



WELCOME
TO THE
78TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE & AGM
Northamptonshire County
Association of Local Councils

MOULTON COMMUNITY CENTRE, MOULTON

What Does Unitarisation Mean for Parish Councils and English Local Government?

Northamptonshire County Association of Local
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Winston Churchill on being offered the Local Government Board in the 1906 Government

There is no place in the government more laborious, more anxious, more thankless, more cloaked with petty and even squalid detail, more full of hopeless and insoluble difficulties



"Tip" O'Neil: Former Speaker of the House of Representatives



All politics is local

Or is it...

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Councillors in England May 2025 (A Post-Election Snap Shot):

Type of Council	Con	Lab	LD	Gn	Reform UK	Others
County	467	87	286	82	419	106
Unitary	878	1142	765	148	256	416
London Borough	396	1104	181	24	1	233
MBC	327	1426	242	105	45	240
District	2007	1575	1571	492	78	1044
Totals	4,075	5,334	3,045	851	799	2,039

Councillors in England (rounded figures):

Three main parties

- **12,454 councillors**
- **77%** of England's total councillor population

Councillors in England:

- Greens, Reform UK and other parties, small local groups and Independents

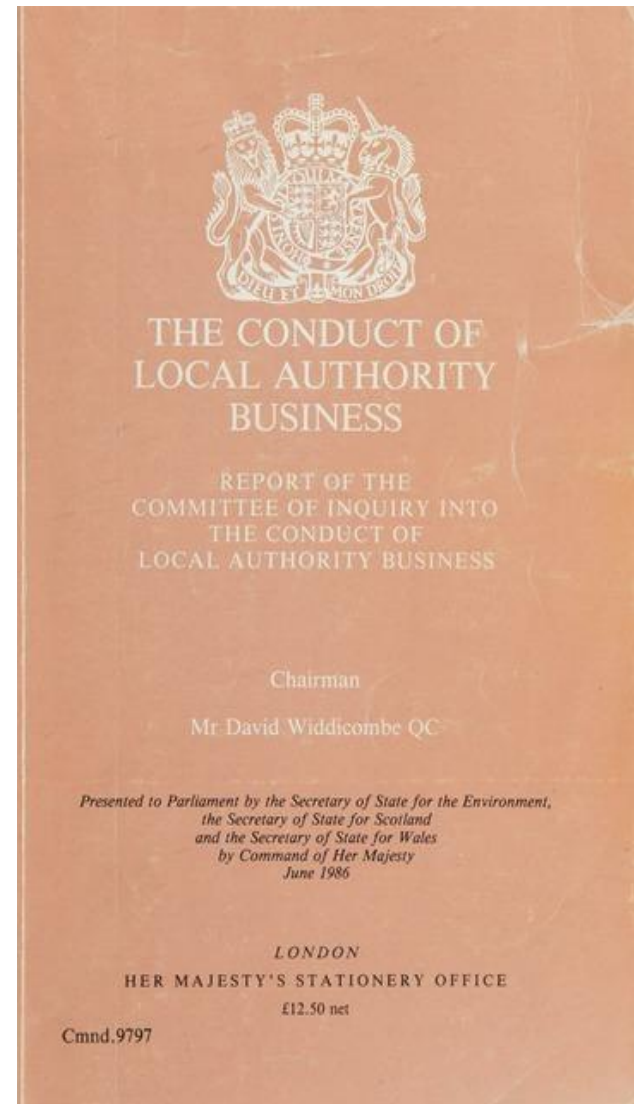
3,665 or 22.5 % of England's total councillor population

Characteristics of English Local Government

- Creature of statute
- No independent or constitutionally protected right to exist
- Boundaries, shape, size, structure, powers, roles, responsibilities and functions are set by central government
- *Ultra-vires (local government can not act beyond its legal powers)**
- Funded locally and by central government
- Very big – the largest units of local government in Europe; size of English councils represents the victory of technocracy over democracy.
- Mixed system of two / three tier and unitary system
- * *The Localism Act 2011 changed this – a bit*

What Does it Mean to be Creature of Statue?

