



Northumberland Local Government Reform and Highways 2009-2026

Impact on Roads, Maintenance, and Service Delivery

Local Government Reform Overview

Rationale for Change

2009 reforms replaced two-tier councils with a single unitary authority to streamline decisions, reduce duplication, and modernise service delivery.

Impact on Highways

Highways functions consolidated under Northumberland County Council, enabling unified strategy, coordinated operations, and efficient resourcing.

Outcomes & Benefits

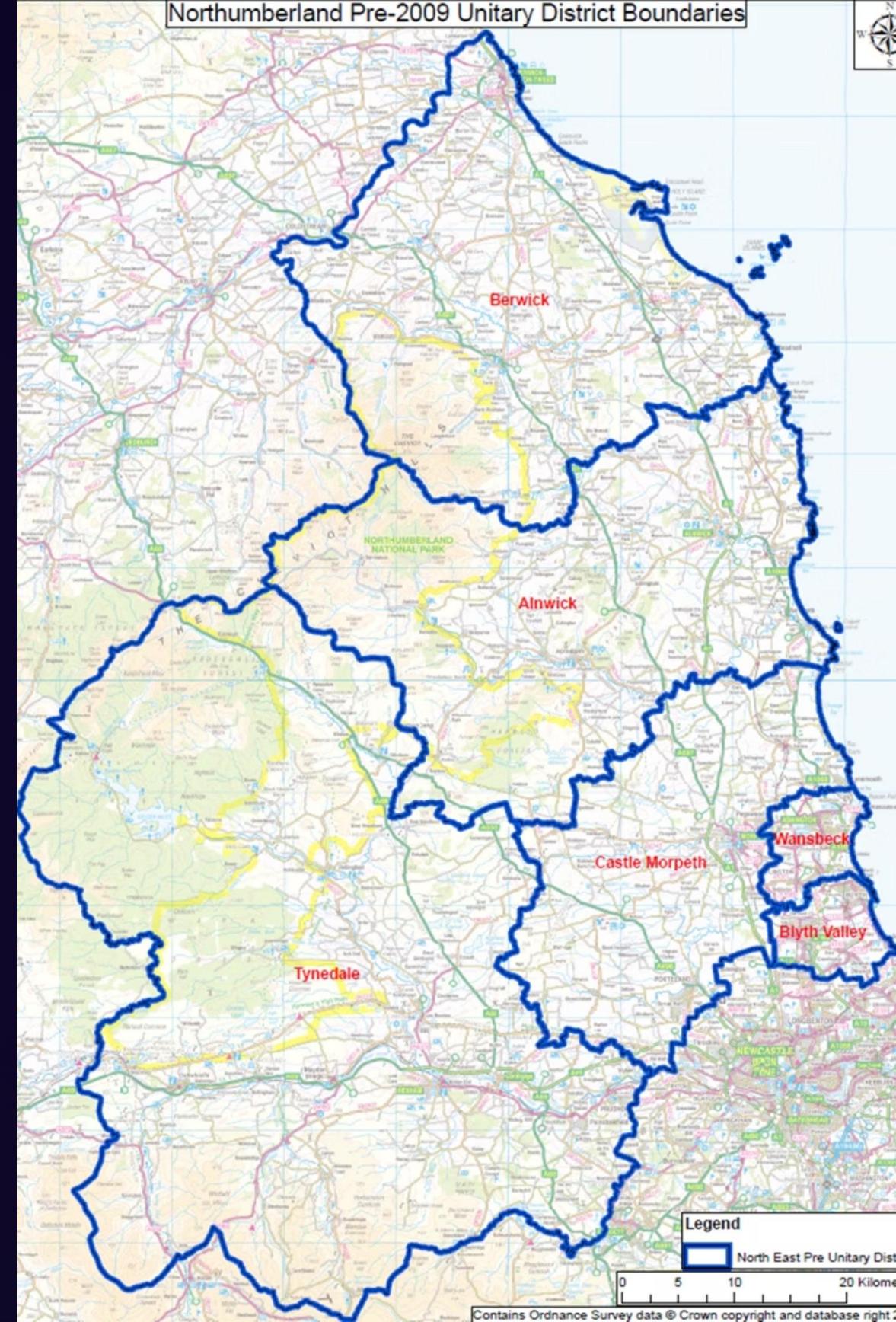
Standardised policies, integrated staff and assets, consistent service levels, and clearer accountability across the county.



