



Get change right

... for democracy

Local government is changing.

You can help to decide how this happens.
Find out more about what's proposed and the implications for local democracy.

Why is local government changing?

At the moment, local government in our area is quite complex. There is a county council that provides some services, five district councils and two borough councils that provide other services, a small unitary council (York) that provides all services within its boundaries, plus parish and town councils and parish meetings.

The Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Simon Clarke MP, has told us that he wants local government in York and North Yorkshire to be reorganised and simplified. His vision is to see at least two unitary authorities (councils that provide all services currently provided by the county, borough and district councils) that would work together at a strategic level, as one combined authority under an elected mayor. There are also opportunities for town and parish councils to deliver more services, if they wish to do so.

District Councils, Borough Councils and the unitary council of City of York, as they stand



If we do this, it will open the door for a possible devolution deal for our area. That would mean more powers to decide things at local level, and potentially £2.28 billion of investment into strategic projects such as roads, housing and a greener economy. It would create opportunities for businesses in our area, leading to a stronger, more vibrant economy.

This is a big change that will affect the fortunes of 800,000 people – so the Leaders of the district and borough councils across North Yorkshire have come together to make sure that we get change right.

North Yorkshire County Council has proposed a new mega-sized unitary council to cover all of North Yorkshire (615,000 people across 3,000 square miles). It would come together with City of York Council (unchanged at 200,000 people across 100 square miles) in a combined authority under a mayor. The district and borough council Leaders **do not** support this model.

We're listening...

The Leaders of the district and borough councils in North Yorkshire have come together to oppose creation of a North Yorkshire mega-size council, and create a more practical alternative bid, based on more workable geographies, a grass-roots understanding of local communities, and respect for local democracy.

Over the coming weeks we'll be reaching out to elected members, including parish and town councillors and parish meetings, to listen and consult. We want to understand what you think, so we can build a local government model provides proper democratic representation for citizens across the geography.



Why a mega-size council bid is bad for democracy

The County Council claims:

We will create a unitary council for all of North Yorkshire. York will remain unchanged. These two will form the combined authority under a mayor.

We say:

Leaving aside the years that it will take to unify systems across as huge an area as North Yorkshire, a mega-size council based in Northallerton will be too remote from many towns and parishes, and too removed from local communities to understand their needs and get delivery right.

A combined authority made up of a mega-size council for North Yorkshire and a minnow-size council for York is unbalanced and unfair. Either North Yorkshire will overpower its tiny neighbour (to York's detriment) or the combined authority will be forced into creating an artificial equality, giving York a disproportionate say over North Yorkshire's massive geography. Either way, it is unworkable and will cause difficulties for the future mayor.

We will create a balanced model with broadly equal-sized councils. They will be better connected with communities, and will create a marriage of equals in the combined authority, setting it up for success rather than failure.

The County Council claims:

We will remove confusion and strengthen local people's "say".

We say:

The mega-size model is top-level and remote, so to compensate for this, the county council plans to create a plethora of new structures underneath. How these will be accountable, how they will work together, and what actual influence they will have, is far from clear. This doesn't remove confusion and complexity, it creates *more* of it. It is unnecessary bureaucracy caused by the fact that the mega-model is too large, too unwieldy, and not fit for purpose.

Let's keep it simple. We just need unitary councils of a workable size, so decision-making can be local, rapid and direct. We will build a model which empowers town and parish councils, and that the public can understand and engage with.

The County Council claims:

We will have 144 councillors, reducing down to 90 in time with reorganised boundaries.

We say:

The county council's model threatens local representation and democratic engagement. It *must not* go ahead. Under the initial stage of their proposal, a "local" councillor will be one voice in a group that is more than three times the size of the largest borough council now (and six times the size of the smallest district council). With 144 councillors, even getting heard in Northallerton will be difficult. Having real influence over the decisions that matter, will be almost impossible.

When the number of councillors is reduced to 90, councillors will on average represent more than 6,800 people, across a massive geography. This will make access to representation more difficult for citizens, reduce the level of democratic engagement, and place an unreasonable burden on councillors.

The principle of democracy and democratic representation must be protected. We will create a model where elected members can make their voice heard, with a fair and proportionate level of representation that works for citizens: enough councillors to be close to their constituents, but not so many that they lose their ability to influence.

The County Council claims:

We will represent the county at national level.

We say:

Why would a unitary council try to take on the role of the elected mayor? That isn't the way to achieve lobbying power, especially with a government that strongly supports the mayoral role. We will make sure the elected mayor is properly connected to elected members through strong, balanced unitary authorities that are the voice of their communities.

We will build a practical model of local government, that embodies respect for different roles, not rivalry and division. That way the combined authority can focus on driving investment and growth, and the mayor can get on with their job.

What you should do next

We believe that creating a mega-size council would be a mistake.
If, like us, you agree that...

- Local community knowledge is important
- Local connections between councils, elected members and citizens should be maintained and strengthened
- Local people should have ready access to proper democratic representation in a structure where elected members can have genuine influence over decision-making
- Parish and town councils have an important role to play, that should be reflected in any reorganisation model
- The local government structure should be simple and accountable and “make sense” to the citizens it serves

...then, now is the time to make your voice heard.

- Visit www.get-change-right.com to find out about how we are approaching local government reorganisation
- Sign up to one of our online engagement sessions, and help us shape our bid
- Give your comments via our online feedback form at www.get-change-right.com/consultations
- Write to your MP and let them know why you think a mega-council would be a mistake. You'll find your MP's address on our website
- Join your voice and influence with ours, to make sure that we protect local democracy and representation

www.get-change-right.com

This information has been compiled by the Leaders of North Yorkshire's district and borough councils:

Cllr Richard Foster of Craven District Council
Cllr Richard Cooper of Harrogate Borough Council
Cllr Mark Robson of Hambleton District Council
Cllr Angie Dale of Richmondshire District Council
Cllr Keane Duncan of Ryedale District Council
Cllr Steve Siddons of Scarborough Borough Council
Cllr Mark Crane of Selby District Council.

They have launched a campaign: “Working together to get change right”, to oppose a mega-sized council bid, and develop an alternative proposal based on workable geographies and a grass-roots understanding of local communities and economies.

