



NORWICH City Council

Committee name: Scrutiny

Committee date: 20/03/2025

Report title: Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation – draft Norwich City Council response

Portfolio: Councillor Stonard, Leader of the council

Report from: Chief executive

Wards: All wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

To consider Norwich City Council's draft response to the Government consultation on Norfolk and Suffolk devolution plans, as published on 17 February 2025.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee consider Norwich City Council's draft response to the Government consultation on Norfolk and Suffolk devolution plans and provide its recommendations to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 2 April 2025, ahead of submission to the Government by the consultation closing date of 13 April.

Policy framework

The council has five corporate priorities, which are:

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

This report meets all the council's corporate priorities.

Report details

Introduction

1. This report invites the Scrutiny Committee to review Norwich City Council's draft response to the Government consultation on Norfolk and Suffolk devolution plans, attached at Appendix A, and to make recommendations to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 2 April 2025.
2. Before deciding whether to proceed with the necessary legislation, the Government is seeking input from residents, businesses, and stakeholders on proposals to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) for Norfolk and Suffolk.
3. The consultation includes questions on:
 - a. The proposed geography of the MCCA
 - b. Governance and decision-making arrangements
 - c. The potential impacts and benefits of a combined authority structure for Norfolk and Suffolk.
4. Under the proposed governance model (Appendix B), district councils cannot be full constituent members of the MCCA. However, they may serve on committees and participate as non-constituent (non-voting) members. This reflects the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process, which will replace district councils with unitary authorities.
5. Norwich City Council could be appointed as a non-constituent member with the possibility of being granted voting rights at the discretion of the MCCA. If a Norwich unitary is established through LGR, Norwich would become a full constituent member with voting rights.
6. If approved by Parliament, the Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA would be established in time for the first mayoral election to take place in May 2026, with new unitaries across Norfolk scheduled to go live in May 2028.
7. As such, it is worth noting that if a Norwich unitary is established through LGR, there would be a period between the MCCA being established and unitaries across Norfolk being implemented, where Norwich may not have voting rights.
8. While LGR is a separate process, the consultation explicitly states that LGR is **not within the scope of this survey**. The consultation is open from 17 February to 13 April 2025.

The draft consultation response

9. The consultation seeks feedback on how the proposed Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA can drive improvements across key areas, including social outcomes, the economy, the environment, and local services. However, the potential impacts and benefits of the MCCA remain largely speculative at this stage.
10. As a result, most survey responses indicate that Norwich City Council supports the MCCA in principle, recognising the potential benefits of devolved powers and funding for people and places across the region.

11. However, the specific benefits for Norwich will depend on the MCCA's governance arrangements - particularly Norwich's ability to influence decision-making in relation to its urban priorities, challenges, and opportunities, as outlined in sections 4 and 5 of this report.

Consultation

12. The draft response to the Government's consultation on the proposed Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA has been shaped by extensive engagement and ongoing collaborative work to update the Greater Norwich Local Plan (2024), the Norwich Inclusive Economy Vision (2024), and the 'We are Norwich' community-led Plan (2024-2029), along with LGR proposals.

Implications

Financial and resources

13. 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.

14. There are no proposals in this report that would reduce or increase resources.

Legal

15. No legal implications have been identified in the development of Norwich City Council's draft response to the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation.

Statutory considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and Diversity	This report does not have direct impacts for equality and diversity.
Health, Social and Economic Impact	This report does not have a direct health, social and economic impact.
Crime and Disorder	This report does not have direct impacts for crime and disorder.
Children and Adults Safeguarding	This report does not have direct impacts for children and adults safeguarding.
Environmental Impact	This report does not have a direct environmental impact.

