



Cabinet



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Report for:	Cabinet
Title of report:	Devolution - Local Government Reorganisation
Date:	18 th March 2025
Report on behalf of:	Leader of the Council, Councillor Adrian England
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Interim Plan – this will follow the report as soon as Hertfordshire authorities have approved the plan for formal reporting.
Background papers:	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government White Paper – 16 th December 2024
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	LGR – Local Government Reorganisation

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Corporate Priorities	Community engagement Service improvement and delivery
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	<p>Vibrant communities</p> <p>Sustainable future</p> <p>Clean, Safe and Green</p> <p>Homes to be proud of</p> <p>Proud and thriving Borough</p>
Wards affected	ALL
Purpose of the report:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To seek Cabinet approval for the Interim Plan to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government 2. To seek Cabinet agreement that the decision is urgent and not subject to call-in
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Cabinet agrees that the Interim Plan be submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and delegates authority to the Leader of the Council to make any further changes required post Cabinet and pre-submission following consultation with Group Leaders. 2. That Cabinet agree that the decision is urgent and not subject to call-in. 3. That Cabinet notes that the Mayor has agreed that the decision is reasonable in all the circumstances and has agreed that it shall be treated as an urgent decision.
Period for post policy/project review:	Not applicable as the full proposal must be submitted by 28 th November 2025 and the full proposal will supersede the interim plan.

1 Introduction/Background:

In December the Government published their Devolution White Paper. As part of this, they set out their ambitions for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). This includes their desire to move away from 2-tier models to a unitary model.

In January, the Minister for Local Government wrote to all 2-tier areas (including Hertfordshire) inviting them to consider options for re-organisation to fit that ambition (annex 1). Areas should respond with an Interim Plan which should set out progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance explained in the invitation letter. The Interim Plan must be submitted by the 21st March 2025. Thereafter, Government wishes to receive a full proposal by 28th November 2025.

A White Paper Working Group has been set up across Hertfordshire to help drive forward this work. It is made up of representatives from all Councils (Herts County Council and the 10 Boroughs and Districts) and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

In conjunction with this, leaders and Chief Executives have been involved in structured conversations to explore future options for the structure of Local Government and identify areas of consensus and opportunities for further development.

The immediate priority for these groups has been the identification of a suite of options to share with Government that can then be further developed and tested as we work towards the November deadline.

It is important to note that this March submission seeks only to share the potential options that Hertfordshire Councils wish to test further. It expressly does not identify a preferred option. Government has been clear that there is scope to finesse the initial headline options following the interim March submission ahead of the November deadline, which will confirm the preferred option

2 Key Issues:

Understandably, there are a variety of views across Hertfordshire on what the future Local Government structure could and should look like. However, by approaching this with a positive mindset and a desire to achieve consensus as to what is submitted for the March update to Government, four broad options have been identified for further exploration and inclusion:

- A single unitary for the whole of Hertfordshire;
- 2 unitaries, split according to the current Joint Strategic Planning (JSP) area boundaries;
- A 3 unitary model
- A 4 unitary model;

The draft submission (attached) clearly sets out these four broad options as the consensus agreement of all Hertfordshire Councils as those which should be further investigated. As requested by Government it also sets out some initial analysis for each of the identified options.

All Councils are now being asked to endorse the document ahead of its submission. This Cabinet report represents that endorsement. Furthermore, given the tight timescales and rapid development of this work, it also requests that authority is delegated to the Leader of the Council to approve any final (post Cabinet but pre submission) changes which may be required. Any post Cabinet changes would only be done following consultation with the other Group Leaders with the commitment that no one option will be noted in the submission as the preferred option for Dacorum Borough Council.

3 Options and alternatives considered

This report outlines the contents of the March 2025 submission to Government, which provides an update on the options being explored by Hertfordshire Councils to respond to the Government's White Paper on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. Options which clearly did not

meet the Government criteria or garner sufficient support within Hertfordshire have been excluded at this stage. The options in the Interim Plan will continue to be developed and assessed before the final proposal submission date in November 2025.

