



Future Nottinghamshire

Initial views on possible local government reorganisation

What is the purpose of this document?

This document provides background and context to Nottinghamshire County Council's public engagement about the structure of local government in the County. It explains the County Council's current thinking and invites your initial views during October if you live or work anywhere in Nottinghamshire.

This is not a formal consultation as the Council is not currently making any formal proposals for re-structuring local government in the County.

Your opinions about the future of local government in Nottinghamshire will inform the 'case for change' that will be considered at a County Council meeting in December. If the County Council then decides to make firm proposals for change there will be a formal public consultation about them, with a further opportunity for you to comment.

Details of current Nottinghamshire councils

Nottinghamshire County Council
817,851 residents
66 County Councillors

Bassetlaw District Council
116,304 residents
48 District Councillors

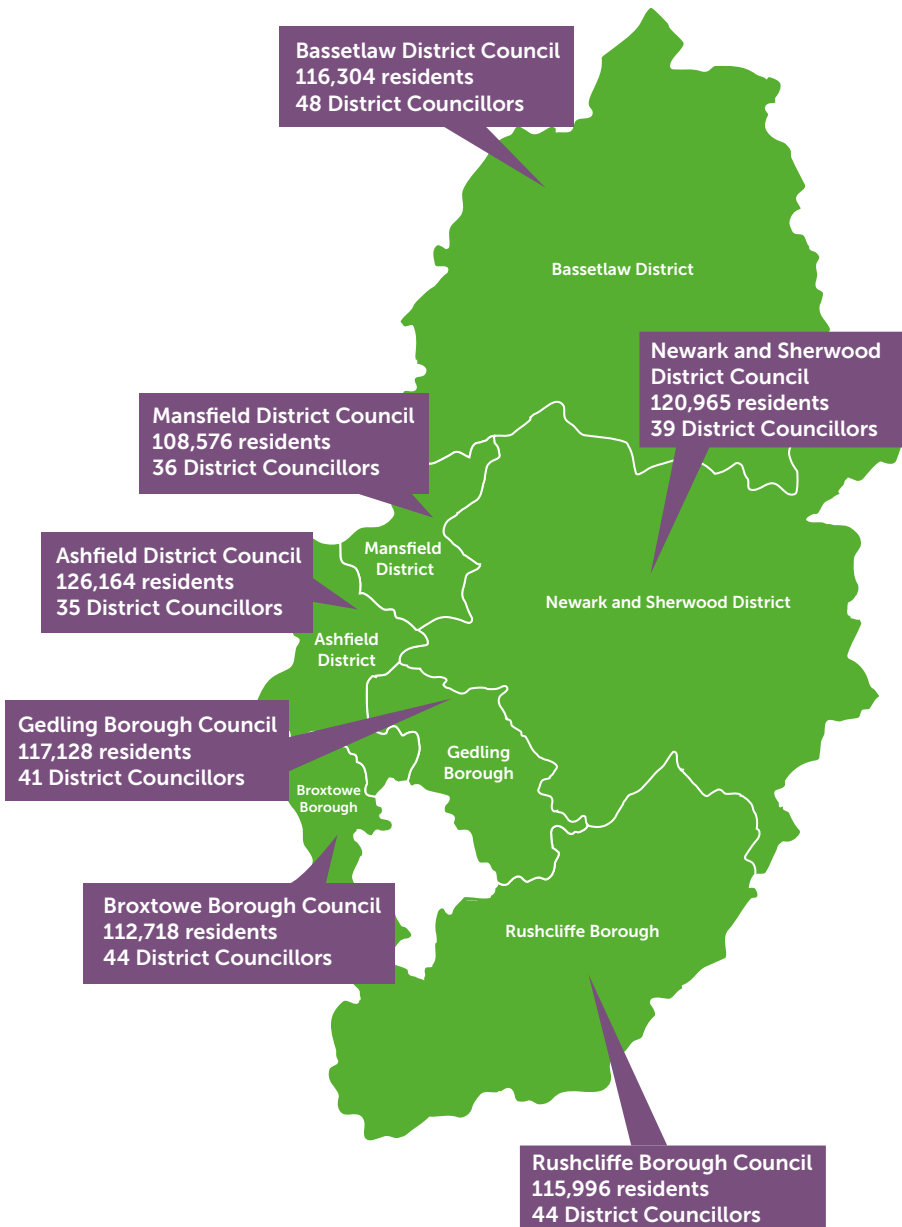
Mansfield District Council
108,576 residents
36 District Councillors

