



Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
Chairman: Cllr Rob McCarthy CEO: Nikki Bugden

24th March 2026

HERTFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS (HAPTCo)
RESPONSE TO PROPOSALS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN
HERTFORDSHIRE CONSULTATION (6th February 2026)

Category of responder: Local Government Organisation – other

Response submitted by: Nikki Bugden, Chief Executive Officer, Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils

Contact: Nikki@haptc.org.uk

Dear Beatrice Andrews & Ruth Miller

Deputy Directors,

Local Government Reorganisation

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

I write in response to your letter regarding the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposals Consultation for Hertfordshire dated 6th February 2026.

Given the diverse geographical spread of our member parish, town and community councils across Hertfordshire, each with unique local priorities and perspectives, HAPTCo cannot offer a collective view on behalf of all member councils for questions 1–6 and question 9.

We respectfully request that due consideration is given to their individual responses to this consultation. Our member councils play a vital role in delivering essential hyperlocal public services and providing an agile democratic voice for local communities. They are deeply rooted in their areas and best placed to advocate for them. Local Councils are elected voices of their communities, and decisions should reflect the priorities of the community.

HAPTCo has focused its response on those parts of the consultation where it can speak collectively, with experience. Our responses to questions 7 and 8 are listed below.

This reorganisation presents an opportunity for meaningful and impactful change. However, success will depend on the mechanisms being fit for purpose from the outset. This is an opportunity to learn from previous experiences and challenges and to fully commit to a bold new chapter in local government, empowering our communities and

harnessing hyper local experience and knowledge through effective partnership working.

Question 7) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?

HAPTC supports the report of the Hertfordshire Parish and Town Council Task and Finish Group (established 17/7/2025) and reiterates the responses from that group. We respectfully request that their recommendations, some of which are summarised in the submission documents, are strongly supported when considering the proposals¹. The report advocates that the new Unitary Authorities recognise Local Councils knowledge, agility, forward thinking and ability to represent the community.

Parish, town and community councils (PTCC's) along with County Associations, have a powerful and informed voice that must be heard from the very beginning of the LGR process.

Without clear and robust mechanisms for neighbourhood-level engagement, the ambition for genuine local empowerment risks remaining aspirational.

HAPTC feels that the following framework suggestions would ensure that collaboration and empowerment is effective and delivers on the intended outcomes as laid down in the Government's English Devolution White Paper².

1. Integration and Implementation Team

- HAPTC must be involved at the earliest stage as a full member of any integration and implementation team responsible for establishing new Unitary Authorities.
- HAPTC would support the appointment of a qualified Parish Council Lead Liaison Officer. Evidence from existing unitary areas shows this role is critical.
- These teams must develop and ensure adoption of a binding Charter (or devolution framework) that sets out the roles, responsibilities and relationships between the Unitary Authority and the parish and town council sector, including matters relating to resources, assets and property.

The Charter

The Charter must:

¹ Pg 78 onwards [hertfordshire-lgr-proposal.pdf](#)

² [English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](#)

- Recognise the varying size, capacity and aspirations of parish, town and community councils
- Be a working document that informs ongoing actions and expectations
- Be embedded in day-to-day practice, be binding and be reviewed regularly
- Provide clarity on governance, meeting frequency, communication, consultation, service standards and dispute resolution

A Charter without enforcement or regular review risks becoming symbolic rather than operational.

2. Devolution of Assets & Services

Local assets are central to community identity. Locally differentiated assets and services are best held and managed at parish and town council level, as the hyperlocal tier is most often the primary conduit for community feedback.

