

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Proposal for Modernising Local  
Government in Buckinghamshire

January 2017



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There is no dispute about the need for change in Buckinghamshire. But real change requires new thinking. A fresh approach, responding to the economies of the place and to the people who live and work there.





***There is nothing wrong with change  
if it is in the right direction.***

Winston Churchill



Buckinghamshire is naturally sliced in two by the topography of the Chiltern Hills. Its distinct communities have been artificially tied together for too long under the administration of an upper tier Council which in turn is obliged to serve two economic masters.

Neither urban nor a collection of market towns, Buckinghamshire is a long strip with no sense of connection between the residents of Buckingham and Burnham. It is fundamentally a divided place. The north is an open area with great potential for rapid growth: a rural vale centred around the towns of Aylesbury and Milton Keynes forming part of the Midlands. The southern communities are nestled in the Chilterns and along the Thames Valley and dominated by their proximity to London: a part of the commuter zone constrained by its green belt and its natural topography. Amersham and Chesham are served by the London Underground and are increasingly used as commuter towns. High Wycombe has pockets of deprivation, rising homelessness and ethnic and religious diversity.

The delivery structures of public services are divided by this geography. The Aylesbury Vale and Chiltern Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) align with the district proposal. So do the local policing areas with a clear division across the natural boundary. The blue light services all recognise Milton Keynes as part of Buckinghamshire. There are no services which are delivered across the county administrative area, although partnerships have formed to help create a pass through the Chiltern Hills. The rivers, rail and roads also reflect the division between the north and south of the County. The poor connectivity between north and south is a product of the topography and emphasises the natural divide.

Milton Keynes, released from the county administrative constraint in 1997 has become the fastest growing city in Europe. Aylesbury could follow suit. The Cambridge to Oxford Corridor is one of the prime growth corridors for UK PLC in the coming decades.

The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) recognises Aylesbury Vale as part of that geography and places Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale but – significantly – not the rest of Buckinghamshire – within the Corridor. A unitary Aylesbury Vale working in partnership with its neighbour, has the potential to emulate its success and maximise the potential for growth and increased productivity to the benefit of the UK as a whole.

In the south the pull to London is undeniable. A Council based along the Thames Valley would be able to advocate its cause with its natural partners and can fully benefit from its London and M40 corridor relationships to be part of its own functioning economic geography. The expansion of Heathrow and development of Crossrail will continue to make the south of the County desirable areas for new businesses and those seeking a UK base near London.

Meeting this demand within the constraints of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and green belt requires innovation and agility with a clear focus on developing the infrastructure to maximise land use and take advantage of emerging opportunities.

The new unitary Councils will be able to reshape the relationships with residents focussing on building resilience and independence. Sustainable local government can work alongside people and communities to assist them in securing their own wellbeing with emphasis on early intervention and prevention to reduce demands on hard-stretched public services.

Milton Keynes is a growing but yet relatively small unitary (population: 261.7k). The opportunity to share delivery with similar community needs has the potential to improve the resilience of Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. To the south, the increasing number of families being housed in Bucks from Brent, Harrow and Hillingdon to help with the London homelessness crisis requires a different sphere of close working relationships, looking towards London.

The County Council has shouldered the responsibility of delivering strategic services across this divided County. Strategic transport and infrastructure has been driven by the need to provide north / south connectivity. What is more important is connecting economies and communities to their natural neighbours - to the Midlands in the north, and the Thames Valley and London in the south. Social care administered across these different and unconnected communities has proved to be increasingly costly and has failed to realise the economies of scale a large population would ordinarily provide in areas with a clear social and economic centre.

Unsurprisingly the administration has struggled. It has struggled to improve the performance of its services; struggled to keep pace with the rapid growth of its northern neighbour and above all struggled to make ends meet.



