POLICY BRIEFING

The South Gloucestershire Opportunity: A Missed Chance in England's Local Government Reorganisation

Centre for Place-Based Policy | February 2026

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Submitted to: HM Government Consultation on Gloucestershire Local Government Reorganisation

Executive summary

The government's local government reorganisation programme, as set out in the English devolution white paper (December 2024), rightly seeks to replace two-tier councils with efficient unitary authorities serving populations of 500,000 or more, aligned with functional economic geographies. In Gloucestershire, three proposals have been submitted — a single county-wide unitary, an east/west split, and a Greater Gloucester model — all of which treat the county boundary as immutable. This briefing argues that all three miss a more significant and structurally logical opportunity: the reorganisation of South Gloucestershire, already a unitary authority but one whose boundaries make little geographic, economic or administrative sense. We propose that South Gloucestershire should be abolished, its urbanised wards transferred into an enlarged Bristol unitary authority, and its rural and small-town wards returned to a new Gloucestershire unitary. This would produce two viable, coherent authorities meeting the 500,000+ population threshold, better serve the government's strategic goals for growth and devolution, and resolve an historic anomaly dating from the ill-fated Avon experiment of 1974.

Key recommendations

- Abolish South Gloucestershire Council as a unitary authority.
- Transfer the 17 wards comprising the Bristol urban fringe (population: ~185,000 at 2021 census) to Bristol City Council, creating an enlarged Bristol unitary authority with a population approaching 660,000.
- Transfer the 11 rural and small-town wards (population: ~106,000 at 2021 census) to the new Gloucestershire unitary authority, which, combined with the existing Gloucestershire county area (~648,000), would serve a population of approximately 754,000.
- Simplify the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, aligning its membership more closely with the Bristol/Bath functional economic area.
- Use the LGR process to unlock greater devolution powers for both the West of England Mayor and a new Gloucestershire strategic authority.

1. Background: the current reorganisation process

The English devolution white paper, Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth, published on 16 December 2024, sets out the government's intention to complete the devolution map across England and to simplify local government structures. The white paper's local government reorganisation (LGR) programme invites all remaining two-tier areas — where county and district councils co-exist — to submit proposals for consolidation into single-tier unitary authorities.

The white paper specifies that new unitary authorities should generally serve populations of at least 500,000, in order to achieve the efficiency, financial resilience, and strategic capacity needed to deliver high-quality public services and act as effective partners to Strategic Authorities. Exceptions may be made where geography or functional economic logic requires it, but the 500,000 population threshold represents the government's clear aspiration.

The white paper also commits to extending Mayoral Strategic Authorities to all parts of England, ideally with directly elected mayors exercising powers over transport, housing, skills and economic development. Crucially, the government has stated that 'reorganisation should not delay devolution and plans for both should be complementary.'

In Gloucestershire, seven councils — Gloucestershire County Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester City Council, Stroud District Council, and Tewkesbury Borough Council — submitted three reorganisation proposals to government in November 2025:

1. A single unitary authority covering the whole of Gloucestershire county (population approximately 648,000);
2. Two unitary authorities split broadly east/west, with Gloucester, Stroud and Forest of Dean in the west, and Cheltenham, Cotswold and Tewkesbury in the east;
3. Two unitary authorities, one being an expanded 'Greater Gloucester City' covering several nearby parishes, and a 'Gloucestershire Unitary' covering the remainder.

A government consultation on these three proposals is currently running (February–March 2026). All three proposals take the current Gloucestershire county boundary as their starting point and do not engage with the question of South Gloucestershire, which — as an existing unitary authority — falls outside the formal LGR invitation process directed at two-tier areas.

> *This briefing contends that by confining analysis to the Gloucestershire county area, the current proposals collectively miss the most strategically significant local government reform opportunity in the South West: the rationalisation of South Gloucestershire itself.*

2. South Gloucestershire: an authority born of accident

2.1 Origins and current character

South Gloucestershire Council was created from the district of Northavon and the Borough of Kingswood on 1 April 1996, when the short-lived county of Avon was abolished following widespread public opposition. Avon was perceived as having failed because it was overbound and lacked natural geographic unity, combining major cities with very different and distant rural areas. However, this flaw was preserved in the creation of South Gloucestershire. Its southern half consists of dense urban and suburban settlements forming

the northern and eastern fringes of Bristol — Filton, Patchway, Kingswood, Staple Hill, Downend, Bradley Stoke — which have a high-tech economy, major university and national strategic transport connections. Its northern and eastern half consists of the market towns of Thornbury and Yate, along with parts of the Cotswold National Landscape area of outstanding natural beauty, and the agricultural landscapes of the former Sodbury and Thornbury rural districts.

