

# Bay unitary

Your questions  
*answered*

## Why are we talking about unitary councils?

The Government has recently asked all principal councils in Cumbria to submit proposals for unitary local government for the area, to be received by 9 December 2020.

## What is a unitary council?

A unitary council would bring all the different services currently offered by county and district councils under 'one roof'.

Currently, residents here are governed by a two-tier system, where local services are provided by ourselves and the county council.

In our district there are also town and parish councils.

## So what are you proposing?

Barrow Borough, South Lakeland District and Lancaster City Councils are preparing a full proposal to create a new unitary council to serve the area currently covered by those districts. We refer to this as 'The Bay'.

## So who would empty my bins, look after the roads and deliver services like schools and social care?

These services would be organised by the proposed new unitary council for the Bay area. The new council would take responsibility for services currently undertaken by the districts and county councils.

## What are the alternatives?

We expect that there will be a number of alternative proposals submitted for Cumbria, including a single unitary council (presented by the County Council) and options for the creation of two unitary councils within the Cumbria area.

We think a single unitary would be too large and cumbersome, detached from local communities leading to a democratic deficit. It would need to decide resources to be used in the north and south of Cumbria, where there are different needs to be met. Independent research also shows a drop in respect, engagement and voter turnout for large local authorities.

In contrast, a new unitary authority, focused on the needs of local people and businesses in The Bay area, would be better placed to engage with its residents, easier to understand for electors, with joined-up decision-making, clearer accountability and improved and closer relationships with the voluntary sector and town and parish councils.

The Government will ultimately decide which proposal they favour for Cumbria. Government has said that it will consult on the options it may take forward.

## What is the case for The Bay?

We believe a Bay unitary would be best focussed on meeting the needs of our communities, businesses and environment.

The proposal builds on a strong sense of community identity, a functioning economic area, shared strategic ambition, the existing health services footprint and is of appropriate population size for the organisation of a unitary council.

We are already:

- a strong, closely-linked community
- a functioning economic geography, with 96% of the workforce both living and working in the area

- focused on the Bay: 76% of business and 90% of the population are within 7km (4 miles) of the Bay
- well-connected and local: direct public transport links to the Bay, compared to 50-mile drive to County Hall in Carlisle
- The Bay is served by a single NHS Trust, is in the same postal and broadcast area and the three councils already successfully work together through economic partnerships

## What are the benefits of becoming unitary?

Under the current two-tier arrangements there is sometimes confusion over which council provides which service.

For example, at the moment we are responsible for waste collection but the county council is responsible for waste disposal. We are responsible for the majority of off-street parking, but the county council is responsible for on-street parking. We provide leisure services, but the county council provide libraries and youth services.

In a unitary authority, all these services and more would be provided by one single, new organisation, enabling us to make sure these areas are better joined-up and with the flexibility and efficiency to provide better services.

## Why now? Shouldn't councils be concentrating on the Covid-19 response?

The Leaders of the three councils have repeatedly said that, while they welcome the opportunity to talk about opportunities to improve local government, they don't think this is the right time. They have said that all our efforts at present should be focused on supporting our communities through the pandemic.

However, now that the Government has sent the invitation letter, the Leaders have said they owe it to those same communities to come up with a proposal they believe is in the area's best interests.

## Barrow and South Lakeland are in Cumbria, Lancaster is in Lancashire. Will the Government allow you to create a new council across county boundaries?

In the invitation letter from Government, it was made clear that the Government would consider proposals from 'one or more districts in a county and one or more relevant adjoining areas'.

A cross-boundary authority around Morecambe Bay fits that criteria and we believe it is the best way forward for our three areas.

## Where can I find out more – and how do I have my say?

It's a difficult time to be consulting with our communities, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, and we have also only got a limited time to consult to meet the Government deadlines.

But we have lots of information on our websites, including a link to a survey you can complete and email and postal address details to write with your views.

We are also conducting some independent polling and are consulting directly with key stakeholders and businesses over the next few weeks to hear their opinions.

Visit our web pages for more details:

[www.southlakeland.gov.uk/thebay](http://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/thebay)  
[www.lancaster.gov.uk/thebay](http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/thebay)  
[www.barrowbc.gov.uk/thebay](http://www.barrowbc.gov.uk/thebay)

