

## Appraising the options for the future of local government within Warwickshire

June 2025

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June 2025

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# Executive Summary

## The purpose of this paper

In December 2024, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government released the English Devolution White Paper. The White Paper sets out the Government's ambitions around local government reorganisation in that they are seeking to establish Unitary Councils, in existing two-tier areas. Subsequently, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025, a formal call for unitary solutions has been made by the Government. Each council in Warwickshire was invited to work with the other councils in the area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation. In this context, the District Councils wished to undertake a piece of work to review all of the options for local government reorganisation and select the option with the most benefits for the people of Warwickshire. Therefore, the District Councils commissioned Deloitte to undertake an appraisal of the options, which could be used to inform the formal submission of plans, requested by Government in November 2025.

This paper represents the output of this work. It undertakes an appraisal of two key options for the future of local government in Warwickshire and selects a preferred option. The paper then goes on to outline potential next steps in the run up to final submission of plans in November 2025.

## The Options

Two options for local government reorganisation have been examined as outlined below.

**Option 1 – Single unitary model:** A single unitary council based on the existing geography of the five Borough and District Councils and the County Council.

**Option 2 – Two-unitary model:** A two-unitary council model as follows:

- (1) Based on the existing boundaries of North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Rugby Borough Council
- (2) Based on the existing boundaries of Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council

## The Criteria

These two options have been assessed against the following criteria, as set by the Government in the letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025:

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

### Ranking the options against the criteria

Each of the options have been given a forced ranking against each of the six criteria, as indicated in the table below (please note that a ranking of one is best and a ranking of two is worst). This process has been undertaken objectively by assessing the relative merits of the evidence as well as the theoretical benefits and disbenefits of each option against each criteria.

The rankings for each option have then been added together and ranked with the lowest score (i.e. the total number of first place rankings) being selected as the preferred option.

Table 1: Rankings of each option against the six criteria.

Criteria	Option 1: Single-Unitary	Option 2: Two-Unitary
1. Establishment of a single tier of local government	2	1
2. Right size to achieve efficiencies, and withstand financial shocks	1	2
3. Public service delivery	2	1
4. Councils working together and local place identity	2	1
5. Support devolution arrangements	2	1
6. Stronger community engagement	2	1
<b>Overall Ranking</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Place Score: 11</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Place Score: 7</b>

There is therefore a strong conclusion from this appraisal that the two-unitary model is best for Warwickshire against the Government's six criteria.

The body of this report contains the evidence and rationale for each of the rankings against the six criteria. However, in summary:

### Criteria one: Establishment of a single tier of local government

The two-unitary model creates sensible economic areas for Warwickshire due to its focus on place. The North and South of the county have extremely different economies and challenges. This is clear from the data whether economic, social, health, housing or travel to work issues are observed. This means that local plans are required to meet local needs. Economic growth is a priority for Warwickshire, and given the North / South divide, a two-unitary model is more suitable to drive this agenda for the economies of North and South Warwickshire.

The two-unitary model could also support local government in North and South Warwickshire to deal with the significant economic challenges it faces by creating stronger services such as planning functions specifically for each area with concise local plans that deliver for residents and business.

Finally, the two-unitary model would also create a more powerful voice for the North and South Warwickshire economies that can work within and influence existing partnership organisations. A single county unitary approach does not create a big enough strategic unit to create advantage for

the economy. Put simply, there is not a Warwickshire economy. The county needed to join with Coventry to create a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) that made economic sense. Moreover, while size is important to create strategic focus, this could be better achieved through the Strategic Authority approach. Accordingly, it is easy to envisage an approach that combines two North and South unitaries in Warwickshire with full constituent membership of a Strategic Authority, therefore providing an ideal combination of strategic thinking on issues such as planning and transport, and local focus on the specific challenges that need to be faced in the North and South of the county.

The single county unitary creates a footprint that is too big and has less chance of creating economic growth due to its lack of focus on place. For one local authority to develop individualised plans to address the needs outlined in this report would be very difficult. Instead, local plans are required to address these local needs, based on a real understanding of place and local economy, which is best provided by a greater number of smaller unitaries dedicated to place.

### **Criteria two: Right size to achieve efficiencies, and withstand financial shocks**

A rapid financial assessment has been undertaken as part of this work and while it indicates that the single county unitary is likely to achieve greater financial benefits due to its scale, both the single county unitary and the two-unitary options deliver savings when compared to the status quo. The gap between the two options is not significant when total spend of local government across the county is considered.

Moreover, there are different ways of looking at value for money. Due to the impact of council tax harmonisation, under a single county unitary approach, residents of the Districts in the South could see themselves paying higher council tax rates for services that are run more remotely and are less responsive.

It should also be noted that the financial assessment has only looked at transactional savings from bringing services together. Smaller unitaries may be able to deliver more transformational change by creating more locally designed preventative services. Investing in these preventative measures can generate long-term cost savings. This could bridge the savings gap to the single unitary model.

This has also been a purely theoretical exercise to look at costs and benefits. Savings delivery from this kind of programme is much more difficult in reality. There are certainly several examples of county unitaries that have been formed which have then struggled financially subsequently. Size alone is not an answer to financial sustainability.

It is also worth noting here that the public engagement activity undertaken identified a frequently raised concern that any projected savings from reorganisation would be negated by the cost of implementing it – there is scepticism around whether savings can be delivered.

On the population size question, the single county unitary is the only option that meets the Government's criteria for a minimum population size of 500,000. However, the proposed two unitaries would cover a significant population size and compare favourably to other unitary councils that currently exist in England. By 2048 both proposed councils would have a population of greater than 350,000.

On the basis of the financial assessment and the population size, the single county unitary has been ranked as best against this criterion, but the gap between the options is not big.

### **Criteria three: Public service delivery**

The two-unitary model is the preferred option for Warwickshire as it strikes a strategic balance between achieving efficiency and effectively addressing the diverse needs of its residents.

This model acknowledges the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery, empowering two distinct authorities to tailor services to their respective jurisdictions while collaborating on county-wide priorities, such as children's services. This approach ensures both local responsiveness and strategic alignment, fostering greater agility, stronger community relationships, and a more effective allocation of resources compared to a highly centralised single-authority model.

The two-unitary model has more chance of improving services due to its focus on local need. The data shows that there is significant variation between the North and South of the county in areas including the economy, housing market, transport links and health and wellbeing. Residents have very different needs in both places. A two-unitary model can take into account these different local needs, and deliver services that are responsive to them, more easily moving resources to where they are needed most. For services where scale is important, and local need less so, the two unitaries can collaborate.

While the single county unitary can create more economies of scale, avoid disaggregation, and potentially deliver greater performance consistency across the county, diseconomies of scale are also possible when organisations get bigger. Organisational structures and processes can become too complicated and cumbersome. A bigger organisation may find, for example, it more difficult to bring about transformational change by building new sets of relationships with residents and the community and voluntary sector.

There would also be the opportunity for the two unitaries to review areas where different services are provided by the Councils and consider whether expanding services across the footprint may be advantageous. For example, the two unitaries may consider the future position on the Housing Revenue Account and associated housing service, and arts and culture service delivery.

#### **Criteria four: Councils working together and local place identity**

The two-unitary model better maintains a sense of real place and community. Any proposed model of local government should be reflective of the way people live their lives, including where they live and where they work. The current county council area of Warwickshire (of course excluding Coventry) is not a coherent single place, but represents an administrative set of boundaries.

By contrast, there is so much variation between the North and South of the county that they should be considered separate places with their own unique challenges and priorities. Residents have very different needs and concerns in both places, and there are relatively consistent needs and concerns within both North and South. A two-unitary model, therefore, ensures that local government in Warwickshire will reflect real places, rather than an artificial one. This model allows for tailored policies and initiatives that respect existing cultural and economic disparities, fostering a stronger sense of local ownership and belonging while enabling closer engagement with communities and their unique needs and priorities.

The two-unitary model also better maintains effective local leadership. There is a significant danger that a county unitary could become too remote from citizens and communities, reduce local decision making, and even perhaps damage the interests of the individual places. Bigger local authorities may be more inclined to give more focus to factors such as value for money at the expense of local need, and have to trade off the different needs of different places, simply due to their size. This can mean that local places lose out.

A two-unitary model could create a very different culture, building on the strengths of the Boroughs and Districts in working with local people, and creating, in the words of Dorset Council, two 'district councils with county council powers'. The two unitaries could speak up for the interests of place and the discrete local communities within each area, creating a stronger, unified voice than currently exists, and ensuring the place voice is heard at a strategic level. It would also maintain local political leadership and accountability which will enable engagement with residents and support local decision making.

Finally, the two-unitary model builds on the Boroughs and Districts' track record of collaborative working. There is much evidence in this regard. The two-unitary model is a better cultural fit. It clearly creates two new entities, removing any sense of 'takeover' by the County of the Boroughs and Districts which may cause problems.

### **Criteria five: Support devolution arrangements**

A two-unitary model is optimal for Warwickshire as it balances strategic scale with a vital focus on local needs.

A single county unitary could potentially join the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) as a full member. However, there would be risks of this approach. In allocation of the financial Integrated Settlement, Warwickshire could lose out to the more deprived areas elsewhere across the WMCA footprint. In addition, if a single county unitary joined WMCA, it would immediately become the second largest Council by some margin, and could unbalance this established Combined Authority. Another option proposed has been for a Warwickshire Strategic Authority. If this were the case, it would preclude a single county unitary, as the two organisations could not be the same size according to guidance.

Perhaps more importantly, it has been reported that the Mayor could veto Warwickshire joining the WMCA as a full member. This significantly limits the potential to create an alternative devolution structure that would make sense for Warwickshire with a single county unitary.

Any other structure may involve two or three other neighbouring county areas; in which case there would not be an effective size ratio between the single county unitary areas and the overall Strategic Authority: the single county unitaries would be too close in size to the potential Strategic Authority. If the single county unitary entered a Strategic Authority alongside other smaller unitaries, again there would be a size and power imbalance within the Strategic Authority between the Warwickshire single unitary and other, smaller unitaries.

Fundamentally, if the WMCA is not an option, there is not a logical devolution solution for a future single county unitary. There may be an option to look towards Leicestershire, or towards Worcestershire and Herefordshire, but in both cases, there are differences of geography and economy between South Warwickshire and Leicestershire, or North Warwickshire and the Worcestershire / Herefordshire footprint.

A two-unitary model provides more opportunity in this regard and makes it easier to deal with other county areas. First, the new unitaries could assess their local geographies and economies and decide to pursue the devolution options most effective for their local places. For example, the North unitary could look to Staffordshire and Leicestershire. The South unitary could look to Worcestershire, Oxfordshire or Northamptonshire. Conversations are already being held by the Boroughs and Districts in this regard. Moreover, the size ratio works more effectively in this scenario – the smaller unitaries can advocate for their local interests without dominating any potential future Strategic Authority as they are too large.

Therefore the two-unitary model has been scored as best against this criterion.

### **Criteria six: Stronger community engagement**

The Councils appointed ORS (Opinion Research Services) in 2020 to conduct an extensive engagement programme to examine the options for local government across Warwickshire.

Divided views were expressed across the focus groups but, on balance, residents and stakeholders were slightly more in favour of two-unitary councils for Warwickshire than a single authority. Residents were particularly in favour of a two-unitary model.

Those who opposed a single council for the whole of Warwickshire did so chiefly on the grounds that the county is too large and too diverse in terms of social and economic need (particularly



between north and south) for it to be a viable consideration. It would also be the most 'remote' option: there was again considerable concern about a loss of local influence and democratic accountability within one large local authority. It could also result in democratic deficit as councillors will be expected to cover far larger areas and populations.

This engagement process provides evidence for scoring the two-unitary model as best.

Moreover, the two-unitary model better maintains effective local engagement moving forward. There is a significant danger that a county unitary could become too remote from citizens and communities, reduce local decision making, and even perhaps damage the interests of the individual places. By contrast, a **two-unitary model could create a very different culture**, building on the strengths of the districts in working with local people. There is lots of evidence of the effectiveness of the local engagement programmes of the Borough and District Councils in Warwickshire.

## Conclusion and next steps

Ultimately there is a lack of empirical evidence to support whether a bigger county unitary or smaller unitaries will be more effective in delivering services in any given place. Therefore, an assessment of the preferred option must be based on the specific local context in each place.

In Warwickshire there is clear evidence that the North and the South of the county are fundamentally different places, and as such, require their own local government structures. This is why this report recommends the two-unitary model.

This paper has also suggested, as requested by the Government in its letter of 5<sup>th</sup> February:

- Thoughts on barriers and challenges,
- Indicative costs in relation to the option,
- Early views as to the councillor numbers,
- Early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.
- A summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and further plans
- Indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team
- The voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward.

## Introduction

In December 2024, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government released the English Devolution White Paper. The White Paper sets out the Government's ambitions around local government reorganisation in that they are seeking to establish Unitary Councils, in existing two-tier areas.

Subsequently, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025, a formal call for unitary solutions has been made by the Government, with a March 21<sup>st</sup> deadline for initial plans. Each council in Warwickshire was invited to work with the other councils in the area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation.

The District Councils commissioned Deloitte to undertake an appraisal of the options, which could then be used to inform final plans in November 2025.

This paper represents the output of this work. It undertakes an appraisal of two key options for the future of local government in Warwickshire and selects a preferred option.

The paper then goes on to outline potential next steps in the run up to final submission of plans in November 2025, as the Government has requested.

The structure of this paper therefore carefully follows the requirements of Government in that it:

- Outlines the barriers and challenges that the Boroughs and Districts have faced and continue to face;
- Identifies the options, undertakes an options appraisal against the criteria for local government reorganisation set by the Government, and selects a preferred option, and
- Outlines potential next steps in the development of this proposal, including indicative costs, possible councillor numbers, early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions, a summary of local engagement and plans for wide local engagement, and the voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward.

Please note that the work in this paper was undertaken in a very short timeframe and is based primarily on an analysis of data, information and evidence provided.

## Barriers and challenges

The development of a new unitary model for Warwickshire presents a complex set of challenges.

### **The challenges with the current process**

The limited timeframe for this process raises concerns. The tight deadlines for creating the proposal have limited the opportunity for engagement with broader key stakeholders, both internally with staff and externally with partners, businesses, and community groups.

In particular, public perception and engagement are crucial for the successful transition into a new structure. As indicated below, some work has been done in this regard, but the Borough and District Councils are keen to further inform and involve residents, businesses, and stakeholders.

Also, the development of the full plan for November with supporting business case will require significant capacity, expertise and dedicated roles to ensure it can be successfully delivered. The Councils will need to secure specialised skills to coordinate restructuring, service integration, and wider change management. The current compressed timeline has limited the ability to assess current staffing levels and identify potential skills gaps in these areas, raising concerns about the capacity to manage the additional workload and complexities associated with this transition.

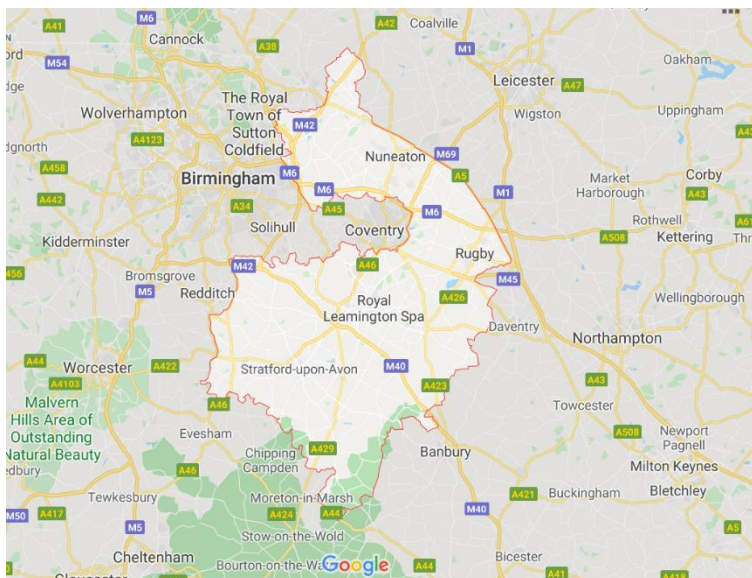
Therefore, securing funding to further develop the case and implementation plans will be essential. This will also facilitate broader engagement with stakeholders in a co-developed manner, as noted above.

## Options appraisal

### The shortlisted options

Based on previous work and engagement, two options were shortlisted:

#### Option 1 – Single County Unitary



#### Option 2 – Two-unitary Option

- **Unitary 1:** Based on the boundaries of North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Rugby
- **Unitary 2:** Based on the boundaries of Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon



## The criteria

These two options have been assessed against the following criteria, as set by the Government in the letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025:

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

## Ranking the options against the criteria

Each of these options have been given a forced ranking against each of the six criteria, as indicated in the table below (please note that a ranking of one is best and a ranking of two is worst).

The rankings for each option have then been added together and ranked with the lowest score (i.e. the number of first and second and third place rankings) being selected as the preferred option.

Table 2: Ranking of each option against the six criteria.

Criteria	Option 1: Single-Unitary	Option 2: Two-Unitary
1. Establishment of a single tier of local government	2	1
2. Right size to achieve efficiencies, and withstand financial shocks	1	2
3. Public service delivery	2	1
4. Councils working together and local place identity	2	1
5. Support devolution arrangements	2	1
6. Stronger community engagement	2	1
<b>Overall Ranking</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Place Score: 11</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Place Score: 7</b>

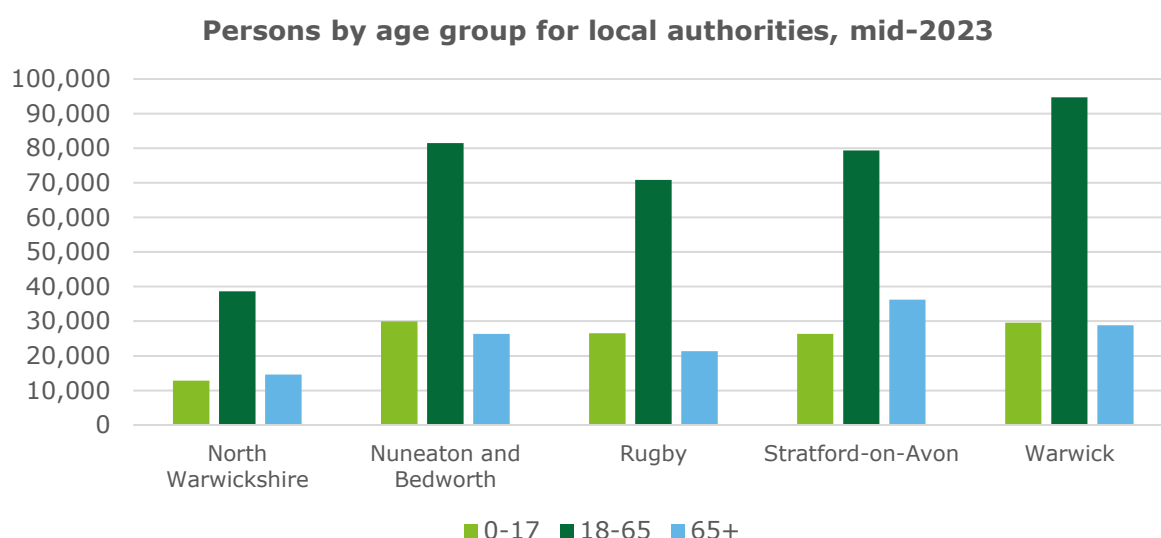
The body of this report contains the evidence and rationale for each of these rankings against the criteria.

