

Future Northants

Local government reform consultation

Kettering
Borough Council

Corby
Borough Council

Borough Council of
Wellingborough
making Northamptonshire a place to be proud of

 East
Northamptonshire
Council

 Northamptonshire
County Council

 South
Northamptonshire
Council

 NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

 DAVENTRY
DISTRICT COUNCIL

There are currently eight local authorities across Northamptonshire providing council services including housing, planning, social care and protecting the vulnerable; and they also collect rubbish, maintain roads and run libraries. Councils are currently organised in a two-tier structure, with some services provided by the County Council and some provided by seven borough or district councils. The councils have been invited by the Government to submit proposals to restructure local government in Northamptonshire.

It is proposed that local government in Northamptonshire should change, it is important that you have a say in how these and many other services are delivered in the future.

Why should I get involved?

If you live or work anywhere in Northamptonshire your council, local services and the council tax you pay would be affected by the proposals in this document.

Following an urgent invitation from the Government, and because of the need to make local government services more sustainable, Northamptonshire's eight councils are proposing to reduce the number of councils in the county from eight to two from April 2020.

All eight councils are co-operating to seek the views of residents, businesses and others about the proposal during a period of public consultation from June 18th to July 22nd. We want to know your opinions. So please read this document and take part in the consultation.

While explaining the main issues, this document cannot include all the background and detailed evidence, so please visit the website www.futurenorthants.co.uk for further information.

We want to
hear your views
before any decisions
are made

How are the eight Northamptonshire councils organised now?

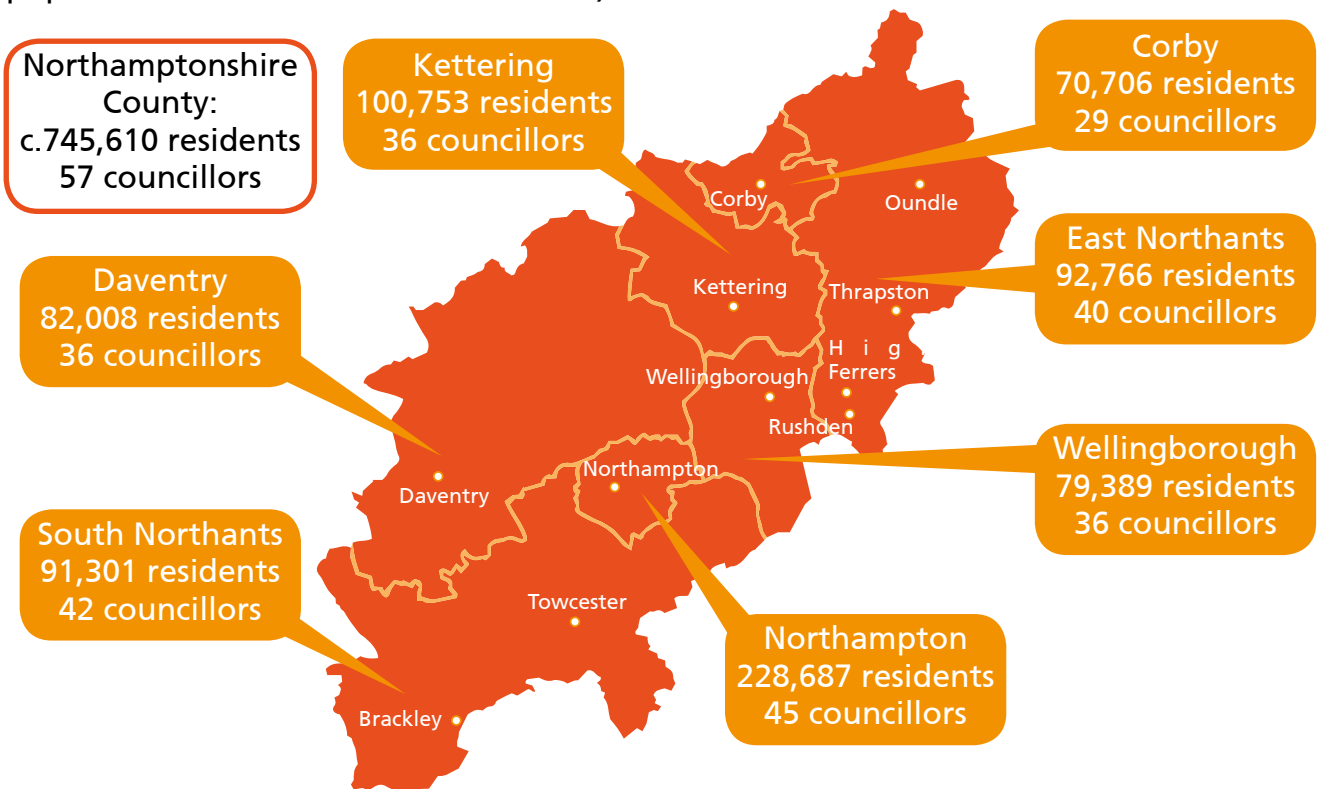
In addition to the many parish and town councils, there are currently eight local authorities providing council services across Northamptonshire in what is often called a 'two-tier' structure – in which major services are divided between the county council (on the one hand) and the seven borough or district councils (on the other).

