



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL – 19 MARCH 2025
Subject	INITIAL PROPOSALS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council Email: joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Robert Weaver, Chief Executive Email: Democratic@Cotswold.gov.uk
Report author	Robert Weaver, Chief Executive Email: Democratic@Cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To note the work underway across Gloucestershire in response to the formal invitation received from Government to develop proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR).
Annexes	Annex A Minister’s Letter to two-tier authority areas (dated 5 th February 2025) Annex B Draft Gloucestershire letter to Government on Interim proposals
Recommendation(s)	The Council resolves to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the work taking place across Gloucestershire in response to the formal invitation from Government to develop proposals for Local Government Reorganisation• Note the Gloucestershire letter to Government on interim proposals.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering Good Services
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Senior Management Team, Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council.



BACKGROUND

- 1.1** On 16 December 2024, the new Labour Government published an English Devolution White Paper. This set out the Government's intention to transfer powers away from central government to local government, in particular through the universal creation of mayoral strategic authorities across combinations of local authorities. It also set out the Government's intention to simplify and streamline the structures of local government, in particular in what are known as the two-tier areas of England where County Councils and District Councils deliver services (alongside parish and town councils).
- 1.2** On the same day, the Local Government Minister wrote to Council Leaders in two-tier areas. This set out the Minister's intention to invite in the new year Councils in two-tier areas and neighbouring small unitary councils to work together to produce proposals for local government reorganisation into unitary councils (that is, councils which combine the powers of county councils and district councils into a single organisation). The Minister's expectation was that to withstand financial shocks, these new unitary councils should have a minimum population size of 500,000 although he accepted that there may be areas across the country where this did not make sense locally and proposals for smaller councils would be considered.
- 1.3** The Minister's letter indicated that for some areas that wanted to proceed more rapidly with devolution to strategic mayoral authorities and local government reorganisation, he would be prepared to consider laying legislation to postpone those County Council elections planned for May 2025. Gloucestershire County Council's Cabinet met in early January and their Leader wrote to the Minister requesting a postponement of its May 2025 elections. At the same time, Gloucester City Council's Leader co-signed with four other Gloucestershire District Council Leaders a letter to the Minister opposing the proposal to postpone County Council elections in Gloucestershire. The Minister subsequently decided that Gloucestershire County Council's elections should proceed as planned in May 2025.
- 1.4** The Minister wrote a further letter to the Council Leaders of all seven Gloucestershire Councils on 5 February 2025, (Annex B) formally inviting proposals for local government reorganisation in this area. The letter set out the criteria the Government would be looking at when considering any proposals received. The deadline for the submission of any proposals is 28 November 2025. The letter also requested areas submit an informal interim response to Government by 21 March 2025, highlighting what proposals were under consideration and how the councils are working together to bring proposals forward.
- 1.5** Both before and since receipt of this letter, the Gloucestershire local authorities, along with other key stakeholders, had begun an intensive programme of work to develop proposals for consideration. Six officer-level workstreams have been meeting regularly, coordinated by the council Chief Executives and overseen by a political leadership board comprising the seven council Leaders.



- 1.6** A draft interim response letter to the Minister is included at Annex B. However it remains quite possible that the draft may be subject to slight amends up to the 21st March deadline. The hope is that each council leader will be prepared to co-sign.
- 1.7** There appear to be three main LGR proposals currently under active consideration by Gloucestershire partners. These are:
- A single unitary council covering the whole county of Gloucestershire (population size c.650,000)
 - Two unitary councils for the county, broadly aligning with district council boundaries - in the east of the county (Cheltenham, Cotswold and Tewkesbury, population c.300,000) and the west of the county (Gloucester, Forest of Dean and Stroud, population c.350,000)
 - Two or three unitary councils for the area, one of which would be based around the historic cathedral city of Gloucester, but likely with expanded boundaries to reflect its 'natural' identity with surrounding areas that would also more likely identify with Gloucester as their urban centre.
- 1.8** Officers will continue to work up proposals for consideration by political leaders between now and the November deadline. This work will also involve extensive community engagement and engagement with key stakeholder partners, as well as internally within our respective organisations.
- 1.9** In parallel, officers and Leaders continue to explore options for joining a combined authority and/or strategic mayoral authority with neighbouring areas beyond Gloucestershire. At the time of writing this report, a number of potential options are still under investigation and these are referenced in the letter at Annex B.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1** Do nothing. This is not currently recommended as the Government has indicated that more resources and devolved powers will be transferred to those areas that take forward devolution opportunities.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1** Whilst the Minister's letter has indicated a preference for a single proposal to be submitted for each two-tier area, he has accepted that it is possible that multiple proposals may be submitted. If this is the case, the Government is expected to consult in early 2026 on the various proposals received, and then to reach a decision on a preferred option in mid-2026.
- 3.2** Subsequent timetables for any move to new local government structures and joining a strategic mayoral authority are dependent on which option is accepted by the Government, and the timeline for Government decision-making and legislation



4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** These are being developed as part of the review of options currently being undertaken across the county.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to invite areas to submit proposals for local government reorganisation. The Secretary of State has exercised those powers in his letter to various authorities dated 5 February 2025.
- 5.2** Some of the LGR options under consideration may involve Principal Area Boundary Reviews, which if accepted would be conducted under various pieces of legislation.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1** This is being developed as part of the review of options currently being undertaken across the county.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1** This is being developed as part of the review of options currently being undertaken across the county.

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** None identified at this stage.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1** The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- English Devolution White Paper:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67ade9866e6c8d18118acd58/English_Devolution_White_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf
- Letter from Local Government Minister to Council Leaders in Two-Tier areas 16 December 2024:



https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67864788f041702a11ca0f44/Local_government_reorganisation_-_letter_to_two-tier_areas.pdf

- Letter from Local Government Minister to Gloucestershire Council Leaders 5th February 2025: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-invitation-to-local-authorities-in-two-tier-areas/letter-gloucestershire>

9.2 These documents will be available for inspection online at www.cotswold.gov.uk or by contacting democratic services democratic@cotswold.gov.uk for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

Annexes:

- Annex A Letter from Local Government Minister to Council Leaders 5 February 2025
- Annex B Draft Gloucestershire letter to Government on Interim proposals