The 2021 census recorded South Gloucestershire's population at 290,424, rising to an estimated 306,332 by mid-2024. This makes it comfortably smaller than the authorities in the proposals under consideration: significantly below the white paper's 500,000 threshold, and with a geographical incoherence that hampers effective strategic planning.

The white paper explicitly states that it will consider reorganising existing unitary councils 'where there is evidence of failure or their size or boundaries are limiting public service performance.' Both criteria may credibly be applied to South Gloucestershire: its population is well below the target threshold, and its internal geographic divisions have long created tensions between the urban fringe communities with their Bristol-facing orientation and the rural northern settlements whose natural hinterland lies in Gloucestershire.

2.2 Functional economic geography

The south-western parts of South Gloucestershire — broadly those areas lying within or immediately adjacent to the Bristol built-up area — function economically, socially and culturally as part of the Bristol city region. They are home to major employers on the Bristol North Fringe, including Airbus and Rolls-Royce at Filton, the University of the West of England (UWE) at Stoke Gifford, and the Cribbs Causeway retail and logistics cluster. At the 2011 census (the last not to be affected by pandemic working patterns), 34,636 residents of South Gloucestershire commuted across the boundary into Bristol, while 28,895 residents of Bristol commuted into South Gloucestershire – in both cases, most remained within the Bristol built-up area. As well as commuting overwhelmingly to Bristol, residents' healthcare is managed by the same NHS Integrated Care Board, their transport networks are designed around Bristol, and their urban form is continuous with Bristol's.

The northern and eastern parts of South Gloucestershire — Thornbury, Yate, Chipping Sodbury, the Cotswold edge, and the rural parishes of the Severn Vale — are functionally distinct. They are as likely to look to Gloucester and Cheltenham for higher-order services, share landscape character and agricultural traditions with Gloucestershire, and have historic administrative connections with Gloucestershire stretching back centuries. Until 1974, all of the area now comprising South Gloucestershire was part of the shire county of Gloucestershire.

> *In short, South Gloucestershire as currently constituted attempts to serve two functionally different places with one administrative structure — and, in so doing, serves neither as well as it could.*

3. The proposed solution

3.1 Abolish South Gloucestershire and redistribute Its territory

We propose that the government use the LGR process to abolish South Gloucestershire Council and redistribute its 28 wards between Bristol City Council and the new Gloucestershire unitary authority/authorities. The boundary between the two new jurisdictions should roughly follow the Bristol built-up area as defined by the Office for

National Statistics, supplemented by an assessment of functional economic and community ties.

We propose that 17 wards currently in South Gloucestershire — those lying within the continuous Bristol urban area and its immediate North Fringe — should be transferred to an enlarged Bristol unitary authority. A further 11 wards — those comprising Thornbury, Yate, Chipping Sodbury, the Cotswold edge, the Severn Vale, and rural parishes — should be transferred to the new Gloucestershire unitary authority. The ward-by-ward allocation is set out in full in the Annex to this briefing.

3.2 Population impacts and the 500,000 threshold

The table below summarises the population implications of the proposed reorganisation, using 2021 census data and 2024 ONS mid-year estimates.

	Population (2021 census)	Population (2024 estimate)
Bristol (current)	472,088	~500,000
Urban South Gloucestershire wards (proposed transfer)	184,655	~196,000
Enlarged Bristol (proposed)	656,743	~696,000
Gloucestershire county (current)	645,100	~668,000
Rural South Gloucestershire wards (proposed transfer)	105,769	~110,000
Enlarged Gloucestershire unitary (proposed)	750.869	~778,000
South Gloucestershire (current, for reference)	290,424	306,332

Both resulting authorities comfortably meet the government's preferred 500,000 population threshold. The enlarged Bristol unitary, at nearly 700,000, would be a substantial city authority capable of acting as an effective anchor institution for the West of England region. The enlarged Gloucestershire unitary, at nearly 780,000, would be among the larger unitary authorities in England outside the major conurbations. Alternatively, if Gloucestershire pursues a division into two unitaries – at least one of which would necessarily be below the 500,000 threshold – the addition of South Gloucestershire's rural wards would reduce the size of the population deficit for those authorities.