Northamptonshire County Council provides services for residents across the whole of the county, including education, social care for children and adults, highways, and some environmental services.

Corby Borough Council, Daventry District Council, East Northamptonshire Council, Kettering Borough Council, Northampton Borough Council, South Northamptonshire Council and the Borough Council of Wellingborough provide important local services for residents in their areas, including housing, planning, waste collection, revenues and benefits, and leisure services.

Each of the eight councils has a political Leader and Chief Executive/Managing Director, and there is a total of 321 councillor positions running local government across Northamptonshire. Council tax levels are set separately by all the individual councils each year.

The current structure of Northamptonshire local government is shown below (with populations and numbers of councillors).



Why is it time for urgent change?

While the two-tier system is long-standing (and many will be sorry to see it go), in light of the issues set out below, Northamptonshire's eight councils accept that urgent change is necessary to move towards a sustainable local government structure for Northamptonshire residents.

One important reason for this conclusion is that a recent Northamptonshire County Council Best Value Inspection report (January-March 2018), commissioned by the Government, found that the County Council did not have the right culture, governance and processes to make robust decisions, and subsequently has over-spent on its budget in previous years and faces significant on-going budget deficits. The report concluded that:

"The problems...are now so deep that it is not possible to promote a recovery plan that could bring the council back to stability and safety in a reasonable timescale...A way forward with a clean sheet, leaving all the history behind, is required." [paragraphs 4.16-17]

Therefore, the Government has taken the unusual step of appointing external Commissioners to take over Northamptonshire County Council's functions associated with strategic financial planning, governance and scrutiny. Without more effective budgetary control, the quality and reliability of council services across the county cannot be guaranteed: unless the current financial position is urgently reversed, it is likely that some important services will have to change drastically, or even cease.

Taking all these factors into account, the Government has written to all eight Northamptonshire councils inviting them urgently to co-operate to make proposals – by the end of August 2018 – to restructure local government in the county. The Government has said that any proposals should:

- *Improve local government and service delivery across the area, give greater value for money, generate savings, provide stronger strategic and local leadership, and be more sustainable*
- *Command a good deal of local support as assessed in the round overall across the whole area of the proposal*
- *Be based on existing local government areas, and any new authorities should have populations substantially more than 300,000.*



What options have the Northamptonshire councils considered against the criteria?

The extent of the county council's financial problems, and their causes, have led the Government to direct a major change. The Best Value inspectors believe: "a new start is required for the residents of Northamptonshire".

Option	Considerations
No change	Maintaining the existing two-tier system would not solve the current problems.
Establish a single unitary authority based on the whole Northamptonshire county boundary	Establishing a single unitary authority based on the existing county boundary, would not deliver a recognisably "new start". Furthermore, the option of a single unitary council is expressly ruled out in the Government's invitation letter.
Create three unitary authorities	Establishing three unitary authorities would not meet the population requirement. Northamptonshire has a total population of around 740,000 and under a three unitary council structure, at least one authority would have a population level of less than 300,000.
Create two unitary authorities based on a single authority for Northampton Borough, and a single authority for the other areas around it	This would also not meet the Government's population test – the population of Northampton Borough is only 228,687.
Create two unitary authorities based on groupings of existing West and North districts or boroughs	The option for two unitary authorities covering West and North would deliver two credible geographic units, both with populations in excess of 300,000.
Mergers with some neighbouring councils (outside Northamptonshire)	Current legislation dictates that unitary authorities cannot span more than one Police Authority. In Northamptonshire, the County has a Police Authority co-terminus with its boundaries. Hence, without a change to the law, a unitary council covering part of Northamptonshire cannot merge with another authority outside the county. It would not be possible to effect a change in the law within the timescales for submission of our proposals.

What do the Northamptonshire councils propose?

Two Unitary Authorities

Following the Government's invitation and in the light of its criteria, the eight Northamptonshire councils are jointly considering a proposal where the current two-tier system of eight councils would be replaced by two unitary councils which would have responsibility for all council services in their respective areas.

