

Final Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk

“Future Norfolk – People, Place, Progress – The Power of Three”

Executive Summary

Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, Norfolk's acceptance onto the Devolution Priority Programme early 2025, and the submission of Interim Plan proposals in March 2025; the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution invited Norfolk's councils to submit final proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Norfolk by 26 September 2025.

North Norfolk District Council, Breckland District Council, Broadland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk and Norwich City Council have prepared a submission for a three-unitary model for LGR in Norfolk, in accordance with the decisions taken by those authorities in submitting interim proposals to Government in March of this year.

This report summarises the detailed development of the three unitary proposal over recent weeks, the current position and next steps. The final proposal – “Future Norfolk – People, Place and Progress – the Power of Three” is annexed to this report. It has been developed collaboratively, under the oversight of the respective Leaders and Chief Executives and in line with the Government's guidance and with the support of consultants Inner Circle Consulting who were procured jointly by the six authorities to support the development of a strong proposal for submission to Government.

Options considered

North Norfolk District Council's position with respect to LGR was considered and agreed at Full Council on 19th March 2025. This report takes forward the decision agreed at that time.

At this point there are two options open to the Council:

Option:1: Continue in collaboration with partner authorities and submit the proposal for three new unitary authorities for Norfolk as detailed in the reports in the Annex - **Future Norfolk – People, Place, Progress – The Power of Three** to the Secretary of State (as per recommendation).

Option 2: Agree not to submit the proposal to Government (not recommended).

Consultation(s)

Internal consultation has included:

- Leader

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive • Section151 Officer • Monitoring Officer • Communications Manager <p>During the development of the proposal key stakeholders were engaged and a public survey conducted across Norfolk to assist with evidence and informing the proposal. Norfolk's Members of Parliament were also consulted on the proposal.</p>
Recommendations	<p>That Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the content of this report and supporting documents detailing the proposal 2. Endorses the final proposal for a three-unitary model for local government reorganisation in Norfolk 3. Delegates to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, the approval and submission of the final proposal to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution for consideration in accordance with the Government's prescribed process
Reasons for recommendations	<p>To respond to the statutory invitation from the Secretary of State to submit a final proposal for local government reorganisation in Norfolk.</p> <p>This proposal for a three unitary model for local government in Norfolk offers a compelling and credible pathway to public service reform that is strategically aligned, financially sound and rooted in local identity. It positions Norfolk to deliver better outcomes for residents, strengthen democratic leadership, and contribute meaningfully to the Government's wider devolution and public service transformation agenda. It is believed that, of the options available, this proposal has the potential to deliver lasting benefits for communities across Norfolk, and to support a model of governance that is fit for the future.</p>
Background papers	<p>"Future Norfolk: People, Place, Progress – The Power of Three" final proposals for a three unitary council model for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk</p>

Wards affected	All
Cabinet member(s)	Cllr. Tim Adams, Leader of the Council
Contact Officer	Steve Blatch – Chief Executive

Links to key documents:

Corporate Plan:	The 2025/26 Corporate Plan Action Plan prepared in March 2025 included a specific action relating to Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation – Action 25.
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	Not Applicable to NNDC
Council Policies & Strategies	Not Applicable

Corporate Governance:	
Is this a key decision	Yes
Has the public interest test been applied	Not Applicable
Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter	Full Council 19 March 2025 - Home Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 19th March, 2025, 6.00 pm

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper (Dec 2024) and Norfolk's inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme (early 2025), Norfolk's district councils began assessing Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) options, evaluating one, two, and three-unitary models against six government criteria.
- 1.2 Between 18–20 March 2025, six District Councils (Breckland, Broadland, Great Yarmouth, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk and Norwich City) endorsed a three-unitary model. South Norfolk supported a two-unitary model. On 21 March, both proposals were submitted to the Minister.
- 1.3 Meanwhile, Norfolk County Council submitted its own considerations for a one or two-unitary model, and on 9 June, signalled its intent to pursue proposals for a single unitary authority.
- 1.4 On 7 May 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to the Chief Executives of Norfolk County Council and the seven district, borough and city councils with feedback on the Interim Plans and invited final proposals to be developed and submitted to MHCLG by 26 September 2025.
- 1.5 To support the development of the case for three unitary councils of large enough scale to deliver, but close enough to residents and communities to reflect their needs, and realise their ambitions and opportunities; the six councils jointly procured Inner Circle Consulting to prepare a compelling, evidence-driven final proposal and leveraging their experience in the provision of County Council services and functions, particularly Adult and Childrens Services. The work taken forward by Inner Circle over the period since early June has been developed collaboratively, under the oversight of the Leaders and Chief Executives and in line with the Government's guidance.