Risk management

Risk	Consequence	Controls required
Norwich may not have constituent membership in the proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority	Less focus within the Mayoral Combined County Authority around the power of cities to drive sustainable and equitable growth, leading to worse outcomes for Norfolk and the UK.	Develop a strong business case for a three unitary model for Norfolk to demonstrate impact on the Government's devolution and local government reorganisation ambitions.
Legal	No legal risks have been identified.	Not applicable

Other options considered

16. One option was to not respond to the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation. However, this was not pursued, as it would mean missing the opportunity to highlight urban priorities, challenges, and opportunities to the Government. Engaging in the consultation ensures that Norwich's needs are considered when shaping the proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

17. This report, along with the appendix, provides the Scrutiny Committee with the necessary information to consider and formulate any recommendations to Cabinet regarding Norwich City Council's draft response to the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation – draft Norwich City Council response

Appendix B - Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Combined County Authority – proposed governance arrangements

Contact officer: Head of Strategy, Engagement and Culture

Name: Helen Chamberlin

Telephone number: 01603 989269

Email address: helenchamberlin@norwich.gov.uk



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Establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority across Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?

- Strongly agree
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

Norwich City Council support the proposal for a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) being established across the Norfolk and Suffolk geography. We believe local decision-makers, with their unique vantage points, expertise, and influence, are best positioned to shape policy and public service delivery effectively. This localised approach can unlock significant benefits for residents, neighbourhoods, and communities.

To deliver the full potential that devolution has to offer, it is crucial that decision-making processes and governance arrangements are genuinely collaborative. Principal authorities must be meaningfully involved and engaged, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered and that all areas of the county are fairly represented. With an effective partnership approach between central government, Strategic Authorities and local government, the MCCA could offer tailored solutions that recognise the distinct challenges and opportunities that affect the urban, rural and coastal communities across Norfolk and Suffolk.

During the transition period between the MCCA's establishment and any future Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), we believe every principal authority should hold a voting seat on the MCCA Board, alongside the elected Mayor. This interim arrangement would ensure local leaders are empowered to drive growth and raise living standards, aligning with core missions of the English Devolution White Paper.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined County Authority?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree

- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

The proposed governance model within the Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA would see decision-making exercised by four constituent members representing the councils of Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council. The proposal also sets out provisions for four non-constituent members to be appointed, with voting rights being granted at the discretion of the MCCA.

Norwich City Council recognises this would be an interim model whilst LGR is implemented. However, during this period, decision-making authority would be solely exercised by Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council. We believe a more inclusive governance model that aligns with the principles of devolution is needed from the outset. Such a model would better utilise the expertise local leaders have to offer and prevent Strategic Authorities from becoming isolated from the local communities that they serve.

The proposed governance arrangements also highlight that in due course, if a proposal is implemented, any new unitary councils will become the constituent members of the Combined County Authority and, legally, it will become a Combined Authority. With key strategic powers, functions and funding being transferred to the Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA, it is vital that Norwich has a strong voice and a seat at the table to represent the unique needs of our modern, growing, and ambitious urban centre.

Local government reorganisation, alongside devolution, presents a rare opportunity to design structures that genuinely work for places in a targeted way, rather than forcing a one-size-fits-all solution. A motion to support the creation of a new unitary authority for Greater Norwich on urban boundaries has the full backing of all city council's political leaders and a business case is being developed to take this proposal forward in line with government timeframes.

Alongside our Norfolk district colleagues, we would request that government consider agreeing:

1. The number of non-constituent members (per county) be increased to ensure equal representation for rural, urban and coastal areas.
2. Granting non-constituent members voting rights on issues that directly affect their area or where resources or capacity are required to deliver outcomes

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the economy of the area?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

A Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA should establish a clear economic role for each place within the wider region through their respective economic plans. This would allow local leaders to respond to their distinct needs, focus on future growth potential and meet the government's ambitions on housing delivery and economic growth.

Our ambition is for devolution and LGR to amplify the potential of a Greater Norwich on urban boundaries, recognising our role as the region's economic powerhouse with the potential to power activity and growth across the district and wider (proposed) devolved area.

Building on the Norwich 2040 City Vision which was launched in 2018, the Norwich 2040 Inclusive Economy Vision is a response to the latest evidence on Norwich's economy, labour market, and resident population. This has highlighted economic strengths including the city's thriving independent retail and leisure offer, capacity for growth, and nationally significant specialisms in sectors such as health, life sciences, and financial services.

The Inclusive Economy Vision is 15-year roadmap for how Norwich will deliver a dynamic, productive, and inclusive economy which provides a foundation for Norwich to be the happiest, healthiest, and most liveable city in the UK. However, the opportunity to deliver our ambitious economic plan for Norwich, the region and the nation will be lost if the MCCA does not grant Norwich a role in decision-making that reflects its contribution as the region's economic powerhouse.