## Criteria 1 – Achieving a single tier of local government for the whole of the area

This section explores the establishment of a single tier of local government for the entirety of Warwickshire, replacing the existing two-tier system. Against the shortlisted models, it evaluates the benefits of each option to enhance efficiency, accountability, and strategic planning, ultimately delivering better outcomes for residents and businesses across Warwickshire.

### Population Base

Chart 1: Population by age group for each local authority.<sup>1</sup>



All regions share a dominant 18-64 age group, indicating a generally consistent workforce proportion across Warwickshire.

Stratford-On-Avon and Warwick have a pronounced 65+ population, which creates common needs in the South of the County that must be addressed in any future model.

<sup>1</sup> [Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

While the overall trends remain largely similar, the Unitary structure options influence the distribution of certain age groups and the division of the tax base across the county – as shown below:

Table 3: Population and tax base for the current structure. <sup>234</sup>

	Population			Tax Base		
	2021	2024	2038	2021	2024	2038
North Warwickshire	65,000	66,166	76,056	21,577	21,869	25,138
Nuneaton and Bedworth	134,200	137,794	158,391	39,187	40,085	46,077
Rugby	114,400	118,781	136,536	39,307	40,975	47,100
Stratford-On-Avon	134,700	141,929	163,144	58,229	61,704	70,927
Warwick	148,500	153,153	176,045	56,343	58,280	66,991

It must be noted that 2038 predictions are based on 1% year-on-year increases in population and tax base sizes.

### ***Single Unitary Model***

The following table illustrates the consolidated structure resulting from merging all districts into a unified entity, operating under a single unitary model.

Table 4: Population and tax base for proposed single unitary model.

	Population			Tax Base		
	2021	2024	2038	2021	2024	2038
Unitary 1	596,800	617,823	710,172	214,643	222,913	256,233

A single unitary model is the only option that meets the Government's 500,000 population minimum size criteria.

However, the model may also make it more difficult to represent and address the demographic differences within a single county unitary. Smaller councils can more effectively advocate for and represent the interests of different population groups within their areas which create different needs and service requirements.

A single unitary model benefits from a significantly larger tax base compared to multiple, smaller unitary authorities. This provides a more substantial and stable funding foundation for the delivery of public services across the entire county. However, as will be noted below, setting a single council tax rate then becomes very difficult. Although the tax base is bigger, the prospective council's financial commitments are also of course much larger.

### ***Two-Unitary Model***

The following table outlines the structure of a two-unitary model, in which two distinct unitary authorities would be established. Unitary 1 would encompass the Boroughs of North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Rugby, merging with part of Warwickshire County Council; with

<sup>2</sup> [Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Council Taxbase 2021 in England - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021 - Office for National Statistics](#)

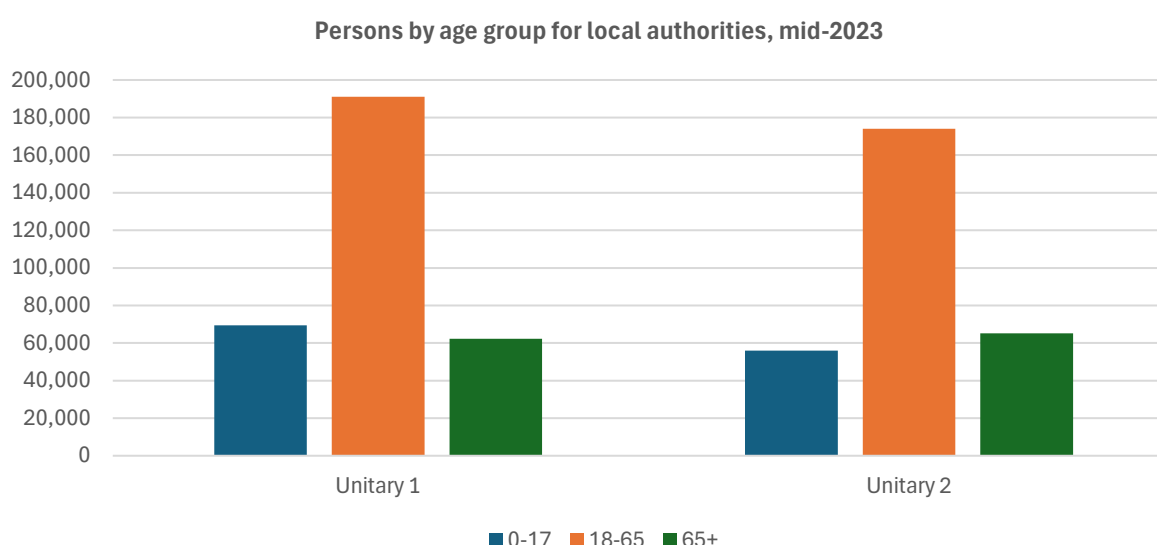
Unitary 2 comprising the Boroughs of Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon, merging with part of Warwickshire County Council.

Table 5: Population and tax base for proposed two-unitary model.<sup>5 6</sup>

	Population			Tax Base		
	2021	2024	2038	2021	2024	2038
Unitary 1	313,600	322,741	370,983	100,071	102,929	118,314
Unitary 2	283,200	295,082	339,189	114,572	119,984	137,919

Both councils would reach the population level of 350,000 by 2048, and in 2038 one council would meet this criterion, while the other would be close.

Chart 2: Population age groups for the proposed two-unitary model.<sup>7</sup>



Analysis of the projected age distribution for both proposed unitary authorities reveals only marginal differences in demographic composition. Both Unitary 1 and Unitary 2 will require a balanced approach to service provision, recognizing the needs of a diverse population.

While Unitary 1 may have a slightly larger working-age population and a marginally higher proportion of young people, both unitary authorities will need to prioritize education, recreational opportunities, and affordable housing.

Similarly, while Unitary 2 might have a larger proportion of residents aged 65 and above, both entities must ensure robust social care services and health and well-being initiatives for their aging populations. Ultimately, recognizing the relatively balanced demographic profiles is essential for effectively planning and allocating resources across both proposed unitary authorities.

## Local Economy and Identity

In evaluating the optimal unitary structure for Warwickshire, understanding the diverse economic needs and opportunities across the county is paramount. This section outlines the economic

<sup>5</sup> [Local Statistics for Warwickshire \(E10000020\) - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>6</sup> Council Taxbase: Local Authority Level Data for 2024 – Published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 13/11/24 and revised on 13/12/14.

<sup>7</sup> [Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)



landscape across the Warwickshire region and the potential impact of single or two-unitary models on local economies, considering factors such as investment attraction, strategic planning, resource allocation, and the ability to address region-specific challenges.

The majority of Warwickshire's population live within the south and centre of the county, in areas such as Warwick, Stratford-on-Avon, and Nuneaton and Bedworth. The market towns of northern and eastern Warwickshire which were industrialised in the 19th Century, include Atherstone, Bedworth, Coleshill, Nuneaton, and Rugby. Of these, Atherstone has retained most of its original character. Past major industries included coal mining, textiles, engineering and cement production but heavy industry is in decline and is being gradually replaced by distribution centres and other light-to-medium industry and services.

Of the northern and eastern towns, only Nuneaton and Rugby are well-known outside Warwickshire. The prosperous towns of central and western Warwickshire include Royal Leamington Spa, Warwick, Stratford-upon-Avon, Kenilworth, Alcester, Southam and Wellesbourne.

### **North Warwickshire**

North Warwickshire, a predominantly rural area, bears the legacy of its historical dominance by the mining industry, even after the closure of its last coal mine in 2013. This industrial heritage continues to shape the community's identity. While mining may no longer define its economy, North Warwickshire has adapted, with key sectors driving its present-day economic landscape. In 2020, wholesale and retail, transportation and storage, the manufacture of metals, electrical products, and machinery, along with warehousing and transport, emerged as the dominant economic forces. This shift is evident in the emergence of a major logistics hub, characterized by large distribution centres and warehouses serving as key nodes in the UK's supply chain network. Additionally, North Warwickshire benefits from its integration into the Midlands automotive cluster, further contributing to the region's manufacturing strength.

While the area currently has a modest visitor economy, with Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon often overshadowing local destinations, and limited shopping opportunities leading many residents to seek retail options outside the borough, North Warwickshire anticipates that the rise of remote work and online shopping will reshape these dynamics in the future <sup>8</sup>.

### **Nuneaton and Bedworth**

Despite being the smallest Borough in Warwickshire by area, Nuneaton and Bedworth holds the third-largest population, reflecting its predominantly urban character. Historically reliant on industries like coal mining and heavy engineering, today, the dominant employment sectors encompass wholesale, retail, and trade; health and social work; and transportation, storage, and communication. These industries are housed within a network of industrial estates, accommodating a mix of small and medium-sized enterprises alongside headquarters of national and global companies. However, a significant portion of Nuneaton and Bedworth residents commute outside of the region to areas, such as Coventry and Leicestershire, for employment, highlighting a continued reliance on manufacturing and a need for greater diversification of employment opportunities within the borough <sup>9</sup>.

### **Rugby**

The Borough of Rugby revolves around its namesake town, which houses approximately two-thirds of the district's population, with the remainder residing in the surrounding rural areas.

Rugby's location means it is well connected to all parts of the UK. The West Coast Mainline connects Rugby to Central London within an hour and Birmingham within half an hour. Rugby also sits within the inner, 'Golden Triangle', on the strategic road network (M6/ M1/M69/A5/A14) which

<sup>8</sup> [North Warwickshire - Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Nuneaton and Bedworth - Borough Plan](#)

is considered the prime location for logistics and warehousing as it provides access to 90 per cent of the UK population within 4 hours. Immediately adjacent to Rugby's southwestern boundary is DIRFT (Davenport International Rail Freight Terminal) which provides rail goods links to the deep seaports.

The primary employment sectors are concentrated in wholesale, retail, and trade; motor vehicle repair; and transportation and storage. These industries are largely situated within retail parks predominantly located north of Rugby town centre, complementing the diverse range of retail businesses within the town itself. The largest business sectors in Rugby are logistics (14.7%) and manufacturing (12.9%) with particular strengths in aerospace and automotive. The Borough's businesses base in terms of size is focused on the small (10-49 employees) and microbusiness (0-9 employees).

The Borough also houses significant employers including Jaguar Landover's Specialist Vehicle Operations division at Ryton, which produces around 10,000 specialist and high-performance vehicles each year. The technology centre at Ansty Park is also home major employers such as Meggitt, the London Electric Vehicle Company (which makes the iconic London Taxi), AVL, and the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centre, making Rugby a hub for advanced manufacturing and manufacturing technologies. Rugby has a track record of being an innovative and entrepreneurial area and currently has a higher than UK average start up rate by small businesses.

Rugby Borough Council has recently agreed an Economic Strategy<sup>10</sup> that focusses on the themes of People, Business and Growth. It sets the long-term outcomes of:

- People: Reduced economic and health inequalities by increasing economic activity, apprenticeship participation and raising skill levels in residents as a proportion of the local workforce.
- Business: A growing and diverse business base and retention of existing Rugby businesses through the provision of employment space to meet demand.

Growth: Increasing prosperity for all, measured through gross disposable income, business rates and visitor spend

## **Stratford-On-Avon**

The largely rural district of Stratford-on-Avon is characterized by a dispersed population, with its largest settlement, Stratford-upon-Avon, accounting for less than 25% of the district's residents<sup>11</sup>. The remaining population is distributed among smaller market towns and rural areas, contributing to the district's distinct character. Stratford on Avon is the largest district in Warwickshire covering an area of 978 km<sup>2</sup>, almost half the entire geography of Warwickshire.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Stratford-on-Avon was worth an estimated £5.3 billion in 2021, according to figures published by the ONS. Stratford-on-Avon's GDP growth between 2020 and 2021 was 7.4% per year.

Tourism plays an important role in Stratford-upon-Avon's economy, attracting over 6 million visitors in 2023, it is estimated that total tourism spend is in the region of £450m pa.

Beyond tourism, the district's economy is bolstered by strategically located business parks that house manufacturing and distribution facilities. The Manufacturing industry is the largest in Stratford-on-Avon based on the number of jobs, accounting for 17.6% of roles in the area. The Council is home to prestigious employers such as Jaguar Land Rover's research and development

<sup>10</sup> [Economic Strategy - Rugby Borough Council](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Stratford-on-Avon District - Core Strategy](#)

facilities, Aston Martin' Headquarters and main assembly plant along with professional services such as NFU Mutual.

## Warwick

Warwick's economy ranks among the most prosperous in England, boasting a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of £7.4 billion in 2021, with an impressive 10.6% annual growth rate between 2020 and 2021. The area exhibits a high value and high potential, with a strong entrepreneurial spirit and a diverse range of businesses. The Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles industry is the largest employer, accounting for 13.8% of jobs. In fact, Warwick boasts a job density of 1.03, meaning there are more jobs than working-age residents. While the unemployment rate stands at 5.8%, the area faces challenges, including a reliance on low-paying jobs in retail, hospitality, and tourism, as well as limited access to superfast broadband and good mobile coverage in some rural areas. However, Warwick possesses a highly skilled workforce and a strong business survival rate, presenting opportunities for growth in emerging sectors like low-carbon technology and the digital creative industry. The automotive and future mobility sector also plays a significant role, along with a thriving tourism sector.

## Economic Sectors

- **Tourism:** Parts of Warwickshire attract many tourists, primarily in the South of the county, due to Stratford-upon-Avon's links with Shakespeare, as well as the historic castles found in Warwick and Kenilworth. To recognise this, a Destination Management Organisation is in operation for south Warwickshire, recognising it as an entity. This shared strength presents opportunities for joint marketing efforts, developing regional tourism itineraries, and collaborating on initiatives to extend the tourism season and attract new visitor demographics.
- **Access to Knowledge and Innovation:** A key advantage for all Boroughs and Districts is their proximity to renowned research and educational institutions. Warwick University, centrally located within the region, and several Birmingham based Universities, within easy reach, provide access to a wealth of knowledge and expertise. This accessibility attracts a significant influx of students from across the UK and internationally, contributing to the vibrancy and economic growth of the local communities, as well as opportunities for collaboration on research and development, knowledge transfer, and skills development, potentially benefiting businesses in both regions.
- **Manufacturing Base:** the Boroughs and Districts have a strong manufacturing presence, particularly in the automotive sector, which forms a significant part of their economic base.
- **Low Carbon Economy:** Warwickshire Boroughs and Districts are committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions, presenting opportunities for growth in renewable energy, green technologies, and sustainable practices.
- **Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering:** Building on the existing automotive expertise, the county can leverage opportunities in electric vehicle (EV) battery production, hydrogen technology, and future mobility solutions.
- **Digital Creative Industries:** Leamington Spa's "Silicon Spa" cluster provides a strong foundation for growth in video game development, digital technologies, and creative industries.
- **Bioscience, Agri-tech, and Medtech:** With a history of research and innovation in bioscience, Warwickshire can attract investment and foster growth in agri-tech, medtech, and related fields.

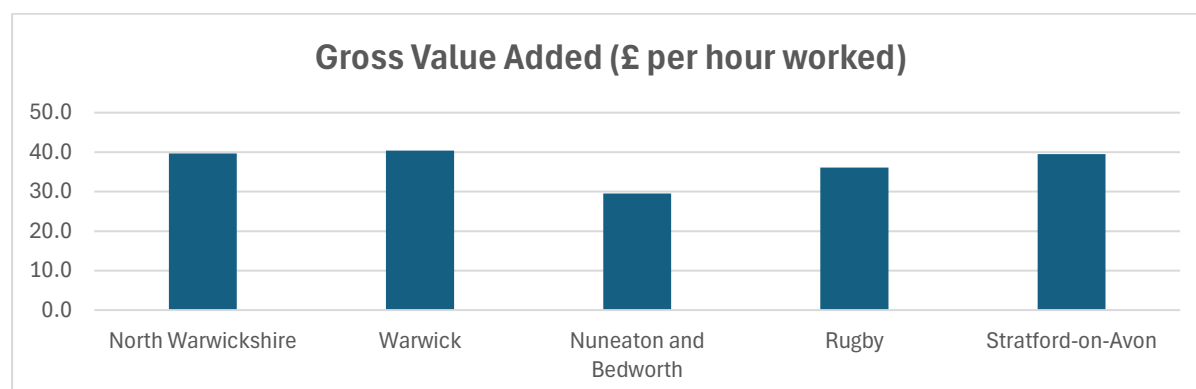
There is significant diversity across the County in sectors.

The economy of the South of the county is largely based on higher value industries, particularly in the fields of professional business services, computing and software, and high-value engineering and manufacturing. Tourism is also important.

By contrast, the economy of the North of the county is based on heavy industry and the legacy of the mining industry. The North continues to have a higher proportion of lower-value manufacturing industries, personal services and public-sector employment than the national average.

### Gross Value Added (GVA)

Chart 3: Gross Value Add per work hour



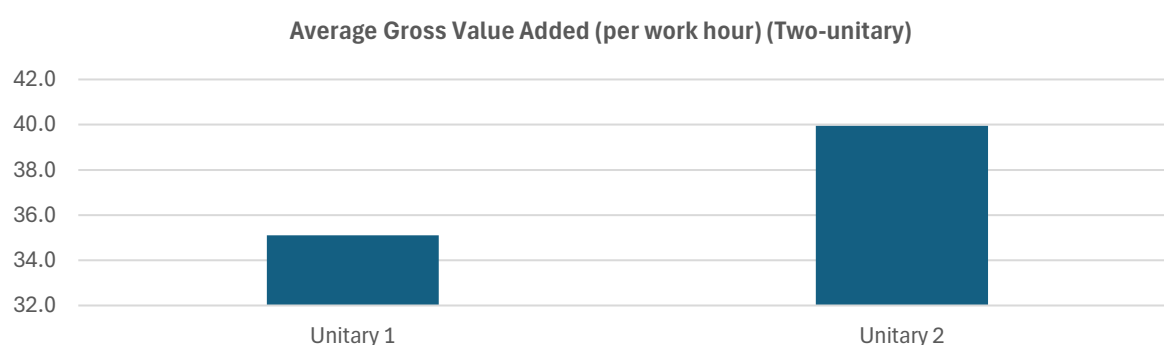
Examining the GVA figures across the region reveals strong performance in the South, as well as North Warwickshire, and weaker performance in the other Boroughs in the North.

This pattern suggests a more moderate level of economic output per worker in these areas, potentially influenced by a greater reliance on lower-value industries or a less skilled workforce.

This is supported by the analysis of GVA split between North and South in the graph below, with unitary two performing over double that seen in unitary one.

This indicates that the North and South have very different economies.

