survey that was undertaken on behalf of 12 of the region’s authorities gave residents across the region the opportunity to share their views on LGR options. The overall response rate was <1% and from a relatively narrow demographic, and while the survey showed that

Option 3 was the least supported, it also highlighted that it was the least well understood. Whilst there was a higher response rate in New Forest and Test Valley, these were still low percentages of the population (c2%) and may have been impacted by the concurrent publicity campaign against the option.

It is also worth noting, that whilst the sample size was small, that more respondents from Newlands parish in Winchester supported than opposed the boundary change option.

The survey showed residents in the parishes that would be impacted by boundary change were concerned about losing their rural character, increased urbanisation, and reduced influence over decisions. These concerns are something that would need to be more clearly understood and addressed as we move forward.

Residents felt there were:

<b>Positives around</b>	<b>Negatives around</b>
Aligning more urban areas with Southampton/Portsmouth, which may mean better service delivery for those areas.	Disruption to those living in the affected areas.
Better reflecting reality for those who live in those areas and linking them to where they access services.	Fragmenting existing communities. Particularly when it comes to separating the New Forest from the Waterside, which is seen as integral to the identity of the area.
Those living in semi-urban areas being served by a council that better reflects their needs.	Residents in affected areas losing local representation and influence in decision-making.

**Criteria five: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**

The balanced population spread across the unitary authorities as proposed in this option helps ensure a fairer representation within the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) by creating governance structures that reflect the true demographic and economic diversity of the region representing urban and rural communities. This balance avoids dominance by any single area and ensures more equitable decision-making power across the MCCA.

This proposal is rooted in the existing economic areas across the South East and South West Hampshire, building on functional economic areas and grouping places with shared characteristics.

By creating unitary authorities that are predominantly urban (such as those encompassing Southampton, Portsmouth, and Basingstoke) alongside more rural and town-focused areas like mid-Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the MCCA can attract stronger and targeted investment. This approach reduces competition for funding within the region by aligning development priorities based on local needs and economic profiles. It also enables infrastructure decisions to reflect the diversity of the areas, for example, urban-focused investments where population density and economic activity are highest, alongside rural development initiatives that support sustainability and quality of life in less densely populated areas.

This balanced and cohesive approach supports the government's devolution goals by fostering stronger local leadership capable of driving tailored economic growth and prosperity. The Solent region, comprising these unitary authorities, has a strategic growth ambition aligned with national growth priorities as set out in the UK Industrial Strategy and UK Invest, highlighting the area's potential to become a globally significant maritime and economic hub. Coordination across these authorities fosters a unified identity and capacity for innovation and investment, amplifying local voices in negotiations with national government and other stakeholders.

In summary, this population-balanced, economically coherent proposal underpins the principles of devolution by ensuring fair representation, boosting economic growth in key urban centres, supporting rural communities, optimising investment, and enabling infrastructure development that reflects local realities. This ultimately empowers the MCCA to deliver sustainable, equitable, and regionally tailored outcomes for all communities across the region.

**Criteria six: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

Given the existing place-based links, a new unitary would be well placed to develop strong arrangements to involve and empower local neighbourhoods.

As demonstrated in the response to criteria three above, there are clear similarities and links between the communities in Southampton, Eastleigh, the Waterside and lower Test Valley wards as areas with significant urban characteristics. Bringing these communities together gives the opportunity to address similar challenges and opportunities.

While varying in form, there are strong examples of good practice community involvement and empowerment in the area which could be built on across the Option 3 footprint. In Eastleigh, Local Area Committees work closely with a wide range of community partners

including schools, colleges, community groups, youth partnerships and business groups to champion the local area, determine local levels of council services and deliver local community priorities.

Similarly, Hythe and Dibden, Totton and Eling, Marchwood, and Fawley all operate town or parish councils ensuring local voices and perspectives area heard in decision making. Our proposed unitary would create a meaningful democratic forum for the Waterside area, ensuring that local voices continue to be heard. Similar arrangements are in place in the parishes proposed as part of the new South East unitary.

We will build on these existing arrangements and design any new community involvement and empowerment arrangements with communities, respecting local identity, history and needs.

Any arrangements would be developed to meet the government’s neighbourhood governance ambitions as set out in the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill and subsequent guidance.

## **Closing Statement**

Option 3 presents a bold yet pragmatic vision for local government reform in Hampshire. It is one that reflects the realities of how communities live, work, and connect today. By aligning governance with functional economic geographies and travel-to-work patterns, this proposal offers a coherent framework for delivering sustainable public services, driving inclusive growth, and empowering local communities. It is a future-focused solution that balances ambition with practicality, ensuring that new unitary authorities are equipped to meet the challenges of tomorrow while staying rooted in the identities and needs of the people they serve.