3.3 The boundary approach

The boundary between wards proposed for transfer to Bristol and those proposed for Gloucestershire broadly follows the edge of the Bristol continuous built-up area as recognised by the ONS. This urban edge is largely controlled by the Avon Green Belt, a policy which limits further expansion of the urban area. Wards south of the M4 motorway corridor in the North Bristol Fringe, or those whose principal settlements are continuous with Bristol's urban fabric, are allocated to Bristol. Wards north of this corridor, or whose settlements are discrete from the Bristol urban area and functionally oriented towards Gloucestershire, are allocated to the new Gloucestershire unitary.

Some borderline wards present particular complexity. Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne, and Bitton & Oldland Common each contain settlements that, while growing, are not fully

continuous with the Bristol built-up area. Frampton Cotterell and Winterbourne are allocated to Gloucestershire on the grounds that they retain a village character and are narrowly separated from the Bristol urban area by the Avon Green Belt. Bitton & Oldland Common is allocated to Bristol on the grounds that Oldland Common is physically continuous with Kingswood and because the Bath Road corridor creates a functional link with the eastern Bristol fringe. These allocations are necessarily judgement calls and the government may wish to subject them to further review.

3.4 The broader boundary question: Bristol's underbounding and the position of the Avon Green Belt

The proposed redistribution of South Gloucestershire's wards offers a further opportunity: a more fundamental review of Bristol's administrative boundaries. The edge of the Bristol built-up area is largely determined by the Avon Green Belt, designated in the 1950s to contain Bristol's post-war expansion and prevent coalescence with surrounding settlements. That green belt was designed for a mid-twentieth century economy and a planning culture that prioritised containment over growth; its continuing relevance in its current form deserves scrutiny.

Bristol is one of England's most economically dynamic cities, yet it is also one of its most constrained due to underbounding, with a relatively small administrative area, severe pressure on developable land within its boundaries, and a housing affordability crisis that ranks among the worst outside London. As a means of constraining sprawl and preventing greenfield loss, the green belt as currently designated also has perverse outcomes as development pressures are met by housing growth on land beyond the green belt, for example, with the rapid northern expansions of Yate and Thornbury in recent years.

The National Planning Policy Framework already permits green belt release where "exceptional circumstances" can be demonstrated, and the government's own planning reforms have made clear that housing need and economic growth can constitute such circumstances. However, most of this land currently falls outside the Bristol City Council boundary.

In this context, a LGR process that redraws South Gloucestershire's boundaries creates a natural moment to ask whether some of Bristol's peripheral areas — not only in South Gloucestershire but also in North Somerset and North East Somerset — might be more appropriately governed by Bristol where they are already urbanised, or where they combine low intrinsic green belt value with existing or readily achievable public transport connections into the city. Subject to further study, these might include:

- The A370/Bristol-Taunton railway corridor, from Ashton Gate and Long Ashton to Nailsea and Backwell.
- The Portishead railway corridor, including Portishead and Pill.
- The Severnside plain, south of the M4 motorway and served by Pilning and Severn Beach railway stations, which is adjacent to the Avonmouth and Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA).
- The A4/Great Western Main Line corridor from Brislington to Keynsham.

Bristol's administrative boundary should reflect its genuine functional and economic footprint, rather than accidents of twentieth century planning doctrines, and this once-in-a-generation reorganisation provides a rare opportunity. Equally, the Avon Green Belt needs to reflect where contemporary development pressures present the greater risks of adverse outcomes, and may merit moving and expanding outwards to prevent development simply "hopping" the belt.

4. Policy alignment with government priorities

4.1 The English devolution white paper

Unitary authorities at the right scale. The white paper's primary structural objective is to create unitary authorities of sufficient scale to be 'resilient, high-performing local authorities.' Both proposed new authorities would exceed the 500,000 threshold, unlike South Gloucestershire in its current form and unlike several of the Gloucestershire-only options under consideration.