Each city in the UK plays a role in driving growth, innovation, and productivity. Our global strength lies in our diversity of place, enabling each place to achieve conditions of success which will drive the nation. The UK economy thrives when its cities thrive — ensuring that Norwich has the right governance structure is not just a local issue, but a national imperative.

With a new government committed to growth and unlocking the economic potential of all parts of the country, now is the time to double down on our ambitions for Norwich's future economy and maximise our potential to be a major contributor to UK Plc.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?

- Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

Working across the Norfolk and Suffolk geography through an MCCA has the potential to improve social outcomes through devolved powers and funding. However, this will depend on how well local and regional priorities are balanced in strategic planning, public service reform and service delivery through the proposed governance arrangements.

A Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA would have greater powers across significant policy areas which directly impact the wider determinants of health and resident outcomes including educational attainment, economic development and social wellbeing.

As highlighted in the evidence base that informed the Norwich 2040 Inclusive Economy Vision, stark disparities exist within and between our communities. Norwich has some of the most entrenched deprivation in the country and 42% of Norfolk's most deprived neighbourhoods are situated within Greater Norwich.

As outlined elsewhere in this consultation response, Norwich City Council believes that local government should be truly local and this should be a driving factor in LGR, to ensure local leaders are empowered with the necessary levers to improve social outcomes and deliver on government's devolution agenda through holistic, joined-up policy planning and service delivery.

If the MCCA and its governance arrangements are designed with a real commitment to place-based leadership and grassroots involvement, it could significantly improve social outcomes across the region. However, if regional ambitions overshadow local need, the proposed MCCA risks reinforcing persistent spatial inequalities and disenfranchising the needs of residents within a Greater Norwich on urban boundaries.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve local government services in the area?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

Norwich City Council agrees that unlocking large-scale economic benefits through a Devolution Deal requires a broader geographical footprint. However, devolution proposals must strike the right balance between local authorities being large enough to collaborate effectively with the MCCA on strategic priorities, whilst remaining closely connected to their communities to ensure meaningful representation and responsiveness to distinct local needs.

The impact of an MCCA on local government services will ultimately depend on its design, leadership, and local context. If LGR is carefully planned and delivers authorities of the right size and scale, it could integrate public services at the local level to improve outcomes for residents and address community needs more effectively.

We therefore urge government to ensure that LGR prioritises keeping local government genuinely local, avoiding the creation of "mega councils" that are far removed from the communities they serve. The fundamental goal of both devolution and LGR should be to deliver growth and prosperity, public service reform and improved community outcomes — not merely short-term efficiency savings.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

Working across a broader geography has the potential to enhance both local and national environmental outcomes by enabling more effective coordination of initiatives, resource pooling, and strategic, long-term environmental planning. A stronger regional voice could bolster environmental advocacy to reflect the unique environmental identity of Norfolk and Suffolk while integrating sustainability across housing, economic development, and transportation strategies.

The combined geography also holds a pivotal role in advancing the UK's net-zero ambitions and exporting world-leading skills, capabilities, and technologies. With strengths spanning offshore wind, North Sea hydrocarbon transition, carbon capture,

usage and storage (CCUS), hydrogen, solar energy, and nuclear newbuild, the region is well-placed to drive clean energy innovation. Norwich City Council is progressing ambitious plans to achieve net zero by 2045, cutting emissions from new and existing buildings and transport through energy infrastructure decarbonisation, while pioneering nature recovery initiatives across our urban landscape.

These assets present significant opportunities for local growth, economic and social regeneration, and improved community outcomes — aligning with national objectives to "identify and support clean energy industrial sectors with the greatest growth potential" and to "consider where sectors and relevant capabilities are located to identify clusters that can drive growth."

However, the success of a broader approach hinges on ensuring that hyper-local environmental needs are not overlooked. Norfolk and Suffolk face diverse environmental challenges - from coastal erosion and flood resilience to rural biodiversity and agricultural sustainability, often requiring place-based, locally tailored solutions.