It is therefore essential that:

- Councils are consulted at the earliest opportunity when assets or services, in their area, may be withdrawn or devolved
- Clear policies and processes exist for asset transfers and service agreements
- Financial models are transparent, sustainable and operationally robust
- Councils have the opportunity to negotiate where there is demonstrated aspiration, need and capacity
- The statutory precept timetable is recognised, enabling councils to consult with their residents, where appropriate, and budget accordingly
- Any devolution proposal includes appropriate funding mechanisms such as CIL, S106, New Homes Bonus or other planning-related funding where applicable
- Historic funding agreements and unspent resources follow any related assets being devolved

To ensure efficacy and empowerment HAPTC would welcome the following structural elements:

- Regular devolution leadership meetings between HAPTC and unitary leaders
- Local deals, reviewed periodically, setting out specific devolved responsibilities for each parish and town council

- A dedicated devolution team within the new unitary authorities (offering support and training on the processes for collaboration or transfer of services and assets and service level agreements)
- A devolution board with representation from the unitary authority, HAPTC and parish/town councils to consider proposals and share best practice
- A dedicated portfolio holder responsible for supporting devolution

Without timely consultation, adequate funding and transparency, meaningful and sustainable devolution cannot be achieved.

3. Local Democratic Forums (also known nationally as Neighbourhood Area Committees)

We welcome the inclusion of Local Democratic Forums (LDF's), but early learning from other areas (such as the Surrey pilot) shows that without democratic mandate and operational clarity, these forums struggle to deliver meaningful local influence.

There should be care not to duplicate or overlap structures and there must be clearly defined objectives for tangible output benefiting our communities. In addition, there should be no reduction in Local Council autonomy.

To meet the ambition set by Government, LDF's must include:

- Clear governance responsibilities
- Transparent decision-making protocols
- Fair representation, with each parish/town council appointing one representative in their area.
- Formal integration of parish/town council evidence and consultation data
- A robust funding allocation framework
- Minimum meeting frequency
- Mandatory communication with all parish and town councils in the LDF's area
- Defined oversight arrangements for boundaries, membership and population coverage
- Elections of Chair and Vice Chair by the LDF ensuring balanced leadership
- Induction and ongoing training for all LDF members
- A sufficiently empowered LDF Link Officer within the unitary authority

We strongly urge for a formal consultation with all parish, town and community councils on LDF Terms of Reference, core principles and operating framework to ensure long-term success.

4. HAPTC Engagement

Following discussions with existing Unitary Authorities and County Association colleagues working within established unitary areas, HAPTC requests representation on the Unitary Authority Executive Committee. This would:

- Strengthen engagement with parish, town and community councils
- Support consistent standards
- Reinforce training pathways
- Provide clear mediation routes for unresolved concerns
- Enhance transparency and cross-tier collaboration

As the long standing, representative body for 94% of Hertfordshire PTCC (covering 400,000 electorate) across Hertfordshire's parished areas, HAPTC brings essential and experienced insight into local needs, risks and opportunities, along with national representation.

Question 8. If you would like to, please use the free text box to explain the answers you have provided to questions 1-7 referring to the question numbers as part of your answer. You may also use the box to provide any other comments you have on the proposal

We believe the government must provide far greater clarity and intent around stakeholder engagement. Whilst we welcomed our initial engagement in a LGR 'Task and Finish' group at County level, HAPTC has often felt informed of this process rather than meaningfully involved.

Hertfordshire's 124 Town, Parish and Community councils form a crucial element of local democracy covering 85% of the county's land, they collectively raised £20.7million in precept for 2025/26.

The absence, at this stage, of clearly determined partnership mechanisms for integration and early implementation, along with the regional (district) variations in open and effective communication and transparency with HAPTC and our member councils is concerning.

Alongside our comments we support the response submitted by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), which reflects extensive national collaboration

with County Associations, including HAPTC, and ongoing dialogue with our member councils.

Genuine neighbourhood empowerment, as defined in the Government White Paper cannot be achieved without drawing on the insight, experience and democratic mandate of those already delivering local governance at the most local level.

Yours Faithfully

Nikki Bugden

Nikki Bugden PSLCC
Chief Executive Officer HAPTC

Rob McCarthy

Cllr Rob McCarthy
Chairman HAPTC

*Signed on behalf of the elected board of HAPTC, all serving Councillors from
Hertfordshire Parish Town and Community Councils*

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