Chart 4: Gross value added per work hour for the proposed two-unitary model.<sup>12</sup>

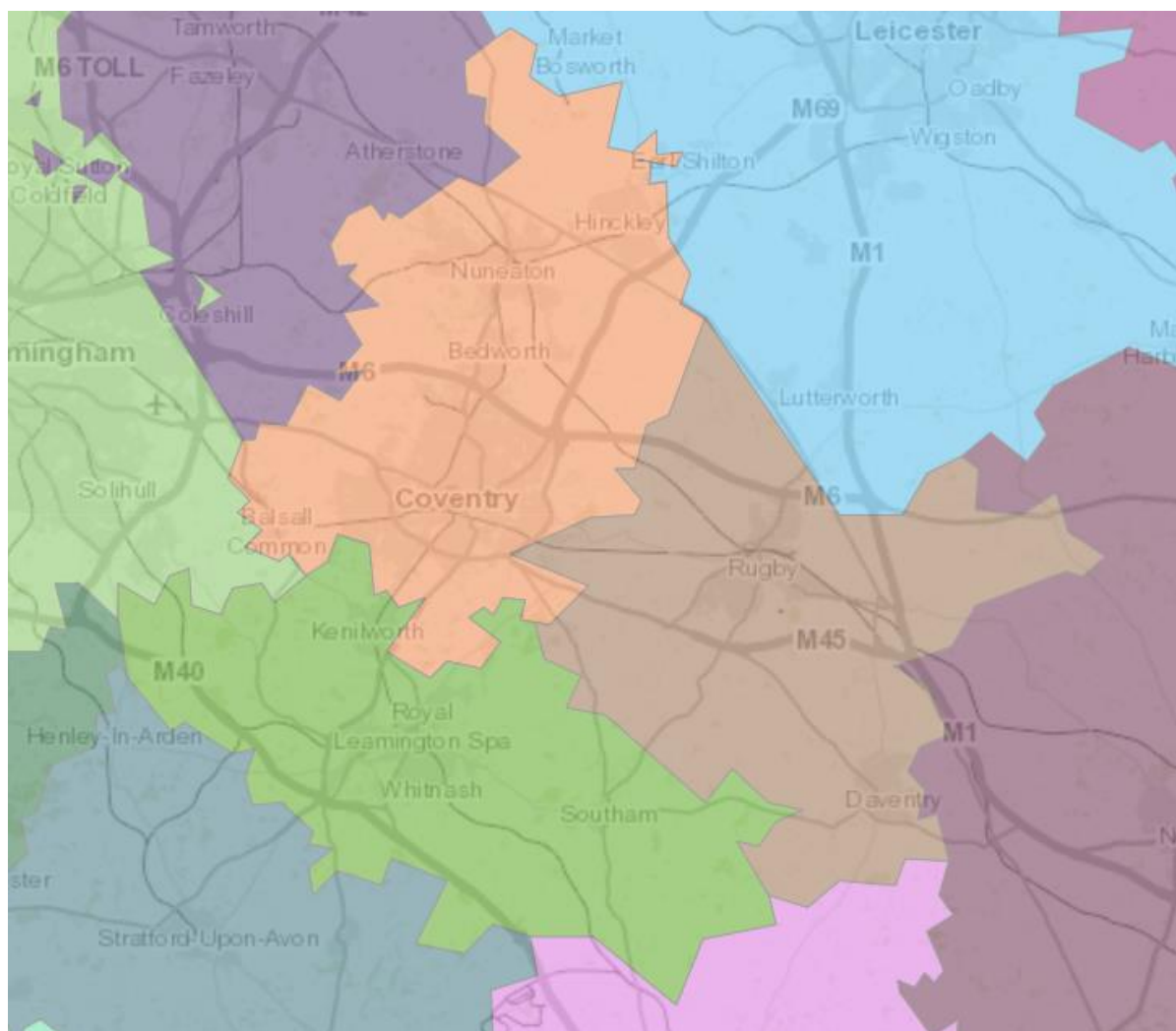


### Travel to Work Areas (TTWA):

This section explores the TTWAs across Warwickshire, highlighting key patterns and their implications for the proposed unitary models. Understanding these patterns can inform decisions

<sup>12</sup> [Regional and subregional labour productivity, UK statistical bulletins - Office for National Statistics](#)

regarding transportation planning, economic development strategies, and the overall design of a unitary system that aligns with the daily lives and needs of Warwickshire residents.



The Travel To Work Area (TTWA) map provides valuable insights into the potential advantages and disadvantages of different local governance models for Warwickshire.

A single unitary authority, while potentially offering streamlined administration for interconnected areas like Coventry, Nuneaton, Bedworth, and Kenilworth, might struggle to address the distinct needs of areas like Stratford-upon-Avon and Royal Leamington Spa. This "one-size-fits-all" approach could hinder the ability to capitalize on the unique strengths of different economic hubs within the county.

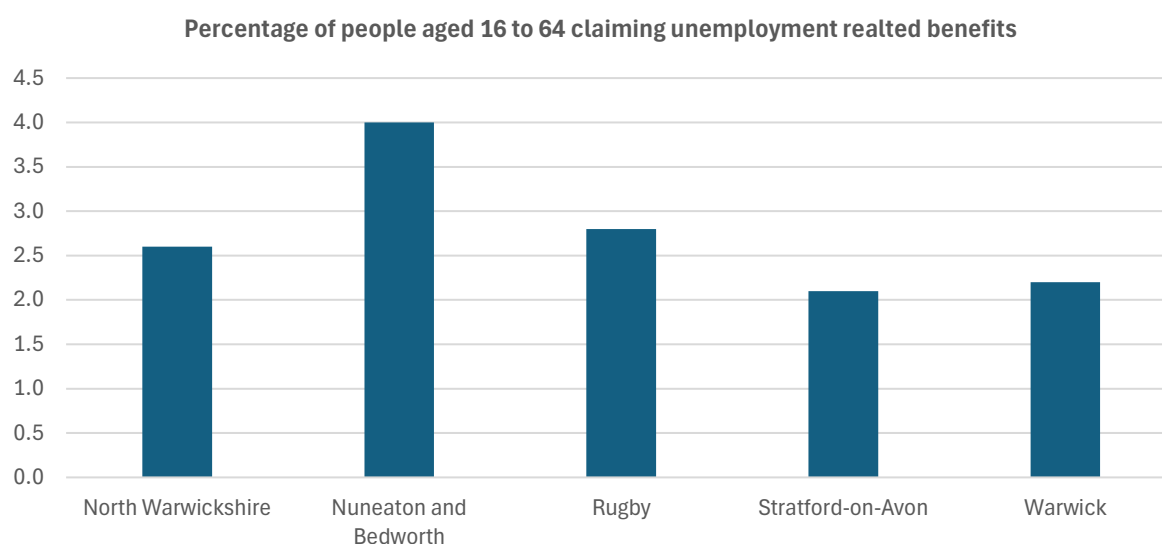
A two-unitary model, potentially dividing Warwickshire along a north-south axis, offers a more tailored approach. The proposed configuration of a northern unitary authority (North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Rugby, and part of Warwickshire County Council) aligns with the strong interconnectedness around Coventry, potentially facilitating effective management of transport, economic development, and infrastructure.

Conversely, the proposed southern unitary authority (Stratford-on-Avon, Warwick, and part of Warwickshire County Council) aligns with a distinct economic hub, enabling tailored strategies for tourism and heritage management. However, collaboration with the northern unitary authority would be crucial to address cross-boundary issues, particularly along shared transport corridors like the M40.

It should be noted that the majority of major travel routes in Warwickshire run East-West rather than North-South, such as the M40, M6 and M45, and the railway lines.

## Economic Inactivity

Chart 5: Percentage of people ages 16-64 who are claiming unemployment-related benefits <sup>13</sup>.



Data on individuals claiming unemployment-related benefits across Warwickshire provides valuable insights into the distribution of unemployment challenges across the county and its potential implications for the proposed unitary models.

- Nuneaton and Bedworth stands out with the highest percentage of unemployment benefit claimants, reaching 4% of the working-age population, indicating a significant need for employment support and economic development initiatives within this urban centre.
- Stratford and Warwick demonstrate lower percentages, at 2.1% and 2.2% respectively, suggesting relatively lower levels of unemployment in these areas.
- North Warwickshire and Rugby fall in between, with percentages around 2.6% and 2.8% respectively.

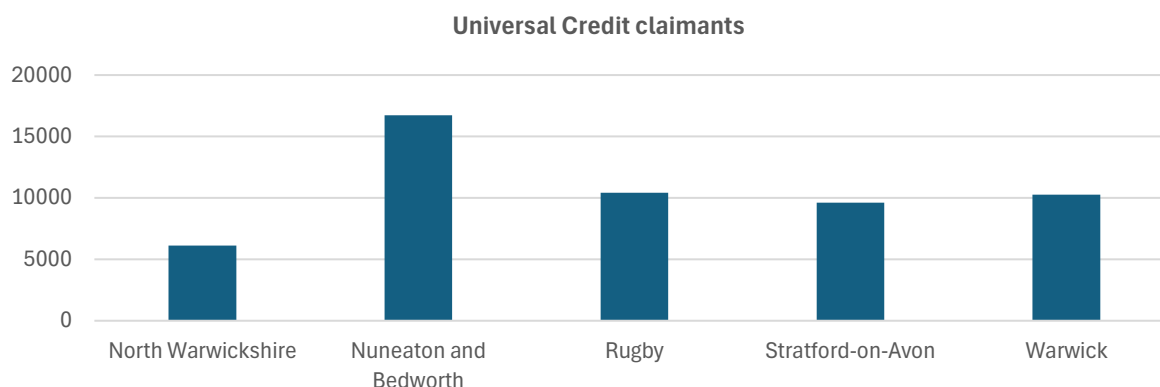
These variations in unemployment rates across districts highlight the importance of a nuanced approach to economic development and employment support within any unitary model.

A multi-unitary model might offer greater flexibility to tailor interventions to the specific needs and circumstances of each unitary area, recognising the diverse economic landscape of Warwickshire.

Data on Universal Credit claimants across Warwickshire districts further reinforces the trends observed in the previous analysis of unemployment benefits.

<sup>13</sup> [Claimant Count - Office for National Statistics](#)

Chart 6: Universal credit statistics – DWP (Dec-24)<sup>14</sup>.



Universal Credit data provides further insights into the economic landscape of Warwickshire, corroborating some trends observed in unemployment benefit figures. Nuneaton and Bedworth stand out with the highest number of Universal Credit claimants, exceeding 16,000, aligning with the previously noted higher percentages of unemployment benefit claimants. This highlights a significant concentration of individuals facing economic hardship and requiring support in these areas.

Similarly, Rugby exhibits comparable levels of Universal Credit claimants to unemployment benefits, indicating a consistent pattern of economic need. Interestingly, North Warwickshire presents a lower claimant count than other districts, contrasting with the unemployment benefit data. This discrepancy underscores the importance of considering multiple indicators when assessing economic conditions.

This analysis highlights the diverse economic landscape of Warwickshire, with each district possessing unique strengths and opportunities. A successful unitary model, whether a single entity or a multi-unitary structure, must balance the flexibility to tailor economic development strategies to each district's specific needs with fostering collaboration and interconnectedness across the region. This balanced approach will promote shared prosperity and sustainable growth for all of Warwickshire.

## Housing

Understanding the current housing landscape in Warwickshire is crucial for evaluating the potential impacts of different unitary models on housing provision, affordability, and planning. This section provides an overview of the key housing characteristics, market dynamics, and growth targets across the Warwickshire districts, highlighting the diverse needs and challenges that must be addressed.

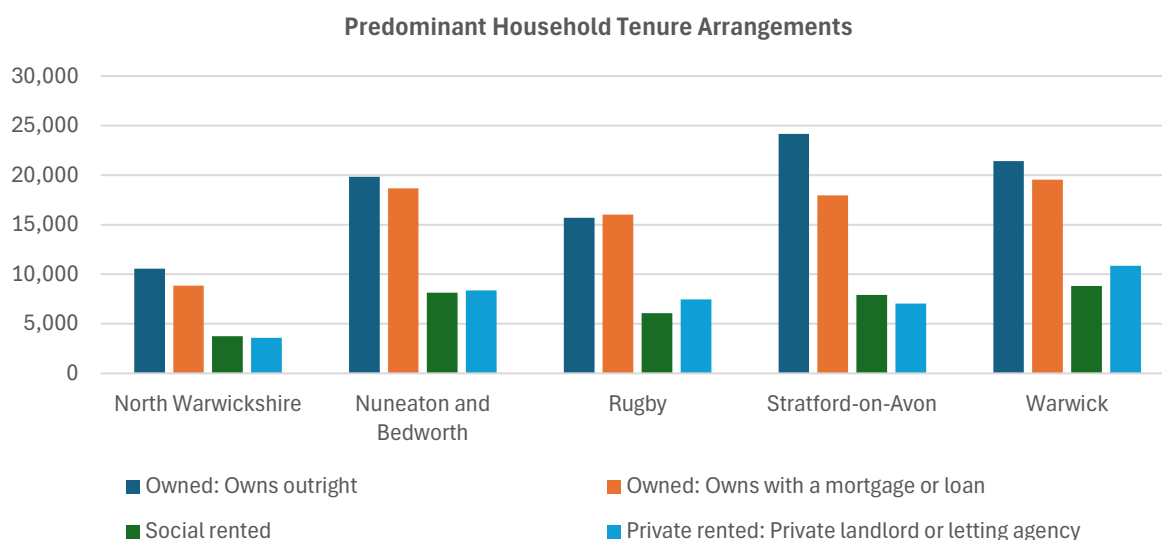
Examining these factors will provide a foundation for assessing how different unitary structures might influence housing development, resource allocation, and the ability to meet the housing needs of Warwickshire's diverse communities.

<sup>14</sup> [Universal Credit Statistics - Department for Work and Pensions](#)

## Housing Tenure:

Analysis of housing tenure patterns across Warwickshire districts reveals distinct variations that highlight the varied market dynamics within the county.

Chart 7: Household tenure agreements by local authority.<sup>15</sup>



Housing patterns across Warwickshire's districts reveal distinct characteristics influenced by local economies, demographics, and housing markets. Stratford-on-Avon boasts the highest rate of outright homeownership in the county, reflecting its affluent resident base and desirable location.

In contrast, North Warwickshire and Nuneaton and Bedworth exhibit a more balanced distribution between social rented and private rented housing sectors, suggesting a greater diversity of housing needs and socioeconomic backgrounds within these districts.

Meanwhile, Warwick stands out with a notably large private rental population, likely driven by the significant student population associated with the University of Warwick.

It is crucial to consider that North Warwickshire has a considerably smaller population compared to other districts, which inherently influences the scale of its housing market and overall representation in county-wide statistics. Understanding these nuances is essential when planning for a potential unitary structure, ensuring that housing policies are tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of each district.

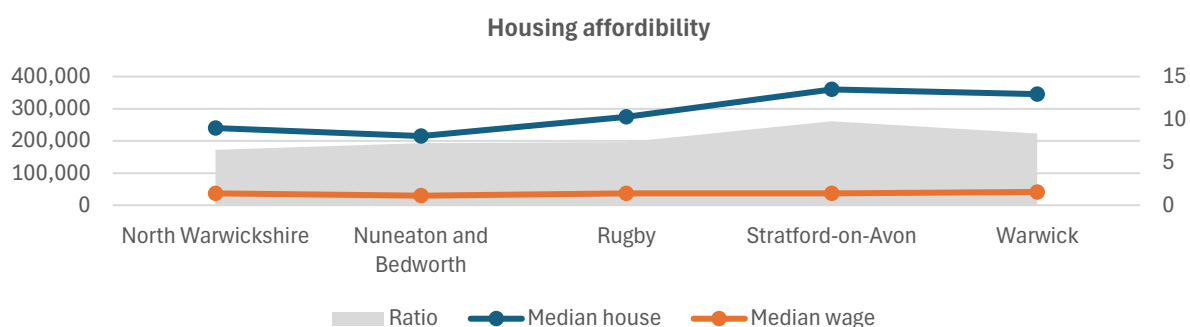
<sup>15</sup> [Household characteristics by tenure, England and Wales: Census 2021 - Office for National Statistics](#)



## Affordable Housing Provision:

By examining affordability, we can gain insights into the housing across the county and assess how different unitary structures might impact this position moving forward. Housing affordability across the Warwickshire districts is illustrated below.

Chart 8: Median house price, earnings and affordability ratio for each local authority.<sup>16</sup>

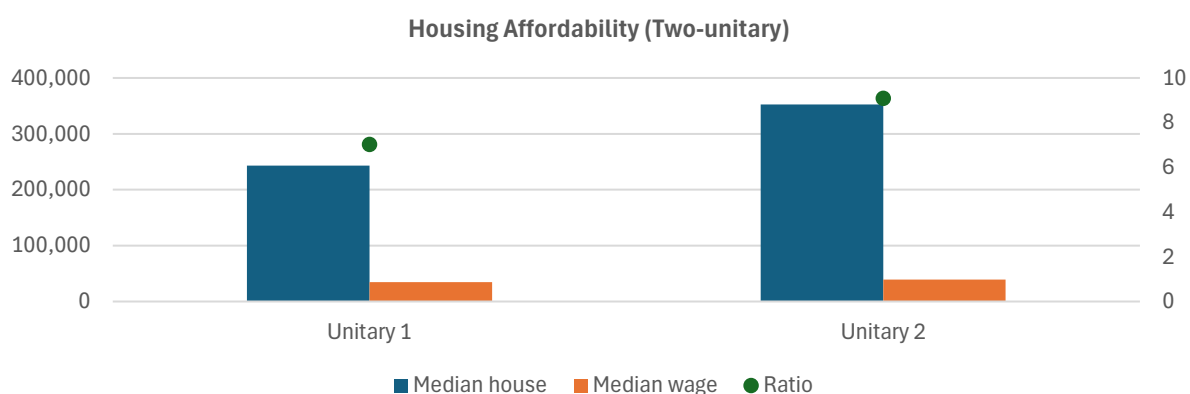


There is a wide spectrum in house affordability in Warwickshire County, with many house prices increasing at a rate far above salary increases and inflation. There is a wide disparity in house prices between North and South.

While the average house price in Nuneaton and Bedworth stands at £234,000, Stratford-on-Avon sees a considerably higher average of £387,000.<sup>17</sup> This price gap exacerbates affordability issues, particularly as house price increases significantly outpace salary growth and inflation.

Furthermore, rental prices across the region have experienced a dramatic surge. Between January 2024 and January 2025, average monthly rent in Nuneaton escalated by 15.8%, while North Warwickshire witnessed an 11.9% increase.<sup>18</sup> This rapid rise in rental costs further compounds the affordability crisis, as it is not reflective of wage growth or inflation, placing additional financial strain on residents.

Chart 9: Median house price compared to earnings and affordability ratio for the proposed two-unitary model.