***The world as we have created it  
is a process of our thinking.  
It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.***  
Albert Einstein



An analysis of Buckinghamshire which concludes that reorganising the local government deck chairs will provide the solution is blind to the problems the County faces. An analysis which fails to acknowledge the significant role which Milton Keynes plays in this County is fundamentally flawed and an analysis which assumes that any new Council will be constrained by existing administrative boundaries lacks vision and the ability to engage in unfettered thinking. Real change requires new thinking: this is an opportunity to move beyond the status quo, to a structure that is fit for the future.

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## OUR SUBMISSION

We propose to abolish the five Councils that currently operate on a two tier basis. We believe that the best option is for three Councils across Buckinghamshire. This would create two new unitary Councils: one in the north (population: 188.7k) alongside the existing unitary of Milton Keynes (population: 261.7k) and one in the south to cover the area of the three southern district councils (population: 339.7k). Partnership working between the two northern unitaries can provide economies of scale for both councils. This proposal respects the economic geography and the communities of Buckinghamshire.

However, if there is a decision to support a two unitary solution for the whole of Buckinghamshire, the four districts believe that this should be to create two Councils of fairly equal size which allow for appropriate economic and community based relationships. The proposal by the County Council would create two mismatched Councils (population: 528.4k and 261.7k) that cut through the middle of the economic geography.



## SUMMARY OF OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The options under consideration are as follows:



### OPTION 1

#### TWO UNITARY COUNCILS

Two unitary council model based on the existing geography of the County Council administrative area and Milton Keynes. Under this model each of the two Councils would deliver the full range of services.



### OPTION 2

#### THREE UNITARY COUNCILS

A three unitary council model based on the existing boundaries of Milton Keynes existing unitary Council, Aylesbury Vale proposed unitary and a proposed unitary covering the combined area of Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Councils. Under this option each Council would be responsible for the delivery of all council services. It is proposed that closer working between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury Vale unitaries could realise efficiencies across both Councils. There would also be joint delivery of back office services across two or more of the three unitary Councils.

## CRITERIA ANALYSIS

The following table provides a rating (1 or 2) for each option against the non-financial criteria (1 being the highest scoring rating for each criterion). For ease of comparison the same set of criteria have been used as the County Council business case. The criteria have been allocated with an equal weighting and the overarching score has been calculated by adding the scores of the first three criteria with the average score for the last four sustainability criteria. Where both models have equal merit they have both been allocated the highest score (1).

Options criteria	Two-unitary model of local government	Three-unitary model of local government
1. Service performance	2	1
2. Democratic leadership & accountability	2	1
3. Local engagement & decision making	2	1
Sustainability		
4. Economic growth	2	1
5. Skills and capacity	2	1
6. Engagement of supply chain	1	1
7. Co-terminosity with partners (partnership working)	2	1
Overarching score	7.75	4
<b>Overarching rank</b>	<b>Second</b>	<b>First</b>

The following table provides a summary of the high level revenue costs and savings (on a real basis) estimated for each option over a five-year period from 2019/20 to 2023/24:

Income foregone, costs and savings	Two-unitary model of local government £m	Three-unitary model of local government £m
Total income foregone (Council tax)	8.7	1.1
Total costs (staff, reorganisation change costs)	14.3	14.3
Total savings (staff, democratic and efficiency savings)	95.9	72.8
Net savings	72.9	57.4

Note: A detailed breakdown of the financial analysis is included in the full report. Savings are against annual revenue outturn total service expenditure of £1.3 billion (based on 2015/16 RO data) and £6.8 billion over the five year period, assuming this level of annual expenditure is maintained.

## ANALYSIS SUMMARY

The financial analysis concludes that a three unitary solution could deliver savings of nearly £58m over five years to residents of Buckinghamshire. A two unitary would deliver nearly £73m over the same period. These savings are against a total annual budget of £1,357m across the county i.e. £6,785m over five years.