Northumberland Before Unitary Status: The Six Districts

Prior to 2009, Northumberland was divided into six independent district councils: Alnwick (north), Berwick-upon-Tweed (far north), Blyth Valley (east coast), Castle Morpeth (central), Tynedale (west), and Wansbeck (east).

Each district operated its own highways teams, budgets, and service standards. This led to inconsistent road maintenance, varied service delivery, and duplication of roles across the county, creating significant operational differences and expectations from residents



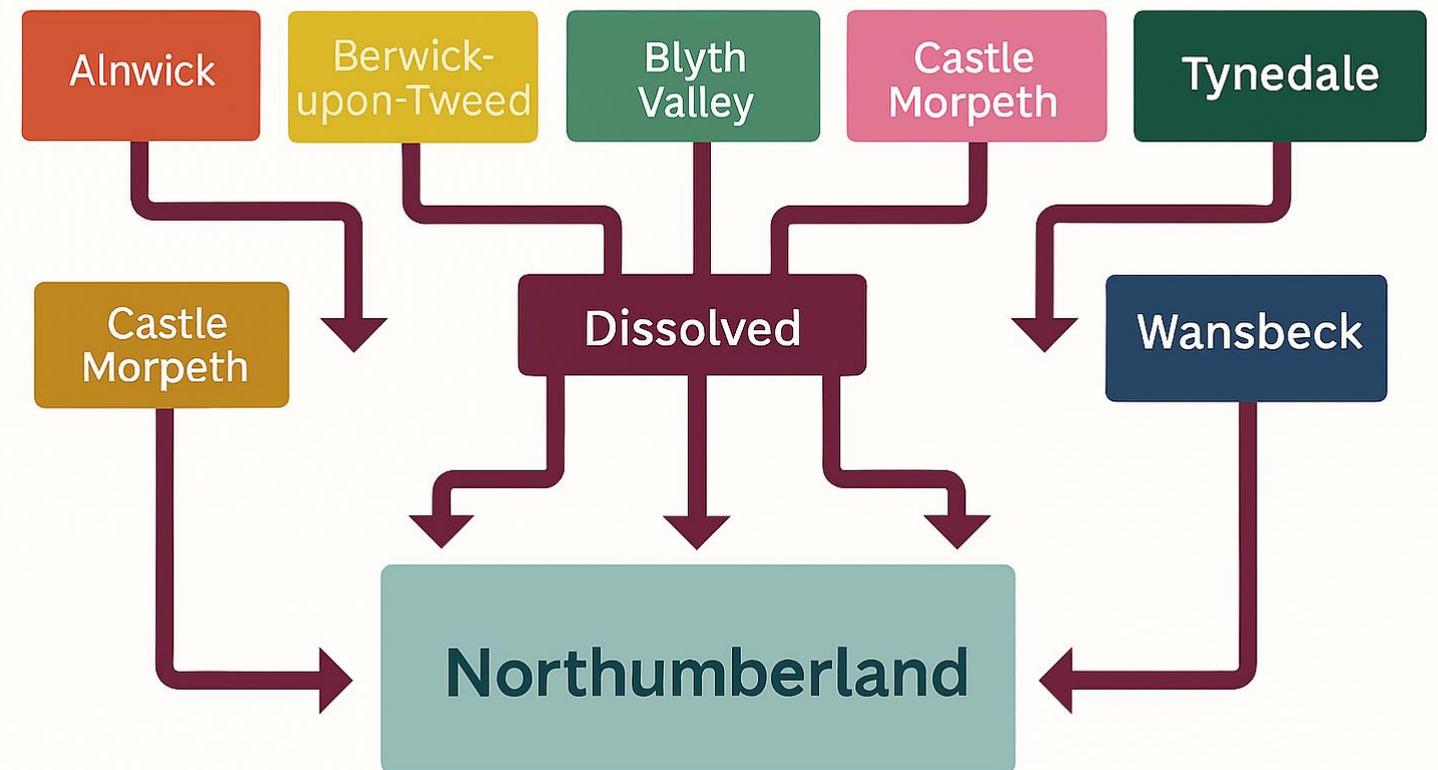
Historic Context of Two-Tier Governance

Before unitarisation, Northumberland operated a two-tier system: the County Council alongside six district councils — Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale, and Wansbeck.

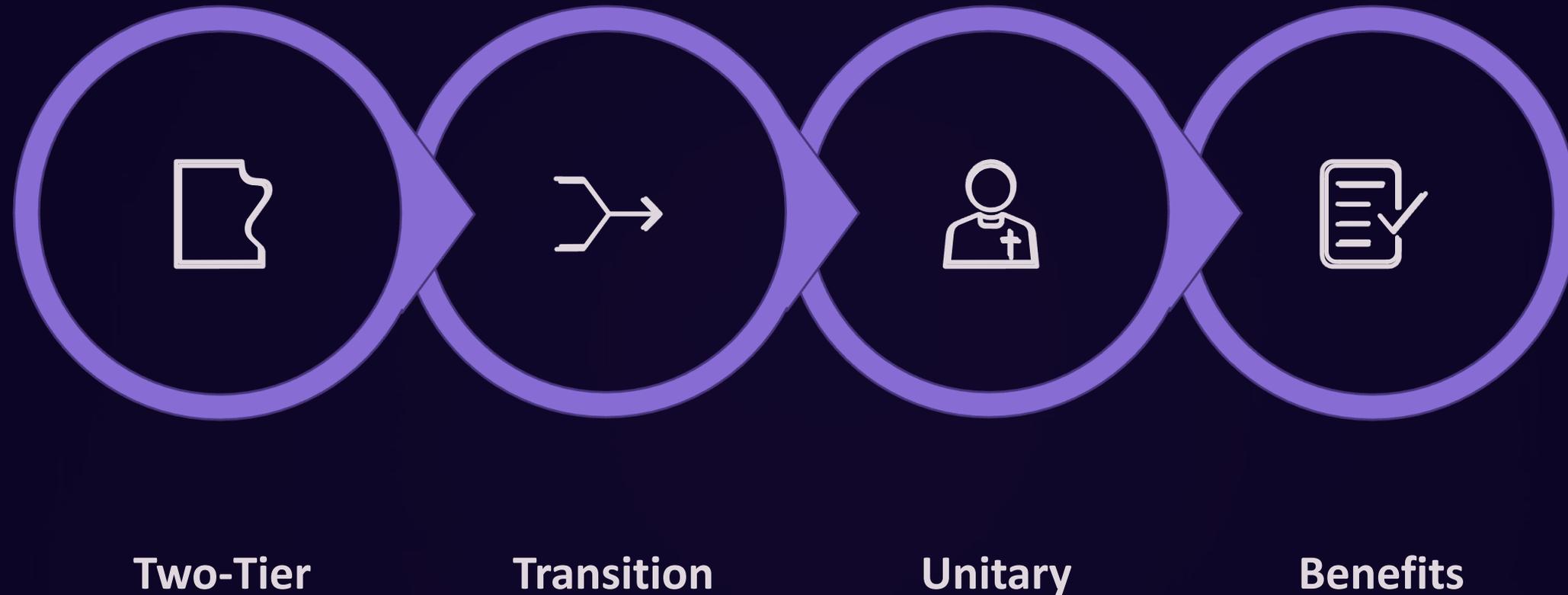
Districts handled localised operations while the county managed broader strategic services, creating fragmented delivery and varied practices. Highways management exemplified this: differing maintenance methods, inspection cycles, and service standards.

