NORWICH
City Council

Committee name: Council

Committee date: 06/01/2026

Report title: **Norwich City Council Response to MHCLG Consultation on unitary proposals for Norfolk and Suffolk**

Portfolio: Councillor Stonard, Leader of the Council

Report from: Chief executive

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

KEY DECISION

Purpose

This report seeks Council's approval of a draft response to the Government's consultation on Norfolk and Suffolk unitary authority proposals, which launched on 19 November 2025.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Council:

- Endorses Norwich City Council's draft response to the Government consultation on Norfolk and Suffolk unitary authority proposals as they appear in Appendices 1 and 2, ahead of submission to Government before the consultation closing date of 11 January 2026 and makes any comments it deems necessary for consideration by Cabinet.

Policy framework

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- An open and modern Council.
- A prosperous Norwich.
- A fairer Norwich.
- A climate responsive Norwich.
- A future-proof Norwich.

This report meets all the council's corporate priorities.

Report details

Introduction

1. On 7 May 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to Norfolk councils with feedback on Interim Plans submitted under the Local Government Reorganisation programme (LGR) in March 2025.

2. In response, Norwich City Council, working with Breckland District Council, Broadland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, and North Norfolk District Council submitted a detailed proposal for three unitary councils across the county area of Norfolk on 26 September 2025.

3. These proposals advocated for West Norfolk, East Norfolk and Greater Norwich unitary authorities to replace the existing eight county, city, district and borough councils in Norfolk.

4. The proposal set out the concept and benefits of this three-unitary model. It was not a full business case, as final decisions on detailed structures will rest with the new authorities once they are established.

5. At the same time, Norfolk County Council proposed a single county unitary covering the whole of Norfolk, while South Norfolk Council proposed a two unitary model for East and West Norfolk encompassing all areas of the county. All three models are subject to the consultation.

6. Similarly, councils in Suffolk submitted two proposals, with Suffolk County Council proposing a single unitary covering the whole county area, and Babergh District Council, East Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, and West Suffolk District Council proposing three unitary councils.

7. The consultation on these models was launched on 19 November 2025 by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and local Government (MHCLG). It asks questions about each proposal to help inform its assessment of the best solution for the two counties. Scheduled for a period of seven weeks, the consultation closes on 11 January 2026.

8. As an affected local authority in Norfolk, Norwich City Council is a statutory consultee for each of the proposals for both Norfolk and Suffolk.

9. Before deciding whether to proceed with necessary legislation, the Government is also seeking input from other statutory consultees, residents, businesses and stakeholders.

Consultation

10. The responses (as they appear in appendices 1 and 2) have been developed by Norwich City Council officers in close consultation with the district and borough councils making up the six authorities proposing the three-unitary bid.

11. There is full consensus amongst these councils that answers to the multiple-choice questions across all authorities should be the same. Free text

responses are also consistent but have been nuanced by each council to take into account local priorities and needs.

12. This includes reference to Wymondham and its neighbouring parishes, which hare not included in the proposed Greater Norwich boundaries, albeit it was considered in the development of the boundaries. The consultation response sets out how its inclusion would have benefited the case, whilst ensuring that this does not undermine the case for the Greater Norwich boundaries that have been submitted.

13. Working with its joint proposing authorities, Norwich City Council has promoted the invitation to respond to proposals to the other statutory consultees identified by Government, and local stakeholders, partners, businesses and residents, through a dedicated communications plan.

Next steps

14. Following closure of the consultation, Government will consider responses and issue a “minded to” decision about which model will be adopted sometime in March or April 2026.

15. This will be followed by a short period to enable feedback on this decision, with legislation laid through a Structural Change Order (SCO) to enable the transition. This final decision is expected before summer recess (16 July 2026) with the SCO expected to be laid in Autumn 2026.

16. The SCO will:

    a. Establish a vesting date (always 1 April, typically at least a year after the SCO is made).
    b. Establish one or more unitary areas.
    c. Establish a council/s for the unitary area/s.
    d. Abolish (as appropriate) existing district areas.
    e. Dissolve and wind up the councils of abolished areas from vesting day.
    f. Amend the terms of office of existing councillors.
    g. Create a vehicle to manage transition to new arrangements – a Joint Committee / Shadow.
    h. Give authority for a new council or an Implementation Executive for a continuing council – and provide for sub-committees and for officers drawn from all relevant areas to implement changes.
    i. Create the main transition/implementation function
    j. Set out future electoral arrangements

Implications

Financial and resources

17. Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council’s stated priorities, as set out in its community-led plan “We are Norwich” and budget.

