



# One Council

## A proposal from South Hams and West Devon



### WHAT IS THE PROPOSAL?

This proposal, to create one single new council to serve the areas currently managed by South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council, is one of several measures that we are considering to help us close a £1.9 m gap in our finances.

This is a top priority for both councils. If either of us cannot set a balanced budget, there would be severe financial consequences for both of us because we already share one workforce.

If this were to happen we may lose the ability to set our own future path.

In the proposal, which is one of a number of measures the councils are considering to close the funding gap, South Hams and West Devon predict that the creation of a single council could save up to £0.5 m every year. This is excluding any potential income resulting from an increase in Council Tax. These savings would not be made through cuts to services, but because a single council will cost less to operate.

Both councils have shared a Chief Executive since 2007 and now we also share a joint workforce with many of our policies and procedures aligned. However, during this time the political structures and decision making processes of the two councils has remained completely separate. This means that we still have two Leaders, two sets of councillors, two sets of accounts and two sets of political meetings.

This is a proposal to bring the two political structures together, a natural continuation of the shared service journey that both authorities have been on. It also looks at further savings that could be made by reducing the number of councillors and combining our assets.

## HOW IT WORKS NOW

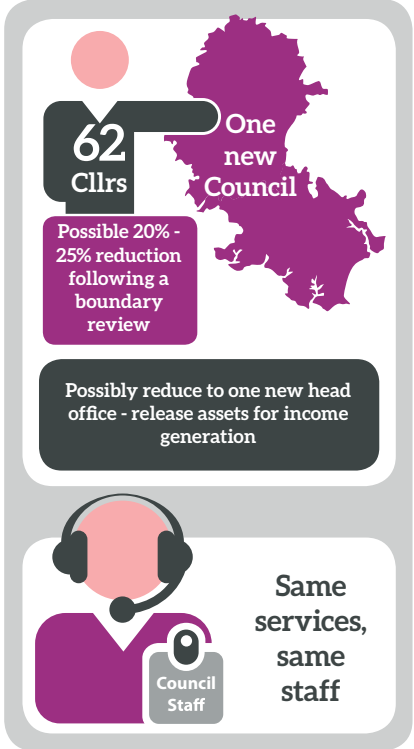
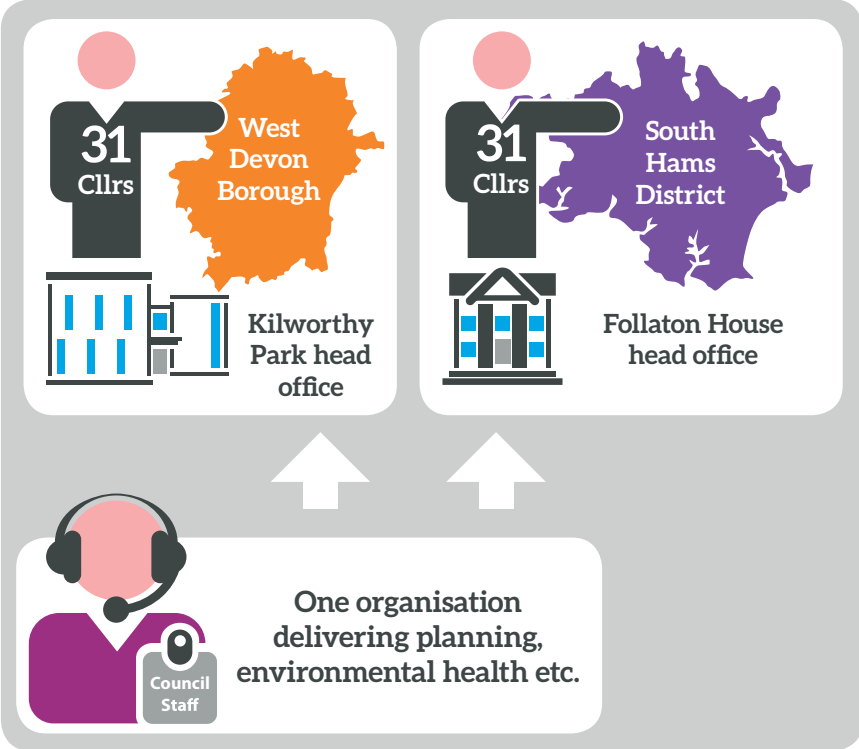
## THE PROPOSAL

County

Devon County Council - health, schools, recycling centres etc.