- 1.6 The work has also been supported by a team of Senior Responsible Officers from each district who have provided co-ordinated input across key service areas to ensure a shared evidence base with particular input from subject Matter Experts, particularly Finance Officers, Monitoring and Democratic Services Officers and Communications Officers.
- 1.7 The final proposal documents in the annex to this report integrates data from all Norfolk councils, provides operational and organisational commentary from subject matter experts within the six districts, insights from communities and strategic stakeholders, and draws on best practice from unitarisation processes elsewhere.
- 1.8 It is important to state whilst the proposals submitted to Government lay out our collective thinking on how a model of three unitary councils might operate across Norfolk, that it will be for the new Unitary Authorities to make final decisions on their set up and operation. As such, this proposal is intended to set out the concepts and key benefits of a three unitary model for local governance in Norfolk and is not a full business case. The recommendation to approve the submission of the final proposal to Government is therefore an in-principle endorsement of the three unitary model proposal and is not binding on any future decision taken by Government or shadow authorities.

2.0 Current position

- 2.1 Each council can only make one final proposal for unitary local government across the whole of Norfolk and final proposals can either be submitted individually by a council or jointly with other councils that were invited to submit proposals.
- 2.2 If councils within an area are unable to agree on a single proposal and want to submit separate proposals, these must be submitted together, as a single submission for Norfolk, which includes all proposals being put forward by councils. The Secretary of State can decide to take forward proposals that are submitted by areas with or without modification.

3. Summary of Submission

- 3.1 This report and attached appendices set out an overarching proposal for LGR in Norfolk developed jointly by the six district councils - Breckland, Broadland, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk and Norwich City.
- 3.2 Our proposals "**Future Norfolk: People, Place, Progress – The Power of Three**" outline the establishment of three new unitary councils: Greater Norwich, East Norfolk, and West Norfolk. Each unitary council is designed to deliver more responsive public services, strengthen democratic leadership, and unlock long-term economic and social benefits for their communities, nuanced to consider the uniqueness of each of the three areas.
- 3.3 Finally, the proposal includes an extensive set of Appendices, designed to provide detailed workings and evidence to support the overall submission.

4. Government Criteria

4.1 Within the English Devolution White Paper the Government laid out six criteria for LGR, further emphasised in the feedback letter received after the Interim Plan submission in March.

4.2 Our proposal “**Future Norfolk: People, Place, Progress – The Power of Three**” meets the Government’s reorganisation criteria, offering strong alignment across key areas:

- **Improved Local Services:** Creating three distinct unitary councils will enable tailored, place-based service delivery focused on prevention, integration, and local priorities, moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach.
- **Stronger Leadership & Accountability:** Unitary councils rooted in their communities will enhance democratic representation, rebuild trust, and ensure decisions reflect local values.
- **Economic Growth:** The new councils will align with the emerging Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Strategic Authority, supporting coordinated investment, local enterprise, and regional competitiveness.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Adoption of the three unitary model outlined in our proposals projects a net benefit of £220m over eight years and annual savings of £56m from year four onwards.
- **Local Identity:** Proposed boundaries for the three unitary authorities reflect existing community identities and economic areas, anchored on the county’s three principal urban centres of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn, promoting cohesion and effective governance.
- **Optimal Size and Scale:** Each council will serve 300,000 – 400,000 residents, balancing strategic capacity with local connection.
- **Service Reform & Innovation:** The model prioritises locally designed, integrated services over traditional consolidation, supporting national priorities and objectives for prevention and citizen-focused delivery.

5.0 Developing the Case for the East

5.1 Boundaries

5.1.1 In developing our final submission, work was undertaken to consider and understand the potential boundaries of the new unitaries. MHCLG advice suggested that reference needed to be given to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and specifically the use of existing district boundaries as building blocks for the new councils. Our proposals have therefore considered this advice in the development of our submission proposals.