Although local government has origins pre-dating the sovereignty of Parliament, all current local authorities are the statutory creations of parliament and have no independent status or right to exist. The whole system of local government could lawfully be abolished by Act of Parliament. (HMSO, 1986:45, para 3.3)





I took one flight over England's historic counties ... then ripped them all up, admits Lord Heseltine (DT 25th October, 2023)

It Gets Worse: Much

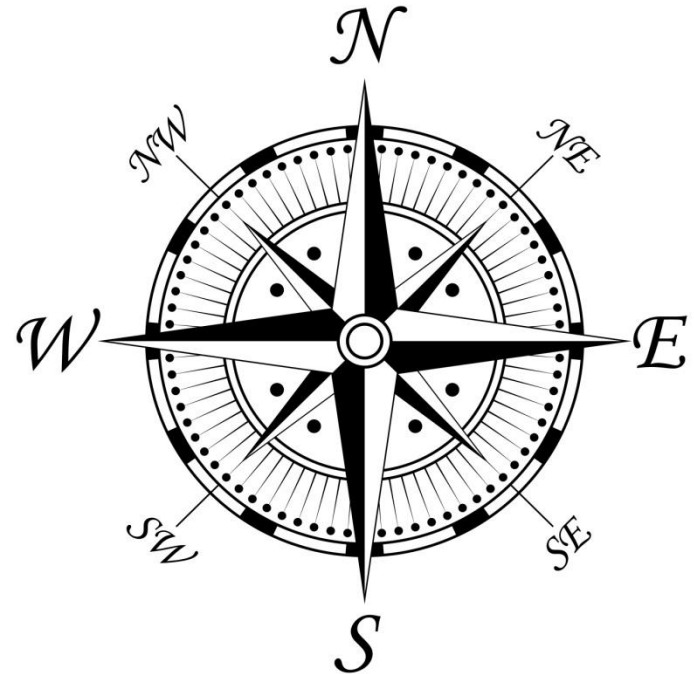
- In February 2025 [Jim McMahon](#), then Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, wrote to all two-tier and unitary councils in England stating that all local government will move to a unitary system with new council areas having a target population of at **least** 500,000. Councils were invited to work together and submit an interim plan by 21 March 2025 and a final proposal for reorganisation by 28 November 2025



Council boundaries: Administratively Convenient Lines on a Map

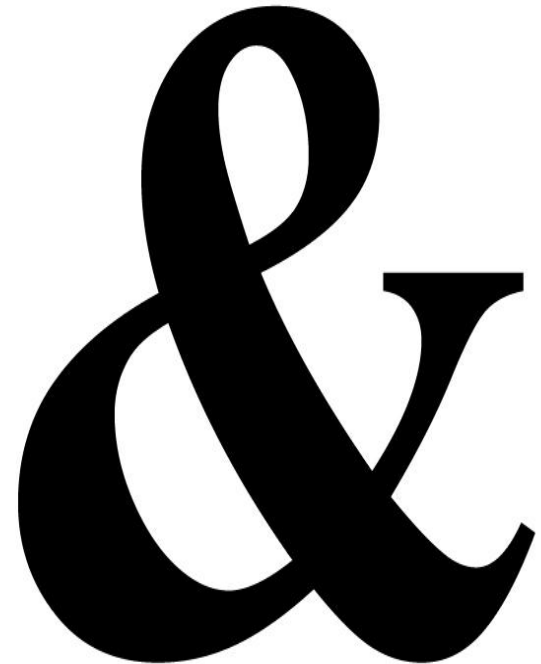
- **Points of the compass councils:**

- East Staffordshire
- North East Derbyshire
- South Norfolk
- South Hams
- South Holland
- East Hampshire
- West Berkshire
- West Lindsey
- North Yorkshire
- North East Lincolnshire
- North Northamptonshire
- West Northamptonshire
- Mid Suffolk