Devon County Council - nothing would change

District / Borough



Parish

Parish Council - local issues etc.

Parish Council - nothing would change

This proposal lays out how we think the creation of one council would work and how the efficiencies would be achieved. It also includes a timeframe for getting approval from the Secretary of State.

However, before we finalise our proposals and submit them to the Secretary of State who will decide if we can set up a new council, we want to know what you think.

Your opinion will help the secretary of state make a fully informed decision when we submit the proposal later in the year.



Cllr J Tucker  
Leader,  
South Hams  
District Council



Cllr P Sanders  
Leader,  
West Devon  
Borough Council



Cllr S Wright  
Deputy Leader,  
South Hams  
District Council



Cllr L Samuel  
Deputy Leader,  
West Devon  
Borough Council

We want to hear your views

# One Council

for South Hams and West Devon



## HOW TO HAVE YOUR SAY

From x August until x we will be asking for your opinion. During which time we will be asking you to respond to **6 questions about the proposal.**

(See the questions and more information about the proposal below)

You can access the proposal and the consultation survey via a dedicated website [www.onecouncil.org.uk](http://www.onecouncil.org.uk)

So that you can ask us and our officers' questions, we will be holding briefing sessions at the following times and venues:

TOWN / VILLAGE	DATE OF EVENT	EVENT
<h2>Details of events to go here</h2>		

You may also get a call from x who are conducting a phone poll on our behalf. They have randomly selected a representative group of people from South Hams and West Devon and will be asking them the same 6 questions.

To stay informed of the process, please do sign up for our dedicated **One Council** newsletter:

(SIGN UP)

[www.onecouncil.org.uk](http://www.onecouncil.org.uk)

Follow us on twitter and facebook and join in the discussion



#SHDC #WDBC  
#ONECOUNCIL



Southhamsdistrictcouncil  
Westdevonboroughcouncil



## WHY DO WE NEED TO CREATE ONE COUNCIL?

Since 2010 there have been huge pressures on all local government budgets, not just locally but across the country. All councils are being asked to find ways of funding themselves and not to be reliant on funding from central government.

South Hams and West Devon are facing a combined funding gap of £1.9 million by 2020. If we don't make changes, the essential services that you rely on will be at risk. To date, neither authority has cut statutory services, those services that the councils are required to provide by law.

However, it is essential that we make changes now and find better ways of using our resources, or risk having to reduce the levels of statutory services that we currently provide. If either council are unable to close the funding gap, central government could take control of our future and make decisions for us.

At South Hams and West Devon we have always been at the forefront of change in local government, embracing new working practices in order to maintain financial stability without cutting front line services.

In 2007 we were the first local authorities to share a Chief Executive and we now share one single workforce. Over the years this arrangement has delivered a number of efficiencies, but these savings alone have not been enough to secure our future.

In 2013 we embarked on an award winning transformation programme (T18) which radically altered the way the organisation is structured. The purpose of T18 was to enable both councils to meet their financial obligations up until 2018. With the introduction of new technology and more online services, we got rid of the old council silos, created a more flexible workforce and delivered a combined saving of £5 million.

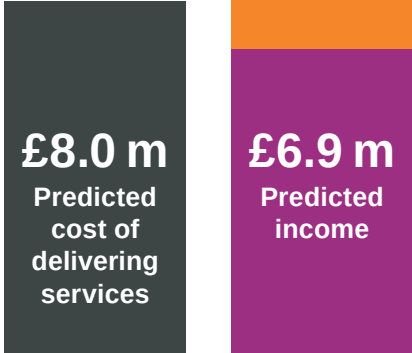
However, with further cuts to our central government grant and the reduction of new homes bonus funding, we are once again facing a combined £1.9 m funding gap by 2020.

**£0.8 m**  
9% budget gap



**South Hams District Council**  
Predicted budget for 2020/21

**£1.1 m**  
14% budget gap



**West Devon Borough Council**  
Predicted budget for 2020/21



## THE PROPOSAL TO CREATE ONE COUNCIL

At South Hams and West Devon we are marked by our similarities, we share a common boundary and our areas are both predominantly rural which neighbour more urban areas such as Torbay and Plymouth. Both of us face similar challenges and opportunities for the future.