5.1.2 Members are therefore asked to note that ahead of the main submission to Government there is an initial section (part 1 – Unmodified boundaries & request for modification, at Appendix A of this report) that sets out a three unitary solution for Norfolk based on current district boundaries. The submission then requests a modification of existing boundaries to enable our

proposal to be as efficient and effective as possible, through meeting the needs of local government and transforming services for our residents and communities, along with complying with relevant legislation.

- 5.1.3 The “modified” proposal, as set out in Appendix B, proposes three new unitary authorities, with five existing districts moving in their entirety into one of the new councils and the current Broadland and South Norfolk council areas being “split” between the proposed Greater Norwich and East authorities and two existing South Norfolk wards being included in the proposed West authority. Such an arrangement is considered to reflect the distinct communities of the three areas and reflect how the majority of residents live their lives and seeks to minimise the potential for service interruption and costs of more extensive boundary changes.
- 5.14 This would mean the proposed East Norfolk authority would be formed from the whole of the existing North Norfolk and Great Yarmouth districts, as well as the more rural communities of the Broadland and South Norfolk districts, covering approximately 30% and 66% of the populations of those two districts.

5.2 Blueprint for the proposed East Norfolk Unitary Council

- 5.2.1 The proposed East Norfolk unitary council will adopt a resident-focused, integrated model of service delivery, breaking down silos and simplifying access to services. This approach will prioritise supporting residents to live good quality lives, increasing opportunity for those of working age through investing in skills for the jobs of the future; supporting families and young people through early years support and education and older people’s independence, health and wellbeing; alongside promoting economic and business growth, accommodating new residential development and the co-ordinated provision of place-based services, many of which in the proposed East Norfolk unitary authority area are discretionary services but which underpin the area’s significant and diverse tourism economy – eg resort infrastructure, public realm, clean and safe beaches, provision of public toilets etc.
- 5.2.2 The proposed new council would place priority on meeting residents’ needs across a large geography with “local” delivery based on established local area geographies (market and coastal towns). Residents would be able to access services how and when they need whether digitally, by phone, or in person. Advanced use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) would support 24/7 digital access while enabling personalised support for vulnerable residents.
- 5.2.3 **Children Services** - Services will be localised with an emphasis on early intervention and improve educational outcomes (particularly SEND provision) while retaining essential countywide partnerships for safeguarding, fostering, and specialist provision.
- 5.2.4 **Adult Social Care** – Services will be delivered tailored to local needs to a large and expanding elderly population, focused by data-driven insights particularly in terms of independent and supported living, and through strong workforce planning and better co-ordination of services with health partners.
- 5.2.5 **Early Intervention and Prevention** - A dedicated department will focus on proactive support, using predictive analytics to identify and assist at-risk individuals and households before problems escalate, and statutory

interventions are needed. These interventions will particularly focus on housing and homelessness issues, seasonal worklessness and money management, family support and independent living for older people. Multi-agency teams will deliver joined-up, community-based services that improve wellbeing and seek to reduce future demand on statutory services.

6.0 Financial Modelling for the East Norfolk authority

- 6.1 The proposed East Norfolk unitary authority combining North Norfolk, Great Yarmouth, and the more rural parts of Broadland and South Norfolk, is projected to start with a £3.0 million budget surplus based on 2025/26 figures, providing a strong platform for investment and transformation.
- 6.2 Council tax harmonisation is a key variable, with five scenarios modelled. For the proposed East Norfolk four out of the five scenarios modelled would deliver a net financial gain, without significant impact on Council Tax bills at today's figures. While no recommendation is made as to which scenario might be applied as this will be a decision for the new authority, the analysis highlights that it will be possible for the East authority to balance resident fairness with long-term financial stability.
- 6.3 Transition costs in establishing the proposed East Norfolk authority are estimated at £32 million over three years, covering the establishment of the shadow authority, ICT and workforce changes. These would be funded locally through reserves and assets, with no reliance on central government. By Year 4, the authority is expected to break even, achieving between £18 and £19 million in annual savings by Year 8 through streamlined operations and prevention-led services.
- 6.4 Risks include low unearmarked reserves, limiting flexibility, though debt levels remain affordable with modest debt servicing costs and there is a positive ratio of debt to annual Council Tax revenues. Overall, the financial modelling confirms that the proposed East Norfolk unitary authority would be financially viable with the potential for long-term sustainability provided harmonisation is well-managed and reforms are implemented effectively.