Transitioning to a unitary system would unified operations, enabling more effective, scalable, and equitable service delivery countywide.

District Councils Merging into Northumberland



Two-Tier vs. Unitary Structure



The shift to a unitary model streamlined decision-making, eliminated service overlaps, and established clear accountability for residents across Northumberland.

Operational Impacts on Highways Services

Unification transformed how Northumberland plans, staffs, and delivers highways services — from workforce integration and policy standardisation to asset consolidation and long-term infrastructure planning.

- Team Integration- Working arrangement and term and conditions.
- Job descriptions
- Depot locations
- Varied systems and process'
- Fleet
- Highways adoption records and information
- Fleet investment must not pause before major restructures.
- Digital systems (web, CRM, payments) must be functional from Day 1.
- Strong leadership needed to harmonise service standards.
- Depot rationalisation requires sensitive handling.
- Single Status harmonisation is complex and impacts morale.
- Culture change is as important as organisational change.



Staffing Changes and Workforce Integration

Unified Workforce

Merged district teams into one countywide unit for collaboration and specialization.

Efficiency & Deployment

Reduced role duplication; enabled cross-boundary staffing to meet demand.

Consistent Practices & Resilience

Standardised training improved flexibility, capacity planning, and talent growth.

Standardisation of Policies and Procedures



Unified Service Levels

One authority aligned inspections, winter coverage, drainage, and repair priorities for countywide consistency.



Common Standards & Metrics

Unified technical standards and performance measures promote fairness and transparent expectations across districts.



Centralised Planning & Delivery across Highways

Shared tools streamline procurement, align workflows, and enable countywide programs.



Long-Term Asset Management

Coherent policies support resilient maintenance cycles and responsive service delivery for residents.

Implementation: Staff Integration and Transition



Staff Induction & Training

Comprehensive onboarding for merged teams, standardising procedures and safety protocols across all districts.



Skills Mapping & Development

established cross-training opportunities.



Health and Safety Implementation

Unified safety framework and risk assessment processes across all highway operations for consistent hazard identification and control.



Fleet Standardisation

Consolidated various vehicle types, reviewed the fleet replacement programme and equipment into a unified fleet, streamlining maintenance and operator training.



Assets, Systems, and Infrastructure

Consolidation of physical assets, technology systems, and operational infrastructure underpins the efficiency gains delivered by Northumberland's unitary highways model.

