

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATIONS**  
**THE CONTEXT FOR THE JOINT PROVISION OF COMMUNITY SPORTS CENTRES:**  
**1965 - 2020** [Moderated by Malcolm Tungatt]

❖ **From Harlow Sportcentre (built in 1964 in a New Town development) to the Current Structure of Local Government**

The changing structure of UK Local Government has helped shape how the joint provision of sports centres, almost exclusively on school campuses, has changed over the years.

**The current structure** of local government varies from area to area. In most of **England**, there are two tiers – county and district – with responsibility for council services split between them. In the context of joint provision, education services are under the control of the county councils and ‘leisure’ services under the control of the district councils. However, London, some other metropolitan areas and parts of shire England operate under a single-tier structure with councils responsible for all services in their area.

In total there are 337 local authorities in England made up of 5 different types:

- county councils
- district councils
- unitary authorities
- metropolitan districts
- London boroughs

The table below shows the number of each type of council.

<b>Two-tier:</b>	
County councils	25
District councils	<u>188</u>
	213
<b>Single-tier:</b>	
Unitary authorities	56
Metropolitan districts	36
London boroughs	32
City of London	1
Isles of Scilly	<u>1</u>
	124
<b>Total</b>	<b>337</b>

Some shire district councils (including unitary authorities) and all metropolitan district councils have the status of either a borough or a city and are referred to as borough or city councils.

There are also numerous **town and parish councils**, some of which have been party to joint provision schemes.

**The current structure in Scotland** is 32 Unitary Authorities operating as single-tier councils. In **Wales** there are 22 Principal Areas also operating as single-tier councils. Eleven are named as counties and eleven are styled as county boroughs. **Northern Ireland** is divided into 11 Districts; all have responsibility for leisure and community services, but education services are provided by the Education Authority for Northern Ireland so it is effectively a two-tier structure in a joint provision context.

❖ **How have the structures progressed to the current picture since 1964, when Harlow Sports Centre first opened its doors?**

**Prior to 1965** there were 46 two-tier County Councils in **England**, divided into lower tier municipal boroughs, urban districts and rural districts. There were also 73 single-tier county boroughs and the City of London and the Isles of Scilly Councils. In **Scotland** there were 33 two-tier county councils divided into large burghs and small burghs and 4 single-tier counties of cities. In **Wales** there were 13 two-tier county councils divided into municipal boroughs, urban districts and rural districts and 2 single-tier county boroughs and in **Northern Ireland** there were 6 two-tier county councils divided into boroughs, urban districts and rural districts and 2 single-tier county boroughs.

In **1965** a new structure was introduced to **London** whereby Greater London was formed from the old London County Council (LCC), the county of Middlesex, the three county boroughs of Croydon, East Ham and West Ham and segments of the surrounding counties of Essex, Kent, Surrey and Hertfordshire. At the time Greater London was declared to be an "area" and not to lie in any county. The Greater London Council (GLC) and 32 new London borough councils were created, along with the continuation of the City of London. 20 of these boroughs, (commonly known as Outer London boroughs) were single-tier councils as far as providing education and 'leisure' services were concerned, although the GLC retained an interest in managing some strategic parks in these areas which it had inherited from the old LCC. The remaining 12 boroughs (commonly known as Inner London boroughs) and the City of London were two-tier authorities as far as education services were concerned with their schools under the control of the Inner London Education Authority.

In **1968** 6 new single-tier county boroughs were created

In **1973** Northern Ireland had had its entire two-tier system replaced by a single-tier district council system, with 26 council areas.

In **1974** a new two-tier structure was introduced to the rest of **England and Wales** whereby 39 revised (and in many cases larger) counties, also known as shire counties, provided the top tier of local government and 296 non-metropolitan districts the lower tier. All of the existing single-tier county boroughs were abolished. However, in the heavily urbanised areas six additional new counties were created, known as metropolitan counties, with the subdivisions called metropolitan districts. Each of these 36 newly-created metropolitan districts were single-tier councils for the delivery of education and 'leisure' services, although the metropolitan counties often had an interest in the provision of cross-borough countryside recreation schemes.

In **1975** **Scotland** had the same structure introduced except that the upper-tier units were known as regions.

In **1986** the Greater London Council and the six metropolitan counties were abolished and in 1990 the Inner London Education Authority was also abolished, leaving the 12 Inner London boroughs and the City of London as new single-tier authorities, although the abolished larger areas are still recognised for some purposes such as statistical presentation, fire and police services, waste disposal and strategic planning.

In **1995** the two districts of the Isle of Wight were merged and the county became a new Unitary Authority (UA). The first of many districts in England to be granted single-tier UA status in subsequent years, as described below.

In **1996** **Scotland and Wales** had their two-tier systems replaced, in Scotland by a single-tier system of council areas and in Wales by a similar system of single-tier UAs.

Also in **1996** the next process of restructuring in **England** began, implemented in phases over the next 25 years. In 1996 the counties of Avon, Cleveland and Humberside were abolished and a total of 12 new single-tier UAs were created in these areas. The city of York was separated from North Yorkshire and became a UA.

In **1997** several large towns and cities were detached from their counties and, in total, 14 new UAs were created. The historic county of Rutland was detached from Leicestershire and converted to a UA.

In **1998** the county of Hereford and Worcester was divided into the two-tier county of Worcestershire and the somewhat misleadingly named UA; the County of Herefordshire. The county of Berkshire was abolished and divided into six new UAs. Elsewhere in England 9 other districts became UAs.

In **2004** legislation was passed to allow referendums on regional government in the English Government Office Regions (GORs). On 4 November 2004, a referendum was held in the North East which produced a major 'no' vote. Consequently, the plans for referendums elsewhere were dropped, with plans for regional assemblies shelved. However, should regional assemblies be introduced at a later date, this will almost certainly lead to a major reorganisation of local government structures.

In **2009** there was a further round of local government reorganisation, in which 10 new UAs were created. The county of Bedfordshire and its districts were abolished and split into two UAs and the county and districts of Cheshire were also abolished and split into two UAs. In addition, 5 complete counties and their districts were abolished and re-created as 5 separate UAs – Cornwall, County Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire. Due to the changes in Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly Council is also considered as a UA for coding purposes. Proposals to create a UA in Cumbria were withdrawn following opposition from the districts and in **2011** plans to create two new UAs in Exeter and Suffolk were revoked by Parliament.

In **2015**, the 26 single-tier districts in Northern Ireland were re-organised into 11 new single-tier districts, but as noted earlier the education services are provided by the Education Authority for Northern Ireland.

In **2019** two new UAs were created in England. The County of Dorset and its districts were abolished. Christchurch district merged with the two existing UAs in Bournemouth and Poole, both created in 1997, to become a new UA and the remaining districts of Dorset also merged to form a new UA.

Finally, in **2020** the county of Buckinghamshire and its districts merged to form a new single-tier UA.

**In summary**, the results of this latest phase of restructuring in **England** since 1995 has meant that the 39 two-tier shire counties created in 1974, split into 296 districts, has been replaced by 25 two-tier shire counties split into 188 districts and 56 new single-tier Unitary Authorities with the obvious impact on new opportunities for joint provision of community sports centres between counties and districts. In **Scotland** and **Wales** there are now no two-tier authorities and **Northern Ireland** is in a unique situation of its own.

**Data based on Government and Council websites, including:** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-structure-and-elections>