We currently have 62 elected councillors serving 138,000 people across the two areas. South Hams is the fifth largest geographical district in Devon both in size and employment opportunities and West Devon is the largest and is predominantly rural.

This proposal would see the creation of a new single South and West Devon District or Borough Council to serve both areas from April 2019, with all of the staff and assets from South Hams and West Devon transferred into one new council.

We are in the unique position of already sharing one workforce. However, by managing two separate political and decision making structures our officers still have to produce two sets of work. If we were to become one council there are a lot of efficiencies that can be made quickly by reducing this duplication of work and enabling officers to focus more on delivering services. As well as significant cost savings we would instantly be delivering better value for money to our customers.

This proposal does include a small reduction in the number of staff, primarily in areas where the duplication of work is the greatest, however, staff reduction is not the focus of this proposal. The formation of one single organisation to service the two councils has already been achieved and we anticipate that any reduction in staff would be less than 10 full time posts.

Further efficiencies could also be made through a reduction in running costs, currently for every piece of software and application that the councils licence, there are two costs. In many instances these could be renegotiated to reflect the cost for one single organisation rather than two, so one website platform, one back office system etc.

If this proposal is approved by the secretary of state we anticipate these initial efficiency savings could generate up to £0.5 m a year.

But this is only part of the story up until 2019. This proposal also looks at the possible reduction in councillors, the rationalization of assets and the equalization of council tax.

## REDUCING THE NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS

There is no proposal to reduce the number of councillors before the 1st April 2019. The ultimate intention of the proposal is to reduce the number of councillors by approximately 20-25% in time, but in order to do this the Boundary Commission would be needed to conduct a review of all council wards and their representation. Any changes they propose would not come into place until the elections in 2023.

This review would also give us the opportunity to refresh how we work and deliver a new modern local government for a new era. Technology and social media is changing how residents wish to interact with their council, this review would give us the opportunity to ensure that we have the training and tools to meet customers expectations.

As elected councillors we could also redefine our roles, working closely Towns and Parish councils to establish how we can work more effectively with them in the future.

A strong local presence and a desire to resolve customer issues at the first point of contact will remain a fundamental principle of the new council. We currently have a team of locality officers, a team on the ground who work across specific geographic areas and complete a wide range of tasks for many council services.

As an important link between the councillors and the community we see this team as vitally important to help us engage with the communities served by a single council with a large geographic area.

## MAKING THE BEST USE OF OUR ASSETS

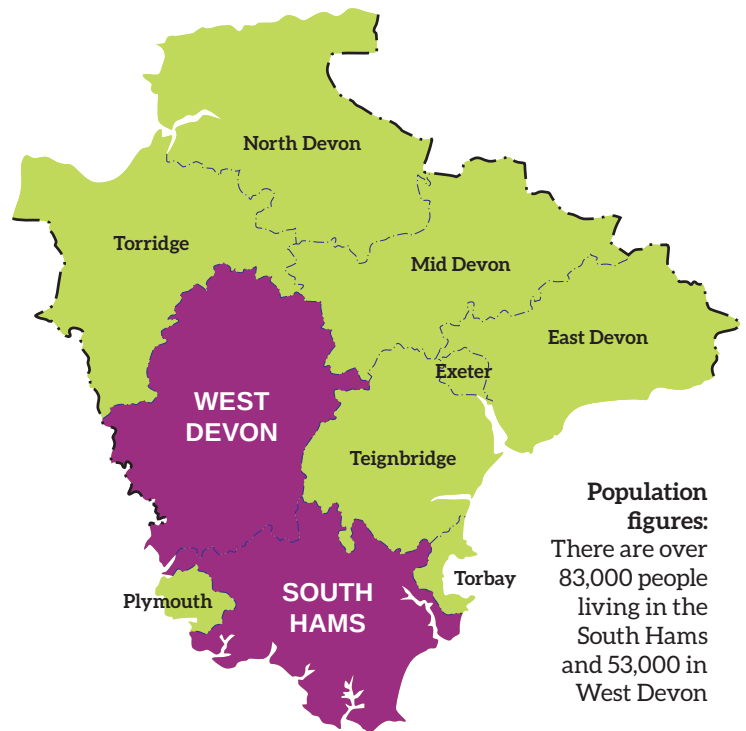
A new council would need to consider what it does with its property, how to make best use of office space, working arrangements for staff and how this might contribute towards closing the funding gap. All of these assets which currently belong to the two councils would be transferred to the one new council. There would then be a comprehensive review of all of the property and the new council would need to agree a strategy.