The two new unitary councils would be:

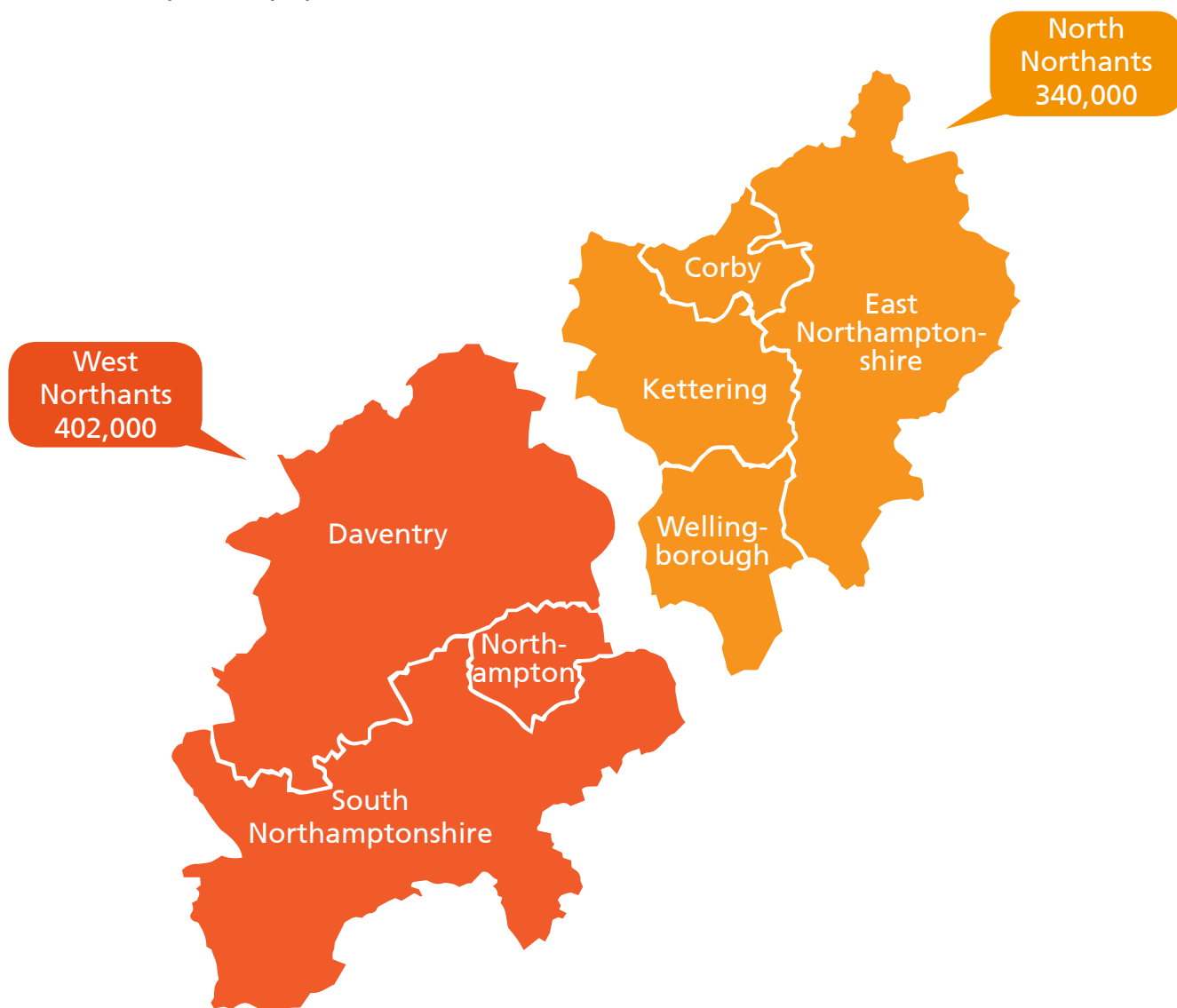
WEST NORTHANTS UNITARY COUNCIL

Comprising the areas covered currently by Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire councils

NORTH NORTHANTS UNITARY COUNCIL

Comprising the areas covered currently by East Northamptonshire, Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough councils

The existing county council and the seven borough/district councils would be abolished to be replaced by the two new unitary councils in April 2020, as shown on the map below with the respective populations.



What are the benefits of two unitary councils?

