

SLCC

For Local Council Professionals®

ESTABLISHING A NEW LOCAL COUNCIL

*Key actions that must be taken to
establish new local councils in
England within the context of the
government's invitation for proposals
for a single-tier of local government*

FEBRUARY 2025

Take action now: establishing strong local councils for your unparished communities

The government's proposal to create unitary authorities offers a unique opportunity to enhance local democracy and enhance ultra-local representation. Local councils can serve as effective community partners to unitary authorities, ensuring that community voices remain strong and influential.

The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) has over 25 years of experience in guiding the creation of new parish councils under unitary structures. Our advisory service has first-hand experience with virtually all unitary creations in the last 20 years. We have seen town councils flourish and become effective place shapers.

We offer briefings to cabinets, executive committees, and senior managers, and have developed comprehensive top tips for creating effective new town councils, backed by powerful 'how to' knowledge. Additionally, we can arrange peer visits to showcase the best examples in our sector.

We strongly support the government's vision for a more devolved system which delivers democracy within walking distance. We are eager to assist in this transition. By following our ten-point plan, you can ensure robust, community-level governance that maintains local empowerment and addresses democratic challenges.

Why this matters

Our communities face a critical moment. As the government moves towards new and larger unitary authorities, many historic towns and cities risk losing their ultra-local voice. But there's a powerful solution: establishing new parish, town, and city councils. These councils aren't just administrative bodies - they're the foundation of grassroots democracy in England.

Reform in your area risks leaving historic towns and cities without direct, place-specific representation. Based on our experience of previous reorganisations, SLCC is calling for **immediate action** - establishing new parish, town, or city councils as the only way to ensure strong, community-led leadership of ultra-local issues.

This is **your chance to shape the future of local governance**. The following **ten essential steps** will guide you through the process of establishing a new council - **but time is running out**.

1. Start the process now

- **Act fast:** The best route is to start a Community Governance Review (CGR) before the shadow unitary council is formed to avoid conflicts. While CGRs are more community-driven, structural change orders streamline establishing parish councils in a broader local government reorganisation. If a structural change order is preferred, there is still significant benefit to engaging the local community to ensure buy-in
- **Secure funding:** Budgeting for this process is critical - ensuring the council starts with financial stability. There are 24 town councils each precepting over £2 million this year. Their budgets are typically larger, supported by service fees and charges.

2. Define the council's role and communicate the benefits

- **Win public support:** Make it clear - this council will **hold agencies accountable**, protect local services, and **safeguard your community's character**. It will deliver local services which reflect the needs and individuality of the local area.
- **Develop a winning strategy:** Clear, factual messaging will ensure **stakeholders and residents rally behind this movement**.

3. Secure assets and services now

- **Don't lose vital resources:** Map (list) those assets and services which are cherished by local communities and which they wish to run and protect. Make these **part of the council vision and strategy**.
- **Demand first refusal:** Assets of Community Value - such as parks, children's play areas, street services, and buildings - **should be transferred to the new council** - including allotments, **which are a statutory responsibility**.

4. Set a realistic, sustainable budget

- **Avoid undervaluing your council:** A weak budget means a weak council. Current data show successful larger councils operate with an average Band D precept of £98 (based on councils with a tax base above 10,000, 2024-25).
- **Benchmark against success:** Use data from thriving councils to ensure a **strong financial foundation**. We can provide benchmarking data to help establish appropriate funding levels for sustainable service delivery.

5. Learn from proven success stories

- **Follow the leaders:** Shrewsbury, Salisbury, Weymouth, Chippenham and Taunton have all successfully created powerful town councils by maintaining control of ultra-local services.
- **Deliver what residents need:** These councils **manage parks, cemeteries, leisure centres, markets, theatres, community centres, museums, car parks, youth services, and town centres** - so can yours.

6. Appoint an interim officer - immediately

- **Expert guidance is crucial:** Your council needs experienced guidance from day one. Secure an interim chief officer who understands local councils inside and out. SLCC's consultancy service, provides **seasoned professionals** who can support the shadow council.
- **Get the right leadership in place:** An interim chief officer will **drive progress and prevent delays**.

7. Recruit a qualified, experienced chief officer

- **Leadership matters:** The right chief officer must bring **proven management, communication, and strategic skills**.
- **Competitive pay is essential:** If you want top talent, you **must offer a salary that attracts the best**. The role of chief officer demands competitive compensation - currently averaging £78,200 for larger councils, with some, in the largest town councils, receiving comparable salaries to district council chief executives. Invest in professional development through SLCC and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) membership to ensure continued growth and success.

8. Form a shadow council today

- **Ensure a smooth transition:** The shadow council, made up of all principal councillors for the area of the new council, will oversee **crucial early decisions**.
- **Secure funding for setup:** A small but vital setup budget will **make all the difference**. This ensures the new local council hits the ground running when its first elections arrive.

9. Establish an executive committee for operations

- **Delegate the details:** IT systems, finance, staffing, policies - **this must be managed efficiently**.
- **Engage expert support:** SLCC and NALC provide governance checklists **to keep you on track**.

10. Transition to a town council - secure your status

- **Make it official:** Every new local council **starts as a parish council** - but, once elected, it can **easily convert to a town or city council** by resolution.
- **Preserve your heritage:** Petition to transfer historic armorial bearings, civic rights and privileges and city status to maintain **your town's identity**.



Act today - SLCC is here to help

The time to act is **now**. SLCC provides **expert guidance, training, and resources** to ensure your local council is set up for success.

Contact SLCC today to take the first step in securing local democracy for your community.

SLCC: Empowering excellence in local governance. As the professional body for town and parish council officers, we provide the expert guidance, qualifications, and support you need to establish and run an outstanding local council. Let's work together to strengthen local democracy in your community.

For further information and professional support, please visit www.slcc.co.uk/establishingalocalcouncil

SLCC: The professional membership organisation for local council officers.

SLCC equips its members with expert training, qualifications, and resources to ensure the highest standards of local governance. Our team is ready to assist with the establishment of new town and parish councils.

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