



**Council**

**Supplementary agenda**

**Tuesday, 18 March 2025**

**19:30**

**Agenda**

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**EXEMPT ITEMS:**

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and the public.)

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an agenda item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12 A of the Local Government Act 1972 or it being confidential for the purposes of Section 100A(2) of that Act.

In each case, members are asked to decide whether, in all circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

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## **A case for Greater Norwich - supporting the Interim Plan**

### **Introduction**

1. Norwich City Council have worked closely with district council partners across Norfolk to develop a joint **Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation**. The joint Interim Plan identifies that a three unitary model, with one of the unitary councils proposed covering a **Greater Norwich Unitary Authority**, ranks highest across the criteria that Government has established.
2. We are hugely ambitious for Greater Norwich and its residents. Through engagement at both member and officer level, and with the support of our district council partners, we have built on the work of the districts **to further define the distinct challenges and opportunities** that a Greater Norwich urban model presents - by targeting efficiencies within the differing characteristics of the Norfolk geography – and which set the city and its urban area apart in a predominantly rural county.
3. This report reflects work completed over the timelines set by Government for an interim plan and demonstrates our ambition of being a stable, sustainable and effective 21st Century local council, which can deliver from day one - and for the next 50 years. Further detailed work to shape our position will continue between now and September, in collaboration with district colleagues.
4. We look forward to receiving Government's feedback on the joint Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation proposal and our supporting case for a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority as part of a three-unitary model for Norfolk.

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Introduction**

5. The report sets out Norwich City Council's case for a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority against the Government's published criteria for Local Government Reorganisation. It should be read in conjunction with the joint Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation submitted by the districts and boroughs of Norfolk. A full proposal will be developed and submitted to the Government by the 26th of September.
6. The strength of our case is built across **four interdependent pillars**:
  - **Economic ambition** - as Norfolk's economic powerhouse, we are outperforming a number of core cities, offering potential to be a major contributor to UK PLC, supporting delivery of Government's ambitions in the East of England.

- **Enhancing public service delivery** – the Greater Norwich area faces deep-rooted inequalities alongside diverse needs and opportunities, spanning economic growth, housing, and essential public services. Addressing these challenges **requires tailored, place-based solutions** that reflect the unique characteristics of our local communities - solutions that can only be effectively designed and delivered at the local level.
- **Financial resilience** – we have a history of good financial management with a significant asset base of £1.2bn, generating £5m of income and useable reserves of £163m that can be used to **support ongoing financial sustainability**.
- **Connectivity** - Norwich is one of a network of 27 identified ‘key cities’ across the country that collectively represent urban living in the UK context. As the **only key city in the East of England**, Norwich is uniquely placed as **an anchor to help government deliver** on its policy aims and bring sustainable economic prosperity to the East.

## **A high growth city**

7. Norwich is a high-growth city in a region that is predominantly rural in character. It powers activity and growth across the area and the wider proposed devolved area. **Since 2010, the Greater Norwich economy has grown by 64%, outstripping the performance of core cities like Birmingham and Sheffield.**
8. Many of the key growth areas for housing and business lie beyond the formal boundary of the city. As a single tier council with all the levers for growth and key services available, Norwich, like Oxford, Cambridge, Exeter and other constrained cities, has the potential to accelerate growth, increase population, homes and local prosperity in a way that benefits not only the city and region, but the whole country.
9. Cities like Norwich accelerate national growth. The UK’s economic growth depends on cities which generate the majority of national GVA<sup>1</sup>. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority will be a powerful engine of growth – therefore, having an urban, fast growth city as a constituent member of the Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Combined County Authority is critical to the Government’s key strategic missions and devolution plans.

## **Unique to the region**

10. As a university city with a proud history of science, arts and innovation, Norwich is distinctive in a predominantly rural region. A strong voice at the Mayoral Combined County Authority will be critical in realising the full potential of devolution as well as the funding and powers available to drive the Government’s strategic agenda – adding to the case for A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gross Value Added – a measure of the economic productivity of a region, industry or sector*

11. The city's distinctive demographics shape its character and priorities. Norwich faces challenges more closely aligned to other UK cities than the surrounding rural parts of Norfolk and Suffolk. Local Government Reorganisation creates the opportunity to design an efficient, targeted, preventative approach to delivering services in Norwich which specifically meets the needs, challenges and opportunities of a growing urban community.
12. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority, in turn, would benefit the rest of Norfolk, enabling other unitary councils to better focus on their distinctive challenges and opportunities, rather than attempting a one-size fits all approach, which will deliver neither efficiency nor effectiveness.
13. Cities will continue to play a vital role in a thriving, diverse economy. However, to achieve their potential, it will be essential to create the conditions for inclusive and sustainable growth, based on their unique specialisms, grounded in their place and people. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority would:
  - set the right foundation for long-term sustainable growth and prosperity
  - deliver transformed services better tailored to the needs of an urban area
  - provide a stronger platform for local voices and democratic representation
  - deliver the best outcomes for the new mayoral strategic authority and ensure that services meet the distinctive and differing needs of urban and rural areas.

