



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • Gloucestershire • GL5 4UB
01453 766321
www.stroud.gov.uk

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

cc Alison McGovern MP
Minister of State (Minister for Local Government and Homelessness)

2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF
By email: Ministerial.Correspondence@communities.gov.uk

28 November 2025

Dear Secretary of State

Proposals from Gloucestershire Councils – Stroud District Council's views and support

Stroud District Council, at its meeting on 20 November 2025, considered the three full proposals that have been developed for Gloucestershire:

1. A single unitary council for the whole county, developed jointly by all seven principal councils
2. Two unitary councils (east / west), the east comprising Cheltenham Borough, Cotswold District and Tewkesbury Borough Council and the west comprising Gloucester City, Forest of Dean and Stroud Districts, developed jointly by all seven principal councils
3. Two unitary councils, based on a Greater Gloucester and a rest of Gloucestershire Unitary Council, developed by Gloucester City Council.

Stroud District Council supports the full proposal for one unitary council for the whole of Gloucestershire.

Of the 42 Councillors present, 27 voted to support the full proposal for one unitary council and 15 voted to support the full proposal for two unitary councils (one for east Gloucestershire and one for west Gloucestershire).

There were no votes for the two unitary 'Greater Gloucester' city and Gloucestershire Unitary Council full proposal.

Councillors agreed that doing nothing, and voting for none of the proposals, was not an option as they were focused on best serving their residents in their consideration of local government for the future.

The merits and concerns raised in respect of each option are set out below together with other key issues set out in the Council's report and raised in debate.



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • Gloucestershire • GL5 4UB
01453 766321
www.stroud.gov.uk

The value of District Councils

For the last 50 years or so, District Councils have delivered visible frontline services that matter to every resident and business in their areas.

We play a valuable role within integrated care systems by providing services that influence the wider determinants of health. We are committed to improving the quality of life in our communities through providing essential services such as waste collection, planning and housing, the prevention of homelessness, welfare support, environmental health, parks and green spaces and leisure centres.

We play a unique role in place shaping, striving to create attractive places to live and work, and promoting a share in the prosperity of the economic development that we drive for our communities. We foster pride in our places, provide cultural and educational opportunities, and are close to the communities that we serve.

This is working well in Gloucestershire. In Stroud, our annual satisfaction surveys from residents consistently return higher gradings than peers elsewhere, and 92% of our residents are happy with where they live. We have not asked for Local Government Reorganisation. We are concerned by the democratic deficit that would result from reorganisation, with a reduced number of councillors serving sizeable numbers of residents in all three proposals, when the number of residents to each councillor is already the highest in western Europe.

Local Government Reorganisation

However, we have responded positively to the statutory invitation to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Gloucestershire, working closely with our partner principal councils, to help unlock the longer-term prize of devolution, which would bring tangible benefits to the county as part of a Strategic Authority with devolved powers and funding.

We have done so because we believe that Local Government in Gloucestershire must continue to represent the concerns of our communities and that services continue to be responsive to local needs. We are committed to doing our best to ensure that Local Government remains genuinely local, with our communities genuinely empowered. We believe that our role in helping to shape the future of Local Government in Gloucestershire is important.

We acknowledge that the future of Local Government in Gloucestershire will be a Ministerial decision and confirm that SDC will play its part with partner principal councils to make a viable and deliverable full proposal work.

Assessment criteria

In its assessment of the full proposals against the Government's criteria for unitary local government, Stroud District Council has paid particular attention to the criterion that 'new unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment'. As far as is possible at this stage, the Council has considered whether the proposals demonstrate:

- Support for the development of inclusive economic prosperity which meets the needs of all, particularly the most vulnerable in society

Leading a community that is making Stroud district a better place to live, work and visit for everyone

Chief Executive: Kathy O'Leary



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • Gloucestershire • GL5 4UB

01453 766321

www.stroud.gov.uk

- An equitable and financially viable council structure which does not exacerbate wealth or service need imbalances
- Ability to maintain the delivery of key services at a local level to our residents and businesses with a focus on long term effectiveness rather than short term efficiency. Savings to be achieved by economies of scale and not service reductions
- Strengthening of participative democracy including adequate elected representation
- Alignment with other public service providers and structures which support our parish and town councils and the voluntary and community sector
- A structure which facilitates continued joint and ambitious working for our local environment, nature recovery and climate action
- A structure which builds local identity incorporating best practice from the current councils and ensuring valued local assets are retained for community use
- A structure which facilitates the delivery of the SDC Council plan priorities: environment, climate and nature; communities and wellbeing; local economy; housing and working for our communities.