The total scores allocated in relation to the non-financial analysis indicate option 2 is more advantageous than option 1. The financial analysis recognises the additional savings potential from option 1 but option 2 is the preferred overall option as it has the strongest delivery along with potential for significant savings

## OUR VISION

Given the challenges faced in Buckinghamshire systemic and innovative change is required to ensure that local government is sustainable and meets the changing needs and aspirations of residents. The vision is therefore built around the following principles:

1. Local government will be rooted in communities and residents will be empowered to participate in the design and delivery of services for their local area;
2. Administrative boundaries and democratic accountability will reflect real economic and community geographies to allow aligned planning, consistent prioritisation and place based action to improve outcomes for residents and ensure that the deployment of public money is optimised;
3. Community resilience will be enhanced by providing 'just enough' of the right services at the right time, thereby promoting independence and the capabilities of individuals, rather than perpetuating a paternalistic model of local government which increases dependency;
4. There will be clear focus on achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth that creates shared prosperity and promotes resilience and independence.
5. Collaboration and partnership working between public bodies will be enhanced by coterminous working, shared prioritisation and joint action;
6. Innovation in the use of data and technology and in the design and delivery of public services to best reflect and support the way people live their lives and improve effectiveness, productivity and efficiency.



## OUR AMBITION

**One Direction** - each council focussed on one economic geography

**Even More Local** - two councils provides greater local accountability

**More Effective** - the right services at the right time improves outcomes and builds resilience

**More Efficient**- thriving economies and resilient communities provide sustainability

### Why our ambition makes sense for Buckinghamshire:

#### ONE DIRECTION

The north and south of Buckinghamshire are very different functional economic areas, with distinctive characteristics, challenges and opportunities. Two new unitaries in Buckinghamshire would allow each Council to pursue its own economic goals focused in just one direction.

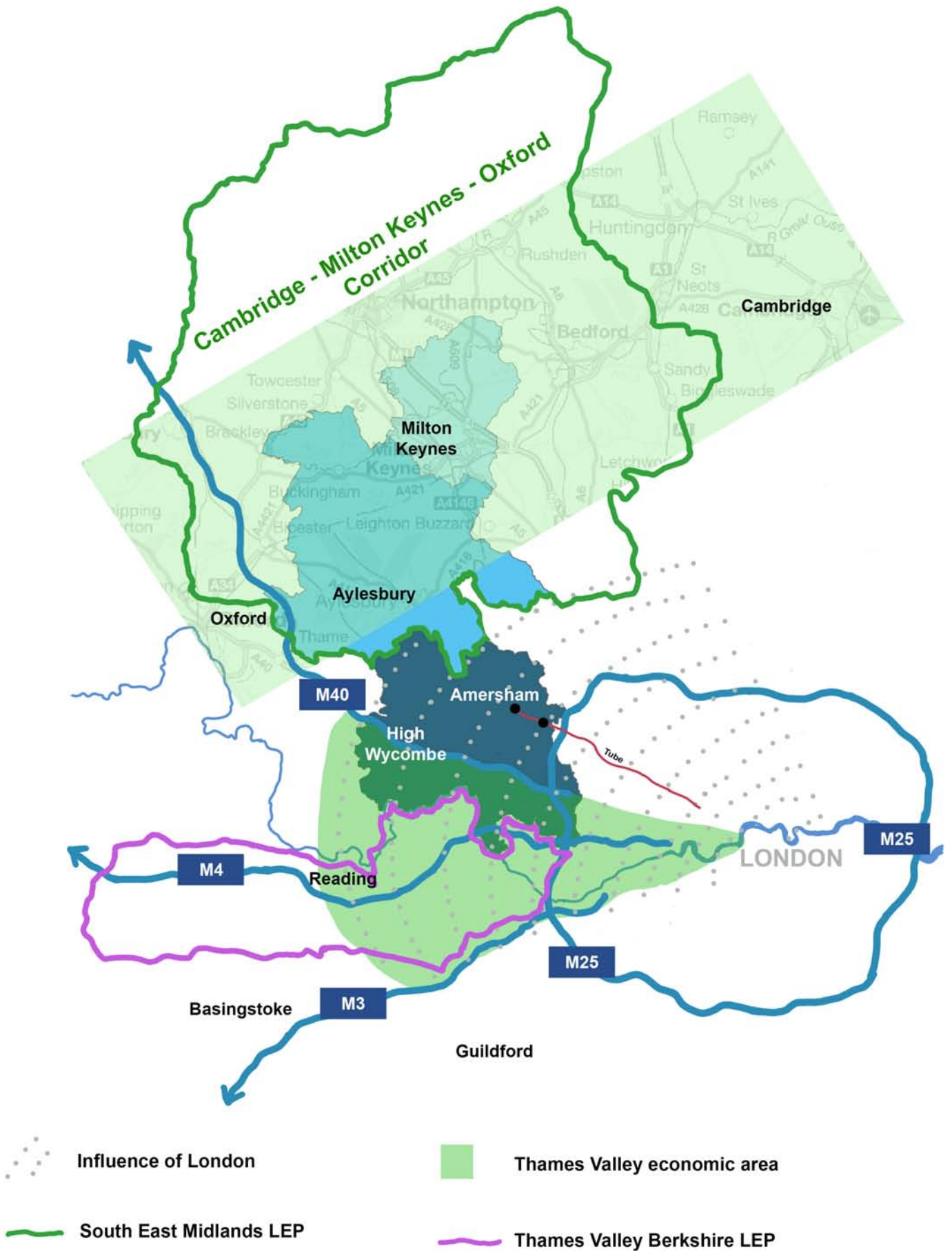
Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes are part of the Cambridge to Oxford Corridor identified by the NIC as a priority area for national growth. By contrast, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe are part of the Thames Valley and West of London economy. National infrastructure investments such as Crossrail and the expansion of Heathrow in the south, and East West Rail between Cambridge and Oxford - along with the potential expressway, will further intensify this functional difference.

