

The Six Questions in the government consultation

Reasons the Bay and North Cumbria are the right option



Is the proposal likely to improve local government and service delivery?

We believe only our proposal for the Bay and North Cumbria has set out how we would improve local government and services. The Bay is committed to working better. We will empower communities and partners to co-design and enable delivery of improved services. Our priorities will be to strengthen community power, build community wealth, address inequalities, and tackle the climate emergency. We will use reorganisation as a catalyst for change that delivers greater value for money and provides stronger strategic and local leadership.

If services will be delivered on a different geographic footprint to currently, or through some form of joint arrangements, is this likely to improve those services?

All other proposals are based on the current county boundaries and/or some form of combined authority. We think this would do nothing to address councils being pulled in different strategic directions. North Cumbria is linked into the 'Borderlands' and the North East, while South Cumbria has deep ties to North Lancashire and the North West.

When trying to balance the different needs of such a geographically and economically diverse area, services, residents and businesses suffer. Both Childrens Services and Adult Social Care require improvement. With focus on the Bay and North Cumbria, we could do much more on economic prosperity as well as being more ambitious on waste management, planning, and transport.

In the Bay we want to prioritise actions to tackle the climate emergency and build a more sustainable economy for the future, tackle inequalities and improve wellbeing and make community empowerment and building community wealth strategic priorities.

Is the proposal likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?

Our proposal strengthens alignment with local health services which in Cumbria divide along the lines we propose. In 2010/11 social care accounted for 41p of every pound of council tax. By 2019/20 this was expected to be 57p in every pound and to keep increasing (excluding police, fire and education costs).

Integration with the health service is by far the most important alignment in helping councils manage expenditure and improve outcomes.

The Bay Council would straddle Cumbria and Lancashire Constabulary. Our preference would be for no change to these boundaries to continue working effectively with both forces. There is a similar issue on fire and rescue services, although there would need to be changes to Cumbria Fire & Rescue which is currently part of the County Council. We believe local government issues should be the driver for Local Government Reform and that Government should engage directly with Police and Fire as experts in their field if they propose change to these services.

Do you support the proposal from the councils?

We think it is for the authorities in North Cumbria to explain their alternative propositions neither of which are credible geographies for Barrow and South Lakeland. We do not support the One Cumbria proposal. It embeds rather than resolves current challenges.

Barrow and South Lakeland want to deepen long-standing community and council relationships with Lancaster. We have a plan for improving local services, would create a viable and sustainable council and reflect a credible geography. When offered the choice 85% of people back the Bay.

Do the unitary councils proposed by the councils represent a credible geography?

The Bay and North Cumbria are the only credible geographies. The Bay works economically and socially and for service delivery, and it is what people here have told us they would prefer. North Cumbria would be able to focus on its priorities, strengths and opportunities. One Cumbria would compound the challenges that Cumbria currently faces.

Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation?

Cumbria was created during the last comprehensive reform of local government in 1974. It was chosen over alternative proposals for a Bay Council. The Bay was also included in early plans for regional assemblies in 2004. The Bay makes sense but local people have never been offered the option. Now is the time.

Advantages of the Bay and North Cumbria



We are proposing two new unitaries – one for The Bay covering the area of Barrow, Lancaster, and South Lakeland and, another for North Cumbria covering the area of Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland, and Eden.

Test 1: The Bay and North Cumbria will improve local government services

The councils will reflect the natural geography. The majestic Lakes are a great asset but physically separate north and south Cumbria. County services recognise this and operate along the lines of different district areas. Creating the Bay and North Cumbria unitaries would respect our geography and enable more tailored solutions.

Improved service delivery will come from each area being able to design new councils to address distinct community priorities and opportunities without compromise. The Bay would reinforce existing joint working between Barrow, Lancaster, and South Lakeland. North Cumbria would strengthen alignment around the Borderlands and the Energy Coast. The Bay and North Cumbria would be free to accelerate integration with their respective local NHS partners.

Our reform agenda will enable us to take forward required improvements in areas like Children's services, Adult Social Care and transport. We would also be able to empower communities and focus on their priorities, including tackling inequalities and the climate emergency.

All local councils have had to make significant financial savings and are still experiencing financial pressures. Each proposal offers potential efficiencies but adopts different approaches to achieving them. The Bay proposal enhances value through reinvesting in service reform, unlike alternatives dependent on unsustainable staff and spending cuts.

Test 2: The Bay and North Cumbria will be stronger strategic and local leaders

The Bay would have a population of 319,000 and North Cumbria 327,000 placing them both in the top twenty largest unitaries in the country. Both would reflect their functional economic areas, with 96% of people who live in the Bay also working here. Together their population would be 20% more than that of Cumbria only solutions.

Our plans would enhance local democracy and representation. We will support new parishes where people want them. We will support the Boundary Commission to reflect boundaries in their review of Parliamentary seats. We will bring unitary councillors closer to the people they serve improving accountability. We will work with leaders from all sectors across the locality to put communities first.

We will also work together, and with others, on securing a better devolution deal than would be possible by Cumbria acting alone. Investment funds associated with devolution deals to single county areas have been around one third of the level of those to Combined Authorities.