<sup>16</sup> [House price to residence-based earnings ratio - Office for National Statistics](#)

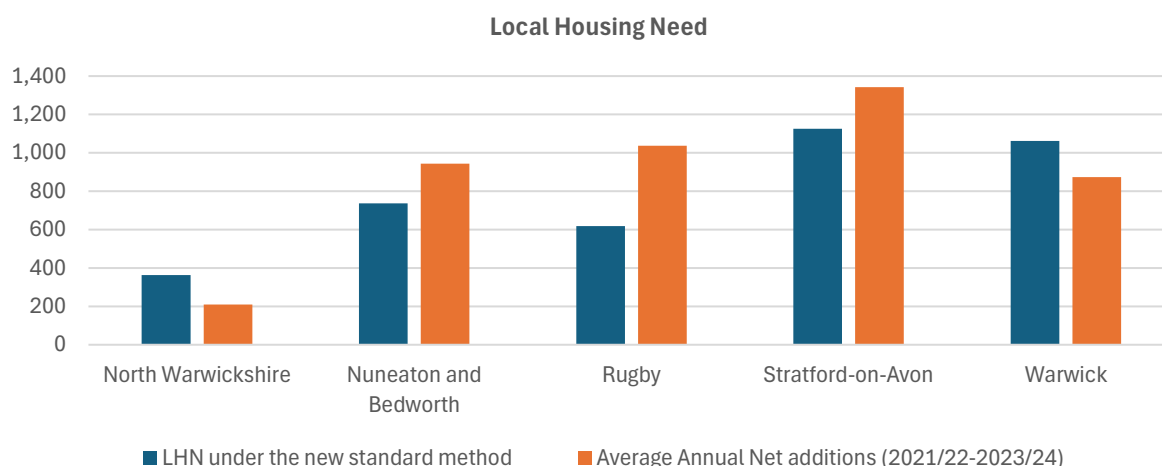
<sup>17</sup> [Housing prices in Nuneaton and Bedworth](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Housing prices in Nuneaton and Bedworth](#)

The chart above again shows the differences in challenges between North and South in terms of house prices, wages, and affordability ratios.

### Local Housing Need:

Chart 10: Local housing need for each local authority. <sup>19</sup>



By analysing the gap between housing delivery and projected needs, we can explore how different unitary structures might influence the ability to meet housing targets and ensure sufficient housing provision across the county.

Across Warwickshire, the average annual net additions of housing generally exceed that of Local Housing Need targets set by the new standard method. This is particularly pronounced in Stratford-On-Avon and Rugby. However, shortfalls are observed in North Warwickshire and Warwick.

North Warwickshire and Warwick, which each are underperforming in meeting their prescribed housing targets, will sit in different unitaries, mitigating the risk of any one cluster being disproportionately impacted by the combined position.

### Expected Outcomes

Exploring potential unitary models for Warwickshire reveals a range of possible outcomes, each with its own set of advantages and considerations.

#### **Single Unitary Model:**

A single unitary model for Warwickshire presents the potential for enhanced efficiency and streamlined service delivery. Centralising functions like procurement and administration could lead to cost savings, potentially allowing for reinvestment in public services or a reduction in the tax burden. This model also promotes county-wide equity by ensuring consistent service levels across Warwickshire. Areas like environmental protection, transport, and public health could benefit from a unified strategic approach.

#### **Two-Unitary Model:**

The two-unitary model aims to strike a balance between county-wide coordination and local responsiveness. By dividing Warwickshire into two distinct entities, this model allows for greater

<sup>19</sup> [LHN outcome of the new method](#)

tailoring of services to the specific needs of each area. This localised approach can foster stronger community engagement and a heightened sense of local identity. Areas like social housing, education, and community safety could benefit from this model's ability to blend strategic alignment with local sensitivity.

Finally, the two-unitary model could also enhance relationships to the voluntary sector and local communities, building community resilience and independence, and focusing on preventative solutions such as social prescribing, taking a whole population health approach to the health and social care needs of the population.

### Estimated Costs

This section presents a high-level comparative analysis of the estimated costs associated with each proposed unitary model for Warwickshire. These estimated costs, along with expected efficiency benefits are outlined in more detail as part of the Criteria 2 financial assessment. Please note that an estimate of this type is by its nature very driven by the assumptions made.

The assumptions made so far are based on previous experience of undertaking similar exercises with further adjustments for the Warwickshire context. However, such assumptions will need to be adjusted further as the planning process develops.

Therefore, these figures cannot be relied upon at this stage by the local authorities concerned as accurate estimates. More work would be required to establish this. This is an exercise to show relative costs and benefits, which can then give an indication of which option may be the most financially advantageous.

Finally, please note that further work will have to be undertaken on how these costs will be funded, but it is likely that they can be funded from the benefits achieved if up front funding can be found from areas such as reserves.

The council tax harmonisation number is income forgone rather than a real cost. The other costs could be phased over a period, depending on the pace of implementation plans and the degree of change that the new authorities wish to implement.

Table 6: Indicative costs across the proposed two-unitary models.

	Single-Unitary	Two-Unitary
<b>Redundancy Costs</b>	£1.6m	£1.2m
<b>Integration PMO</b>	£1.1m	£1.3m
<b>Digital/IT</b>	£5.0m	£6.0m
<b>Estates</b>	£0.6m	£0.5m
<b>Council tax harmonisation</b>	£4.0m	£8.2m
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>£12.3m</b>	<b>£17.2m</b>

## Criteria 1 – force-ranked assessment

Option 1: Single Unitary	Option 2: Two-Unitary
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	1 <sup>st</sup> Place

While a single county-wide unitary model for Warwickshire might appear advantageous in terms of efficiency and strategic focus, a compelling argument exists for prioritising a two-unitary structure. This argument centres on the benefits of strong local identity and tailored economic development, which can be better fostered under a more localised model.

Warwickshire is comprised of diverse communities, each with its own unique identity, history, and priorities. A two-unitary model acknowledges and embraces this diversity, empowering communities to shape their own future and tailor solutions that resonate with local values. This localised approach fosters greater citizen engagement, a sense of ownership over local decision-making, and more effective governance that reflects the specific needs and aspirations of each area. Furthermore, it allows for the preservation of unique heritage, character, and natural environments through tailored planning and development policies that respect local distinctiveness.

From an economic perspective, the North and South of the county have extremely different economies, challenges and needs.

The economy of the South of the county is largely based on higher value industries, particularly in the fields of professional business services, computing and software, and high-value engineering and manufacturing. Tourism is also important. By contrast, the economy of the North of the county is based on heavy industry and the legacy of the mining industry. The North continues to have a higher proportion of lower-value manufacturing industries, personal services and public-sector employment than the national average.

A single county unitary may have to dilute the priorities of individual places and focus on the overall strategic position, simply due to its size.

In contrast, two distinct unitary authorities can develop specialised strategies that leverage the unique strengths and opportunities of their respective regions. This targeted approach fosters innovation, attracts investment aligned with local strengths, and creates a more diverse and resilient county-wide economy. Smaller authorities are often more agile and responsive to the needs of local businesses, fostering a supportive environment for entrepreneurship and job creation. This structure also allows each authority to tailor solutions to the specific economic challenges faced by their communities, whether supporting rural tourism, revitalising towns, or attracting investment in key growth sectors.

For example, a Northern future unitary could place a strong emphasis on regeneration. One policy move could involve relocating the place of work of local government staff to the towns in the North, which could have a significant impact on local regeneration of town centres.

There is a logical counter-argument that aggregation and larger local government structures are more likely to produce economic growth and productivity because of the ability to focus strategically on major issues including transport, skills and housing. It could be argued a single county unitary would be beneficial as it would provide a single voice for Warwickshire.

While it is agreed that size is important to create strategic focus, this could be better achieved through the Strategic Authority approach and adopting a collaborative approach, which focuses on Transport, Skills and Economic Development.

Therefore, the two-unitary model is ranked highest due to its ability to provide better place leadership and local decision making across economic geographies, which supports the different need profiles across North and South.

To mitigate potential challenges associated with fragmentation and limited economies of scale, the two-unitary authorities would need to establish robust mechanisms for collaboration on strategic issues such as infrastructure, transport, and skills development. This ensures county-wide coordination and avoids duplication of efforts. Additionally, exploring opportunities for shared services, joint procurement, and strategic partnerships can help maximize resource utilisation and mitigate the financial disadvantages of smaller authorities.

## Criteria 2 – Achieving efficiencies, improving capacity and withstanding financial shock

This section evaluates the shortlisted Unitary Models for Warwickshire against Criteria 2, ensuring that any proposed unitary structure is optimally sized to deliver efficiencies, bolster capacity, and ensure long-term financial resilience.

To facilitate this assessment, a high-level financial analysis has been conducted for each shortlisted model. This analysis estimates potential savings, costs, and income implications. It is important to note that these figures are preliminary estimates, and further in-depth financial modelling will be conducted as part of subsequent planning phases. While the ultimate financial outcomes will be determined by detailed decisions made throughout the implementation process, this analysis provides a valuable comparative assessment of the relative financial sustainability and resilience offered by each model.

### Current Financial Outlook

A comprehensive assessment of the proposed Unitary Models necessitates a thorough understanding of the current financial landscape of Warwickshire's existing councils. As a first step in the financial analysis, a review of each council's financial position was conducted.

A summary of the current financial position for each Warwickshire council is provided below. The data in the table below shows the financial position at the end of FY 2023/24 as this was the latest full financial year at the time of writing this report.

Table 7: A summary of the current financial position for each council.

	North Warwickshire <sup>20</sup>	Nuneaton and Bedworth <sup>21</sup>	Rugby <sup>22</sup>	Stratford-On-Avon <sup>23</sup>	Warwick <sup>24</sup>	Warwickshire CC <sup>25</sup>
<b>Gross expenditure (£'000)</b>	£44,295	£101,875	£62,321	£65,684	£115,490	£1,181,400
<b>Gross Income (£'000)</b>	£39,800	£67,217	£43,449	£41,202	£76,280	£543,800
<b>Net Expenditure (£'000)</b>	£4,495	£34,658	£18,872	£24,482	£39,210	£637,600
<b>Surplus / Deficit on the provision of services (£'000)</b>	£13,873	-£2,920	£6,026	£8,304	-£2,987	-£29,900
<b>Useable Reserves (£'000)</b>	£36,536	£44,116	£74,249	£56,110	£78,772	£229,000
<b>Debt (Public Works Loan Board borrowing) (£'000)</b>	£46,229	£70,705	£70,016	£0	£238,157	£279,400

Please note that these numbers need to be treated with caution as a reflection of the financial positions of each council. For example, the District Councils referred to above as running deficits on the provision of services have plans to deal with these deficits in their Medium-Term Financial Strategies and return to balance on the provision of services. In the meantime these councils are still delivering balanced budgets as required.

<sup>20</sup> North Warwickshire: [financial-statements-2023-2024-audited](#)

<sup>21</sup> Nuneaton and Bedworth: [audited-statement-of-accounts-2023-to-2024](#)

<sup>22</sup> Rugby: [Statement of Accounts 2023-24.pdf](#)

<sup>23</sup> Stratford-on-Avon: [CONTENTS](#)

<sup>24</sup> Warwick District: [Statement of Accounts 2023.24.pdf](#)

<sup>25</sup> Warwickshire CC: [Statement](#)

Secondly, some of the reserves quoted above will relate to the councils' Housing Revenue Accounts. These reserves can only be used for HRA activity, and not to plug wider gaps, and so are not necessarily an indicator of financial health.

Thirdly, the type of debt must be considered. The key point here is sustainability – there is nothing inherently wrong with debt if it can be repaid in a sustainable way based upon income. For example, Warwick DC has debt, but this is linked to their Housing Revenue Account as the Council still owns its own stock. If this is the case, the debt will not present a significant risk as the income within the HRA from the rental yields from the housing stock will enable repayment.

The Warwickshire County Council debt must be greater understood to establish the genuine risk level here.

A common concern shared by all councils is the anticipation of future funding gaps. This shared challenge underscores the timeliness of exploring the potential benefits of local government reorganisation as a means to address financial sustainability in the long term.

### **Warwickshire County Council**

Warwickshire County Council had a deficit on the provision of services of £29.9m at 2023/24 year end. It also had PWLB debt of £279.4m, but £229.0m of usable reserves.

To fund budget allocations in 2025/26, Warwickshire County Council will utilise £4.8m from its reserves. The Council has outlined a budget reduction strategy of £21.8m in 2025/26, reaching £79.6m by 2030, giving an indication of the increasing financial pressure due to demand increases for key services.

Warwickshire County Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)<sup>26</sup> for 2025/26 to 2029/30, was approved in February 2025 and gives further insight into this problem of demand increases.

The MTFS includes addressing pressures in the provision of adult social care by providing investment of £46.8m over the coming five years. The existing 2% social care precept on council tax currently generates £7.9m of funds per year. The strategy also commits £8.1m to meet the rising costs and demand for children's social care services and a further £7.4m to enhance home-to-school transport services.

These demand pressures are key risks for the County Council. For example, its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs block has a significant deficit against it, like many upper tier councils. Currently the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has, since 2020, allowed local authorities to exclude DSG deficits from their main revenue budgets as part of what is known as a statutory override. But this override due to expire in March 2026. Should this happen, a section 114 notice may need to be issued<sup>27</sup>.

### **North Warwickshire Borough Council**

North Warwickshire Borough Council had a surplus of £13.9m at 2023/24 year end. It also had PWLB debt of £46.2m, but £36.5m of usable reserves. North Warwickshire Borough Council's 2025/26 budget (approved in February 2025)<sup>28</sup> forecasts a breakeven position.

North Warwickshire's MTFS outlines a phased budget reduction plan of £500k in both 2025/26 and 2026/27 and £1m in 2027/28<sup>29</sup>. The strategy balances service investments with necessary budget reductions to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

<sup>26</sup> [Warwickshire County Council approves budget for 2025/26 to support vulnerable residents amid financial challenges](#)

<sup>27</sup> [2025/26 Revenue Budget Resolution - Warwickshire County Council](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Council sets budget with significant investment in Leisure, Planning enforcement, Community Grants and VE Day celebrations, street cleaning and town centres – North Warwickshire Borough Council](#)

<sup>29</sup> [2025/26 Financial Budget Summary - North Warwickshire Borough Council](#)

### **Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council**

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council had a deficit of £2.9m on services at 2023/24 year end. It also had PWLB debt of £70.7m, and £44.1m of usable reserves. The Council's draft budget for 2025/26 was approved in December 2024. However, it was noted that difficult decisions will need to be made regarding services and fees, due to uncertainty around future financial settlements and sustainability of reserves.

### **Rugby Borough Council**

Rugby Borough Council had a surplus of £6.0m at 2023/24 year end. It also had PWLB debt of £70.0m, and £74.2m of usable reserves.

Rugby Borough Council's updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (2025-2030), presented to the Cabinet in February 2025, sets forth a cumulative savings and transformation target of £6.5m by 2029/30 <sup>30</sup>. The 2025/26 budget reflects a commitment to service enhancement and strategic investment, allocating £3.9m towards aligning resources with projected service demands.<sup>31</sup>

### **Stratford-on-Avon District Council**

Stratford-on-Avon District Council had a surplus of £8.3m at 2023/24 year end. It also has £56.1m of usable reserves.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council adopted its latest Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFS), spanning the period from 2025/26 to 2029/30, in February 2025 <sup>32</sup>.

The Chief Financial Officer has confirmed a balanced budget for the next five years, however the Council acknowledges the challenging financial landscape and anticipates a growing reliance on reserves in future years to mitigate the uncertainty surrounding government funding.

### **Warwick District Council**

Warwick District Council had a deficit of £3.0m on services at 2023/24 year end. It also had PWLB debt of £238.2m, and £78.8m of usable reserves. It is worth noting in addition that the Council, while reporting a deficit on services, was able to top up a number of other reserves in-year.

Warwick District Council approved its latest Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in February 2024. The MTFS acknowledged a projected budget deficit of £2.5m for the 2025/26 financial year. To address this deficit and present a balanced budget as required, the Council plans to utilise funds from its General Fund Volatility Reserve, which held a balance of £5.2m as at April 2025.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the MTFS presented a balanced budget (and surplus) by 2027/28, supported by a change programme with robust plans to achieve this.

### ***Single Unitary Model***

A single unitary structure for Warwickshire would pool the financial resources of all councils, creating a single entity with a larger overall reserve base. This model could provide greater flexibility in addressing the immediate budgetary challenges faced. The combined reserves could offer a financial cushion while longer-term solutions are developed and implemented and while economies of scale are achieved. However, careful consideration would be needed to ensure equitable and transparent allocation of these shared resources to avoid disadvantaging financially stable boroughs.

<sup>30</sup> [Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 - 2029/30 - Rugby Borough Council](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Rugby Council budget to focus on significant investment across all areas of the Borough](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 - 2029/30 - Stratford-on-Avon District Council](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Meeting of the Cabinet 06/02/24- Warwick District Council](#)



Table 8: The potential financial position of a single unitary model.

Single Unitary Model (£'000)	Gross expenditure	Gross Income	Net Expenditure	Surplus / Deficit on Provision of Services	Useable Reserves	Debt (long term borrowing)
<b>Unitary 1</b>	£1,571,065	£811,748	£759,317	<b>-£7,604</b>	£518,783	£704,507

### **Two-Unitary Model**

Please note that in the analysis below it has been assumed that each unitary would inherit 50% of Warwickshire County Council's current financial position.

In the two-unitary model, both unitaries would possess a relatively strong reserve position collectively. However, Unitary 2 would have a higher level of debt, and potentially a deficit on the provision of services. This deficit would be of a similar size to the single county unitary outlined above, but held by a smaller council. This could potentially make it more difficult to tackle. However, it should be remembered that councils did have plans as individual organisations to manage these deficits on the provision of services, and so this may not be a significant issue.

The County Council deficit may be of greater concern, as it is exposed to increasing demand pressures across social care and SEND services. As will be discussed below, it may be that a two unitary model, with a greater focus on local place-based preventative services, may be in a better position to tackle this demand and therefore the potential deficit in the future.

The government's proposal to allow councils to retain and ring-fence planning fees presents an additional opportunity for significant savings within the General Fund. While precise figures are not yet available, this change could positively impact council finances across the county, particularly by offsetting existing deficits and reducing reliance on borrowing. This potential revenue stream should be considered when evaluating the long-term financial sustainability of different unitary models.

Table 9: The potential financial position of a two-unitary model.

Two-unitary Model (£'000)	Gross expenditure	Gross Income	Net Expenditure	Surplus / Deficit on Provision of Services	Useable Reserves	Debt (long term borrowing)
<b>Unitary 1</b>	£799,191	£422,466	£377,025	£2,029	£269,401	£318,644
<b>Unitary 2</b>	£771,874	£389,482	£382,692	<b>-£9,633</b>	£249,382	£377,857

### **Financial Assessment**

As part of the preparation of a report on the options for future local government structures in Warwickshire, a financial assessment has been undertaken of the potential savings, costs and income foregone of the two options currently being considered.

This section outlines the initial draft results from the financial assessment undertaken, plus, importantly, the associated assumptions behind each element of the calculations.

Please note that an exercise of this type is by its nature very driven by the assumptions made.

The assumptions made so far are based on previous experience of undertaking similar exercises. Therefore these figures cannot be relied upon at this stage by the local authorities concerned as accurate estimates. Much further work would be required to establish this. This is an exercise to show relative costs and benefits, which can then give an indication of which option may be the most financially advantageous.

First the potential savings are explained, and then the costs.

## Potential Savings

While the prospect of financial efficiencies serves as a key driver for local government reorganisation, it is essential to quantify these potential savings and assess their impact. This section explores the restructuring of senior leadership teams, the streamlining of democratic representation through a reduction in the overall number of councillors, and council tax harmonisation.

By analysing current staffing levels, estimated costs, and potential structural changes, this section aims to provide a clearer picture of the tangible efficiencies achievable under each proposed unitary model.