Buckinghamshire has been punching below its weight in terms of economic growth. In particular the key urban centres of Aylesbury and Wycombe have been significantly underperforming in terms of productivity and growth indices. Compared to the Thames Valley NUTS2 sub-region, growth across Buckinghamshire GVA was £1.4 billion lower from 1997 to 2014 missing out on 15,000 new jobs. Had it performed to the level of Milton Keynes it would have delivered additional GVA of £4.6 billion, 35,000 jobs and 5,000 businesses. Milton Keynes, separated from the County to become a unitary in 1997, is now consistently one of the most successful, fastest growing and sustainable cities.

The confusion of the LEP geographies would be resolved by two new unitaries, allowing the LEPs to support and drive growth with a clear focus and direction. At present, the administrative geography of the LEP boundaries hinders this clarity of thought and action. Bucks Thames Valley LEP (BTVLEP) was the last LEP to be formed in 2012. Aylesbury Vale had two years previously joined the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP)- itself a natural evolution from the Milton Keynes South Midlands (MKSM) growth area. The Thames Valley Berkshire LEP would better reflect the Thames Valley economic area if it were to include the Chiltern Thames Valley - and offer real prospects for strong partnership working with Enterprise M3 LEP. This arrangement may also provide more sustainable and agile building blocks for future devolution deals based around real issues such as the NIC Cambridge to Oxford Corridor and Thames Valley / Heathrow hub.



# ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY MAP



## EVEN MORE LOCAL

Two new unitary Councils means arrangements are even more local. Our proposal creates a new opportunity for more local involvement in decision making and true local accountability.

There is a need for local ward councillors to reclaim their community leadership role as the accepted and mandated voice of citizens. Councils supported by local councillors work hard to stimulate good local economic growth and engage with local communities encouraging them to reduce the demand on services and to step into the breach left by the withdrawal of publicly provided services. Councils, and councillors, will need new approaches to do this successfully, such as utilising less formal social networks, participatory democracy, better engagement with young people and a broader influencing role, rather than the more formal traditional structures associated with the public sector.

