

Cumbria Local Government Reorganisation Outline Proposal



Copeland Borough Council

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Purpose of this report

This document is the outline proposal for local government reorganisation in Cumbria submitted by Copeland Borough Council. It details the case for change in Cumbria, how we are agreeing the best geographic model and the further detail that will be included in our full proposal.

Objectives of this report

The key objectives of this document are to:

- Clearly outline the case for change;
- Demonstrate our vision for local government in Cumbria and how that supports the delivery of key elements of the Government's policy agenda;
- Document the criteria to agree a geographic model for future unitaries; and
- Outline the further detail to be included in the full proposal by the 9th December



Key opportunities for Cumbria

Cumbria has significant strengths and opportunities to grow and develop, from the existing strong tourism industry to nuclear and renewables assets that can enable it to lead the UK towards net zero ambitions.

Cumbria has significant assets and opportunities to develop and grow which include:

- The opportunity to establish an elected mayor to **promote the region** and give a clear voice for the people and economy of Cumbria through devolution.
- Cumbria is a **Centre of Nuclear Excellence**: decarbonising heat, power and transport, and driving clean growth as we head towards Net Zero by 2050. Through the Barrow shipyard we are also at the core of the UK's defence industries and nuclear deterrent.
- We have significant assets for **renewable energy** including a large coastline and plenty of wind which can support the UK's clean energy agenda and net zero ambitions.
- Cumbria is home to a **wealth of natural assets** including the Lake District world heritage site, three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, parts of the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Cumbria Coast Marine Conservation Zone. These open spaces and their biodiversity supports tourism which brings over 47 million people and £3.1bn to the local economy every year.¹
- We make a significant contribution to **national rural economy** with the commitment to innovate and the use of new technologies to support food self sufficiency and wider national agricultural policy.



1. Cumbria Tourism (<https://www.cumbriatourism.org/what-we-do/awards/>)

Challenges for Cumbria

Cumbria faces a number of local challenges and issues while managing the national issues of devolution and EU Exit and the international challenges posed by COVID-19 and climate change.



In addition to national issues such as COVID-19, forthcoming white papers on devolution and planning, EU Exit, health and social care integration, climate change and digitisation, Cumbria faces some specific challenges including:

Large, rural and sparsely populated - Cumbria is the second largest county in the country but has a small and mostly rural population which means delivering high quality services fairly across the whole area is challenging.

Financial sustainability - Local government nationally is under significant financial pressure. Prior to COVID-19 the Councils in Cumbria required savings of £16.8m in 2020/21 on top of savings made since 2011.¹

Shrinking and ageing population - The population is older than the national average and is expected to shrink which presents a challenge regarding skills, economic growth and adult social care.²

Inequalities - There are pockets of significant deprivation and significant variations in life expectancy, education and other key life factors across the county.

1. Medium Term Financial Plans of the seven councils
2. ONS population estimates

The case for local government reorganisation

Local government reorganisation is supported by the authorities of Cumbria as it presents an opportunity to deliver better services to residents, more efficiently and will bring clarity to local government. It will enable stronger leadership for Cumbria and enable devolution to attract investment, strengthen the economy and level up the region.

The key benefits associated with a move to unitary local government are:

- **Stronger voice to central government** - Unitary government will give a strong voice for the region on a regional, national and international stage.
- **Unlocking devolution** – Local Government Reorganisation may enable a devolution deal with a possible mayoral Combined Authority and the region has ambitions to lead the way towards carbon negativity while creating jobs, promoting growth and ‘levelling up’ across the region.
- **More efficient governance** - The two-tier system creates duplication and overhead costs for residents which reduces the value for money that the people of Cumbria expect.
- **Scale in service delivery** – More efficient delivery will enable greater organisational sustainability to enable services to be resilient, efficient and improved.
- **Integrating planning and delivery** – the two-tier system separates planning from delivery which weakens the effectiveness of economic development. This also prevents joined up services e.g. separating delivery of children’s services from services that support children, such as leisure and cultural services.
- **Clarity in democratic representation** – The two-tier system creates confusion regarding the role of District and County councils. A unitary structure provides a single organisation to contact regarding residents’ local area.