Test 3: Only the Bay has demonstrated a good deal of specific local support

The Bay has demonstrably strong local support. Public opinion polling of 1000 adults in The Bay found 60% believe the area would be best served by our proposal. A joint survey of people received over 3000 responses with 85% of people favouring The Bay over a single county unitary (One Cumbria). Polling for North Cumbria districts showed a preference for any two unitary model, while the county have only recorded support for unitary local government, rather than specific proposal for a single or two unitary Councils.

Each of our councils debated and overwhelmingly approved our submission with councillors from across the political spectrum backing the Bay. 88% of local councillors voted for the Bay.

Questions about One Cumbria

Cumbria County Council want One Cumbria to abolish local districts and to continue their model. We believe a single authority in Carlisle based on the County Council weakens local government, lacks local support, represents a challenging geography and will not best enable the future devolution of powers and resources from Government



Will One Cumbria really improve local government, services and save costs?

- ***If the County Council has struggled to balance different community needs, why would a unitary on the same geography be any better?*** The county council was created in 1974 against alternative recommendations for the Bay and North Cumbria. The Bay was also an option in regional assembly proposals in 2004. This time the Bay should have its own council.
- ***Would a physically remote council improve services?*** One Cumbria would be one of the largest unitaries in England by both population and area. It would have the same population as Wiltshire but be twice the size. Proposals for Local Area Committees recognise Carlisle is simply too isolated to improve local government services.
- ***Why can only One Cumbria improve services?*** One Cumbria consistently claims that only one council can improve services but fails to explain why. Simplification benefits from being a unitary apply to all proposals. Forcing a single service delivery model across such a large area would be a backward step. Many county services today require improvement. We need a different model, where councils work with partners to support communities and businesses. Most important of all these connections is with the local NHS, which operates as two systems better aligned to the Bay and North Cumbria.
- ***Will claimed savings really be delivered?*** One Cumbria depends on significant reductions in staffing and supplier spend that risk future financial viability. All councils have had to make significant financial savings and will have further financial pressures following the pandemic. How can we be confident this ambitious scale of saving is possible without reducing service standards? Will there be the capacity to deliver improvements?

Is One Cumbria really going to provide stronger strategic and local leadership?

- ***Will people be better represented?*** One Cumbria would have a population of around 500,000 people making it one of the top five largest unitaries in the country. As it is likely to have less than one hundred councillors each will have an unsustainable caseload.
- ***Will Parishes really have increased voice?*** Given the desire to have standard approaches, One Cumbria would find it hard to develop different relationships with over 200 Parish Councils and individual Parishes will find it hard for their voice to be heard.
- ***Will a devolution deal be possible?*** A single unitary will not be well placed to secure a devolution deal. The strategic voice for Cumbria will be diminished by one council compared to the strength of Combined Authorities. Investment funds for devolution deals to single county areas have been around one third of those to Combined Authorities.
- ***Will a single authority really be viable?*** One Cumbria will need to behave as though it was two unitaries in its relationships with the health system. This will also be necessary in relation to growth because the economic areas of the North and the Bay pull in different directions – to South Scotland and North East England and to North Lancashire and North West England.

Can One Cumbria really claim it has demonstrated a good deal of local support?

- ***Is there cross-county council support for One Cumbria?*** Full Council did not debate and approve the One Cumbria proposal in the context of the current invitation.
- ***Is there local support for One Cumbria?*** All statements relate to the principle of unitary local government not the specific proposal. Our polling shows people don't want One Cumbria to be imposed on them top down by the county – or by Government.

Questions about two Cumbria unitaries proposals



Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland and Eden have submitted two unitary proposals between them:

- Carlisle and Eden's proposal is for a North and South Cumbria (Carlisle Eden and Allerdale, Plus Copeland, Barrow and South Lakeland)
- Allerdale and Copeland's proposal is for an East and West Cumbria (Barrow, South Lakeland and Eden Plus Copeland, Allerdale and Carlisle)

Is it possible to agree a single proposal for two unitaries in Cumbria?

- Two unitaries are possible but only if Lancaster is included to achieve the government size threshold of 300,000 to 600,000.
- The separate proposals for two unitaries by these councils are essentially identical and neither option meet the size threshold. Neither option works for Barrow and South Lakeland who have a clear and longstanding alignment with the Bay.
- By including Lancaster in the Bay proposal we would enable the four North Cumbria councils to form a strong and viable authority able to deliver all services and maintain deep connections with communities across the area. It would build on a coherent geography, economic strengths and a shared health footprint. It would meet the threshold test.
- All district councils agree that a two unitary model is needed. Only the Bay and North Cumbria can make it happen.

Would these proposals really provide stronger strategic and local leadership?

- Both these proposals would see the unitary delivering local services and a strategic Mayoral Combined Authority for Cumbria providing strategic services.
- This risks being a continuation of existing two tier working.

- We think a Combined Authority, and a directly elected Mayor, should enhance local service provision as a result of closer joint working and collaboration at a local level, not replace county services.
- Cumbria may not be of sufficient size to be a powerful Combined Authority in its own right – we need to strengthen partnerships and devolution across the region. Decisions on reorganisation should not limit our ability to secure a better devolution deal later.

Is a good deal of local support demonstrated?

- Both proposals show a preference in local polling for two unitaries but neither indicate which option is favoured.
- Neither proposal has full support of the three district areas comprising each proposed geography.
- The option of a North Cumbria and Bay solution should be offered. They would be two viable unitaries, both of a size and scale to deliver services efficiently but able to maintain locality services in areas they understand well.