The review would need to consider whether the council should retain the two head offices at Killworthy Park and Follaton House or whether they should be sold, redeveloped, used to produce an ongoing income or remain as it is.

It will look at the potential of creating one single head office for the new council, which would reduce operating costs, and whether there could be an increase in partnership working within the community, working closer with other public bodies such as the NHS or the police.

The single council would have to carefully consider its property strategy, it would need to be fully costed and consulted upon. Therefore, any major changes to which buildings the new council operates from are unlikely to take place in the short term.

Any savings or income that could be made from the property strategy would be additional to the savings that we have already identified.



## ONE COUNCIL, ONE VOICE

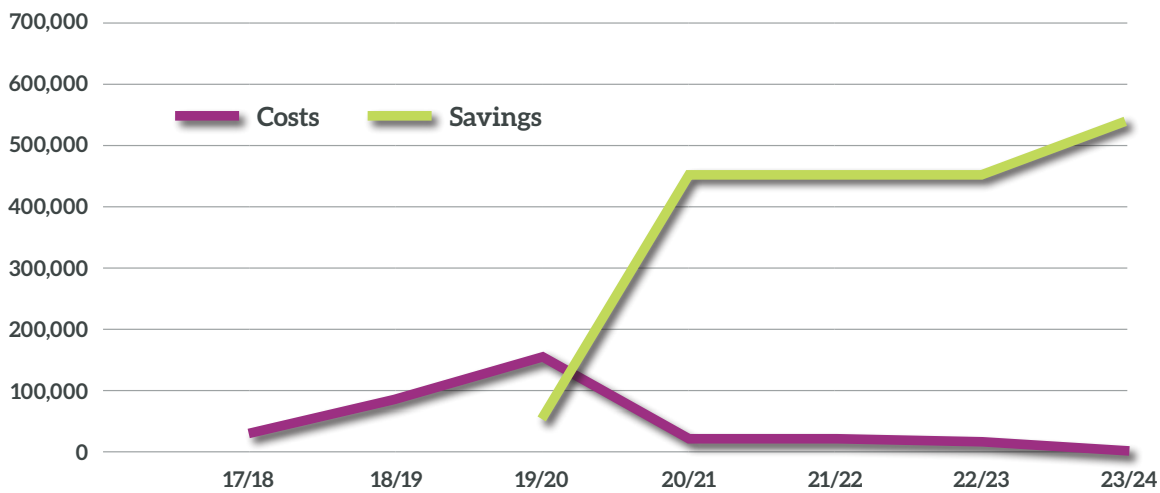
We believe that South Hams and West Devon will be much stronger together as one entity rather than two. Currently West Devon Borough Council has the smallest population of all of the Devon Districts at 54,4000 people and South Hams is somewhere in the middle 84,500 people (2015). The formation of one single council has the potential to create much stronger local leadership which will be representing 138,000 people the second largest in Devon behind Plymouth, with 117 parishes.

The new physical boundary of the two authorities would also create the largest district in Devon, just over 1/3 of the total area covered by Devon County.

This would give our leaders more people power when it comes to debating and negotiating regional issues, giving us a much louder voice.

## THE COSTS

The one-off implementation costs will total £325,000 (the cost will be spread over a number of years) and the annual savings are £0.5 m. The chart on the following page shows costs and savings.