There are crucial roles for councillors not only in being civic entrepreneurs but also in providing visible civic leadership to enable and support the work of others. Councillors work hard to foster

strong relationships and within local communities through partnerships, with Parish Councils, Town Councils and Community Associations; through their service on the boards of local voluntary organisations; their membership of local Business Improvement District Boards and through their wider engagement within their communities to identify individuals from all walks of life, and organisations from all sectors who want to play a role and to inspire others to do the same and more.

They need recognition and support, to help them enhance their role as key influencers and door-openers to other community leaders who can make things happen. Businesses create wealth, not the state, but local government can create the conditions for enterprise to thrive by engaging the private sector and universities to develop their distinctive economic assets. The challenge is to create a new relationship between the citizen and the state, rebuild trust and ensure good local integration between health, social care and other services.



## MORE EFFECTIVE

There is no disagreement that the delivery of services will be aided by the demise of the two tier system. A new Council will have the opportunity to write a new chapter. Officials at the Department for Education considered that Ofsted's 'inadequate' judgement in 2014 was at the more serious end of the spectrum of failure. (Red Quadrant Report February 2015). More than two years on, Ofsted are saying that the progress of improvement is too slow, and the service continues to fail to meet its own performance targets. Improvements should not be assumed from Local Government Reorganisation alone.

Even an investment into the services, as has been shown already, will not of itself bring about the necessary improvement. A reappraisal of why the recent investment in Children's Services by the County Council has failed to achieve the level of improvement expected by Ofsted will be required and a model developed which will enable the new Councils to achieve their performance targets. At the heart of this reappraisal will be a drive to focus professional resources on active engagement with children, families and communities and an enhanced approach to partnership working in localities building trust and a shared focus on outcomes amongst agencies.

Approaches must respond to the particular challenges faced in Buckinghamshire and the different communities within the County area. There are distinct differences between the make up of the communities in the two main towns of High Wycombe and Aylesbury which are apparent from the data about the two places. There are also different challenges faced in the different housing areas. For example across Buckinghamshire only 48% of children are placed within the Council's area compared to 75% in Milton Keynes. There is no shortage of housing in the north of the county whilst the south is experiencing price rises and housing shortages.

Design and delivery of local services will be sensitive to the particular needs of different communities. Improving effectiveness in Children's Services is all about providing just enough of the right service at the right time and targeting response where it is needed. A think family approach, building family and community resilience and developing our work force so that we continue to improve outcomes for families is the way forward. This must take place in a co-ordinated, integrated and, wherever possible, co-located way with partners. There must be highly effective leadership and management with a vision of continuous improvement and strong political and community support.



## MORE EFFICIENT

The financial analysis concludes that a three unitary solution could deliver savings of nearly £58 million over five years to residents of Buckinghamshire. However, two new unitary Councils with a focus on economic growth emulating Milton Keynes, have the potential to enable both Councils to significantly improve growth and productivity. Additional GVA and house building have a direct financial benefit both in national revenue and for the Councils concerned. The change to unitary status will not bring about this growth unless there is a redirection of strategic focus - allowing the different areas of Buckinghamshire to operate within their own functioning economic geographies.

The vision of our proposal is about independence and delivering the right amount of help when needed. Low level intervention, coupled with effective early intervention has been successful in enabling people to live in their own homes for longer, for providing independence for people with long term conditions and empowering communities and the voluntary sector to play a role in providing early help and support to people in their own homes. This approach if rigorously pursued can reduce the number of people who require care outside their own homes. The budget analysis for Adult Social Care shows that £74.7 million (58%) was spent supporting service users no longer able to live in their own homes, a significant proportion of the overall spend and one which is subject to upward cost pressures now and in the future. Because of the high and rising cost of care, a small increase in the number of those able to remain in their homes with support would have an impact on budget spend.