Striking the right balance will depend on achieving an appropriately sized and scaled local government through LGR, ensuring principal authorities remain closely connected to the communities they serve while being equipped to contribute to regional strategies.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

A Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA has significant potential to support the interests and needs of local communities through unified and strategic regional advocacy.

Working across the broader geography of Norfolk and Suffolk will enable the region to amplify its regional voice, directing resources and political influence towards shared priorities and challenges. This collaborative approach could foster more coordinated solutions to reflect regional disparities in skills, infrastructure and

economic opportunities, benefiting communities through more cohesive, joined-up policymaking.

However, the extent to which community identities and local needs are truly reflected will depend on how effectively those identities and interests are embedded in long-term planning and the decision-making infrastructure as set out in the proposed governance arrangements (see question 2). As such, devolution must also provide a strong platform for local voices with distinct interests to be heard and represented within any Strategic Authority.

Achieving the right size and structure of local government through LGR will be essential to ensuring that principal authorities are not only fit for purpose but are truly designed to deliver in the best interests of Norfolk and Suffolk's distinct rural, urban and coastal communities.

About You

1. Please tell us how you found out about this consultation.

(select one)

- Social media
- Email
- GOV.UK website
- Local council website
- Poster/ leaflet
- Word of mouth
- News outlet (newspaper / TV / online)
- Other

2. What best describes your response?

(Select one)

- I am a member of the public, giving my views as an individual
- I am responding on behalf of, or as a representative of, a business or organisation

For those responding as a member of the public giving views as an individual

3. What is the first part of the postcode where you live? For example, if your postcode is AB1 2CD, you would write AB1 **N/A**

We ask this so that we can identify what Local Authority you live in and understand a bit more about the area where you live. We do not use this information to identify you.

4 What best describes your gender? **N/A**

(Select one)

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Prefer to self-describe: (open text box)

5. What is your age group? **N/A**

(Select one)

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+
- Prefer not to say

6. What is your ethnic group? **N/A**

(Select one)

- White
- Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
- Asian or Asian British
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Other ethnic group
- Prefer not to say

7. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person or to have a long-term, limiting condition? **N/A**

Please tick one box only

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

8. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation? **N/A**

- Heterosexual/Straight
- Gay/Lesbian

- Bisexual
- Prefer not to say
- Other – Please write below

Routing for business/organisation

- What best describes your organisation?
- Business
- County Council
- Unitary council
- **District Council**
- Town Council
- Parish Council
- Health Body
- Voluntary and community sector or charity
- Academic
- Elected representative
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please Specify)

10. What is the first part of the postcode where your business or organisation is based? For example, if your postcode is AB1 2CD, you would write AB1.

We ask this so that we can identify what Local Authority your business/organisation is based in and understand a bit more about the area where it is located. We do not use this information to identify your organisation.

NR2

Establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority across Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council

The following information is set out on [government website](#) for the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation and has been appended for ease of access.

Proposed institution, governance and decision making arrangements

Name and geographic area

It is proposed that a Mayoral Combined County Authority is established over the local council areas of Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council. The government's proposal is that the Combined County Authority would be formally known as the Norfolk and Suffolk Combined County Authority.

Membership

Constituent councils

The councils of Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council would be the constituent councils of the proposed Combined County Authority. Each council would appoint two representatives to be constituent members. This means that there would be four constituent council members in total. Constituent councils would each be able to appoint the same number of substitute members as they appoint constituent members to act in the absence of their constituent members.

The Mayor

The Combined County Authority would have a Mayor, directly elected by local government electors (which are those eligible to vote in local council elections who are on the electoral register) across the two constituent council areas. The first mayoral election would take place on 7 May 2026. Mayors are typically elected on 4-year terms.

The Mayor would be a constituent member of the Combined County Authority, and exercise the mayoral functions outlined in the Devolution Framework on behalf of the Combined County Authority.

The Mayor would be required to appoint a deputy Mayor from among the constituent members to act in their absence or if the office of the Mayor is vacant.

The Mayor would be permitted to appoint a maximum of one political advisor.

Non-constituent and associate members

Norfolk and Suffolk Combined County Authority's constituent members would be able to appoint a maximum of 4 non-constituent and associate members to support the delivery of their work programme. Non-constituent members are representatives of an organisation; for example, a district council, local NHS trust, the Police and Crime Commissioner, or a local registered provider. Associate members are named

individuals who can provide particular experience or expertise – for example, on active travel, or local businesses.