## NOW TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

### IN THIS FIRST SECTION WE ASK YOU FOR YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE PROPOSAL:

#### What won't change

- You will still be able to vote for a councillor to represent your Town, Parish and Ward
- Your functions of your Town and Parish Council will remain unchanged
- Services delivered by Devon County Council will be unaffected by this change
- You will still get the same services from your local council only delivered by one council across the whole of South Hams and West Devon instead of two.
- Key strategies such as the Joint Local Plan will not be affected.
- The staffing structure of the councils will largely remain unchanged
- The new council will continue to look for opportunities to work in partnership with Town and Parish Councils

#### What will change

- There will be one council covering the areas currently administered by South Hams and West Devon
- Ultimately there would be fewer district councillors, a new structure would be in place for the elections in 2023
- There would be a single revenue and capital budget for delivering services in your area with a single set of strategies and policies.
- The name and branding of your local council would change
- The council tax between the two areas is different and will need to be equalized, there is currently a £62.97 difference between the two councils
- The location of your council head office is likely to change over time
- How and where your local council meetings are held could also change

## IN THIS SECOND SECTION WE WELCOME YOUR THOUGHTS ON OUR APPROACH TO CLOSING THE FUNDING GAP

### What are the other options for closing the funding gap?

In the spring of 2017, we asked our officers to explore how we could close a forecast budget gap of £1.9 m by 2020, and how we could protect the services that we deliver to you.

They came back to use with a number of proposals, which collectively could deliver the savings that we need. They include

- Creating one single council to deliver further efficiencies
- Outsourcing frontline services in South Hams and West Devon
- Setting up a company to run all of South Hams and West Devon's front line services
- Borrowing money and investing it to earn an income

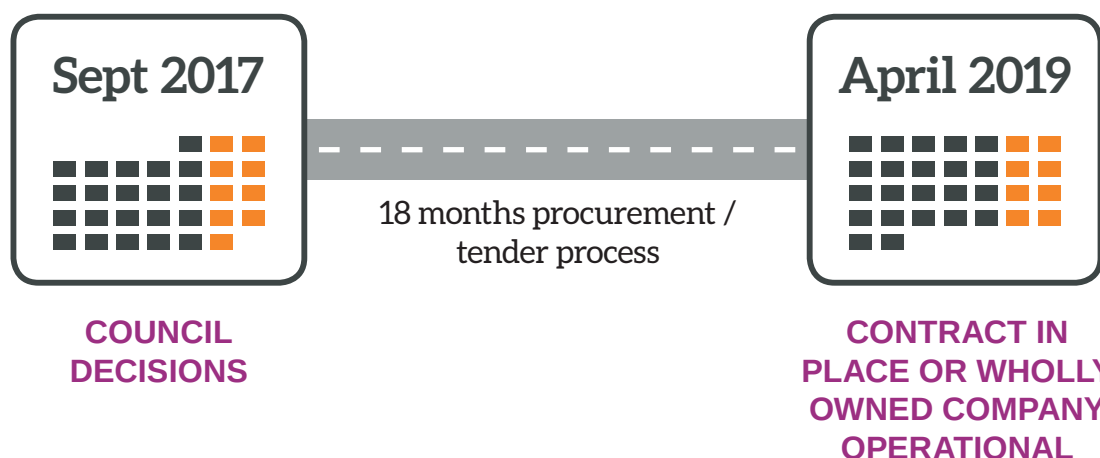
### Wholly owned company or outsourcing of frontline services

While holding discussions about whether we could create one single council, we have also been exploring the best options for delivering our front line services such as waste, street cleaning and maintenance. We are currently in the process of testing the market to see what options would be available us.

Once this piece of work is complete, we will know what the best costed options are for us and we will again be asked to decide how we would like to proceed.

We will be choosing between whether we bring all of these services in-house in West Devon, where they are currently outsourced to FCC, to go out to tender and include those services for South Hams as well, bring all of those services for South Hams and West Devon in house or set up a separate company to run those services.