Casual mergers: 'Ampersand' Councils

- Redcar and Cleveland
- Kings Lynn and West Norfolk
- Basingstoke and Deane
- Brighton and Hove
- Bath and North East Somerset
- Cheshire West and Cheshire
- Oadby and Wigston
- Blackburn with Darwen
- Barking and Dagenham
- Epsom and Ewell



These Places Just Don't Exist

- Three Rivers (the Chess, Gade and Colne)
- Sandwell (Sandwell Priory)
- Newham (Merger of East Ham and West Ham, so it was a 'New' Ham)
- Kirklees (Kirklees Priory legendary burial place of the English freedom fighter and resistance hero: Robin Hood)
- Calderdale (a river)
- Telford and Wrekin (Telford a bloke; Wrekin, a hill)
- Vale of White Horse (A valley and the Bronze Age Uffington White horse)





These Council Names are Quite Good, Though

- Bassetlaw
- Babergh
- Craven
- Dacorum
- Rushcliffe
- Shepway
- Teignbridge
- Tendring
- Wirral



The names derive from Anglo-Saxon hundreds



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What's in it for Local Government?

- Fewer Councils

- All 21 two-tier areas are to be reorganised on the basis of minimum populations of half-a-million
- Abolition of all 164 District Councils
- Some county unitary councils and some sub-county.
- A guesstimate is reduction in councils to around 200 for a population of 56 million
- This means – far fewer councillors too.

Devolution or decentralisation? What's coming to local Government?

- Structural change
- New (Strategic) Combined Authorities with a devolution framework based on deal struck between the centre and combinations of councils to be headed by a directly elected mayor
- A reinvention of the two-tier system but on a much larger scale
- Fewer Councillors
- No Change to the Widdicombe doctrine
- Some new responsibilities with budgets
- Same central control

Thank Heavens for Parish Councils

- Reinventing the two-tier structure on a bigger scale so:
- Parishes keep local government local in a much bigger structure – a vital role
- Representing the views of communities that will get lost in bigger unitary councils and strategic authorities.
- Important to get to know the elected mayor at parish level
- CALCs will play a vital co-ordinating role to make sure the voice of parishes and places doesn't disappear.

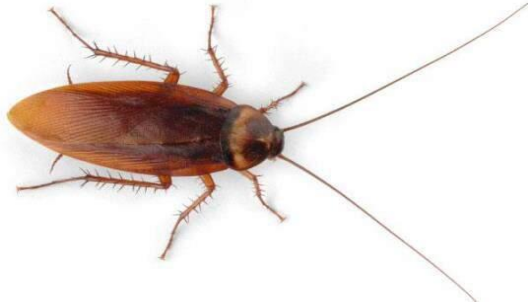
What Can Parishes and CALCs Do Before and after 'R' Day?

- Make a noise and get a seat at the table.
- The public have generally been ignored in the process with the most perfunctory and often slanted consultation. Parishes must draw the public into the process.
- Parishes will have their own views but where there is agreement the CALC is needed as a united and strong voice.
- Recognise you are not facing an existential threat – that's only for counties and districts!
- Only parish can make a nonsense unitary structure meaningful

What Can Parishes and CALCs Do Before and after 'R' Day?

- Create more Town and Parish councils (Northamptonshire has form in this regard)
- Where it is possible to get across the board agreement on any issue, use that through the CALC
- Educate unitary councils (and the government) that devolution must match parish capacity and therefore different models are needed across a unitary – where you can take something on – do; where you can't don't!
- Beware unitaries bearing gifts! If it's presented as a take it or lose it option – engage and enrage the public
- The government has largely overlooked parishes, remind them you're there and will be after 'R' day

It's said that Cockroaches will be the only thing to survive a Nuclear war



Parish and Town Councils will be the only thing to survive 'R' day. Use that Knowledge – plus break the Vicar of Dibley Image!!