## Senior Leadership

The estimated size and cost of the new leadership structures across each unitary model, utilising a comparative analysis based on the current size and estimated cost of existing senior leadership teams, is illustrated below. This analysis draws on average salary rates to ensure consistency.

Table 10: Size and estimated cost of current leadership structures across each council using average salaries.

Council	L0		L1	
	Posts	Costs	Posts	Costs
<b>North Warwickshire</b>	1	£145,739	2	£197,800
<b>Nuneaton and Bedworth</b>	1	£144,365	4	£448,820
<b>Rugby</b>	1	£136,525	1	£94,822
<b>Stratford-On-Avon</b>	1	£151,359	1	£120,272
<b>Warwick</b>	1	£171,635	2	£239,578
<b>Warwickshire County Council</b>	1	£251,065	4	£741,631
<b>Total</b>	6	£1,000,688	14	£1,842,923

Please note that this analysis, which is based on the senior leadership teams set out in the annual statements of accounts across the existing councils, revealed varying configurations in L1 grades, highlighting different models of leadership and delegation (for example, some of the councils above have a chief executive and a deputy, and then directors, while others just have a chief executive and then a set of directors – which explains the variation indicated in L1 posts between 1 and 4).

In terms of the methodology, these structures have then been compared to projected structures for senior leadership teams within the proposed unitary models.

It is important to note that this represents a high-level analysis for comparative purposes. As part of the next phase of planning, a more thorough and detailed modelling exercise will be undertaken to refine these projections and ensure optimal staffing structures for each proposed unitary model.

## Democratic Representation

Understanding the current landscape of democratic representation is crucial when evaluating the potential impact of transitioning to a unitary system.

The following table provides key data points for each council, including the number of councillors, their basic allowance, the leader's allowance, and the total number of electors within their jurisdiction.

Table 11: Demographic representation and expenditure.

	No. of Cllrs	Basic Allowance	Leader Allowance	Current Democratic Spend	Electors per councillor	Total Electors
North Warwickshire	35	£4,647	£9,381	£237,084	1,446	50,625
Nuneaton and Bedworth	38	£5,134	£11,300	£252,598	2,703	102,714
Rugby	42	£7,132	£13,543	£291,691	2,051	86,144
Stratford-On-Avon	41	£6,332	£12,638	£360,898	2,808	110,837
Warwick	44	£6,341	£18,388	£272,028	2,519	115,148
Warwickshire County Council	57	£11,395	£29,618	£474,023	7,875	448,861

Determining the appropriate number of councillors for each proposed unitary model is crucial, balancing democratic representation with financial considerations. While definitive councillor ratios will be subject to further analysis and consultation, this section explores potential scenarios based on current elector counts and provides indicative allowance cost projections.

For the purpose of this report and the financial estimates, a range of councillor-to-electors ratios commonly observed in unitary authorities nationally have been explored for benchmarking purposes. Indicative allowance costs are calculated using the average basic allowance across existing Warwickshire councils. It's important to note that these are preliminary estimates, and actual allowance rates will be determined as part of future planning.

### ***Single Unitary Model***

Using the North Yorkshire Council model as a comparator (1 councillor per 5,374 electors), a single unitary authority in Warwickshire, with approximately 449,000 electors, would likely require a council size of around 84 councillors. The costs of this model have been compared to existing costs to create an estimate of savings. This has been done by taking an average cost of allowances based on the table above and multiplying out by the number of electors in the new model, and comparing to current costs.

There would be concerns here around a democratic deficit. A number of councillors would be removed, and there would be fewer individuals to whom ward concerns could be submitted.

It should also be noted that a single country unitary would have to have a boundary review before being implemented, because there is no single boundary at present that could be used that creates voter equity; the variation across the county would be too great. Using County Council Division boundaries would create a number of wards outside of the 15% target ratio of elector to councillor including two of more than 30%, which triggers an automatic review.

One solution mooted to tackle the democratic deficit would be to transfer powers to parish and town councils and build on their existing role. However, such a move would generate more costs, as parts of the county do not have any parishes currently, and a further precept on council tax would be required.

Concerns have also been raised about the transfer of services to Parish Town Councils and the variance in service that may arise. Parish Councils may need to increase their precept to enable service delivery. Furthermore, strong governance would be required. This may lead to a discussion on the potential merger of Parish Councils, which could impact the democratic deficit.

## ***Two-Unitary Model***

Using Cheshire East Council as a benchmark (1 councillor per 3,475 electors), a two-unitary model for Warwickshire would result in the following:

- **Unitary 1:** With roughly 239,000 electors, this unitary would need approximately 69 councillors.
- **Unitary 2:** This unitary, with around 226,000 electors, would require about 65 councillors.

The costs of this model have been compared to existing costs to create an estimate of savings. This has been done by taking an average cost of allowances based on the table above and multiplying out by the number of electors in the new model, and comparing to current costs.

Please note that there has been some indicative work by District officers looking at a different option for the electoral boundaries and councillor numbers. At present it would be possible for a two unitary model to use the electoral boundaries in place for Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council and achieve electoral equality with a ratio of 2647 electors per councillor. All the wards within this model would be within 15% of the target ratio of elector to councillor and only 9 of 56 wards would be greater than 10%. This would create 85 councillors, the same number of councillors as the Districts have currently, but this would represent a reduction as some County Councillors would be lost.

A similar ratio for the Northern unitary would provide 89 councillors. This may be particularly important for areas where no town or parish councils exist at present. The greater number of councillors creates greater democratic engagement. This would see a significant reduction in councillor numbers. There would, however, be a need for a full ward boundary review before a new council came into effect to allow these boundaries. Three possible wards would approach the ratio of 30% of target ratio of elector to councillor, which triggers an automatic review.

## ***Operational Efficiencies***

Another key benefit of reorganisation is the potential to achieve greater efficiency and cost savings in operational expenditures. Back-office services can achieve considerable efficiencies through consolidation into a shared-services model.

Procurement and contract management, IT infrastructure consolidation and HR functions all could be managed in a collaborative manner. A single unitary authority would benefit from substantial economies of scale, leveraging its combined purchasing power to negotiate more favourable contracts for goods and services. While a two-unitary model offers a smaller scale of savings, it could still achieve efficiencies through joint procurement initiatives and standardised contract management practices, shared HR services or a coordinated approach to payroll management.

A more granular assessment of these areas will be carried out as part of subsequent implementation planning, in which operational costs, service delivery models, and potential areas for consolidation or streamlining will be refined.

Savings estimates have been made in the areas of corporate services (including wider digital transformation), property (estates) rationalisation and service optimisation. These savings represent the transactional benefits that might be possible from reorganisation and rationalisation. They do not include potential transformation opportunities.

## **Council Tax**

Transitioning to a unitary system for Warwickshire necessitates a careful examination of the existing Council Tax landscape and its implications for each proposed model. Currently, significant disparities in Council Tax rates across the county present both challenges and opportunities.

Addressing these disparities will be essential to ensure fairness and transparency in local taxation under a new unitary structure. Harmonizing rates will likely involve a multi-year approach, with some areas experiencing a freeze in Council Tax while others see gradual, manageable increases to avoid placing undue financial burden on residents.

This section appraises the existing Council Tax base for each District Council, highlighting the disparities that must be addressed. It explores the potential implications of harmonisation for each unitary model, considering factors such as revenue generation, affordability for residents, and the need for a phased implementation approach.

Please note that this is a modelling exercise based on assumptions and therefore numbers should not be treated as accurate forecasts, but rather to show the relative benefits and drawbacks of each model.

Table 13: Council Tax Base for 24/25

Local Authority	Council Tax Base for 2024/25
<b>North Warwickshire</b>	21,869
<b>Nuneaton &amp; Bedworth</b>	40,085
<b>Rugby</b>	40,975
<b>Stratford-on-Avon</b>	61,704
<b>Warwick</b>	58,280

While a larger tax base offers greater financial capacity, it's crucial to consider the complexities of harmonizing Council Tax rates and ensuring equitable resource distribution across the county. A thorough assessment of these factors is shown overleaf to determine the most viable and sustainable unitary structure for Warwickshire.

To understand the potential implications of Council Tax harmonisation, the analysis explores one distinct scenario, based on average rates across each dwelling, across the different unitary models. This scenario is called **Low-to-Max**: Raising lower tax rates to match the highest existing rate.

### ***Single Unitary Model***

A single unitary authority model for Warwickshire offers the advantage of a larger, unified tax base, leading to enhanced financial resilience and flexibility compared to the existing fragmented system. This consolidated revenue stream could potentially streamline the transition to a harmonized Council Tax rate across the entire county.

To aid in evaluating the financial implications of harmonizing Council Tax rates, an analysis has been conducted, considering the scenario over 5-year and 10-year periods. The following table presents the estimated costs associated with each scenario, providing decision-makers with a clear understanding of the short-term and long-term financial implications. This data is crucial for assessing the affordability and feasibility of each harmonization approach within the context of broader financial constraints and strategic priorities.

<sup>34</sup> Council Taxbase: Local Authority Level Data for 2024 – Published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 13/11/24 and revised on 13/12/24.

Table 15: Estimated cost of harmonising Council Tax rates under the single unitary model.

Single Unitary Model	Low-to-Max (£'000)
<b>5 years</b>	4,033
<b>10 years</b>	31,840

A single unitary model, combined with a low-to-max Council Tax harmonization strategy, emerges as the most financially advantageous approach for Warwickshire, despite an estimated opportunity cost of £4.0m over 5 years.

This strategy involves freezing Council Tax rates in the North of the county, which currently has higher rates, while gradually increasing rates in the lower-rate South until rates align. This may be politically difficult for a new county unitary to undertake as a council tax rise would be unpopular to implement.

By implementing standardised annual increases of 3% in the lower-rate districts, full Council Tax harmonization is projected to be achieved by 2034.

### ***Two-Unitary Model***

The table presents the estimated cost of harmonising Council Tax rates within each unitary authority under the two-unitary model, considering both a 5-year and 10-year timeframe.

Table 16: Estimated cost of harmonising Council Tax rates under the two-unitary model.

Two-Unitary Model	Low-to-Max £'000
<b>5 years</b>	8,233
<b>10 years</b>	54,511

A two-unitary model requires income foregone of £8.2m over five years, which is more expensive than the single county unitary. However, such an approach would be less difficult to implement, and would potentially be more popular with residents, as big council tax increases in the South would not be required.

It should also be noted that there may be extra implications for council tax of potentially creating parish councils for the whole of the county, a proposal which has been mooted if a single county unitary was created. This would involve additional charges to the council taxpayer.

### **Transition Costs**

Transitioning to any new organisational structure inevitably involves costs associated with the change process itself. This section provides an initial financial analysis of the estimated change costs associated with each proposed unitary model for Warwickshire. This analysis aims to provide a high-level understanding of the financial implications associated with each model, enabling informed and responsible decision-making.

To provide a robust and transparent basis for estimating the costs and savings associated with each unitary model, this analysis utilises a set of clearly defined assumptions. These assumptions are based on industry best practices, benchmarking data, and insights from previous local government reorganisations.

## Results of the financial assessment

By comparing the assumptions made around costs with the assumptions made around benefits, the financial assessment seeks to provide high-level financial insights necessary to evaluate the feasibility of each option against the Government's criteria.

Table 17: Costs and savings for each option.

	Area	Option 1: Single-Unitary	Option 2: Two- Unitary
<b>Costs</b>	Redundancy Costs	£1.6m	£1.2m
	Integration PMO	£1.1m	£1.3m
	Digital/IT	£5.0m	£6.0m
	Estates	£0.6m	£0.5m
	Council tax harmonisation	£4.0m	£8.2m
	<b>Total Non-Recurrent Costs</b>	<b>£12.3m</b>	<b>£17.2m</b>
<b>Savings</b>	Leadership savings	£1.4m	£0.9m
	Corporate Services	£10.1m	£9.1m
	Property Rationalisation	£1.7m	£1.5m
	Service Optimisation	£6.3m	£5.7m
	Democratic Savings	£0.8m	£0.6m
	<b>Total Recurrent Savings</b>	<b>£20.3m</b>	<b>£17.8m</b>

As demonstrated above, a single unitary authority could make an estimated total annual recurrent saving of £20.3m.

This is in contrast to the two-unitary model, which could make an estimated total annual recurrent saving of £17.8m.

To achieve these savings, non-recurrent costs of £12.3m and £17.2m may be required.

The single county unitary is less costly to implement, and will yield greater savings.

Please note that any costs arising from disaggregation are considered to be captured in the reduced savings figures for the two-unitary option above, in that they arise from additional staff and members required, which is part of the above calculation.

## Criteria 2 – Force-ranked assessment

Option 1: Single Unitary	Option 2: Two-Unitary
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place

When evaluating proposed unitary models for Warwickshire based on financial sustainability, efficiency gains, and long-term cost-effectiveness, a clear link emerges between the number of unitary authorities and the potential for achieving economies of scale.

### 1st Place - Option 1: Single Unitary Model

From a purely financial standpoint, a single county-wide unitary structure for Warwickshire emerges as the most advantageous. The long-term savings achieved through streamlined operations, reduced administrative burden, and maximized economies of scale outweigh the initial costs.

**2nd Place - Option 2: Two-Unitary Model**

Although this model offers a lower savings potential compared to the single unitary model, and requires higher costs, it may still yield substantial efficiencies compared to the current structure.

There would be a possible route to maximising efficiencies and reducing disaggregation costs by undertaking a careful service by service analysis of the appropriate model for each service. For example, the future unitaries could adopt a shared service model for county-level services such as social care, while aggregating district and borough-level services to make efficiencies.



## Criteria 3 – Delivering high-quality public services

This section critically evaluates the single unitary and two-unitary options through the lens of public service delivery. The evaluation will consider quality, sustainability, and opportunities for reform within public facing services, and will delve into the potential benefits and drawbacks of each model. In evaluating these options, it is imperative to consider the unique characteristics and needs of the corresponding districts in order to understand the impacts of implementing each model.

### Health and Social Care

Warwickshire benefits from good geographic distribution of acute care services, with three acute trusts serving the population: George Elliot Hospital NHS Trust in Nuneaton for Northern Warwickshire, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust serving Coventry and Rugby, and South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust serving the South. Furthermore, Warwickshire shows a slightly better patient-to-GP ratio (1,461:1)<sup>35</sup> compared to the average in England, suggesting relatively good access to primary care.

However, Warwickshire presents a mixed picture in terms of population health. While some areas show positive indicators, others highlight future challenges. There are extremely different health needs in the North and South of the county, with substantial differences in health inequalities that need to be addressed. There is greater health inequality and deprivation in the North, while there is a more affluent but aging population in the South.

The Public Health Annual report reveals stark differences across the region in terms of health indicators. Notably, Nuneaton and Bedworth has significantly worse population health compared to other areas, as demonstrated by life expectancy, preventable deaths and reports of two or more long term conditions, highlighting the presence of health inequalities within the region.

The data also exposes concerning trends in lifestyle choices within the region. With a majority of districts exceeding the national average for adult overweight and obesity rates, there is a clear need for initiatives promoting healthier lifestyles. Furthermore, the high rates of hospital admissions for alcohol misuse among children under 18 in three districts raise serious concerns. This alarming trend necessitates targeted interventions at local levels to address underage drinking and provide appropriate support services. These findings highlight the importance of a multi-faceted approach to public health, addressing both individual choices and systemic factors that contribute to these health outcomes.

Overall, the data shows a range of local issues that can be better tackled by local services focusing on prevention.

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<sup>35</sup> [Constituency data: GPs and GP practices](#)

Table 18: Working for Wellbeing in Warwickshire: Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022 / 2024

	<b>Below England Average</b>
	<b>In line with England Average</b>
	<b>Above England Average</b>

Health data	England	Warwick-shire	North Warwick-shire	Nuneaton and Bedworth	Rugby	Stratford-on-Avon	Warwick
Life expectancy males (age)	78.9	79.4	78.1	77.5	79.4	81.0	80.1
Life expectancy females (age)	82.8	83.1	82.2	81.5	83.0	84.7	83.5
Adults reporting at least 2 long terms conditions with at least one being Musculo-skeletal (%)	13.4	13.6	16.7	16.3	10.0	14.9	11.5
Children living in low income households (%)	19.8	14.9	18.2	21.1	13.6	11.8	10.9
Mortality rate of adults under 75 that could have been preventable (per 100,000 )	142.2	151.9	160.3	196.1	154.4	127.7	138.4
Alcohol related admissions to hospital (under 18) (per 100,000)	29.3	41.1	-	59.0	27.1	34.1	54.4
Adults overweight or obese (%)	63.5	65.6	69.4	69.1	68.5	64.2	62.3

### Adult Social Care

Warwickshire faces significant challenges related to its aging population and the provision of adequate care. In particular, with 26% of Stratford-upon-Avon's population already over 65, exceeding the regional average of 21%, the demand for care services is pronounced.

Across the region, 18% of Warwickshire's care homes require improvement<sup>36</sup>, which raises concerns about the quality of care available to this growing demographic. This is compounded by the high demand for long-term care, with over 8,845 individuals relying on social care support. Projections indicating a further increase in the over-65 population to 24% by 2033<sup>37</sup> highlight the urgency for Warwickshire to address these challenges and ensure the provision of high-quality health and social care services to meet the needs of its aging residents.

<sup>36</sup> [Care Homes in Warwickshire | AgeWell](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – Warwickshire County Council](#)

Table 19: Based on 65+ Population (estimates 2023)<sup>38</sup>

Name	65+ population as a % of total population
<b>Warwickshire</b>	21%
<b>North Warwickshire</b>	22%
<b>Nuneaton and Bedworth</b>	19%
<b>Rugby</b>	18%
<b>Stratford-on-Avon</b>	26%
<b>Warwick</b>	19%

### **Children's Services**

Based on population data, approximately 20% of the population of Warwickshire are aged 0-17.

A positive overall rating of "Good" was provided by the 2021 Ofsted review of children's services. Any local government reorganisation plan needs to not destabilise current performance.

### ***Single Unitary***

The Single Unitary Model offers the benefit of streamlined decision-making and resource allocation across all health and social care services at the county level. This model leverages existing relationships with health partners and the ICB, ensuring smoother collaboration and continuity for services already run by Warwickshire County Council, such as adult social care and children's services.

However, this model carries the risk of over-centralising services, potentially neglecting the specific needs and priorities of different localities within Warwickshire.

### ***Two-unitary***

A two-unitary model allows for more tailored strategic planning, with each unitary area able to address the specific needs and demographics of each corresponding population. It presents a greater opportunity to emphasise community-based care and implement local prevention strategies, which is particularly beneficial considering Warwickshire's aging population, demand for adult social care and health inequalities. By focusing on local health inequalities in this way, a two-unitary model allows for more targeted interventions.

A two-unitary structure for Warwickshire, separating areas with differing health and social care needs, presents a significant opportunity to bolster the voluntary sector and community-based interventions. This model would allow for targeted resource allocation, ensuring funding reaches organisations working within specific socioeconomic contexts. Furthermore, smaller, more focused unitaries can foster stronger community engagement, leading to more relevant and impactful service delivery. By adopting a place-based approach, this model enables the development of tailored preventative measures and health initiatives that resonate with the local population and address their unique challenges.

There is a risk of disaggregation of County Council services under the two-unitary model. However, this can be mitigated. County teams may be aligned on geographic footprints that could be split between new councils relatively easily. There may only be a handful of posts that may need to be duplicated. The potential benefits of the more local approach would outweigh this extra investment.