Sensible geographies aligned with functional economic areas. The white paper states that new structures should 'make sense for an area, including for devolution.' The proposed division reflects genuine functional economic geographies: the Bristol city region in the south and the Gloucestershire economy in the north. This alignment is recognised by the ONS's own definition of the Bristol built-up area, the boundaries of NHS integrated care boards, and long-established travel-to-work patterns.

Enabling stronger devolution and strategic authorities. The white paper envisages Strategic Authorities — ideally with directly elected mayors — covering all of England, serving populations of 1.5 million or more. The proposed arrangements would sharpen the governance of the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (WECA), which already covers Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, and South Gloucestershire. With South Gloucestershire abolished, WECA's membership would be rationalised: Bristol (enlarged) and Bath and North East Somerset would form a cleaner functional unit. A Gloucestershire strategic authority would meanwhile be better positioned to pursue its own devolution deal, unencumbered by the awkward presence of a part-Bristol, part-rural constituent member whose interests frequently diverge.

4.2 The government's growth mission

The government has made economic growth a central mission. The proposed reorganisation directly supports this in several respects.

Bristol Temple Quarter and urban regeneration. Bristol Temple Quarter is one of the UK's largest regeneration projects, aiming to deliver 10,000 homes and 22,000 jobs around Bristol Temple Meads station. Its success depends on integrated transport planning, housing delivery, and economic development across the wider Bristol urban area. Bringing the North Fringe settlements — Bradley Stoke, Stoke Gifford, Filton, Emersons Green — within the same unitary authority as Bristol would remove a critical governance barrier to coherent planning and delivery.

The West Innovation Arc. WECA's Growth Strategy (September 2025) identifies the West Innovation Arc — centred on the aerospace and advanced manufacturing cluster around Filton, Patchway and Stoke Gifford — as a key growth zone. This area, currently in South Gloucestershire, would benefit enormously from being governed by Bristol City Council, enabling integrated planning permissions, land assembly, transport investment, and skills policy to be pursued across a single authority.

Emersons Green Science Park. The £300 million Emersons Green Science Park, recognised as part of Bristol's designation as a Science City, has long suffered from the governance anomaly of being located in South Gloucestershire rather than Bristol, and its geography and transport leaves it relatively isolated from related clusters in Bristol's science and technology-based economic sector. Transferring Emersons Green ward to Bristol would enable joined-up innovation policy and align this nationally significant asset with the Bristol city region's economic development strategy.

Gloucestershire's rural economy. The rural and small-town settlements of northern South Gloucestershire — Thornbury, Yate, Chipping Sodbury, the Cotswold edge — are best served by a Gloucestershire-wide authority that understands and can champion the distinctive needs of market towns, agricultural communities, and heritage landscapes. A Gloucestershire unitary would be better placed to pursue a coherent rural economy strategy, including the management of the Cotswolds National Landscape (formerly AONB).

4.3 Transport and infrastructure policy

The government's integrated transport ambitions — including the Get Britain Moving agenda and plans for integrated rail and bus networks — are directly supported by the proposal. The Bristol MetroBus network, the proposed West of England mass transit system (previously branded MetroWest), and the North Fringe to Hengrove package all span the current Bristol/South Gloucestershire boundary. Unified governance would remove the need for complex inter-authority agreements for every transport scheme, accelerating delivery.

Bristol Parkway station, located in Stoke Gifford ward, is a major national rail interchange. Bringing it within Bristol's administrative boundary would enable more coherent strategic planning around this asset, including housing development in the station's catchment area and surface transport integration.

4.4 Housing delivery

The government has set ambitious housing delivery targets under its housebuilding programme. South Gloucestershire contains some of the most significant housing growth areas in the South West, including the Charlton Hayes/Cribbs development, the ongoing expansion of Bradley Stoke, and the emerging Brabazon development at the former Filton Airfield, which is planned to deliver approximately 2,700 homes. Under the proposed arrangement, these North Fringe developments would be brought within Bristol's planning authority, enabling them to be comprehensively planned as part of the wider Bristol housing market area, rather than managed across an administrative boundary that bears no relationship to housing need or market reality.