### Time frame for decisions





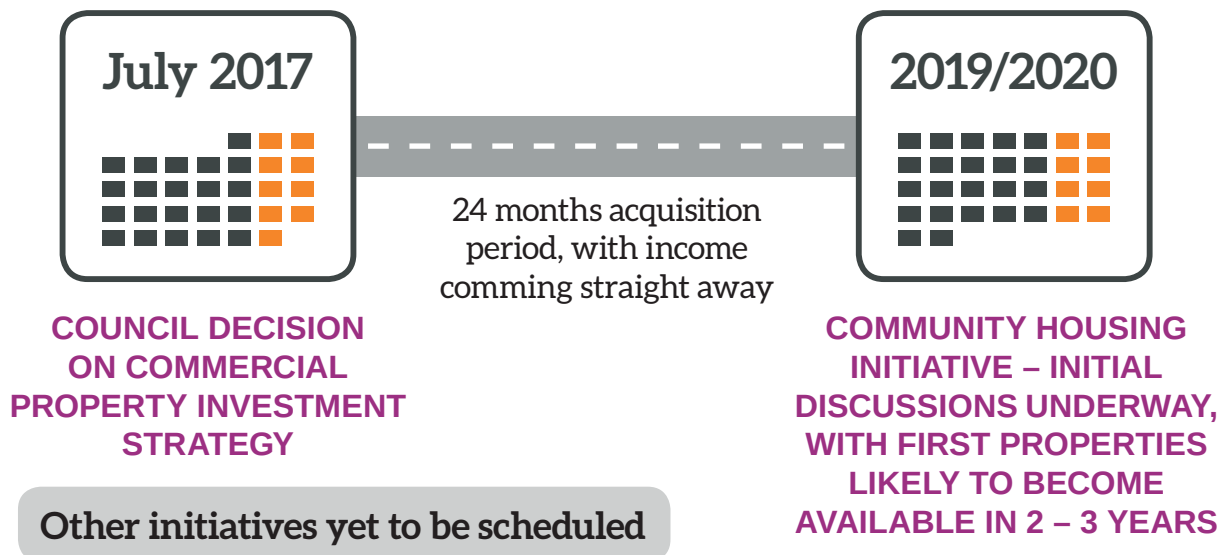
## Investing to Earn

We have an ongoing project with a working group of councillors, where we are exploring all of the options available to us to generate an income.

This includes borrowing money and investing it in commercial property so that we can create an investment portfolio that can provide an ongoing income. We are also working on developing a community housing initiative, which is designed to help local residents to determine and deliver appropriate and affordable housing for their communities.

We are also exploring how we could sell our expertise in areas such as environmental health, offering additional food safety advice and generating an income from selling advertising space on our properties and assets.

## Time frame for decisions



Not one of these options will generate enough income on their own to fill the forecast funding gap. If we do not act now and consider all of these options we will be left with no choice but to reduce the levels of service that we provide.

## Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the proposal of creating one new council as one of the options for closing the funding gap and protecting services?
2. Do you have a suggestion for the name of the council?

## IN THIS THIRD SECTION WE WANT TO KNOW HOW YOU THINK THIS MIGHT AFFECT YOUR COMMUNITY

### **Tiered government will remain**

Creating one council would leave many things unchanged. You would still be represented at district /borough level by a councillor who you elect, only now they will all belong to one new council covering the whole of South Hams and West Devon.

The new council would have a new name, but it would keep the areas covered by South Hams and West Devon the same, preserving their identities and those of the local communities.

There would still be a two-tier arrangement in place. So Devon County Council would continue to be responsible for services like highways, street lighting and social care, there would be no change to services delivered by DCC as part of forming this new council. As before the new district or borough council would be responsible for services like planning, housing benefits, waste collection and environmental health. There would still be elections for County and District councillors in order to preserve local representation.

Parish and Town councils would still exist and operate in the way they do now, but if we proceed to form a new council, we will be having early conversations with them to see if there are any ways that a new council could improve how we work together.

### **Will there still be a mayor of West Devon?**

Currently West Devon Borough Council has a mayor, but South Hams District Council do not. We would welcome your thoughts on whether the new council should seek to have borough status and a civic mayor.

At West Devon Borough Council, the Mayor is expected to uphold and promote the constitution of the council. They chair the meetings of the full council to make sure that its business is carried out efficiently and to ensure that council meetings are a forum for the debate of matters of concern to the local community and to promote public involvement in the council's activities. In South Hams this function is filled by the Chairman of the council.

### **Will my council tax be affected?**

There is currently a £63 difference (on an average Band D property) between the two authorities. Therefore there would be a need to bring the element that both authorities charge in council tax to the same proportions.

Detail TBC following member meetings.

