



NORWICH City Council

Committee name: Cabinet

Committee date: 23/09/2025

Report title: Final Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk

Portfolio: Councillor Stonard, Leader of the Council

Report from: Chief executive

Wards: All wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

KEY DECISION

Purpose

The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution has invited Norfolk's councils to submit a Final Proposal for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Norfolk by 26 September 2025.

This report presents the Final Proposal for a three-unitary model, developed collaboratively by Broadland District Council, Breckland District Council, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council.

Council will consider this report immediately prior to this Cabinet meeting. Any recommendations made by Council will be reported verbally by the Leader/Chief Executive. Cabinet is asked to approve the Final Proposal for submission to Government, delegating the authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader in light of Council's recommendations, to make any necessary non-material amendments to the Final Proposal and submit the Final Proposal to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Note the content of this report and its appendices
2. Consider the recommendations made by Council at its meeting of 23 September, held immediately prior to this Cabinet meeting.
3. Approve the Final Proposal for submission to Government, subject to any amendments agreed by the Cabinet.
4. Delegate to the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Leader the authority to make any necessary non-material amendments to the Final Proposal and submit the Final Proposal to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

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 corporate priorities.

Report details

Summary

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 in March 2025 and invited Final Proposals by 26 September 2025.
2. Six of Norfolk's district councils, including Norwich, endorsed a three-unitary model earlier in the year. Inner Circle Consulting was jointly commissioned to prepare an evidence-driven Final Proposal under the oversight of Leaders and Chief Executives.
3. The Final Proposal (Appendix 2) integrates shared data, expert input, and engagement insights. A high-level Equality Impact Assessment is provided at Appendix 3, and additional Norwich-specific engagement is set out at Appendix 4.
4. The proposal sets out the concept and benefits of a three-unitary model. It is not a full business case, as final decisions on detailed structures will rest with the new authorities once established.

Background

5. In March 2025, six district councils resolved to endorse Interim Proposals for a three-unitary model; South Norfolk supported a two-unitary model. Both were submitted to Government.
6. Since then, Leaders and Chief Executives have overseen development of the Final Proposal, supported by colleagues across all six council, sharing data and expertise on council services and operation. Key issues, such as boundaries and service aggregation and disaggregation, have been addressed collaboratively, with evidence and stakeholder engagement informing the submission.

Current Position

7. Each council may only submit one Final Proposal for local government reorganisation in Norfolk, either individually or jointly with others. Where

councils cannot agree, Government prefers that all proposals are submitted together as a single Norfolk package. The Secretary of State may then decide to take forward any of the proposals, with or without modification.

8. MHCLG has advised that, to comply with the invitation, our submission must include a version based on existing district boundaries. To avoid non-compliance, Appendix 1 therefore sets out an unmodified three-unitary proposal on current boundaries, alongside a request that Government modify these to deliver the preferred model, as set out at Appendix 2. Members are asked to endorse this three-unitary model for Norfolk, at Appendix 2, and delegate to the Leader and Chief Executive the finalisation and submission of the Final Proposal to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution in accordance with the prescribed process.

Next Steps

9. Following submission:
 - a. Government will conduct statutory consultation
 - b. Ministers and Parliament will decide which model, if any, to implement
 - c. The Structural Change Order (SCO) will be drafted for parliamentary approval
 - d. Transition arrangements will begin, with shadow authorities established to oversee implementation, including council tax harmonisation and contract alignment
 - e. Vesting Day is anticipated to be 1 April 2028, when the new unitaries go live.

Consultation

10. Appendix 2 sets out the approach taken by the Future Norfolk councils as a collective. Norwich City Council led additional engagement in spring and summer 2025, complementing the Norfolk-wide activity, as set out at Appendix 4. Methods included ward-level roadshows, youth sessions, VCSE workshops and stakeholder drop-ins.
11. Insights highlighted the importance of:
 - a. Clear communication and reassurance on service continuity.
 - b. Governance that protects local identity and enables participatory decision-making.
 - c. Priority focus on housing, climate action, youth voice, and inclusive service provision.
 - d. Stability for the VCSE sector, co-production, and co-location of services.
 - e. Safeguarding Norwich's economic and cultural role while tackling deprivation and driving green growth.

Implications

Financial and resources

12. 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.
13. A key government driver for LGR is that in moving away from the two-tier system, unitary councils are believed to achieve greater efficiencies and cost

savings by 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.

14. 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 – such as new authorities inheriting a number of service contracts with suppliers across merging councils for the same/similar services that need to be aligned to the geographies of the new unitaries.
15. 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 enablers such as staff structures, operating models and corporate plans. LGR transition typically requires significant programme management capacity and capability.

Legal implications

16. 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.
17. SCOs place on the County Council and district councils a duty 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

Cabinet should note that duties apply both during transition and in the future model. Service continuity during transition will be a key priority.

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and diversity	See high-level Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) at Appendix 3. It considers the transition more than the resulting unitary authority however the outline blueprints on Early Intervention and Prevention within the final submission demonstrate benefits for residents and the stemming of crises.
Reducing Inequality Target Areas (RITAs)	RITA considerations are incorporated in the EqIA at Appendix 3.

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Health, social and economic impact	<p>The proposals 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.</p> <p>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.</p>
Crime and disorder	<p>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.</p> <p>During transition, safeguarding existing community safety arrangements and ensuring no reduction in frontline responsiveness will be critical.</p>
Children and adults safeguarding	<p>The council has a statutory duty to safeguard children and adults at risk. The new 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.</p> <p>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.</p>

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Environmental impact	The proposals 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
The Secretary of State can decide to take forward proposals that are submitted by areas with or without modification. Furthermore, The English Devolution White Paper notes that the Government has the power to initiate and implement LGR, even if local councils choose not to propose changes.	The Secretary of State takes forward proposals that the Future Norfolk councils are not in support of.	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.

Other options considered

18. Do nothing, and do not provide a submission to central government. This is an option open to the Council, as a submission is not a statutory requirement, however it is important that the Council expresses a view. It is worth noting that the Council will also be a statutory consultee on all proposals that are taken forward by central government, thus giving the council the opportunity to comment on alternative proposals at that stage.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

19. T Under the oversight of the Leaders and Chief Executives of Broadland District Council, Breckland District Council, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council, a compelling, evidence-driven Final Proposal for a three-unitary model for LGR in Norfolk has been prepared in line with the Government's guidance.

20. Members are asked to review and endorse the model set out in Appendix 2 in principle and delegate to the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Leader the finalisation and submission of the Final Proposal to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution in accordance with the prescribed process.

Background papers:

1. [Interim Plan - March submission to Government](#)
2. [A case for Greater Norwich](#)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Unmodified submission

Appendix 2 – Modified submission

2.1 Norfolk LGR A proposal for a three unitary model for Norfolk

2.2 The proposal for East Norfolk

2.3 The proposal for Greater Norwich

2.4 The proposal for West Norfolk

2.5 Supporting appendices

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4 – Engagement Insights – Norwich activity

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