<sup>38</sup> [Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

In terms of third party contracts, IT systems and such factors – it is considered that these could be shared between councils on a partnership basis if required. Indeed, a social care partnership could be formed across both Councils if this was felt appropriate, and if functions such as social care commissioning and market management were considered to be better placed at the county level.

## Transport

Warwickshire faces a unique set of challenges in supporting the UK's net-zero ambitions due to its distinct geographical characteristics. As a largely rural county dotted with densely populated historic towns, transportation patterns are heavily reliant on private vehicles. Miles of countryside separate these towns, connected primarily by A and B roads, making sustainable travel options limited. While Warwickshire has good transport links to major cities like London and Birmingham, inter-town connectivity remains a challenge. Barriers to accessing local public transport include inadequate bus shelters, availability and reliability of services and lack of direct connectivity.<sup>39</sup> To address this, the County Council is committed to supporting community rail initiatives, such as the Heart of England CRP, which aims to improve connectivity between Warwickshire, Coventry, and Solihull, promoting more sustainable transport options within the region.

Over the past decade, the number of passenger journeys per head of the population has fallen from 35 trips per person in 2014, to 15.4 trips per person in 2023. 60.7% of people travelling by alternative means of transport when there was a local bus available said that the bus "does not go directly to the places I need to get to."<sup>40</sup> Similar feedback revealed that people travelling by alternative means of transport said that the bus isn't available at the times that they need.

Warwickshire County Council has outlined its commitment to transforming public transport and supporting the UK's net-zero goal by 2030 through its fourth Local Transport Plan (LT4P). This plan centres around four key themes: environment, wellbeing, place, and economy.

- Environmentally, the LT4P focuses on enhancing travel sustainability by reducing pollution and building resilience against challenges such as floods and energy supply disruptions. Improved public transport forms a cornerstone of this strategy.
- The wellbeing aspect emphasizes the benefits of a well-connected public transport system. By encouraging active travel and providing accessible transportation options, the plan aims to improve access to employment, essential services like healthcare, local amenities, and social opportunities.
- Recognizing the interplay of transport and urban development, the "place" theme focuses on influencing planning strategies to create more people-centred environments. Enhanced connectivity is seen as a catalyst for investment and economic growth.
- Economically, the LT4P aims to break down barriers to opportunity by improving transport links between towns. This enhanced connectivity will facilitate access to jobs, education, and training, while also boosting the use of leisure facilities. Ultimately, these efforts are geared towards reducing economic disparities across the region.

The policies outlined in the Local Transport Plan prioritize strengthening collaboration between key stakeholders such as Network Rail, the Department for Transport (DfT), and West Midlands Rail. This collaborative approach seeks to drive improvements in rail services across the Warwickshire region. Complementing these efforts, the BSIP sets ambitious targets to enhance the frequency and reliability of local bus services, further enhancing public transport options for residents.

The BSIP was updated in 2024 with the hope that an updated plan would support the Council in obtaining the BSIP Plus revenue grant funding from the Department for Transport, which would support their aims in improving and promoting bus travel across the region. The Council also hoped to secure capital funding to deliver infrastructure priorities to facilitate bus travel.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/localtransportplan>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/directory-record/6878/warwickshire-bus-service-improvement-plan>

### Single-Unitary Model

A Single Unitary Model offers the advantage of continuity for existing transportation plans and strategies already in place in Warwickshire. By centralizing resources and decision-making, a single unitary authority would have the scale and capacity to consolidate and expand upon initiatives like the Enhanced Partnership Plan and the wider travel plan. This approach could be particularly effective in addressing gaps in service and creating a more integrated transport network that better connects Warwickshire's districts, especially for those in rural areas who rely heavily on public transportation.

### Two-Unitary Model

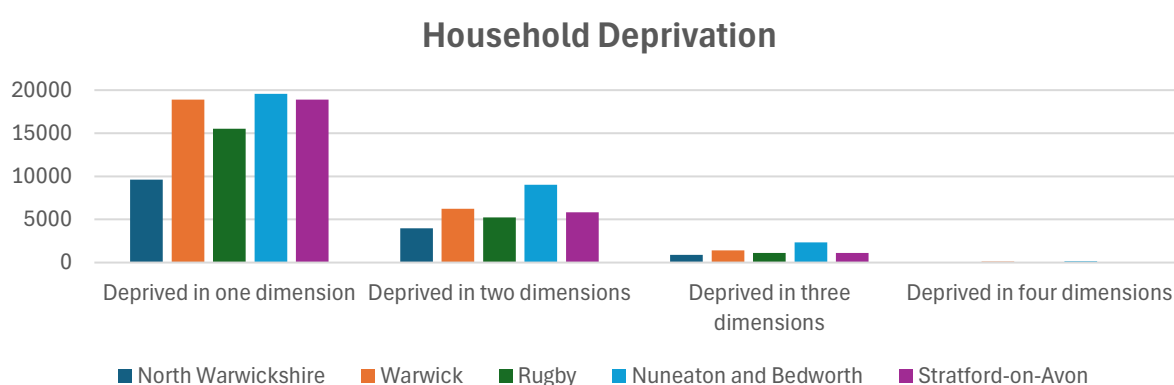
Opting for a Two-unitary Model presents the opportunity to develop more tailored transportation strategies based on the specific needs and geographies of each unitary area.

This model could facilitate strategic planning focused on creating efficient transport links between districts, potentially fostering economic growth by connecting residents with employment opportunities in neighbouring areas. By aligning transportation development with local job markets and area planning, a two-unitary model could lead to a more nuanced and locally responsive approach to addressing transportation needs.

### Deprivation and Homelessness

Deprivation and homelessness pose significant challenges in Warwickshire, particularly in the North of the county in Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire. Nuneaton and Bedworth exhibit high deprivation levels, with over 9,000 people experiencing deprivation across two dimensions (employment, health, education, and housing) and 2,300 across three. While North Warwickshire's figures appear lower in comparison, accounting for population size reveals that approximately 15% experience deprivation in at least one dimension, highlighting a substantial issue. Furthermore, Nuneaton and Bedworth face a disproportionately high number of families (144) living in temporary accommodation as of June 2024, significantly exceeding the national median of 101. This underscores the urgent need for addressing housing insecurity and the underlying factors contributing to deprivation in these areas.

Table 20: Households by deprivation dimension<sup>41</sup>



It is crucial to acknowledge that while the available data provides valuable insights into housing support needs and deprivation levels in Warwickshire, it does not capture the full extent of homelessness in the region. Many individuals and families experiencing homelessness may not seek support from the council or be captured in official statistics. Therefore, it is essential to

<sup>41</sup> [Households by deprivation dimensions - Office for National Statistics](#)

approach these figures with an understanding that they represent a minimum estimate, and the actual number of individuals affected by homelessness is likely higher.

### ***Single-Unitary Model***

The single county unitary clearly has the benefit of size, creating more economies of scale and offering potential for efficiency, strategic planning, and cost savings.

Despite these benefits, a single unitary model may face challenges in ensuring adequate local delivery. Furthermore, the stark regional disparities within Warwickshire, evident in the contrasting socioeconomic landscapes of areas like Nuneaton and Bedworth and Stratford, present a significant challenge to addressing housing and homelessness. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective given the differing needs and challenges faced by diverse populations. Tailored interventions that consider the specific socioeconomic factors, demographics, and support systems available within each region are crucial for creating equitable and impactful solutions to housing and homelessness across Warwickshire. This has been demonstrated through the implementation of district specific levelling up plans in Stratford-on-Avon and Nuneaton and Bedworth. These plans focus on implementing locally led solutions to local issues.

### ***Two-Unitary Model***

Grouping Warwickshire's local authorities based on economic indicators, separating the more affluent areas from those facing higher levels of deprivation, presents a strategic opportunity for addressing regional disparities. This approach allows for the development of targeted interventions and resource allocation tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by each unitary, particularly the combined unitary of Nuneaton and Bedworth, Rugby and North Warwickshire. While collaboration between these groups remains essential for sharing best practices and fostering regional cohesion, acknowledging the distinct economic realities and tailoring strategies accordingly will likely yield more effective and equitable outcomes in tackling shared challenges like housing and homelessness.

## **SEND**

Warwickshire County Council currently oversees the provision of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services within the region. As of the 2023/24 academic year, 18.0% of Warwickshire students were identified as having special educational needs, aligning with the national average of 18.1%<sup>42</sup>. Among these 16,217 students, 4.2% receive support through Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), slightly below the England average of 4.7%. The most prevalent needs in Warwickshire fall under the categories of social, emotional and mental health needs; moderate learning difficulties; speech, language, and communication needs; and autism spectrum disorder. These four areas collectively represent 76% of all pupils with SEND in Warwickshire. Given the significant demand for SEND provision, it is imperative that any proposed unitary model ensures sufficient resources and budget allocation to effectively meet the needs of every child requiring support.

Following a joint Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of SEND provision, Warwickshire County Council, Coventry and Warwickshire Clinical Commissioning Group, and Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice collaborated to publish a Written Statement of Action<sup>43</sup>. This document outlines a strategic plan to drive improvements and sustainable change across SEND services. The statement focuses on five key themes: reducing waiting times for autism spectrum disorder diagnoses; enhancing communication and co-production with parents and carers; ensuring appropriate placement of children with EHCPs in mainstream or specialist settings; increasing SEND training uptake among mainstream school staff; and improving the quality of the

<sup>42</sup> [Pupils in all schools, by type of SEN provision](#)

<sup>43</sup> [Joint local area SEND \(Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities\) Written Statement of Action published](#)

online Local Offer. By prioritising these areas, the council aims to foster ongoing collaborative efforts and elevate the quality of SEND provision in Warwickshire.

### Single-Unitary Model

Under a single unitary model for Warwickshire, the existing SEND provision would likely transition with minimal disruption, ensuring continuity of current programs and initiatives. The centralised structure could streamline decision-making processes and resource allocation, potentially leading to more efficient and consistent implementation of SEND strategies across the county. However, it is important to acknowledge potential concerns regarding a standardised approach. A single unitary model must remain sensitive to the diverse needs of different communities within Warwickshire, ensuring that SEND provision remains responsive and adaptable at a local level.

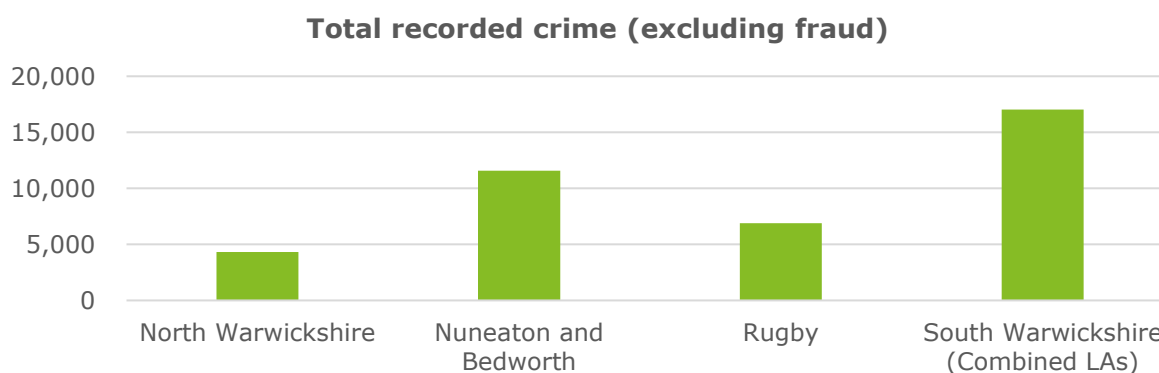
### Two-Unitary Model

A two-unitary model for Warwickshire offers the potential for a more localised and tailored approach to SEND provision. Each unitary authority would have the flexibility to design and implement services that specifically address the needs and priorities of their respective communities. This could lead to greater responsiveness, innovation, and adaptability in meeting the diverse needs of children with SEND. Moreover, a two-unitary structure could encourage collaboration and resource-sharing between the authorities, facilitating the exchange of best practices and potentially leading to enhanced outcomes for all children with SEND in Warwickshire.

### Public Safety

Analysis of crime data from September 2023 to September 2024 reveals distinct trends across Warwickshire's four Community Safety Partnership areas. South Warwickshire recorded the highest total number of crimes (17,026), followed by Nuneaton and Bedworth (11,569).

Table 21: Number of police recorded crimes for headline offences by Community Safety Partnership area, year ending September 2024.<sup>44</sup>

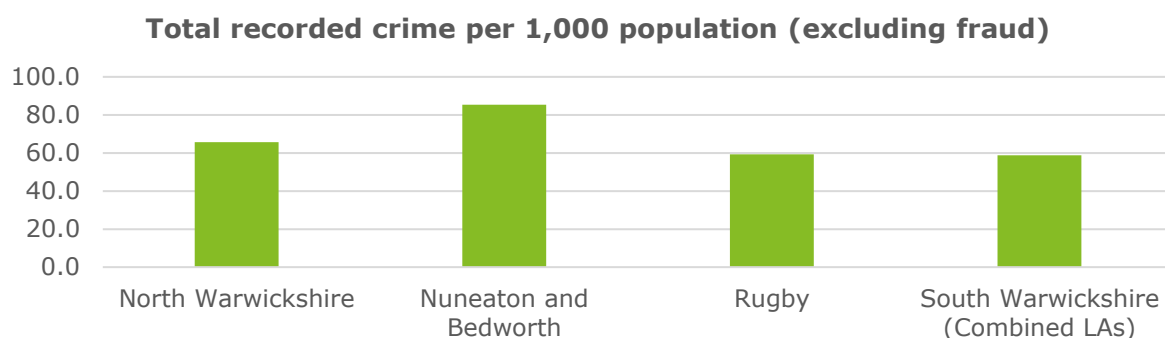


However, when considering population density, Nuneaton and Bedworth emerges with a significantly higher crime rate per 1,000 residents (85.4), exceeding all other areas in Warwickshire. This trend is primarily driven by offences involving violence against the person and theft, a pattern observed throughout the county.

Table 22: Number of police recorded crimes for headline offences by Community Safety Partnership area, year ending September 2024.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> [Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables - Office for National Statistics](#)

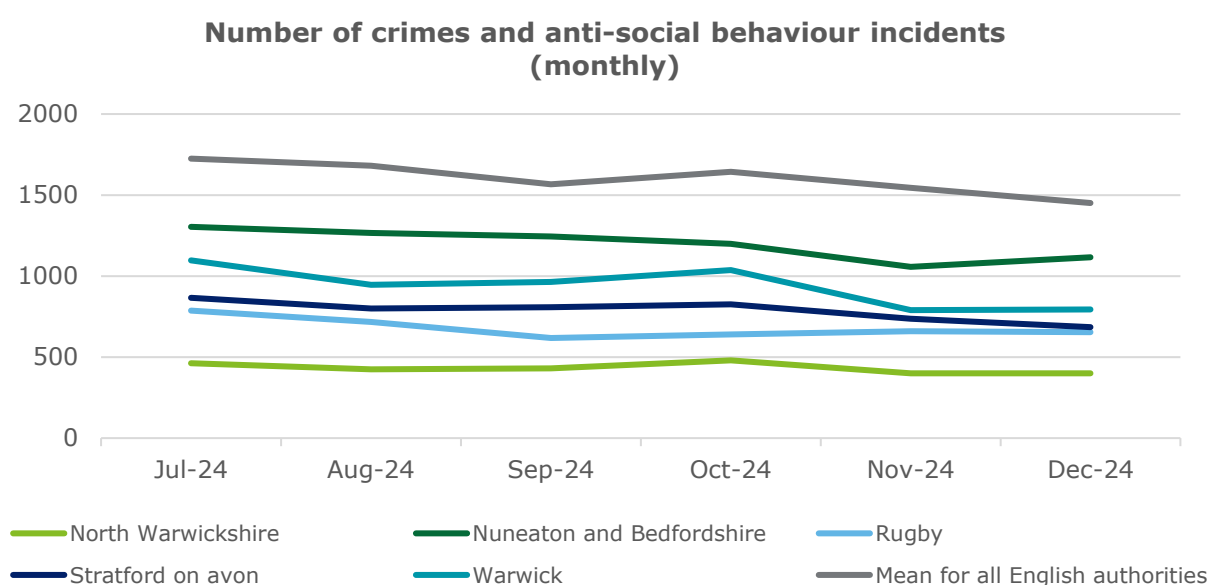
<sup>45</sup> [Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables - Office for National Statistics](#)



Overall, Warwickshire experienced a 1% reduction in total recorded crime (excluding fraud) during this period. This decrease is evident in all Community Safety Partnership areas except for Nuneaton and Bedworth, which saw a 3% increase. Recent concerns include a notable rise in shoplifting (31%) and sexual offences (11%), with all areas of Warwickshire experiencing increases in these crime categories. Conversely, the same period witnessed a 30% decrease in theft from the person and a 15% decrease in criminal damage and arson, with reductions observed across all areas.

Despite these fluctuations, it's important to note that between July 2024 and December 2024, all Warwickshire districts remained significantly below the national average for recorded crime and anti-social behaviour incidents.

Table 23: Number of police recorded crimes for headline offences by Community Safety Partnership area, year ending September 2024.<sup>46</sup>



### **Single-Unitary Model**

A single unitary model for Warwickshire could streamline the oversight of policing and crime prevention strategies at the county level. This centralised approach could facilitate more consistent policy implementation and resource allocation. However, a potential drawback is that it might dilute focus on specific areas with disproportionately high crime rates, as resources are distributed across the entire county.

<sup>46</sup> [Number of crimes and anti-social behaviour incidents recorded in an area \(monthly\)](#)



### **Two-Unitary Model**

A two-unitary model presents a compelling opportunity for targeted intervention. This model could enable the strategic reallocation of resources to areas with greater need, ensuring that crime prevention efforts are concentrated where they are most impactful. Additionally, a two-unitary structure could still benefit from economies of scale, minimising duplication of effort and potentially creating a larger pool of resources to address specific challenges within each unitary area.

To maximise the effectiveness of crime prevention efforts, a unitary model that prioritises strong community engagement and a collaborative approach to public safety is essential. This involves implementing tailored community-driven initiatives such as mentoring programmes, neighbourhood watch programmes, and regular forums for dialogue between law enforcement and residents. This collaborative approach can identify crime hotspots, inform targeted interventions, and foster shared responsibility for safety. There is already in place a South Warwickshire Community Partnership in the South of the county that the two-unitary model could build on.

### **Criteria 3 – Force-ranked assessment**

<b>Option 1: Single Unitary</b>	<b>Option 2: Two-Unitary</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>

There is not much hard evidence on whether the size of a unitary authority makes a difference to service performance. There has been a great deal of longstanding debate on this issue and many arguments and counter arguments.

That being said, a two-unitary model presents a compelling option for Warwickshire, effectively balancing the need for efficiency with the imperative to address the diverse needs of its residents. This model acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery is not optimal for a county as diverse as Warwickshire and that a more nuanced approach is required to ensure services are tailored to local needs and priorities.