4.5 NHS and health integration

The NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board already covers Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire as a single health geography. An enlarged Bristol that absorbs the urban South Gloucestershire wards would reduce the number of local authority partners that NHS BNSSG must engage with, simplifying health integration. The proposed changes are coterminous with the ICB geography in the urban South Gloucestershire area, supporting the NHS's ambitions for joined-up population health management.

4.6 Higher education

The University of the West of England, located in Stoke Gifford ward (to be transferred to Bristol), is one of the largest universities in England with over 30,000 students. Its presence on the Bristol urban fringe, currently in a different local authority from the city it primarily serves, creates unnecessary complications for skills strategy, student housing policy, and economic development. Bringing UWE within Bristol's boundary would enable a coherent skills and higher education strategy for the city region.

5. Difficulties to overcome

This briefing does not minimise the challenges involved in implementing the proposed reorganisation. The following issues would need to be carefully managed.

5.1 Political and democratic challenges

Lack of consent. South Gloucestershire Council has not been formally invited to submit LGR proposals, as it is already a unitary authority. The government would need to determine that South Gloucestershire's 'size or boundaries are limiting public service performance' — a threshold the white paper acknowledges — before initiating a reorganisation process. This would likely be contested by South Gloucestershire Council itself, which has an institutional interest in its own continuation.

Effect on Bristol's governance. The addition of approximately 185,000 residents to Bristol's electorate would require a reconsideration of ward boundaries through a Local Government Boundary Commission review, and potentially a review of the council's size and governance arrangements. This adds complexity and time to the process. The demographics of the additional electorate could also have, or be perceived to have, implications for the political balance of the city council.

Community identity. Some residents of areas such as Kingswood retain a sense of local identity distinct from Bristol. The former Borough of Kingswood had its own council until 1996, and many residents still resist characterisation as Bristolians. The government should consider whether parish and community council structures are needed to preserve local identity, and engage sensitively with communities during any reorganisation process.

West of England Combined Authority membership. South Gloucestershire is currently a constituent member of WECA, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority. Abolishing South Gloucestershire would require new arrangements for WECA membership. Under the proposed model, the urban South Gloucestershire area would be covered by enlarged Bristol, which is already a WECA member. The rural areas would transfer to Gloucestershire, which is currently in discussions about its own strategic authority arrangements. Careful legislative drafting would be required to ensure continuity of WECA functions during the transition.

Gloucestershire's own LGR process. The Gloucestershire reorganisation process — already submitted to government — would need to be coordinated with the South Gloucestershire process. Depending on which option government selects for Gloucestershire, the receiving authority for the rural wards might be a single Gloucestershire unitary or one of two proposed sub-county unitaries. If a two unitary solution is preferred, the addition of rural South Gloucestershire wards potentially alters the equation for how best to divide the county into two.

5.2 Administrative and service continuity

Staff TUPE and workforce integration. South Gloucestershire employs approximately 9,500 people. Their employment would transfer under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment) regulations to either Bristol or the new Gloucestershire unitary, depending on the service they deliver. This requires careful workforce planning and early engagement with trade unions.

IT systems and service contracts. South Gloucestershire has its own IT infrastructure, service contracts, and shared services arrangements, including with the former Avon authorities. Disentangling and migrating these could be complex. The government should ensure adequate transition funding is available, consistent with funding made available to other reorganising authorities.

Education and children's services. South Gloucestershire is a statutory education authority responsible for schools in its area. The transfer of schools in the Bristol fringe wards to Bristol, and in the rural wards to Gloucestershire, would require careful co-ordination to ensure continuity of pupil and school support services.

Waste and planning arrangements. South Gloucestershire is party to sub-regional waste planning arrangements as part of the former Avon area. These would need to be renegotiated. Similarly, the current Joint Spatial Plan for the West of England (developed by Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset) would need to be updated to reflect the new authority boundaries.

5.3 Financial challenges

Debts and liabilities. South Gloucestershire Council has accumulated capital debts and pension liabilities. A fair apportionment formula — most likely based on population ratios or asset location — would need to be agreed between the receiving authorities, using the mechanism established by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and associated regulations.