Ashfield District Council
126,164 residents
35 District Councillors

Gedling Borough Council
117,128 residents
41 District Councillors

Broxtowe Borough Council
112,718 residents
44 District Councillors

Rushcliffe Borough Council
115,996 residents
44 District Councillors



Nottinghamshire County Council spends 91% of the local government funding available for the area on delivering county-wide services including: education, special educational needs and disability support, social care for children and adults, public health, road maintenance and transport services, cultural and leisure services including libraries, waste recycling and disposal, trading standards, planning issues and registration services.

The 7 District & Borough Councils spend 9% of local government funding delivering services including: council tax collection, council housing, waste collection, environmental health, local planning applications, parks and some leisure services.

There are also 161 Town and Parish Councils across Nottinghamshire in those areas that have a Town or Parish Council, each with their own group of councillors. They deliver some very local services, such as maintenance of parks, churchyards and allotments.

The eight councils in Nottinghamshire are currently organised in a two-tier structure, this is where services are divided between the County Council and the seven Borough or District Councils.

In total, there are 353 councillor positions for both County and District/Borough Councils running local government across Nottinghamshire each receiving a separate Councillors allowance for the work they do.

Each of the eight councils has its own political leader, Chief Executive and senior management team and its own headquarters building

What are we doing?

The County Council's current thinking is that there is a strong argument that it is no longer cost effective to operate as a two-tier structure. Within the two-tier structure, responsibility for local services is split between Nottinghamshire County Council and seven District and Borough Councils, and broadly the same services are delivered by all seven different District and Borough Councils. It is anticipated that having only one single-tier of local government would reduce overhead costs (for example fewer senior management posts and council headquarters) and realise economies of scale.

Therefore the County Council is considering a range of options for Nottinghamshire, to replace the eight councils in the current two-tier system with a unitary council system where just one level of local government is responsible for all local services in an area.

The case for change would include the arrangements for local government within the administrative boundaries covered by Nottinghamshire County Council and the County's seven District and Borough Councils. **This will not cover the administrative boundaries of Nottingham City Council where a single-tier system is already in place.**

In examining whether changes are needed, we will take account of **Government criteria and advice** which states that any proposal for changing local government should:

- Improve local government and service delivery
 - Give greater value for money
 - Achieve significant cost savings
 - Provide stronger strategic and local leadership
 - Deliver a more sustainable structure
 - Provide better outcomes for local people
- Be based on a credible geography (with a population substantially in excess of 300,000 but no known defined upper limit)
- Command a good deal of local support

Government legislation also states that proposals for a single tier of local government should consist of whole council areas, i.e. proposals cannot break up parts of the existing District/Borough areas.

The timescales for this work are:

September to November 2018	Phase 1 engagement and case for change development
December 2018	Report to County Council on the provisional case for change and findings from engagement phase
January to March 2019	Phase 2 formal public consultation if case for change agreed by Council
May 2019	Report to County Council on final case for change and outcome of formal public consultation

Any proposal about the future of local government in Nottinghamshire would be submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for consideration and would be subject to Government approval.

Why are we doing it?

There are three main elements which underpin this work.