Evidence clearly demonstrates that residents across Warwickshire have distinct needs and face varying challenges. This is apparent in areas such as skills and education, unemployment rates, aging population and social care needs, and health and well-being indicators. A two-unitary model, with its focus on creating two distinct authorities with a deeper understanding of local circumstances, can more effectively respond to these diverse needs. This structure allows for greater flexibility in resource allocation, enabling each unitary authority to prioritize services and investments that address the specific challenges and opportunities within its jurisdiction.

While emphasizing local responsiveness, the two-unitary model also recognizes the benefits of scale for certain services. For areas where a county-wide approach is more effective, such as social care, the two-unitary authorities can collaborate and establish joint governance structures and shared services. This collaborative approach allows for the pooling of resources and expertise while maintaining a focus on the unique needs of children and families across Warwickshire.

This approach also mitigates any costs of disaggregating County Council services. Some functions and contracts and systems could be shared between councils on a partnership basis if required. Indeed, a social care partnership could be formed across both Councils if this was felt appropriate, and if functions such as social care commissioning and market management were considered to be better placed at the county level.

Furthermore, the two-unitary model avoids the potential pitfalls of excessive centralization associated with a single county unitary. While a single authority may offer greater potential for economies of scale and performance consistency, it also risks creating an overly bureaucratic and inflexible system. Larger organizations can struggle to adapt to local needs, build strong relationships with communities, and implement transformative change effectively. The two-unitary model, by striking a balance between scale and localization, offers a more agile and responsive approach to governance.

## Criteria 4 – How councils in the area have sought to work together

This section highlights how the Warwickshire Borough and District Councils embrace collaboration as a means to enhance service delivery and achieve shared goals, all while recognising and valuing the distinct local identities and rich cultural heritage that make each district unique.

The collaborative spirit between Warwickshire's districts is evident in several key initiatives.

Examples in the north of the county include:

- Shared services between North Warwickshire Borough Council and Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council for independent living support initiative and Private Sector Housing;
- A joint building control service that started with collaboration between North Warwickshire and Nuneaton and Bedworth, and has now expanded to include Staffordshire areas, showing that collaboration outside of the county is possible, and shows the importance of market forces from outside the county for the North of the county;
- Shared procurement, GDPR and IT system support services between Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and Rugby Borough Council;
- Shared management of service areas between North Warwickshire Borough Council and Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (including Head of Service, Revenues Manager, Systems Manager and Financial Inclusion Manager) as well as Revenues & Benefits and an IT system hosted by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council; and
- Further collaborations including dual-use leisure centre partnerships with Coleshill School, Polesworth School, QE Academy in Atherstone and Etone College Nuneaton, the LEADER agreement with DEFRA and Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, the management agreement with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for local nature reserves and the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership.

Examples in the South of the county include the shared information governance team across Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Councils, which started in 2018, and has developed over time with greater investment from both Councils. There are further examples provided below.

### South Warwickshire Local Plan:

Since 2021, Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Councils have been jointly developing a Local Plan, demonstrating a shared vision for the region's future. This collaborative approach ensures cohesive planning and development, addressing the interconnectedness of South Warwickshire while considering the unique needs of each district. The ongoing consultation on the Preferred Options document highlights the commitment to transparency and public engagement in this process. This, particularly evident in their shaping of draft policies and policy directions as well the emerging spatial growth strategy ensuring a fully co-develop approach.

The joint development of a shared Local Plan between Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Councils presents a range of benefits for South Warwickshire, leveraging the strengths of collaboration to address strategic planning challenges and unlock new opportunities:

- **Streamline Processes and Reduce Duplication:** Collaboration allowed for the streamlining of planning processes, reducing duplication of effort, and ensuring greater consistency in decision-making across the region.
- **Enhance Responsiveness to Local Needs:** While benefiting from a shared strategic vision, the joint plan allowed each district to retain a focus on its unique local needs and

priorities, ensuring that planning decisions are tailored to the specific circumstances of each community.

- **Improved Strategic Alignment:** The shared plan provided a framework for addressing cross-boundary issues, such as infrastructure provision, economic development, and environmental protection, in a coordinated and strategic manner.
- **Effective Governance and Resource Allocation:** The councils could maximise efficiency by utilising existing governance structures and officer groups across both districts, ensuring clear lines of accountability and decision-making authority. The partnership also allowed for the allocation of dedicated resources, including a programme manager, to oversee the process and ensure its success.
- **Best Practice Exchange:** The councils benefited from the experiences of the other authority, sharing best practices and lessons learned.

Most significantly, the emerging overall benefit of this collaborative work was its ability to:

- **Address Strategic Challenges:** The shared plan provided a platform for tackling key cross-boundary challenges, such as climate change, economic recovery, and infrastructure provision, in a coordinated and strategic manner.
- **Unlock Growth Potential:** By presenting a unified vision for growth, the shared plan can attract investment, support sustainable development, and enhance the region's overall competitiveness.

The above, therefore, stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and the ability of the Councils to work together effectively to deliver high-quality, cost-effective services that benefit all residents. This challenges the notion that a single-unitary model is necessary for effective service delivery at scale.

#### **Stratford and Warwick Joint Waste Contract:**

Stratford-on-Avon District and Warwick District have a single refuse and recycling collection contract and service. The new service is delivered to both Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District residents through a joint waste contract with Biffa Waste Services Ltd serving around 130,000 households across South Warwickshire.

As part of the waste service the Councils' implemented a weekly food waste collection service ahead of this becoming a statutory responsibility. Food waste recycling stops this material going for incineration. Instead, it is taken to a specialist facility for Anaerobic Digestion where it is recycled. The waste is treated in specialist facilities to produce a biogas which can be used to generate a renewable, low-carbon electricity. The gas can also be put into the gas grid to help decarbonise the gas grid. The treatment method also produces a liquid which can be used to fertilise local farmland.

This service has been so successful that the councils have some of the highest recycling rates in England (Stratford on Avon DC now third with a household recycling rate of 61% and Warwick 20th with 57.2% out of 294 collection authorities). The joint contract has allowed for significant efficiencies in the delivery of the service and enabling the contractor to design the most practical routes for collecting housing waste and recycling.

#### **Stratford-On-Avon Internal Audit:**

Stratford-On-Avon Council receives internal audit and payroll services through a shared service partnership agreement with Warwickshire County Council. The Internal Audit Team of Warwickshire County Council delivers Internal Audit, the Audit Charter and the Council's Risk Management Policy.

## HEART Partnership

The HEART (Home Environment Assessment & Response Team) Partnership is a collaboration between Warwickshire councils which provides advice and assistance to introduce home improvements and disabled adaptations to resident's homes. HEART arranges for adaptations based on the needs of residents such as stair lifts and small ramps, they also work to identify safety and hygiene risks in the home and helps resident's to get help and support to rectify them<sup>47</sup>.

## Shakespeare's England:

Tourism plays a vital role in the region's economy, and Warwick District Council's active involvement in Shakespeare's England highlights the importance of a unified approach to destination management. As major funders and board members, the councils demonstrate their commitment to promoting Warwickshire's rich cultural heritage and attracting visitors to experience its unique offerings.

This collaborative approach to tourism promotion, with active involvement from multiple district councils, yields significant benefits for the region and contributes positively to the wider country:

- **Regional Brand:** A collective approach creates a strong, unified brand for Warwickshire as a tourist destination, enhancing its visibility and appeal in a competitive market. This allows for more effective and efficient marketing campaigns, maximizing reach and impact.
- **Visitor Experience:** Collaboration ensures a more seamless and enjoyable experience for visitors, who can easily navigate the region and access information, services, and attractions across district boundaries.
- **Spreading Economic Benefits:** A coordinated approach to tourism helps to distribute economic benefits more widely across Warwickshire, supporting businesses and creating jobs in multiple districts.
- **Funding Opportunities:** A unified front strengthens the region's position when bidding for tourism-related funding from national bodies, potentially unlocking greater investment in infrastructure, marketing, and destination development.

This thriving tourism sector also contributes to the overall success of the UK tourism industry, attracting international visitors and generating economic benefits for the country. Warwickshire's rich cultural heritage, which is of national and international significance, attracts visitors to Warwickshire. This focus on tourism beyond major cities, supports a more balanced and sustainable distribution of the visitor economy across the UK.

The aforementioned partnerships offer compelling examples of successful collaboration in Warwickshire, but they represent just a glimpse into a much broader landscape. Beneath the surface lies a vast and intricate network of collaborative initiatives, encompassing a wide range of themes and engaging a diverse array of stakeholders across the county.

The numerous and varied examples of collaboration across Warwickshire highlight a crucial aspect of local governance:

- **Collaboration is Woven into the Fabric of Warwickshire:** It's not a reactive measure but a proactive and ingrained approach to serving the community. This commitment to partnership, evident across Warwickshire, underscores a deep-seated belief in achieving more by working together.
- **Borough and District Councils: Active Partners, Not Isolated Entities:** The collaborative efforts demonstrate that Warwickshire's Councils are not insular entities.

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<sup>47</sup> [HEART Partnership](#)

They actively engage in partnerships, leading and participating in initiatives that extend beyond their boundaries, reflecting a commitment to the collective well-being of the county.

- **Effective Collaboration: Not Reliant on Structural Overhaul:** The success of existing partnerships within the current system challenges the notion that a single unitary authority is essential for effective collaboration. Warwickshire demonstrates that positive outcomes can be achieved through a willingness to partner and share resources, regardless of structural models.

Warwickshire's local governance landscape is characterised by a pervasive spirit of collaboration, evident in the breadth and depth of partnerships across the county. This collaborative foundation positions Warwickshire for a future where devolution and local empowerment can thrive, regardless of any potential shifts in local government structures.

## Criteria 4 – Force-ranked assessment

Option 1: Single Unitary	Option 2: Two-Unitary
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	1 <sup>st</sup> Place

Based on a thorough analysis of the options and considering the unique characteristics of Warwickshire, a two-unitary model emerges as the most advantageous structure, effectively balancing the preservation of local identities with the need for efficient and responsive governance.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Place - Option 2: Two-unitary Model

A two-unitary model emerges as the most advantageous structure for Warwickshire, effectively balancing the preservation of local identities with the need for efficient and responsive governance. This model holds significant potential for recognizing and respecting the distinct identities that characterize the county.

Dividing Warwickshire into two-unitary authorities, broadly reflecting the distinct characteristics of North and South Warwickshire, acknowledges the existing cultural and economic disparities and allows for tailored policies and initiatives. This localized approach fosters a stronger sense of local ownership and belonging. Furthermore, two smaller unitary authorities would be closer to the communities they serve, facilitating a greater understanding of local issues and providing more accessible channels for citizen engagement. This proximity fosters a heightened sense of accountability to local needs and priorities.

Preserving and celebrating Warwickshire's diverse cultural heritage is another key advantage. Each unitary authority would be better positioned to allocate resources and develop strategies tailored to the specific historical assets and cultural landscapes within their respective areas. Moreover, by empowering communities with a greater voice in local decision-making, a two-unitary model can strengthen civic pride and encourage active participation in civic life.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Place - Option 1: Single-Unitary Model

While the notion of a single unitary authority for Warwickshire might appear to offer administrative efficiencies, a closer examination reveals potential risks to the distinct local identities, cultural heritage, and civic pride that are fundamental to the county's character.

A single unitary structure risks overlooking the unique needs and priorities of Warwickshire's diverse communities, leading to a homogenized approach that fails to capture the distinct character of individual communities. This could lead to a sense of disconnect between decision-makers and communities, potentially diminishing civic pride and undermining existing collaborative initiatives. A single, county-wide authority, while offering streamlined governance, may struggle to adequately address the diverse needs and priorities of a county as multifaceted as Warwickshire.

## Criteria 5 – How new unitary structures will support devolution arrangements

The UK Government's Devolution White Paper outlines a clear vision for empowering local areas through Strategic Authorities. However, the success of this model hinges on establishing a strong and effective foundation at the unitary level within Warwickshire.

A two-unitary model is optimal for Warwickshire as it balances strategic scale with a vital focus on local needs.

A single county unitary could potentially join the West Midlands Combined Authority. However, there would be risks of this approach. In allocation of the financial Integrated Settlement, Warwickshire could lose out to the more deprived areas elsewhere across the WMCA footprint.

Perhaps more importantly, it is reported that the Mayor could veto Warwickshire joining the Combined Authority as a full member. This significantly limits the potential to create an alternative devolution structure that would make sense for Warwickshire.

Any other structure may involve two or three other neighbouring county areas; in which case there would not be an effective size ratio between the single county unitary areas and the overall Strategic Authority. The single county unitaries would be too close in size to the potential Strategic Authority. If the single county unitary entered a Strategic Authority alongside other smaller unitaries, again there would be a size and power imbalance within the Strategic Authority between the Warwickshire single unitary and other, smaller unitaries.

Fundamentally, if the WMCA is not an option, there is not a logical devolution solution for a future single county unitary. There may be an option to look towards Leicestershire, or towards Worcestershire and Herefordshire, but in both cases, there are differences of geography and economy between South Warwickshire and Leicestershire, or North Warwickshire and the Worcestershire / Herefordshire footprint.

A two-unitary model provides more opportunity in this regard and makes it easier to deal with other county areas. First, the new unitaries could assess their local geographies and economies and decide to pursue the devolution options most effective for their local places.

For example, the North unitary could look to Staffordshire and Leicestershire. The South unitary could look to Worcestershire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire. Conversations are already being held by the Boroughs and Districts in this regard.

Moreover, the size ratio works more effectively in this scenario – the smaller unitaries can advocate for their local interests without dominating any potential future Strategic Authority as they are too large.

Indeed, there would also be the option for a single Warwickshire Strategic Authority if a two-unitary model was pursued, given there would be a size differential between the unitaries and the Strategic Authority. This option would not exist with a single county unitary, as the Strategic Authority and unitary local authority would be the same size.

### ***Single Unitary Model***

Although a single unitary authority for Warwickshire might initially seem to offer a more streamlined approach to local administration, it poses significant obstacles to the successful implementation and enduring effectiveness of devolution.

A single unitary authority for Warwickshire could diminish the influence of individual communities. Subsuming a large and diverse area under a single entity risks reducing accountability and responsiveness to the specific concerns of local communities. Centralising decision-making within a



large unitary structure runs counter to the White Paper's emphasis on devolving power to the most appropriate level, potentially hindering the effectiveness of devolution in addressing local priorities.

A single unitary authority for Warwickshire, encompassing a diverse range of communities and priorities, might struggle to provide the necessary local insight and agility required for effective collaboration. Concentrating power and decision-making within a single entity risks stifling the development of strong local leadership across Warwickshire, ultimately limiting the effectiveness of the Strategic Authority. A large, single unitary authority might be less responsive to the needs of individual communities, as decision-making becomes more centralised and removed from those directly affected. This reduced accountability could undermine trust in the devolution process and hinder the long-term success of the Strategic Authority.

In conclusion, a single unitary authority for Warwickshire presents significant challenges to the principles and objectives of devolution outlined in the White Paper.

A two-unitary structure for Warwickshire, with its emphasis on balance, local focus, and collaborative governance, provides a far more suitable foundation for unlocking the full potential of devolution.

### ***Two-Unitary Model***

A two-unitary model for Warwickshire presents a promising approach to supporting devolution arrangements and fostering a balanced and effective partnership within a potential Strategic Authority.

Dividing Warwickshire into two-unitary authorities, reflecting the distinct characteristics of the north and south, creates a more balanced power dynamic within a larger Strategic Authority. This structure aligns with the Devolution White Paper's emphasis on partnerships between multiple local authorities, ensuring that no single entity dominates.

It would provide a stronger platform for local voices to be heard within the Strategic Authority. Each unitary would be more directly accountable to its residents, fostering greater responsiveness to local needs and priorities, a key principle of effective devolution.

While necessitating coordination, a two-unitary structure can facilitate better alignment between strategic priorities and local needs. Each unitary, with its more focused geographical area, can develop a deeper understanding of its communities' specific challenges and opportunities. This local expertise can then inform decision-making within the Strategic Authority, ensuring that strategies are grounded in local realities. This would empower local leaders to develop tailored solutions to challenges that are best addressed at a more localised level, fostering innovation and responsiveness.

A two-unitary model for Warwickshire would foster the development of strong local leadership, empowering communities to take ownership of their future. This aligns with the White Paper's vision of capable and responsive local governance as a prerequisite for successful devolution. By distributing power and decision-making, this model encourages greater accountability and responsiveness to local needs. It would also provide the necessary foundation for a potential transition to an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority, ensuring Warwickshire is well-positioned to benefit from further devolution.

In conclusion, a two-unitary model for Warwickshire offers a balanced and collaborative framework for devolution and local governance. This structure prioritises local representation, enables tailored solutions, and fosters strong local leadership, aligning effectively with the principles and objectives of the Devolution White Paper.

## Criteria 5 – Force-ranked assessment

Option 1: Single Unitary	Option 2: Two-Unitary
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	1 <sup>st</sup> Place

Based on a thorough analysis of the options and considering the unique characteristics of Warwickshire, a two-unitary model emerges as the most advantageous structure, effectively balancing the need for strategic coordination with the importance of local focus, particularly within the context of a potential West Midlands Strategic Authority.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Place - Option 2: Two-Unitary Model

A two-unitary model for Warwickshire offers a compelling framework for achieving both strategic scale and local focus. A two-unitary model ensures that local economic development strategies are tailored to the specific needs and opportunities of each unitary authority within Warwickshire. This localised approach allows for greater flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness to the unique challenges faced by different areas.

It is also more practical. The new unitaries could assess their local geographies and economies and decide to pursue the devolution options most effective for their local places. For example, the North unitary could look to Staffordshire and Leicestershire. The South unitary could look to Worcestershire, Oxfordshire or Northamptonshire. Conversations are already being held by the Boroughs and Districts in this regard. Moreover, the size ratio works more effectively in this scenario – the smaller unitaries can advocate for their local interests without dominating any potential future Strategic Authority as they are too large.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Place - Option 1: Single-Unitary Model

The single unitary model, with its county-wide scope, presents a significant challenge in relation to a broader Strategic Authority. A single unitary authority risks overlooking the diverse economic needs and opportunities within Warwickshire, limiting the potential for tailored economic development strategies.

Practically, a single county unitary could potentially join the West Midlands Combined Authority. However, there would be risks of this approach. In allocation of the financial Integrated Settlement, Warwickshire could lose out to the more deprived areas elsewhere across the WMCA footprint.

Perhaps more importantly, it is reported that the Mayor could veto Warwickshire joining the Combined Authority. This significantly limits the potential to create an alternative devolution structure that would make sense for Warwickshire. Any other structure may involve two or three other neighbouring county areas; in which case there would not be an effective size ratio between the single county unitary areas and the overall Strategic Authority. The single county unitaries would be too close in size to the potential Strategic Authority. If the single county unitary entered a Strategic Authority alongside other smaller unitaries, again there would be a size and power imbalance within the Strategic Authority between the Warwickshire single unitary and other, smaller unitaries.

## Criteria 6 – How new unitary structures will enable stronger community engagement

The transition to a unitary council structure in Warwickshire presents a valuable opportunity to reimagine and strengthen community engagement. By streamlining local governance, a unitary model can empower communities by providing clearer lines of communication, increased local decision-making power, and a stronger sense of shared ownership over local issues. This presents a significant opportunity to foster collaboration between the council and its residents, cultivating a shared vision for the future of Warwickshire. The following section examines how the proposed unitary options for Warwickshire can facilitate stronger community engagement, ensuring local government remains responsive to the needs of its residents.