The proposal for two unitary councils is intended to treat all parts of the county fairly at the same time as reducing some of the costs associated with local government in Northamptonshire. It will do this in a number of different ways:

- Re-organising the councils would simplify local government and make efficiency savings more achievable. For example, compared with the current position, it has been estimated that re-organisation into two new unitary councils would achieve annual savings of £12million per year through rationalisation, economies of scale and greater efficiency. These are savings that would improve the year on year position of the councils in Northamptonshire.
- In addition, local government re-organisation offers an opportunity to transform the way that services are planned, supported and delivered. By adopting new ways of working, harnessing the full potential of digital technology and by developing initiatives to manage demand for council services more effectively, the new councils could expect to achieve recurring savings significantly larger than those associated with re-organisation alone. The opportunity for a fresh start would also enable the councils to re-negotiate some contracts. This could help them to achieve further recurring savings by reducing their overall spend on third party goods and services.
- Finally, it is important to recognise that local government re-organisation could be used to facilitate a more radical reform of the wider public sector in Northamptonshire. This would enable local agencies to work much more closely together and achieve further savings that would help to address the projected financial deficit.

Are the costs worth it?

Of course, this type of change would also incur costs. For example, it is estimated that to achieve the recurring savings associated with re-organisation alone (£12million per annum) there will be a one-off cost of approximately £22million to make the transition. But the benefits will exceed the costs within a three year period.

Apart from financial considerations, the current two-tier system can be confusing to many people who are unsure of which council does what. For example, the borough and district councils collect council tax, but the county council spends most of the money; residents are typically unaware of the relative costs of county and borough/district services; the boroughs and districts collect waste, but the county council disposes of it; and the division of responsibilities for highways, roads, footpaths and street lighting is often unclear to residents. Moreover, businesses operating across the county may have to make licensing applications to seven different borough/district councils.





Less confusion, greater integration

By resolving these confusions, a simpler unitary structure could provide greater accountability – by making it clearer which authority is responsible for decisions and service standards.

As well as making savings and providing clearer accountability, the two new unitary councils could contribute effectively to the well-being of residents and businesses in other ways. For example, the two councils could achieve more effective integration between their social care services and the healthcare provided by the NHS – a crucial requirement when the numbers of elderly and very elderly people are increasing. It is also expected that strategic planning for education, housing, infrastructure and economic development would be enhanced if the current eight councils were replaced by two unitary authorities.

Unitary authorities would also provide a stronger voice to lobby for the health services, roads and other infrastructure that we require to meet the needs of our growing and ageing population.

Unitary councils are already well known in the UK. Wales, for example, has only unitary councils, and Cornwall and Wiltshire, and many other areas, have them, too. Most recently, the government has approved plans for nine two-tier Dorset councils to merge into two new unitary councils.

The proposal for two unitary councils would not in any way change the status of existing parish and town councils in Northamptonshire. In fact, the creation of two unitary councils could enhance the importance of parish and town councils in providing an essential interface between local areas and the two new councils.



How would council tax be affected?

If two unitary authorities were created, each of them would be responsible for setting its own council tax each year.

One issue to be faced by the new councils, with Government support, would be 'council tax equalisation' (not between the two authorities but between the various areas within each of the new authorities). While local authorities do not all charge the same council tax, all areas within a single local authority are required by law to pay the same council tax for each band. Whereas currently the seven borough/district areas

have different council tax rates, the charges would be standardised within each of the two new unitary council areas.

The following table shows both the current (2018-19) district/borough charges and the total council tax paid for council services across the county – with the areas grouped according to which of the two unitary councils they would belong.

(The figures in the table below do not include the council tax charge for the police or for parish and town councils.)

NORTH NORTHANTS UNITARY incorporating the former areas:	Borough/District Council Tax	Total Local Authority Council Tax
	£	£
Corby	190	1,426
East Northamptonshire	139	1,375
Kettering	205	1,442
Wellingborough	146	1,382

WEST NORTHANTS UNITARY incorporating the former areas:	Borough/District Council Tax	Total Local Authority Council Tax
	£	£
Daventry	156	1,392
Northampton	219	1,456
South Northamptonshire	186	1,442

In summary, the council tax charges levied within each unitary would be equalised over a period that has yet to be decided. The Council Tax you pay may be different as it will take into account specific household circumstances.



Business rates

Business rates would be unaffected by the proposal for two new unitary councils.

What would be the impact on accessing the councils?

It is an important priority for all Northamptonshire's residents to be able to access their councils – and this would continue with two unitary councils. However, with two rather than eight councils, a review of all property would be required to effectively ensure we meet local needs. There would still be opportunities for phone or face-to-face contact, but the councils would also continue to encourage residents to access, order and pay for services online.

What would be the impact on the number of councillors?