Stroud District Council support for one unitary council

This full proposal, and the two unitary councils east /west proposal, were developed by all seven councils working together.

The Options Analysis for the two proposals, which assesses them against the Government's key criteria, shows that for some of them, the one unitary council proposal is more closely aligned. In particular:

- The one unitary proposal represents greater efficiencies and savings, largely based on economies of scale and avoidance of duplication.
- It is based on a functioning economic geography, given the close proximity of the two major urban centres of Gloucester and Cheltenham and their collective hinterland.
- Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Education and Transportation are already delivered on a county footprint, and the existing county boundary is coterminous with the boundaries of other public services such as Police and Health.

Other points made in support:

- The majority of Gloucestershire's stakeholders had stated a preference for one unitary council for Gloucestershire.
- The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) as SDC's preferred Strategic Authority option, might be more likely to welcome one Gloucestershire council than two smaller unitary councils as this would have one vote and not two.
- Some areas such as Cooper's Edge, which is currently split between three district councils, would be better served by the creation of one unitary council.



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • Gloucestershire • GL5 4UB
01453 766321
www.stroud.gov.uk

Views on the two unitary councils east / west proposal

There are strong similarities in the drafting of this proposal and the one unitary proposal above, as both were worked on by all seven principal councils working together. They share common principles and approaches, including the overarching vision and ambition, locality working, future operating model(s), workforce assumptions and approach to using data and digital technology.

Although this proposal did not get the Council's overall support, some positive aspects were noted:

- The recent DCN study and report had highlighted that larger councils are not necessarily better, with smaller councils outperforming larger ones in many service areas and demonstrating higher collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates.
- The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) as SDC's preferred Strategic Authority option, might be more likely to welcome two smaller unitary councils than one large one.
- This proposal could facilitate empathetic representation closer to communities, working alongside existing neighbouring districts with a similar focus on working to support the most disadvantaged residents
- Concerns with the performance of Gloucestershire County Council in respect of Adult Social Care and other services could be addressed through the creation of two new unitary councils
- Creation of two unitary councils would mean fewer staff redundancies and greater retention of valuable skilled people.

And negative aspects were drawn out in debate:

- The deep financial divide between the west Gloucestershire council (of which Stroud District would be part) and the east Gloucestershire council would create two uneven unitary councils. The east would be healthier and wealthier than the west and would face a significant deficit and lack of a balanced budget from day one.
- This could mean that service delivery would be at risk, as would discretionary services valued by residents, in particular our most vulnerable residents.

Views on the two unitary 'Greater Gloucester' and Gloucestershire Unitary Councils proposal

Councillors were concerned about the lack of collaborative working in both developing and appraising this full proposal, which has been prepared by Gloucester City Council. In particular, different financial modelling has been used, and the options analysis has been completely reworked with different scoring to the collaborative scoring undertaken by the seven principal councils in respect of the first two models.



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • Gloucestershire • GL5 4UB

01453 766321

www.stroud.gov.uk

Some positive aspects were noted, such as the focus on the heritage and identity of the historic cathedral city of Gloucester, and a hyper-local, prevention first approach to Adult and Children's Social Services and SEND, however:

- The proposal illustrated little regard for the rest of the county in terms of culture, heritage and identity
- Creation of an independent Fire & Rescue Service would be costly
- Boundary changes would be needed to make sense of the model
- The proposal did not represent functioning economic areas
- The greater number of councillors proposed would probably not be sustained in the event of a boundary review
- There did not appear to be any financial modelling or consideration of the impact on the Stroud Housing Revenue Account and the hundreds of Stroud District Council tenants living in the identified Stroud wards that would make up 'Greater Gloucester'.

Public engagement and consultation

A number of councillors expressed concern that councils were having to make decisions on which full proposals to support before there had been time to carry out any proper public engagement or consultation and strongly felt that the public should have a greater say in their local future.

- We request that local communities are consulted on all proposed local government changes and that the wishes of the local communities and local authorities in the area are respected.

Transition arrangements

Given that District Councils are close to our communities, our role in transition arrangements for Gloucestershire is important.

- We request that all predecessor councils should have equal representation on an implementation executive set up to oversee transition.
- In the event that the Ministerial decision is for one unitary council, we request that this is constituted as a new council and that the existing county council, and six districts are all abolished and a new council is set up.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Chloe Turner
Leader of Stroud District Council