The Council could decide not to agree to submit an Interim Plan or full proposal. However, failing to respond to the invitation will mean that for the March submission Dacorum would exclude and isolate itself from the joint submission that would be submitted by other Herts Authorities. For the final submission in November, the government would mandate a local government structure for Hertfordshire having considered the views of those authorities who have responded. It is essential that the Council engages proactively to ensure that all relevant information and analysis is carried out to present a final option to the government which will best serve the borough of Dacorum.

4 Consultation

The submission has been developed across all Hertfordshire local authorities with Leaders and Chief Executives heavily involved.

We have provided a written and face to face briefing for staff. This was recorded so those staff who could not attend (eg at Cupid Green) could view it. This has included a Q&A session with the answers shared with all staff. A dedicated space on the intranet has been launched.

Written and verbal briefings have also been provided to all Councillors, who will also have access to Q&A and information on the intranet.

We have also reached out to key stakeholders and received some initial feedback. We look forward to developing these conversations as we enter the next phase of option development.

5 Financial and value for money implications:

The financial and value for money implications of each option will be assessed through the next stage where the full proposal will be developed and presented for approval. The costs incurred in date by the council has been negligible and within existing approved budgets, with the majority of the work being undertaken by officers in collaboration with other authorities.

6 Legal Implications

The full legal and governance implications of each proposal will be assessed through the next stage as options are appraised and developed to a full proposal. Further legal and governance considerations are addressed in the Monitoring Officer comments below.

7 Risk implications:

Any programme of change which will result in a significant change in landscape and a transfer of services to new organisations has inherent risks. These have been captured by our internal working group who are overseeing the Dacorum elements of this work.

They include, but are not limited to:

- Staffing risks specifically recruitment, retention, capacity;
- BAU – maintaining strong service delivery while the programme of change ramps up;
- Financial implications
- Governance and decision making
- Democratic representation

The Interim Plan will present four options which will be developed and assessed through the next stage. This is a balanced approach as it will ensure that all reasonable options are fully assessed before making a final recommendation.

8 Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

A Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is annexed. There are no negative impacts identified at this stage as this report proposes the Interim Plan only. A full EIA will be completed as part of the next stage and reviewed as options are developed.

Human Rights – There are no direct Human Rights implications at this stage and this will be assessed at the next stage as the options are assessed in greater detail.

9 Sustainability implications (including climate change, health and wellbeing, community safety)

All sustainability implications will be assessed through the assessment of options and development of the final proposal.

10 Council infrastructure (including Health and Safety, HR/OD, assets and other resources)

All considerations relating to Council infrastructure will be assessed through the assessment of options and development of the final proposal.

11 Statutory Comments

Monitoring Officer:

The invitation for proposals from the Secretary of State is made in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It is a function of the Council to respond to this proposal which is an Executive Function exercisable by its Cabinet. The Interim plan is the first step to respond to the invitation with a full proposal due by 28 November 2025.

This decision is an urgent decision and any delay caused by the call-in process would mean that the Council would miss the submission deadline of the 21st March and therefore would therefore seriously prejudice the Council's and the public's interest. The Mayor has been consulted on this proposal and has agreed that the decision is reasonable in the circumstances and that the decision should be treated as an urgent decision.

S151 Officer:

At present there is no request for funding to support the delivery of the full proposal by the 28th November, as the project plan is agreed by the partners and resource requirements will proceed through the usual DBC financial approval processes. Government have indicated that support to complete this process will be provided but as yet there are no details.

12 Conclusions:

The Interim Plan sets out the four main options which Cabinet is requested to endorse to move forward to the next stage where detailed analysis will be carried out and a full proposal developed. The full proposal will come back to Cabinet for approval in the autumn prior to final submission in November 2025.