7.0 Stakeholder Engagement

- 7.1 The main proposal sets out the significant amount of consultation that the six district partners have undertaken around this proposal. This has included 5,403 online survey responses, 2,000 partner engagements, 62,100 website views, and a social media reach of 438,100; with many supporting the three-unitary proposal. Key feedback showed that the public want:
 - Strong accountability, local representation and access to decision-makers.
 - Services that reflect community needs, protect local identity and support local economies: and
 - Financial sustainability, efficiency and flexibility in future councils.
- 7.2 It is understood that MHCLG will undertake a process of formal consultation on any of the proposals that are deemed compliant, following submission on the 26 September 2025.

8.0 Implementation and Transition

8.1 It is believed that following submission the subsequent key actions of the LGR process are as follows, but at the present time these are not confirmed and have no detailed timescales attached to them:-

- **Statutory consultation:** it is considered likely that the statutory consultation undertaken by MHCLG will encompass all final proposals submitted for a unitary model of local government in Norfolk, to include - a single unitary model submitted by Norfolk County Council, a two-unitary model proposed by South Norfolk District Council and a three-unitary model proposed by the strong partnership of six other district councils in Norfolk.
- **Decision to implement a proposal:** Ministers and Parliament will decide which, if any, proposal is to be implemented. This decision may include modifications and will be subject to collective agreement across Government.
- **Making secondary legislation:** MHCLG will then prepare the necessary legislation – the Structural Changes Order (SCO) – for Parliamentary approval. This will establish the new unitary form of local government in Norfolk and make provision to dissolve all the predecessor councils.
- **Transition period:** Existing councils will continue to deliver services and fulfil their duties until Vesting Day, whilst preparing for the transfer of assets, functions and staff and responsibilities to the new authorities. Shadow authorities will lead implementation planning - including service and budget planning; detailed governance arrangements and council tax harmonisation.
- **New unitary authorities go live:** the Government is aiming for new authorities to go live on 1 April 2028 – Vesting Day. Elections to the new unitary councils, will be held in the transition year to ensure that those who will be responsible for governing the new authorities are democratically accountable for decisions taken during the implementation phase.

8.2 Work is already being undertaken within the Council to ensure that we will be prepared for this next phase of the LGR process, irrespective of the number of unitary councils the Government decides upon. Further details on these arrangements, including supporting our staff through any process, will be presented to members in the coming weeks.

9.0 Options Considered

9.1 Alternative unitary models were considered during the development of the Interim Plan submission and have been considered further through the development of these submission proposals, as detailed within the supporting documents.

9.2 The option of retaining the current two-tier arrangements and “doing nothing” through not making a submission to Central Government could be considered, as there is no statutory requirement upon the council to submit a proposal. However, if the authority chose not to make a submission the LGR process will not stop, as the Secretary of State would almost certainly receive and consider submissions from other Norfolk councils and retains the power to take forward proposals irrespective of the District Council making a submission at this time.

9.3 If the council were to resolve not to submit a proposal to Government as part of this process, this would have a significant impact in that North Norfolk’s distinct

interests and identity, including our geography, economy, rural and coastal communities, heritage assets, infrastructure and coast protection needs would not be fully represented to the Secretary of State. This would not be considered to be in the best interests of North Norfolk's residents, businesses and communities.

- 9.3 The preferred and recommended option is that the Council endorses and agrees to submit the Future Norfolk: People, Place, Progress – The Power of Three” proposal proposing the creation of three unitary authorities for Norfolk as outlined in the annex in that this will deliver the best outcome for North Norfolk's residents, businesses and communities in the event of the Secretary of State agreeing to take forward structural change to local government in Norfolk.