Business rates and council tax. The transfer of the North Fringe employment areas — including Cribbs Causeway, Aztec West, and the Filton aerospace cluster — to Bristol would significantly increase Bristol's business rate income, with implications for the distribution of business rate pooling arrangements in the West of England area.

Rural deprivation funding. The rural South Gloucestershire wards, once transferred to Gloucestershire, would need to be reflected in Gloucestershire's local government finance settlement. The government should ensure that transition arrangements do not disadvantage either receiving authority during the period before a new funding formula takes effect.

5.4 Boundary complexity

Ward-level precision. The proposed boundary necessarily uses existing electoral wards as its building blocks. In some cases — notably Frampton Cotterell, Winterbourne, and Bitton & Oldland Common — the ward boundary does not precisely track the edge of the built-up area at the parish or settlement level. A more granular review, potentially at parish level, could achieve a more accurate functional boundary, though this would add time and complexity to the process. The government should commission the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to undertake a rapid review of the boundary between the proposed Bristol and Gloucestershire areas as part of the LGR process.

6. Conclusion

The English devolution white paper sets out an ambitious and coherent vision for local government in England: fewer, larger, more capable unitary authorities, aligned with functional economic geographies and nested within strong Strategic Authorities with directly elected mayors. The current proposals for Gloucestershire, however sensible within their own terms, fail to address the most glaring structural anomaly in the sub-region: the existence of South Gloucestershire, a unitary authority of just 306,000 people whose territory spans the Bristol urban fringe and the Gloucestershire countryside.

The proposals set out in this briefing would correct that anomaly. They would create a Bristol unitary authority of sufficient scale and coherence to act as a genuine metropolitan anchor — capable of integrated transport planning, strategic housing delivery, and economic development across the city region. They would create a Gloucestershire unitary capable of championing the distinctive needs of its market towns, rural communities, and nationally

significant landscapes. And they would simplify the governance of the West of England, removing the awkward hybrid constituency of an authority that is simultaneously part of the Bristol city region and part of the Gloucestershire hinterland.

The government has rightly identified this as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get the structures of local government right. We urge ministers to take it — and to extend the scope of the Gloucestershire LGR consultation to encompass the reorganisation of South Gloucestershire.

Annex: South Gloucestershire electoral wards — Proposed allocation

The following tables list all 28 electoral wards of South Gloucestershire Council, with their 2021 census populations, and their proposed allocation between the enlarged Bristol unitary authority and the new Gloucestershire unitary authority. Population figures are sourced from the UK Office for National Statistics, 2021 census.

Ward boundaries as at May 2025. All population figures for wards are based on census output areas and may show slight discrepancies compared to actual ward boundaries.

Table A1: Wards proposed for transfer to Bristol City Council (Enlarged)

These 17 wards lie within the continuous Bristol built-up area or the North Fringe of Bristol, and are functionally, economically and physically integrated with the city of Bristol.

Ward	Population (2021 Census)	Rationale
Bitton & Oldland Common	9,459	*Eastern suburban fringe; Bitton village on Bristol-Bath corridor; Oldland Common is continuous with Kingswood urban area*
Bradley Stoke North	11,065	*Purpose-built new town; North Fringe of Bristol; continuous urban development*
Bradley Stoke South	9,619	*Purpose-built new town; North Fringe of Bristol; continuous urban development*
Charlton & Cribbs	9,419	*Cribbs Causeway/The Mall; Charlton Hayes major new development; continuous North Fringe urban area*
Emersons Green	17,339	*Large and rapidly growing suburban settlement; Bristol Science Park; continuous with Bristol urban area*
Filton	11,295	*Major aerospace employment centre (Airbus, Rolls-Royce); North Fringe; continuous with Bristol*
Frenchay & Downend	13,733	*Dense suburban area on Bristol's north-eastern fringe; continuous urban settlement*
Hanham	13,064	*Urban settlement immediately east of Bristol boundary; continuous built-up area*
Kingswood	9,006	*Dense urban settlement; historically separate borough; continuous with Bristol urban area*
Longwell Green	9,890	*Urban fringe settlement south-east of Bristol; continuous built-up area*
New Cheltenham	9,047	*Part of Kingswood/Soundwell urban area; dense suburban settlement*
Parkwall & Warmley	9,230	*Urban east Bristol fringe; Warmley contiguous with Kingswood urban area*