Role of district councils

Much of England has two tiers of local government – upper-tier county councils and lower-tier district councils – with responsibility for local services split between the two.

While all the councils in an area are constituent members of a Combined Authority, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduced Combined County Authorities consisting of upper tier local councils only.

District councils cannot be full constituent members of a Combined County Authority but can participate as non-constituent members and serve on committees (see section 2.5 on non-constituent members' role in decision making).

Combined County Authority powers, functions and funding

The Combined County Authority and its Mayor would have some functions conferred onto them as part of the secondary legislation establishing the Combined County Authority as an institution. These functions would enable them to begin work on delivering local priorities from day one and are expected to include economic development and transport.

The [English Devolution White Paper](#) sets out the government's ambitions for devolution. This includes the powers, functions and funding available to Combined County Authorities – a summary table is included at Annex A.

The collection of powers, functions and funding is known as the Devolution Framework. The powers, functions and funding of a Combined County Authority vary depending on its governance and maturity. The government's intention would be for the Norfolk and Suffolk Combined County Authority to have the powers, functions and funding set out at the mayoral level of the framework. These functions would give the Combined County Authority and the Mayor greater local control over areas such as transport, adult education and skills, and housing to enable improvements in local connectivity, educational outcomes, economic development, driving economic growth and improved social wellbeing.

The government intends to implement the Devolution Framework via the English Devolution Bill; the functions within it would then automatically be conferred onto any existing Combined County Authority if the Bill receives Royal Assent, and the provisions come into force.

Decision making at the Combined County Authority

The Combined County Authority's constituent members (the Mayor and four constituent council members) would be the decision makers within the Combined County Authority. Constituent members would automatically have voting rights. Non-constituent members can be given voting rights at the discretion of the Combined County Authority; associate members would not be able to be given voting rights.

All members would have a single vote. The default voting arrangement for Combined County Authority decisions to be approved would be a simple majority in favour, including the Mayor (for example, 3 out of 5).

No decisions can be made at a Combined County Authority meeting unless the Mayor (or deputy Mayor) and at least three constituent council members are present.

Oversight

To ensure effective scrutiny of decision making and audit of how resources are used, the Combined County Authority would have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and one Audit Committee, in line with the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Further improvements to accountability and oversight are in development and are included in Section 5 of the English Devolution White Paper ahead of legislation being laid.

Remuneration

Norfolk and Suffolk Combined County Authority would approve a scheme for the allowances for constituent members, following consideration of a report from an Independent Remuneration Panel. The Mayor can be paid an allowance as agreed by the constituent council members, also following consideration of a report from an Independent Remuneration Panel.

Local government reorganisation and its impacts

Councils in your area have been invited to develop proposals for new unitary local government. This would replace the existing two tier system, where services are split between a county and district council, and bring these services together in unitary local government, creating opportunities for service transformation which can support improvements in delivery. The aim is to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers and enable more funding to be spent on local public services.

This process (known as “local government reorganisation”) is a separate process to the one in this consultation. On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution invited all councils in your area to develop unitary proposals. All councils in your area have been invited to undertake wide engagement before submitting robust and evidenced unitary proposals to government by 26 September. The established assessment and decision making process will then be followed to determine which, if any, of the proposals submitted are to be implemented.

Further information is being made available at [Local government reorganisation: Policy and programme updates - GOV.UK](#)

This local government reorganisation process does not affect the potential establishment of this Combined County Authority or the Mayoral election in May 2026. In due course, if a proposal is implemented, any new unitary councils will become the constituent members of the Combined County Authority and, legally, it

will become a Combined Authority. This change does not affect the functions/powers or funding available to the area. The governance and decision making arrangements within the Combined Authority will then be updated to reflect any changes needed.

Legislation has also been made to postpone local council elections from May 2025 to May 2026 in: Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council; Essex County Council and Thurrock Council; Hampshire County Council and the Isle of Wight Council; East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. This will allow these councils to deliver both devolution and local government reorganisation to the most ambitious timeline, working toward the first election for the Mayors of the Combined County Authorities in May 2026.