10 Financial and Resource Implications

- 10.1 A key driver for the Government in taking forward local government reorganisation is that unitary councils are believed to achieve greater efficiencies and cost savings through consolidating services and reducing administrative overheads. New unitary models are expected to be structured to achieve efficiencies and to prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services.
- 10.2 Whilst LGR presents an opportunity for councils to rethink, recommission and redesign services, it also creates financial and legal challenges for alignment, aggregation and disaggregation, integration and cost. These challenges will need to be carefully modelled and managed by the new shadow authorities during the transition phase. The financial modelling undertaken by Inner Circle Consulting on behalf of the six districts promoting the three unitary model for Norfolk suggests that each of the new authorities would be financially sustainable based on the Council Tax and Business Rate bases and service delivery costs, with identified savings and efficiency targets.
- 10.3 During the LGR transition, councils will need to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to planning and delivering transformation, reviewing business-as-usual activities to create capacity and developing key organisational issues such as staff structures, operating models and corporate plans. LGR transition typically requires significant programme management capacity and capability.
- 10.4 The transitional costs for the proposed East Norfolk unitary authority are expected to be funded locally, without reliance on Central Government support. One-off transition costs are estimated at £32 million across the transition period and in the first three years which will cover the setup of the shadow authority as well as ICT migration and workforce restructuring with recurring costs of £2 million per year anticipated due to the disaggregation of countywide services. These costs are expected to be met through existing reserves and realisable assets held by the constituent councils.
- 10.5 The proposal notes that the partners to the proposed East Norfolk would have sufficient financial capacity to absorb these costs internally, though careful judgement will be needed where assets also generate ongoing revenue income.

Comments from the S151 Officer:

Officers have considered the options, opportunities and risks associated with this proposal. The submission of these documents to MHCLG and engaging with future consultation with government is advised. Any transition costs to be borne by the Council, where this is not within approved budgets, will be presented to Full Council for future consideration and authorisation.

11 Legal Implications

- 11.1 The legal process governing local authority restructuring is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Once a decision is taken on which model to implement in Norfolk, MHCLG will prepare the necessary legislation – the Structural Changes Order (SCO) – for Parliamentary approval. The SCO will establish the new single tier of local government in Norfolk and make provision to dissolve the predecessor councils.
- 11.2 SCOs place a duty on all impacted councils to consult and co-operate with each other, take any steps necessary to prepare for the transfer, and provide any information that any of those councils may reasonably request to enable the implementation of the approved model of new councils.

Comments from the Monitoring Officer

This business case is a proposal for a three unitary model. It is pertinent to raise that the content would not be binding on any future unitary authority. MHCLG could approve a proposal received with or without modification. The choice for Members is to either submit the proposal appended, or not to submit one by 26 September 2025. However, if none is submitted only the proposals from other councils would be considered.

12.0 Risks

- 12.1 The Secretary of State can decide to take forward proposals that are submitted by areas with or without modification. Furthermore, the Government has the power to initiate and implement LGR, even if local councils choose not to propose changes.
- 12.2 It is, therefore, important to submit a compelling, evidence-based vision for LGR to the Government that fully reflects the needs, opportunities and challenges of Norfolk's diverse places and communities

13.0 Net ZeroTarget

- 13.1 New unitary authorities will be responsible for meeting government targets on greenhouse gas emissions and setting and agreeing Net-Zero targets. As such this decision should not impact North Norfolk District Council's immediate Net Zero commitments.
- 13.2 However, during the time in which LGR is agreed and implemented, there is the potential for delays in the implementation of Net Zero actions for the improvement of community assets and buildings. Should decisions and investment be delayed due to uncertainty of LGR, progress towards Net Zero could be limited, and this would increase the need for accelerated action in the future to meet government targets.

14.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 14.1 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion of local government services are key aspects of local government reorganisation and service transformation. Detailed EDI assessments would be completed at the point of implementation as part of reorganisation and service development. LGR provides an opportunity to further enhance Equality, Diversity & Inclusion across public services and features prominently in our proposed service delivery model, particularly in structuring services around the principles of Early Intervention and Prevention

15.0 Community Safety issues

- 15.1 Community Safety issues have not been identified as part of this proposal but would be taken forward by the new unitary authorities.

16.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 16.1 Under the oversight of the Leaders and Chief Executives of Breckland District Council, Broadland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council, a compelling, evidence-driven proposal for a three-unitary model for LGR in Norfolk has been prepared in line with the Government's guidance.

Council is asked to:-

- 1. Note the content of this report and supporting documents detailing the proposal**
- 2. Endorse the final proposal for a three-unitary model for local government reorganisation in Norfolk**
- 3. Delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, the approval and submission of the final proposal to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution for consideration in accordance with the Government's prescribed process**