Ward	Population (2021 Census)	Rationale
Patchway Coniston	5,412	*North Fringe; contiguous urban development adjacent to Bristol*
Staple Hill & Mangotsfield	15,037	*Most densely populated ward; urban; continuous with Bristol urban area*
Stoke Gifford	14,200	*University of the West of England main campus; Bristol Parkway station; North Fringe*
Stoke Park & Cheswick	7,653	*Rapidly growing; UWE student accommodation; Harry Stoke; North Fringe urban area*
Woodstock	10,187	*Suburban Kingswood/Downend area; continuous with Bristol urban area*
Total — Bristol transfer	**184,655**	

The enlarged Bristol unitary authority would have a 2021 census population of approximately 656,743, combining the existing Bristol population of approximately 472,088 with the 184,655 residents of the 17 transferred wards.

Table A2: Wards proposed for transfer to the new Gloucestershire unitary authority

These 11 wards comprise the small market towns, rural settlements and countryside of northern and eastern South Gloucestershire, whose functional ties, landscape character and historic identity lie with Gloucestershire rather than Bristol.

Ward	Population (2021 Census)	Rationale
Boyd Valley	9,235	*Rural; very low population density; Chipping Sodbury hinterland; characteristic Gloucestershire countryside*
Charfield	5,278	*Small rural market settlement; HM Prisons Leyhill and Eastwood Park; distinctly rural character; historic Gloucestershire*
Chipping Sodbury & Cotswold Edge	10,036	*Traditional Cotswold market town; historic character; gateway to AONB; natural Gloucestershire hinterland*
Dodington	9,885	*Parishes around Yate/Chipping Sodbury fringe; rural and semi-rural; historical Sodbury RD*
Frampton Cotterell	13,238	*Large village/small town; Iron Acton and Coal Pit Heath; semi-rural; not continuously connected to Bristol built-up area*
Pilning & Severn Beach	4,847	*Sparsely settled Severn estuary coastal plain; rural character; historically*

Ward	Population (2021 Census)	Rationale
		Thornbury RD
Severn Vale	9,617	*Rural hinterland north of Bristol; low density; historically Thornbury RD; natural Gloucestershire landscape*
Thornbury	14,485	*Historic market town with castle; distinct settlement well separated from Bristol; natural Gloucestershire town*
Winterbourne	7,604	*Village/small settlement north of Bristol urban fringe; not continuously connected to main built-up area*
Yate Central	9,196	*New town; distinct settlement with own identity; historically Sodbury RD; natural Gloucestershire*
Yate North	12,346	*New town expansion area; distinct settlement; historically Sodbury RD; natural Gloucestershire*
Total — Gloucestershire transfer	**105,767**	

Combined with the existing Gloucestershire county area (2021 census population approximately 648,000), the new Gloucestershire unitary authority would serve a population of approximately 754,000.

A note on ward boundaries and borderline cases

Three wards present a degree of ambiguity in classification:

- **Frampton Cotterell** (population 13,238): Although growing rapidly and within commuting distance of Bristol, Frampton Cotterell, Iron Acton, and Coalpit Heath retain a village character and are separated from the continuous Bristol urban area by agricultural land. This ward is allocated to Gloucestershire, consistent with its rural/semi-rural character and historic association with the former Frampton Cotterell RD.
- **Winterbourne** (population 7,604): Winterbourne village and its associated settlements lie north of the continuous Bristol/Bradley Stoke urban area, separated by green belt. While well connected to Bristol by road, the ward is allocated to Gloucestershire on account of its village character and separation from the built-up area.
- **Bitton & Oldland Common** (population 9,459): Oldland Common is physically continuous with the Kingswood urban area and is allocated to Bristol accordingly. Bitton village itself is more separated, due to the Avon Green Belt, but falls within the same ward and the ward as a whole is more closely tied to the eastern Bristol fringe economy and transport network. The government may wish to consider a more granular parish-level review.

We recommend that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be asked to undertake a rapid review of the boundary between the proposed Bristol and Gloucestershire jurisdictions, potentially enabling sub-ward adjustments at parish level where this would produce a more logical outcome.