This report assumes that local government reorganisation will take place in Cumbria, and focusses on the opportunities that it presents for the people and organisations of the county.

The case for a two unitary model

A two unitary model is the only practical approach to supporting Cumbria, balancing population needs, size and efficiencies of scale with local geography, infrastructure and culture. Cumbria is a large, sparsely populated county

Two unitaries provides the right balance of population size and economies of scale with the practicalities of Cumbrian geography, culture, society and economy. Cumbria is too large to enable a single authority to be efficient and effective but the population is too small for three authorities to be efficient. Two unitaries will enable us to meet and exceed the expectations of our communities, particularly through post-Covid recovery.

- Cumbria has a **low population density** so, while the 500k population would be viable for a unitary, the population is spread over a large area which makes service delivery for the whole area more complex.
- Services need to **be local and reflect their place**. Two unitary authorities will enable localism in service deliver as well as integration and harmony in delivery e.g. focused economic development. Existing County services are delivered over multiple different footprints within Cumbria so two unitaries represents a consolidation of service delivery.
- Two unitaries enables **strong democratic representation** for residents and place without placing too much pressure on town and parish councils to fill the gap
- Many residents **do not identify with the boundaries of Cumbria County Council**. The county came into being in 1974 replacing Cumberland and Westmorland and does not have a single unifying functional economy, socioeconomic geography or culture.
- Cumbria's six largest cities and towns are in different districts and each have a very different identity and culture. Two unitaries will enable them to have a **stronger voice and identity** in how they are run, rather than centralising power in one hub.
- A future **mayoral Combined Authority** enables strategic planning and leadership while two balanced unitaries provides local service delivery and a strong basis for inclusive, clean growth.

Our vision for local government in Cumbria

We will promote Cumbria with strong and fair representation for our communities and businesses. Our services will drive sustainable economic growth, enable safe and healthy lives and deliver value for money for everyone.



How we will achieve it

- Two unitaries providing local representation, responsibility and accountability as part of a strong Cumbria Combined Authority
- Local, responsive, accessible services, integrating planning and service delivery
- Strengthening our economy to lead the UK towards a cleaner, prosperous future
- Delivering high quality services, efficiently and delivering value for our residents in collaboration with our partners

The evaluation criteria

This outline proposal does not include a preferred model for two unitaries in Cumbria as we are taking a detailed, evidence-based approach to understanding the options through five main evaluation criteria which are weighted to reflect our priorities for local government reorganisation

Impact on service delivery	Weighting	Financial benefits and sustainability	Weighting
Service improvement	5	Long term financial sustainability	5
Geography for service delivery	5	Costs and complexity of reorganisation	3
Minimal service disruption	4	Council tax equalisation	3
Manageable demographics and demand	4	Income potential	4
Partnership working	3	Reserves, assets and liabilities	4
Capacity and resilience	4		
Growth	Weighting	Democratic representation	Weighting
Economic growth potential	5	Effective local representation	5
Sustainable economic development	5	Identity	4
Inclusive economic growth, social mobility and levelling up	5	Functional economic geography	3
Unlocking investment	5	Representation in future Combined Authority	2
Housing development provision	4		
		Public support	

Further details in the full proposal

We will submit a full proposal which contains our model for local government reorganisation in Cumbria including the financial analysis that supports it, evidence of public support and a high level timeline for implementing unitary government in Cumbria.

Preferred model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Details of the geographic split of the two unitaries in Cumbria and how that model best achieves the vision set out in this document. The geographic model has not been detailed in this outline proposal as we are taking a detailed, evidence-based approach to understanding what is best for the people of Cumbria and its economic future. The previous page detailed the criteria against which we are assessing a shortlist of options.
Financial analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis of the savings and synergies we expect to achieve through local government reorganisation, considering projected implementation costs, the implementation timeframe and when savings and benefits can be achieved.
Public support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstration of the support for our two-unitary model for local government reorganisation from the public, community groups and key stakeholders.
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A high level outline plan for implementing local government reorganisation in Cumbria, considering the required democratic process and a period of shadow operations