Financial pressures facing the County Council

The County Council faces a financial gap of at least £54 million over the course of the next three financial years (from 2019/20). This gap represents 11% of the Council's net available budget. Although the Council has made savings of more than £272 million in recent years, a combination of reducing Government funding and increasing demand for services means that there are significant financial challenges ahead.

The funding local authorities receive from central Government, through the Revenue Support Grant, is being gradually reduced and will soon disappear altogether. Nottinghamshire County Council has seen this grant fall from £143 million in 2013/14 to £22.6 million now, and after 2020 it is expected the County Council will receive nothing.

Given the savings and efficiencies already made over recent years, further savings will be hard to identify and deliver, and there is a real risk of further reductions to highly valued and vital services, many of which have already been reduced year on year since 2010. In fact, some services the County Council used to deliver such as the Play Service have ceased completely due to financial pressures.

Future demand

Increased demand for all services, especially for adult social care and children's services, means that we must think about how to meet the future needs of our residents. In doing so, we must ensure that the future structure of local government allows for change and innovation across the whole public sector.

Around 60% of Nottinghamshire County Council's £481 million net budget is already spent on social care services to vulnerable children and adults. In adult's services these costs are increasing because people are living longer than ever before, often with long-term health conditions which require ongoing support and treatment. We will see the aging population trend continue over the next 15 years with the number of 65-84 year olds increasing by almost 28% and 85+ year olds by almost 70%. In children's services we are experiencing more children coming into care and the number of safeguarding referrals we have received since 2014 has increased by 136%.

In addition to these demand pressures, people's expectations are changing about how they want their council to work and how they can engage with their local council, especially as technology is advancing.

The complexity of local government in the County

Apart from Nottingham City Council, there are eight councils in Nottinghamshire – the County Council and a total of seven District and Borough Councils. The councils provide different, sometimes overlapping services and broadly the same services are delivered by all seven different District and Borough Councils. In many areas of England, there is one single-tier Council covering the entire area. The two-tiers of local government in Nottinghamshire (County and Borough/District) can be a barrier to strategic planning, efficient and effective delivery of services, and lobbying to Government.

Residents and local businesses often find the current two-tier system confusing and are not clear about which council does what, which councillor has responsibility for County or District/Borough services, and who to contact with their questions.

Faced with these challenges we need to think about how we can best safeguard the future of our services which many local people rely on.

In response, we are exploring options for local government in Nottinghamshire to ensure that it will:

- deliver **more cost effective services**, offering better value for money with lower running costs (for instance, by pooling expertise and removing duplication)
- make access easier for the public, **making it simpler for people to get in touch**
- make **councillors responsible for decisions** on all council services delivered in their community
- simplify local government for the public, **ensuring people always know who to turn to in their local area** for help and advice
- **help voters** to be clear on their councillors' local responsibilities
- **improve services to meet the specific needs of local communities**, ensuring good services across the County regardless of where you live
- **have a stronger united voice** to speak up for and **champion Nottinghamshire and to lobby for major new investment** from Government and business
- **improve planning** for education, housing and infrastructure to achieve **economic growth**

What change are we considering?

We are considering a range of options that could develop a better system of local government for Nottinghamshire and replace the eight councils in the two-tier system with one or more unitary councils providing all government services.

While considering the Government criteria, the council is considering various options, including:

- One completely new unitary council for the whole of Nottinghamshire

OR

- Two completely new unitary councils within Nottinghamshire. There could be a number of possible combinations of existing District/Borough Council areas to achieve this

OR

- Any other feasible option that emerges during the engagement process

OR

- Retaining the current two-tier structure of eight councils

None of the options would change the existing status of Nottingham City Council.

Due to the population of Nottinghamshire's Districts and Boroughs, it would not be possible to obtain Government approval for three unitary councils as it would not meet the minimum population size set in the Government's criteria.

Sharing your views and getting involved

Share your views and thoughts by filling-in the open questionnaire on-line at www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/futurenotts between Wednesday 3rd October – Wednesday 31st October 2018.