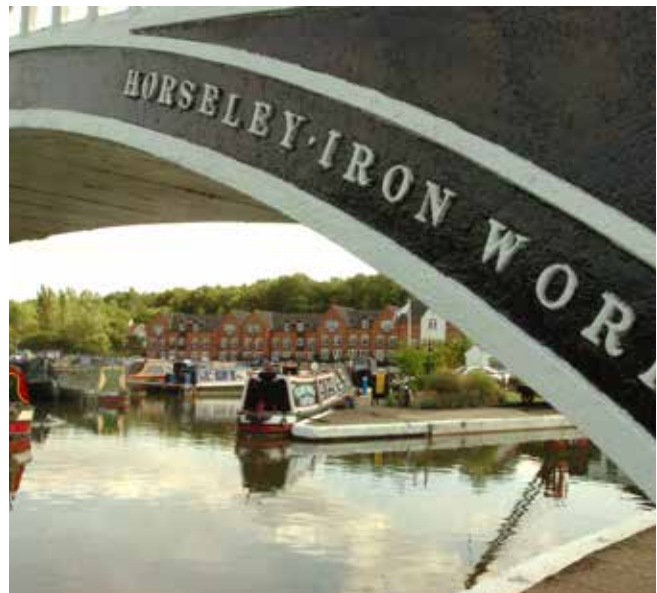
With eight councils, there are 321 elected member positions for local government across the whole of Northamptonshire, but two new unitary councils would require significantly fewer councillors. If a decision is made to create two new unitary councils, then those councils would make proposals to the Boundary Commission concerning the appropriate number of councillors to represent residents and businesses.

What would be the impact on existing staff?

If the proposal for a two-unitary structure is accepted, then savings would be made by reducing the number of senior staff. For example, instead of the current eight senior management teams there would be two. Similarly, the increasing demands of a growing and ageing population, balanced by increasing digitisation and transformation of services, may require changes to the workforce over time.

What happens next?

In response to the invitation Northamptonshire's eight councils have drafted a proposal for the future shape of local government in



the county, but no decisions have yet been made. The councils are conducting a formal consultation, following which each of the eight councils will study the outcomes of the consultation to see if they should continue with the same proposal (for two unitary councils) or whether any better options that meet the government criteria have emerged.

Whatever the councils agree will be reported to the government by the end of August for a final decision to be taken. Depending upon the decision, legislation would be prepared during December 2018 to authorise whatever change may be approved.

If appropriate, interim arrangements would be put in place for 2019-20 with a view to the new councils operating from April 2020.



How can I join the debate?

Public consultation on the proposals for change starts on June 18th and closes on July 22nd 2018. The consultation is being conducted by an independent and specialist social research company, Opinion Research Services (ORS).

Northamptonshire residents, parish and town councils and other organisations are being asked to share their views on the proposal or other options by completing a questionnaire available online at **www.futurenorthants.co.uk**. We're encouraging all residents and other stakeholders to complete the questionnaire to make sure their views are considered. Paper copies are also available in local libraries and other council facilities.

A sample of residents in each council area will also be randomly selected by ORS and asked to complete a telephone interview. If you are invited to take part in this survey, please do so, even if you have already completed the online consultation questionnaire.

Your councils will be talking to local stakeholders, from businesses and voluntary organisations to parish and town councils, to answer any questions they have and explain how the proposals might affect them.



What we will do with your response

Once Northamptonshire's councils know local people's views they will consider them along with all the other evidence before deciding what proposal(s) to put to the Government.

This is an important consultation about the future of all local councils in Northamptonshire.

No decisions have been taken yet and the councils – and the Government – want to know your views. Please take part in the consultation, whether you agree or disagree with the proposal; and you are welcome to suggest other options (either within Northamptonshire or with neighbouring authorities).

Any information provided to ORS (via the questionnaire and/or by any submissions) will be processed in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act and the EU General Data Protection Regulation. Personal information will be kept for no more than 1 year after any decisions have been finalised. For further information, please see **www.ors.org.uk/privacy**

No members of the public will be identified in any ORS consultation reports; but where feedback is submitted by a representative on behalf of an organisation, or by an elected representative or someone acting in their official capacity, this may be attributed.

For more information about this consultation, go to www.futurenorthants.co.uk

Questionnaires and written responses can be returned FREEPOST to: **ORS, FREEPOST (SS1018), PO BOX 530, Swansea SA1 1ZL.**

Please respond as soon as you can and by July 22nd at the latest.

If you have any queries about completing the questionnaire or need assistance to do so, including a copy in large print, audio version or translated into another language, please call ORS on **0800 3247005** or email **consultation@ors.org.uk**