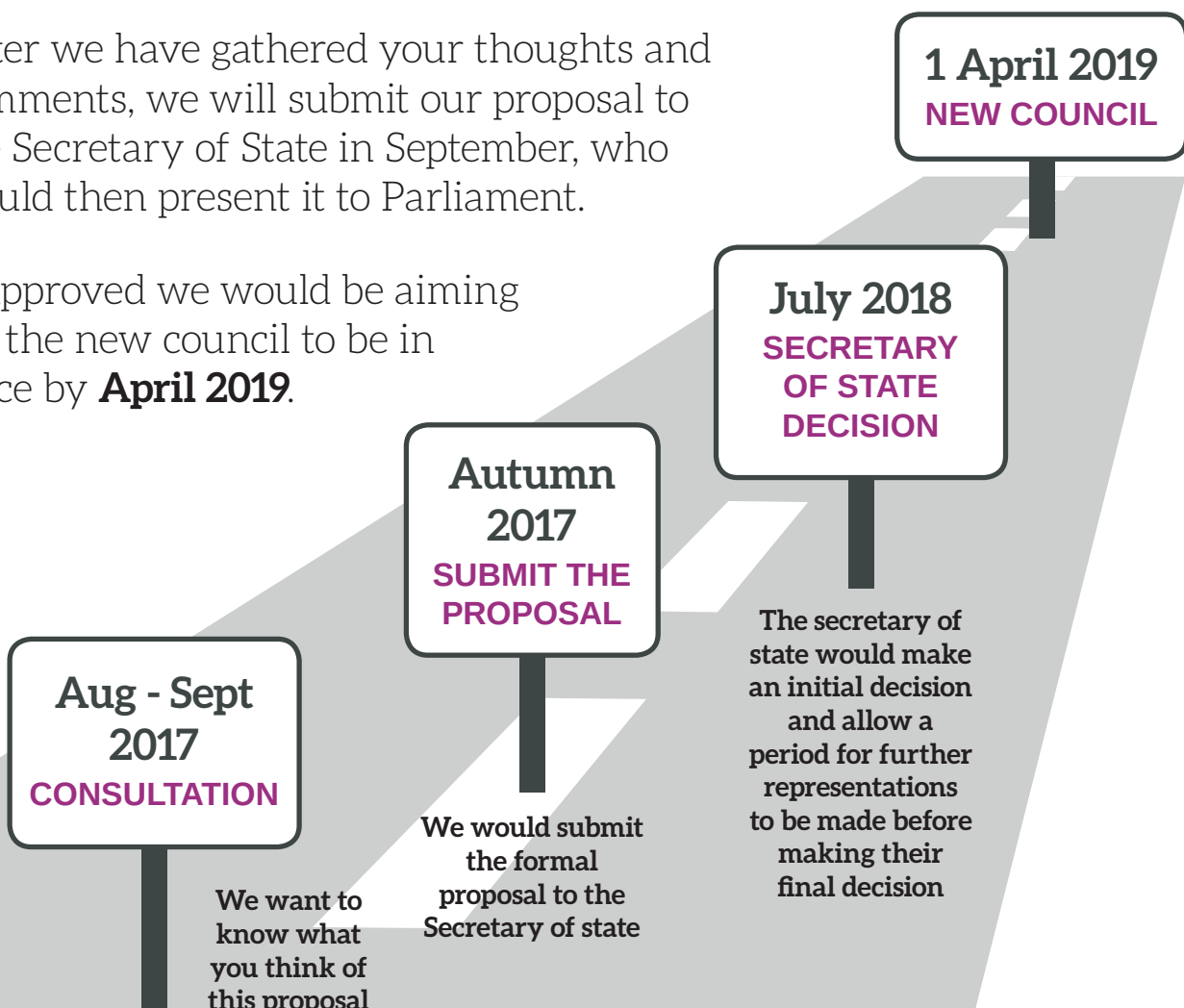
## Consultation Questions

3. Is it important for you that there is a mayor for the combined area covered by the proposal?
4. What benefits do you feel a new single council would bring to your community?
5. Do you think that the proposal might lead to any significant impacts on you, if so what might they be and how could those be reduced?
6. Do you have any other comments to make on the proposal for a new single council?

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

After we have gathered your thoughts and comments, we will submit our proposal to the Secretary of State in September, who would then present it to Parliament.

If approved we would be aiming for the new council to be in place by **April 2019**.



## SUMMARY – TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

The consultation to gather your thoughts and comments will run from x to x.

You can tell us what you think, read the proposal or see a list of frequently asked questions visit at:

[www.onecouncil.org.uk](http://www.onecouncil.org.uk)

## Consultation Questions

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