Between April 2015 and August 2015, the cost of nursing placements for older people in Buckinghamshire increased by over 11% and for the provision of short term Respite Care for Older People increased by 23%. These are people who are capable of living in the community but for whom respite is provided to relieve their community carers. Developing community support to relieve the strain on carers is one significant way that rising costs can be contained. Empowered communities and self sufficient individuals in control of their own lives need less and consume less public services.

We have successfully developed ways of earning additional revenue and reducing our own costs through innovation. Aylesbury Vale District Council's approach to digital delivery has been recognized as leading the way and there is real scope to extend the use of digital delivery into social care and health care. Aylesbury Vale have also pursued a policy of commercialism and targeted charges for added value services, where surpluses generated will be reinvested to support core activities.

Wycombe District Council has capitalised on its land values to provide a revenue stream through the effective development and management of commercial property. This approach provides an ongoing revenue stream which continues to support the delivery of other services.

Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils' have successfully partnered with each other including a joint Chief Executive. This approach can be replicated under new structures to support effective partnering. Beyond this, expanding into new markets, which support the objectives of the councils, thereby providing added value and profits for reinvestment will help to support and protect services. A new approach to building thriving economies and resilient communities alongside innovation will create genuinely sustainable local government.



## IMPLEMENTATION

Our proposed three unitary model is capable of implementation on the same delivery timescale as the two unitary proposal submitted by the County Council. The detailed work has been undertaken which would enable the first steps to be taken very quickly and shadow arrangements put in place to support the transition.

It remains important to recognise that the financial benefits realised from restructure will not be sufficient to avoid the need for ongoing transformation to continue. Political leadership and management must also continue to be focused on the urgent improvement work in Children's Services without being distracted by any decision towards transition to unitary status.

We have a track record of successfully bringing together two organisations into one with minimum disruption to delivery. We also have expertise in modernisation through innovation. We see this as an opportunity for real change and to design new councils fit for the future.





*[The area] "Splits into two natural geographical areas. More local, responds to local issues more effectively without the need for bureaucratic and time consuming "hubs". Less additional work and pressure is thrown on to Parish Councillors (who are volunteers) compared with the single unitary option. AVDC has a great record of innovating income streams for long term financial stability."*

Clive Rodgers, Vice-Chairman,  
Swanbourne Parish Council



*"The difference in scale between Aylesbury Vale and the rest of Bucks (e.g. Aylesbury Vale is one of the fastest growing areas in the country) requires specialist expertise to ensure that this is delivered in the most efficient and timely planned manner with a focus that would be lost as part of a larger authority."*

Nick Cummins, Executive Director,  
Bromford Housing Association



*[The districts proposal] Saves money while allowing disparate communities of North and South Bucks to be catered for most effectively*

Della Fitzgerald, Secretary, Marlow Museum



*"The district councils are in a good position to support businesses and they need greater powers, such as control of highways, to make things happen more quickly.*

*"The county council's proposals for one council – probably based in Aylesbury – with various hubs, committees, and town and parish councils doing different things in different areas is not a 'one stop shop'– it would be worse than the current situation."*

Peter Keen, Chairman of bed manufacturer  
Hypnos



*"Buckinghamshire is a very large and diverse county. North and South are vastly different and our needs and population are very different. We need closer connections and understanding.*

*Two unitary option - This would provide some economy of scale and retain the element of local representation and knowledge which we believe is extremely important"*

Sharon Henson, Clerk/RFO,  
West Wycombe Parish Council





For more information visit:

Aylesbury Vale District Council  
[www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/mlg](http://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/mlg)

Chiltern District Council  
[www.chiltern.gov.uk/mlgcd](http://www.chiltern.gov.uk/mlgcd)

South Bucks District Council  
[www.southbucks.gov.uk/mlgsb](http://www.southbucks.gov.uk/mlgsb)

Wycombe District Council  
[www.wycombe.gov.uk/mlg](http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/mlg)