### Engagement work already undertaken

The Councils appointed ORS (Opinion Research Services) in 2020 to conduct an extensive engagement programme to examine the options for local government across Warwickshire. ORS is a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research and major statutory consultations (including for recent local government reorganisations in Dorset, Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire).

The engagement programme included a wide range of meetings and interviews with members of the public, businesspeople, town & parish councillors, voluntary & community sector representatives and key partners from the healthcare sector.

In summary, ORS independently facilitated/undertook:

- Five focus groups with randomly selected members of the public, one in each local authority area (with a total of 46 participants);
- An online focus group with 11 town and parish councillors from across Warwickshire;
- An online focus group with 13 voluntary and community sector representatives from across Warwickshire;
- An online focus group with two healthcare sector representatives, plus a further two depth interviews; and
- 15 in depth interviews with local business sector representatives from across Warwickshire.

The findings were very interesting.

Divided views were expressed across the focus groups but, on balance, residents and stakeholders were slightly more in favour of two-unitary councils for Warwickshire than a single authority. Residents were particularly in favour of a two-unitary model.

Those who opposed a single council for the whole of Warwickshire did so chiefly on the grounds that the county is too large and too diverse in terms of social and economic need (particularly between north and south) for it to be a viable consideration. It would also be the most 'remote' option: there was again considerable concern about a loss of local influence and democratic accountability within one large local authority. It could also result in democratic deficit as councillors will be expected to cover far larger areas and populations.

This engagement process provides evidence for scoring the two-unitary model as best.

Furthermore, the engagement found that the complexity of existing local government structures in Warwickshire is likely to be acknowledged by a good proportion of residents and should therefore form part of any case for moving to a unitary system. It is also likely, however, that there will be concerns about proposed alternative approaches – driven in part by preference for the ‘familiar’ and fear of the unknown. Indeed, familiarity with and loyalty to existing local services are likely to play a significant role in residents’ and stakeholders’ responses to any suggested changes to local government and their willingness to engage in dialogue on the topic. The arguments in favour of alternatives must thus be strong and robustly evidenced in order to overcome this.

The case for changing local government structures presented by the Councils was accepted by many residents and stakeholders. In particular, the need to have a less complex and therefore less confusing local government system and a single point of contact was appealing, as was the prospect of consistent county-wide service provision.

However, while the ‘simplicity’ argument is easily made, the areas of finance and devolution are potentially more problematic. It is clear that, while widely accepted, neither of these arguments will win hearts and minds; people will also need convincing that change will bring benefits for service provision, will not worsen access, inequality and democratic representation/accountability, and will accommodate the local voice.

Given the frequently raised concern that any projected savings from reorganisation would be negated by the cost of implementing it, it will be important to stress that the projections represent ongoing savings following a five-year transitional period, and that all associated costs have been factored in.

### Deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

Warwickshire’s transition to a new unitary structure must be underpinned by a commitment to empowering communities and local engagement. It is crucial that the model genuinely empowers communities rather than inadvertently diminishing their voice.

### The Single Unitary Risk

While the transition to a unitary authority presents compelling opportunities for enhanced community engagement, it is crucial to acknowledge potential challenges that a single unitary authority presents:

- **Disconnect Between Residents and Decision-Makers:** Consolidating power within a larger geographical area could make it more challenging for residents to engage directly with decision-makers and voice their concerns. This may lead to a reduction in opportunities and appetite for meaningful community input.
- **Overlooking the Needs of Individual Neighbourhoods:** A single unitary authority might struggle to adequately understand and address the unique needs and priorities of diverse neighbourhoods within its jurisdiction. This could result in the prioritisation of county-wide agendas only, leading to a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Broader, county-wide, and regional priorities should be picked up by the Strategic Authority.
- **Undermining Existing Local Structures:** The establishment of a single, county-wide unitary authority could lead to overlap with the roles and responsibilities of existing parish and town councils, potentially diminishing their influence and effectiveness in engaging residents.

### Multiple Unitaries

In contrast to a single, large unitary authority, a model comprising multiple smaller unitary authorities within Warwickshire offers a potentially more conducive structure for neighbourhood empowerment:

- **Closer Relationships and Enhanced Accountability:** Smaller geographical units can facilitate closer relationships between residents and their local government representatives. This proximity allows for more direct communication, greater accessibility, and enhanced accountability to community concerns.
- **Local Decision-Making and Community Participation:** A multiple-unitary model allows for the devolution of decision-making power to the most appropriate level. This could maintain the function of parish and town councils or lead to the establishment of new mechanisms and forums for direct community participation in local governance.
- **Tailored Services and Responsive Policies:** With a more localised focus, smaller unitary authorities are better positioned to understand and respond to the specific needs and priorities of their communities. This could involve tailoring policies and services to address unique local challenges, investing in community-identified priorities, and adapting service delivery models to best suit the characteristics, challenges and needs of each neighbourhood or area.

Delivering genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment requires a unitary structure that prioritises local focus, devolves decision-making power, and actively encourages community participation. While a single unitary authority offers potential benefits in terms of streamlined services and economies of scale, a model embracing multiple smaller unitary councils may provide a more localised, community-centric approach. Careful consideration of Warwickshire's unique characteristics, community identities, and long-term aspirations is essential.

### Make sure that communities are engaged

A successful transition to a new unitary structure in Warwickshire necessitates an approach that actively seeks the perspectives of residents, businesses, and community groups. By incorporating their feedback into the design and implementation of the new system, the transition process can ensure that the new unitary structure truly reflects the needs and aspirations of the community.

### The single unitary challenge

While a single large unitary authority for Warwickshire offers potential benefits in terms of streamlined governance, it also presents a significant challenge in effectively engaging communities across a geographically diverse county.

Creating sufficient opportunities for meaningful engagement with residents across the entire county could prove logistically complex. Furthermore, tailoring engagement strategies to the unique needs and characteristics of Warwickshire's diverse communities, from rural villages to larger towns, would require significant resources and nuanced understanding. A centralised approach also risks creating a perception of top-down decision-making, potentially leaving residents feeling unheard and disconnected from the decision-making process. This, in turn, could lead to the recreation of localised forums, potentially adding unnecessary complexity and fragmentation to the engagement landscape.

### Multiple unitaries

In contrast to a single large authority, a model comprising multiple smaller unitary authorities in Warwickshire offers a more conducive structure for effective community engagement. These smaller entities, by virtue of their size, are naturally closer to the communities they serve. This proximity translates into greater accessibility with the potential for local offices and service points, as well as dedicated local teams responsible for community engagement within their designated areas.

Multiple unitaries enable engagement methods to be precisely tailored to the unique context of each community. This could involve leveraging existing networks and partnerships within a specific

area or employing a diverse range of communication channels—from traditional newspapers and public meetings to online platforms and social media—to ensure that all demographics are effectively reached. This localised approach also fosters a culture of co-production, where residents are actively involved in shaping and designing local services that meet their specific needs.

Ultimately, community engagement should be the bedrock upon which a new unitary structure is built. A model that embraces multiple unitary authorities, with their inherent emphasis on local connection and responsiveness, is better positioned to embed meaningful community engagement into the fabric of local governance. By empowering communities to contribute their knowledge and insights, multiple unitary authorities can ensure that services are truly responsive and relevant.

### **Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement**

During the transition to a new unitary structure, it is crucial to make use of the existing network of community engagement partnerships while establishing new initiatives. By building upon partnerships which already demonstrate a commitment to resident involvement the unitary model will continue to strengthen community involvement. Following the implementation of the new structure, a community engagement strategy should be promptly developed. This will ensure continued momentum in achieving shared goals and aspirations.

### **Existing partnerships: A foundation for engagement**

#### **Engaging neighbourhoods:**

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council prioritises tenant engagement and actively seeks the input of its residents in shaping housing services<sup>48</sup>. Recognising the importance of direct engagement, the Council empowers tenant groups to influence and shape service delivery.

Furthermore, the Council employs a proactive and multi-faceted approach to reach tenants across the borough. A mobile tenant engagement service visits neighbourhoods, providing a convenient platform for residents to share their views. Complementing this, the Council organises neighbourhood walkabouts and dedicated tenant engagement days, fostering open dialogue and collaboration on issues of importance to the community. This commitment to tenant engagement ensures that housing services are responsive to the evolving needs and priorities of residents.

#### **Informing the Council's decisions on climate issues:**

Rugby Borough Council actively integrates community engagement into its decision-making processes, ensuring that its strategies reflect the priorities and concerns of its residents. The "Climate Adaptation World Café" event held in November 2024 exemplifies this commitment<sup>49</sup>. This interactive event provided a platform for residents to engage directly with the Council's draft climate change adaptation plan. Attendees shared their insights and expressed their views on the proposed approach.

The Council, demonstrating its commitment to incorporating community feedback, has since utilised the report generated from the event to inform its approach to climate adaptation. Further demonstrating the importance of community engagement in addressing climate change, Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council have also undertaken initiatives in this area. In collaboration with the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, these councils formed a steering group to empower community groups and town/parish councils in

<sup>48</sup> [Tenant Engagement - Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council](#)

<sup>49</sup> [Have your say on climate change - Rugby Borough Council invites residents to first Climate Adaptation World Café Event](#)

developing projects that promote the inclusion of typically under-represented voices in climate change discussions<sup>50</sup>.

This collaborative effort underscores a shared commitment to fostering broader community engagement and collaboration in tackling climate change.

### Leveraging existing strengths for a unitary future

The success of existing community engagement partnerships in Warwickshire provides a strong foundation upon which to build a framework for engagement within a new unitary structure. These partnerships can inform the development of effective engagement strategies for the future.

- **Leveraging Existing Relationships:** The new unitary authorities can tap into the established relationships and trust built through these partnerships to facilitate communication and collaboration with residents.
- **Adapting Successful Engagement Methods:** The diverse range of engagement methods employed by these partnerships, from community forums to digital platforms, can be integrated into the new unitary structure's engagement plan and adapted to suit the needs of the communities.
- **Embedding a Culture of Collaboration:** The collaborative ethos fostered within existing partnerships can serve as a model for the new authority, ensuring that community engagement is not a one-off event but an ongoing and integral aspect of local governance.

By learning from and building upon these existing successes in community engagement, Warwickshire's new unitary structure can establish a robust framework for community engagement that is both effective and sustainable.

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<sup>50</sup> [Local Climate Engagement Programme](#)

## Criteria 6 – Force-ranked assessment

Option 1: Single Unitary	Option 2: Two-Unitary
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	1 <sup>st</sup> Place

Maintaining strong local engagement and preserving the vital connection between local government and the communities it serves are paramount considerations in the design of any new model.

While a single unitary model for Warwickshire might offer potential efficiencies, the analysis indicates a significant risk of diluting local engagement and diminishing community voice. A single county-wide authority could inadvertently create a more centralised and bureaucratic system, where local concerns might be overshadowed by broader strategic priorities.

The two-unitary model strikes a more effective balance between achieving economies of scale and preserving a strong local focus. By creating two entities with distinct identities and a deeper understanding of their respective communities' needs, this model fosters greater accountability and responsiveness to local concerns.

The two-unitary structure provides a platform for more direct and meaningful citizen participation. It enables the development of tailored solutions that reflect the unique challenges and opportunities within each unitary area. This localised approach is essential for ensuring that services are designed and delivered in a way that resonates with the specific needs of each community.



## Next steps

Following the options appraisal, which identified a two-unitary model as the preferred option, the Districts and Boroughs would like to collaboratively develop a comprehensive case for this model. This process aims to ensure the delivery of meaningful and sustainable change for the benefit of our residents.

### Indicative costs

Creating new councils is a complex undertaking extending beyond the transaction date. While the options appraisal provides a starting point, we recognise the need for a detailed exploration of both the short-term and long-term costs:

- **Short-Term:** Resources will be allocated by way of funding the key capacity to develop a robust Full Proposal and accompanying implementation plans. This will involve detailed analysis, stakeholder engagement, and implementation planning.
- **Long-Term:** A dedicated team will be crucial to ensure the smooth integration of multiple councils with varying working practices, cultures, and values – which can be managed through a set of key workstreams. Investment in this team will be essential for a cohesive and successful transition.

While initial cost estimates have been produced based on previous experience, it is crucial to understand these are preliminary and subject to change. Detailed work is required to establish accurate cost projections that reflect the specific circumstances of Warwickshire. A comprehensive funding strategy will be developed, exploring various options and potential phasing of costs in line with the agreed-upon implementation plans.

Table 24: Estimation of costs of developing a full plan

Area	Description	Cost
<b>Proposal Development, Financial Modelling, and Implementation planning.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of an implementation team.</li> <li>• Development of Full Proposal, Long-Term Financial Modelling (LTFM), and Implementation planning.</li> <li>• Development of Target Operating Model and approach to workforce integration.</li> </ul>	£0.8m
<b>Stakeholder Communications and Engagement</b>	Appointing external communications support to help manage overall communications and engagement leading up to and beyond implementation of the restructure process.	£0.2m
<b>Total</b>		<b>£1.0m</b>

Table 25: Estimation of enabling costs for delivery of the preferred option.

Area	Description	Cost
<b>Redundancies</b>	Redundancies to facilitate restructuring, to reduce long term management costs.	£1.2m
<b>Integration PMO</b>	Costs of major PMO workstreams to drive rapid and effective integration of services needed to deliver benefits.	£1.3m
<b>Digital/IT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Centre and data migration</li> <li>• IT Networks</li> <li>• Telephony</li> <li>• Financial Ledgers</li> <li>• Payroll systems</li> <li>• Procurement systems</li> </ul>	£6.0m
<b>Estates</b>	Costs to consolidate the estate as part of restructure.	£0.5m
<b>Council Tax Harmonisation</b>	Costs to harmonize council tax rates as part of restructure.	£8.2m
<b>Total</b>		<b>£17.2m</b>

As described above, these costs are required to make a step change in the efficiency of the integrated districts as part of the two-unitary model and deliver the recurrent benefits we seek to achieve.

### Numbers of Councillors

The specific councillor-to-elector ratios for each unitary authority will be determined through a detailed analysis of factors such as population density, geographic size, and the need to ensure effective representation across diverse communities.

Please note that there has been some indicative work by District officers looking at a different option for the electoral boundaries and councillor numbers. At present it would be possible for a two unitary model to use the electoral boundaries in place for Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council and achieve electoral equality with a ratio of 2647 electors per councillor. All the wards within this model would be within 15% of the target ratio of elector to councillor and only 9 of 56 wards would be greater than 10%. This would create 85 councillors, the same number of councillors as the Districts have currently, but this would represent a reduction as some County Councillors would be lost.

A similar ratio for the Northern unitary would provide 89 councillors. This may be particularly important for areas where no town or parish councils exist at present. The greater number of councillors creates greater democratic engagement. This would see a significant reduction in councillor numbers. There would, however, be a need for a full ward boundary review before a new council came into effect to allow these boundaries. Three possible wards would approach the ratio of 30% of target ratio of elector to councillor, which triggers an automatic review.

### How a two-unitary model supports devolution

Practically speaking, the two new unitaries could assess their local geographies and economies and decide to pursue the devolution options most effective for their local places. For example, the North unitary could look to Staffordshire and Leicestershire. The South unitary could look to Worcestershire, Oxfordshire or Northamptonshire. Conversations are already being held by the Boroughs and Districts in this regard.

Moreover, the size ratio works more effectively in this scenario – the smaller unitaries can advocate for their local interests without dominating any potential future Strategic Authority as they are too large. By creating two entities with distinct identities and priorities, this model ensures a more balanced power dynamic within any future Strategic Authority, preventing dominance by a single entity and promoting equitable representation for all involved.

A two-unitary model for Warwickshire also supports devolution in the following ways:

### **Strengthening Local Voices:**

Dividing Warwickshire into two unitaries provides a stronger platform for local communities to have their voices heard. Each unitary, directly accountable to its residents, can be more responsive to local needs and priorities. This structure empowers communities and ensures decisions are made at the most appropriate level, aligning with the principles of devolution.

### **Enhancing Collaboration and Local Focus:**

While necessitating coordination, a two-unitary model can facilitate better alignment between strategic priorities and local needs. Each unitary, with its focused geographical area, can develop a deeper understanding of its communities' unique challenges and opportunities. This local expertise, brought to the Strategic Authority, ensures that decisions are grounded in local realities and reflect the diverse needs of the region.

### **Unlocking Devolution's Potential:**

A two-unitary model fosters strong local leadership by empowering communities to take ownership of their futures. This aligns with the White Paper's vision of capable and responsive local governance as a cornerstone of successful devolution. By distributing power and decision-making, this model encourages greater accountability and responsiveness to local needs.

In conclusion, a two-unitary model for Warwickshire holds the potential to effectively support the principles and objectives of devolution. By promoting balanced representation, enhancing local focus, and fostering strong local leadership, this model can pave the way for a more prosperous and equitable future for the region.

## **Local engagement**

The Borough and District Councils have already undertaken local engagement on these issues. They appointed ORS (Opinion Research Services) in 2020 to conduct an extensive engagement programme to examine the options for local government across Warwickshire.

Divided views were expressed across the focus groups but, on balance, residents and stakeholders were slightly more in favour of two-unitary councils for Warwickshire than a single authority. Residents were particularly in favour of a two-unitary model.

Those who opposed a single council for the whole of Warwickshire did so chiefly on the grounds that the county is too large and too diverse in terms of social and economic need (particularly between north and south) for it to be a viable consideration. It would also be the most 'remote' option: there was again considerable concern about a loss of local influence and democratic accountability within one large local authority. It could also result in democratic deficit as councillors will be expected to cover far larger areas and populations.

The Councils will continue to engage their communities in a similar way moving forward.

Public perception and active engagement are crucial for a successful transition to any new local government structure. The Councils' commitment is to ensure residents, businesses, and staff are informed and involved throughout the process.

The Districts and Boroughs will leverage existing networks, collaborating closely with:

- **Community Groups:** Partnering with established groups ensures residents are reached through trusted channels.
- **Parish and Town Councils:** Regular briefings and consultations will facilitate ongoing dialogue and address local concerns.
- **Key Stakeholders:** Engaging with organisations such as the NHS, emergency services, educational institutions, and the voluntary sector to understand their perspectives and priorities.

The communication strategy will employ a diverse range of channels, including:

- **Digital Platforms:** Utilising social media, online forums, and council websites to disseminate information and gather feedback.
- **Traditional Media:** Engaging local newspapers and radio to reach a wider audience.
- **Direct Engagement:** Organising public meetings, workshops, and focus groups to facilitate in-person dialogue and address specific concerns.

The Districts and Boroughs will draw upon best practices in local government engagement, exploring innovative approaches to reach diverse communities and demographics. This may include:

- **Targeted Digital Engagement:** Utilising digital platforms to reach specific geographic areas or demographic groups.
- **In-Depth Focus Groups:** Facilitating focused discussions to gather qualitative data and understand resident and staff perspectives in greater detail.
- **Business Engagement:** Hosting business forums and providing regular updates to ensure the local economy's needs are considered.

### Voluntary arrangements to keep all councils involved

A range of regular meetings have been set up to enable the councils involved to keep working on these proposals. These meetings are supported by a programme team with membership taken from all the districts. There are also regular touchpoints between the Boroughs and Districts and the County Council.



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