18. There are no proposals in this report that would reduce or increase resources other than those already considered in the scenarios of any of the three bids for Norfolk being adopted.

Legal

19. There are no legal implications associated with this report. Norwich City Council is not legally bound to respond to the consultation. However, responding allows for the council's views to be considered.

20. 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 Change Order (SCO) – for parliamentary approval. The SCO will establish the new single tier of local government in Norfolk and make provision to abolish the predecessor councils.

21. SCOs place a duty on affected 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.

Statutory considerations

Consideration	**Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:**
Equality and diversity	The specific purpose of this paper is to agree Norwich City Council's response to the Government consultation opportunity regarding LGR modelling for Norfolk and Suffolk. No dedicated EqIA is therefore required for this purpose. However, a full EqIA relating to the transition to single tier governance in Norfolk is provided within the Council papers that sought approval for the three-unitary bid: Final Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk.
Reducing Inequality Target Areas (RITAs)	RITA considerations are incorporated in the EqIA cited above.
Health, social and economic impact	The proposed three-unitary modelling will have a significant positive impact on health, social and economic outcomes by aligning housing, public health, social care and early intervention within a single unitary structure. This will enable earlier support, reduce duplication and help tackle entrenched inequalities, particularly in deprived urban wards. Economically, a single accountable authority for Greater Norwich strengthens the city's leadership role and supports inclusive growth. During transition, clear continuity planning will be essential to maintain health and wellbeing services, ensuring residents continue to access advice, support and treatment without disruption

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Crime and disorder	Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the council has a duty to work with partners to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Embedding these responsibilities within the statutory Community Safety Partnership in a unitary model will enable stronger coordination between housing, community safety and early intervention functions, including better data sharing and joint responses. During transition, safeguarding existing community safety arrangements and ensuring no reduction in frontline responsiveness will be critical
Children and adults safeguarding	The council has a statutory duty to safeguard children and adults at risk. The three-unitary model strengthens safeguarding by integrating children's and adults' services with housing, health and early help, supported by a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Adults Safeguarding Board. During transition, it will be vital to retain experienced staff, maintain existing safeguarding processes, and reassure partners and families that protections remain robust while new structures are implemented.
Environmental impact	The three-unitary model will support environmental sustainability by reducing duplication, rationalising estates, improving recycling consistency, and enabling greener growth through integrated planning and housing. Neighbourhood-based delivery and digital access will also positively impact travel demand. During transition, the council must manage estates, ICT and waste contracts in a way that avoids unnecessary environmental disruption, while maintaining existing recycling and climate commitments until the new model is in place.

Risk management

Risk	Consequence	Controls required
Norwich City Council does not respond to the consultation.	The views of the council with regards to the future governance of Norfolk and Suffolk are not considered by Government.	Cabinet are asked to agree the responses as laid put in the appendices, incorporating the views of council, as given in their meeting immediately prior to Cabinet.

Other options considered

22. Norwich City Council could decide to not respond to the consultation; however, this would risk the views of the council not being reflected in the future of LGR for Norfolk

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

23. Approval of the council's submission to Government in response to their consultation on proposals helps to ensure that Norwich's needs are considered when shaping a new single-tier, unitary governance structure for Norfolk and for Suffolk.

Background papers:

- Final Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk; Council paper, 23 September 2025.

- One Council for Norfolk: proposal from Norfolk County Council
- A Case for a Two Unitary Norfolk: proposal from South Norfolk Council
- A Proposal for a Three Unitary Model for Norfolk: proposal from Norwich City Council, working with Breckland District Council, Broadland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, and North Norfolk District Council

- One Suffolk: proposal from Suffolk County Council
- Shaping Suffolk Together: proposal from Babergh District Council, East Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, and West Suffolk District Council

Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Norwich City Council: draft response to LGR consultation on Norfolk unitary models

- Appendix 2: Norwich City Council: draft response to LGR consultation on Suffolk unitary models

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