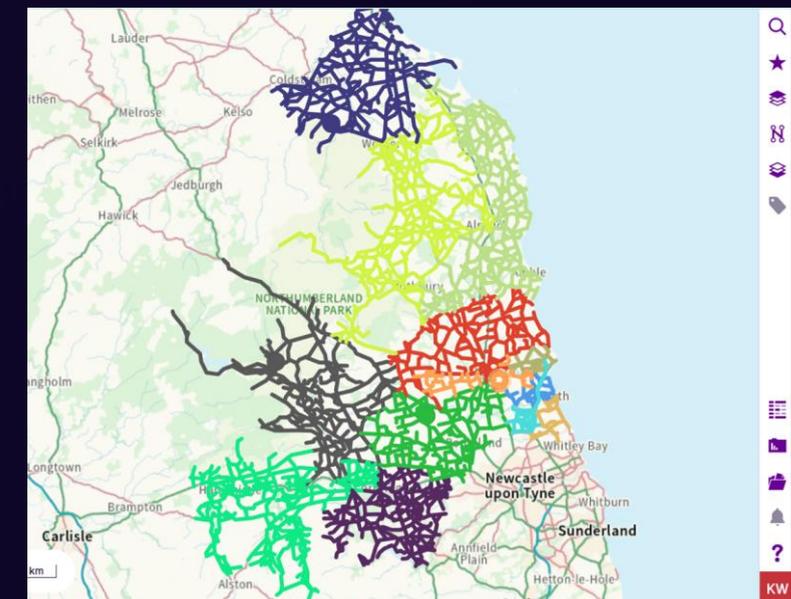
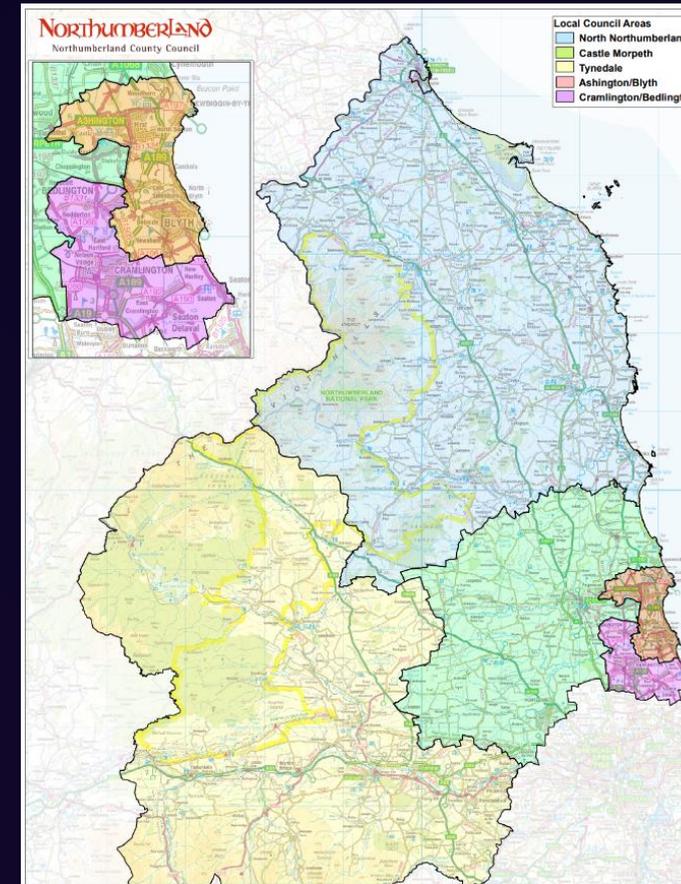
Current Position

Now 4 Highways areas from 3

Each with a Highways Area managers and teams for construction and maintenance

Teams of circa 400 staff across the department. Approximately 240 staff across Highways operational teams. 398 Staff across the following departments;

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Infrastructure Team | Design/Structures | FCERM |
| Streetworks | Parking Service | HDM |
| Highways Capital Delivery | Highways Maintenance | |



Where We Are Today: A Modern, Unified Highways Service

Seventeen years post-unification, Northumberland Highways has evolved into a robust, integrated service, showcasing a range of key achievements and a future-forward approach.



Unified Operational Model

Fully embedded, integrated service with consistent standards and countywide resilience, moving beyond the 'six districts plus NCC' model.



Rationalised Depot Model

Implemented a rationalised depot model with fewer, fit-for-purpose depots, supporting efficient logistics, enhanced winter service coverage, and smarter maintenance operations.



Enhanced Customer Journey

Improved customer experience and communications through stable online reporting, clearer service standards, and better engagement via digital channels.



Climate Resilience Focus

Maintaining a strategic focus on climate resilience, actively planning for flooding, heat events, coastal impacts, and long-term sustainability.



Modernised Fleet

Achieved significant fleet modernisation through rolling replacement programmes, delivering safer, greener, and more reliable vehicles, including EVs and clean-engine plant.



Modern Asset Management Systems

Utilising a single platform for predictive maintenance, data-driven condition assessments, integrated customer feedback, and more credible funding bids.



National Recognition

Achieved national recognition as a well-run rural highways authority, noted for strong winter service capability and leading EV infrastructure rollout.

Benefits

Working Alongside NECA

Implementation of a 3 year Local Transport Plan

Large DLO

Key supplier contracts for materials and services

Maintained a skilled workforce