This 'listening and engagement' stage is being conducted by an independent and specialist social research company, Opinion Research Services (ORS).

Your views will help to inform our thinking about local government in Nottinghamshire and will be carefully considered before any formal proposals are made and consulted about.

We will also be talking to local stakeholders, from businesses and voluntary organisations to Parish and Town Councils, to gain their initial views and thoughts.

The outcomes from this engagement phase will be presented to a meeting of the County Council in December 2018. Councillors will then decide whether to make proposals for change. Any such proposals would be subject to formal consultation between January and March 2019 so that everyone in Nottinghamshire can have their say.

Any proposal about the future of local government in Nottinghamshire would be submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for consideration and would be subject to Government approval.

FAQs

1. Will this affect Nottingham City Council?

No, our current thinking does not affect the City Council's administrative area as this has been a separate local government area operating as a unitary authority since 1998. The City Council will have the opportunity to share its views as part of any consultation if proposals are made, and could make their own proposal in the fullness of time if they so wish.

2. Is this a Nottinghamshire County Council takeover?

Absolutely not. We are exploring options which include replacing all eight two-tier councils and designing a new system of local government in Nottinghamshire that may result in the creation of a completely new council or councils, based around whatever boundaries are eventually agreed.

3. Why aren't we holding a referendum?

The purpose of engagement and consultation is not to seek a simple Yes / No response, but to consider a range of issues and options for change. It is important that we understand the public's views on all these matters before proposals are made and any decisions taken on whether or not to make a recommendation to Government.

4. Are the District and Borough Councils involved?

The seven District and Borough councils in Nottinghamshire have all been contacted. They are encouraged to take part in this engagement process and their views have been sought.

5. What do we mean by a two-tier structure?

A two-tier structure is where some local authority services are provided by the County Council and other services by the Borough or District Councils within the same area. Nottinghamshire currently operates on a two-tier structure.

6. What is a single-tier structure? What is a unitary authority?

A single-tier structure is where there is just one level of local government responsible for all local services in the area. A single-tier structure is known as a unitary authority. All local authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland operate as unitary councils, as do some 55 authorities in England, such as Cornwall, Northumberland and Wiltshire County Councils. Nottingham City Council is a unitary council.

7. Who is writing the case for change? Why are you using consultants?

The case for change will be written by County Council officers and will take into consideration the views of residents and other key stakeholders, such as businesses and health partners.

We have commissioned an independent social research company (ORS) to undertake all the engagement activities to provide an independent analysis of the findings. We will also commission an independent company to confirm that any financial information in the case for change is accurate.

8. How will my views be listened to?

As an independent social research company, ORS will be responsible for analysing and presenting the feedback from the engagement exercise to the County Council – to inform the councillors' consideration of the case for change.

ORS has extensive experience of important consultations across the public sector, including with NHS, Police and Fire and Rescue Services, as well as major local government reorganisation consultations across Dorset, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire. They are a Market Research Society Company Partner and Partner in Excellence of the Consultation Institute.

9. How much will this cost and how much will it save?

The detailed costs and savings of the options being considered will be presented in the case for change at the County Council meeting in December. Independent accountants will validate the financial models that are included in the case for change.

10. Will the case for change look at more than one option?

Yes. The case for change will look at options available within the existing Nottinghamshire boundaries that meet the Government criteria.

11. Does this affect the District & Borough Council elections in May 2019?

No. Any final decision on whether to submit the case for change to Government will be considered by the County Council after the District and Borough elections. All councils in Nottinghamshire will continue to provide their existing services to residents until such time as any proposed change may be agreed by central Government and a timetable for transition has been set out.

12. What will this mean for Council Tax?

We do not know at this stage as any changes to council tax would be decided by any new council if one was to be formed. There are a range of implications/options in respect of council tax and these will be examined in the case for change.

13. What will you do with my response?

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 by them 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.