## **Strong foundations**

14. Norwich City Council is a stable and well-run authority, which has never sought extraordinary financial support from the Government. We benefit from a culture of good governance and financial management. Both our General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account have a history of surpluses, healthy reserves and a strong asset base on which to anchor any transition to unitary status. Through Local Government Reorganisation, any disaggregation of assets from, for example Norfolk County Council, will further enhance this position of financial strength.
15. We have a proven track record in working closely with communities, leading to strong outcomes for the city. There is widespread confidence across the city that a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority would thrive and succeed – further engagement as we develop the full business case will further demonstrate this support.
16. Our experience of being a high-performing urban council which can work collaboratively to design accessible and inclusive services for our distinctive and diverse population means Greater Norwich is well placed to become an innovator in public service reform.
17. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority would start with a strong balance sheet, a track record and culture of stable financial management, and the assets to fund transition and transformation to ensure efficient delivery of first-class public services.

## Main report

### An introduction to Norwich

18. Norwich is not just another city - it is a unique civic and economic centre with distinct heritage. Norwich is grounded in its place and its people, with an economy that functions differently from other urban centres, and the rest of Norfolk.
19. Its geographic location - thriving urban centre in a rural hinterland - has fostered self-reliance, distinctive supply chains and partnerships. Norwich has a uniquely broad blend of specialisms for a city of its size, including a high concentration of anchor institutions, research institutes, two leading universities and a football club. This puts it on the map globally, attracting international investment and supporting growth ambitions.
20. The case for a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority, as part of a three unitary model for Norfolk, is based on strengths across **four interdependent pillars**:
  - **Economic ambition**
  - **Enhancing public service delivery**
  - **Financial resilience**
  - **Connectivity**
21. Within a predominantly rural county, Norwich is distinctive as a **high growth city**, home to 31% of Norfolk's businesses, and with a diverse and increasing talent pool. **Greater Norwich is a £9.9 billion economy, supporting 158,000 jobs and 10,500 businesses.** Nationally significant (and growing) specialist sectors include:
  - our financial services sector which alone contributes over £1.6 billion to the UK economy and is anchored by household names such as Aviva and Marsh
  - creative industries with Norwich identified as one of eight 'creative challengers' across the country, Department for Culture, Media & Sport
  - life sciences hub at the Norwich Research Park featuring four research institutions, a university hospital, and 30 companies.
22. These world-class assets have contributed to Greater Norwich's economy **growing by 64%, outperforming the England average** as well as larger UK cities such as Birmingham and Sheffield. It is an economic powerhouse in the East of England, whose economic performance has **outpaced average growth across the UK's core cities.**
23. Despite this economic growth, Norwich's communities face **specific challenges which are undermining their prosperity.** Approximately 20% of Norwich's population lives in areas classified within the most deprived 10% nationally. The city also ranks as the 10th most unequal local authority for educational outcomes in England. Widening health inequalities are making it harder for residents to access the labour market.

24. As set out in the Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk, which has been developed by a collaboration of all Norfolk district councils, a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority within a three unitary model across Norfolk, presents the strongest case for **enhancing public service delivery and delivering long-term economic resilience**. It addresses the different needs of the city and enables the other two proposed unitary authorities to do the same.
25. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority would:
- secure strategic economic growth, based around Norwich’s distinct dynamic, productive, and inclusive economy, while supporting the wider region of Norfolk to prosper – and fulfilling its potential as an economic powerhouse for not just the East of England, but also the UK
  - harness the city’s unique **opportunities for regeneration and renewal** to build a thriving net zero economy of purpose, actively **prioritising social and environmental goals**, and ensuring growth - building on our long-standing championship of the environment, the city’s natural capital and world-leading research institutions - positioning the city as **leader in sustainable urban development** - continuing our award-winning work on climate resilience
  - promote the city centre as a **hub for innovation and creativity** seeking to revitalise Norwich city centre, establishing it as the East of England's premier location for creative, knowledge-intensive, and "new economy" jobs - enhancing competitiveness, improving digital infrastructure, and supporting emerging sectors like Insurtech
  - be a sustainable authority, able to **transform and deliver high-quality public services**, targeted to need, delivering greater opportunities for residents and businesses - addressing Norwich's inter-generational social mobility challenges, with a focus on dismantling barriers to opportunity for young people
  - provide **greater flexibility to trial new, innovative approaches to service delivery**, building on Norwich’s strong track record in digital innovation, public-private partnerships, and community-led solutions which respond to local needs
  - work alongside statutory partners, to embed strengths-based and co-produced models of prevention to deliver much needed improvements across social care, education, and public health, for example - **transform high-cost public services**, and lead to a reduction in the number of residents experiencing disadvantage
  - be strongly positioned to create public services that are not only fit for today’s challenges but will last into the future – supporting the city to grow and deliver better outcomes - and become the **happiest, healthiest, and most liveable city in the UK**

- through **quality employment**, and recognising the link between poor health outcomes and low-wage, insecure work, prioritise creating access to high-quality, health-promoting jobs - **improve residents' social and economic conditions, empowering them to lead fulfilling and healthy lives**
- capitalise on Norwich's unique strengths, including the **academic excellence of its universities**, through joint working with the city's **education institutions, cultural heritage, and strong local networks** - attracting and retaining talent and investment - expanding the city's reach beyond Norfolk - strengthening the role of anchor institutions to build the wealth of all our communities
- allow a future Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Combined County Authority to **capitalise on powers and funding, accelerating the rate of delivery and powering up the region, supporting the Government to achieve its ambitions.**

## The Government's criteria

26. Set out below is our initial thinking on how a Greater Norwich unitary authority would support the delivery of the Government's criteria.
27. Further work is, of course, required including, crucially, further public engagement, but the case we make is based on the four interdependent pillars referenced in paragraph 6 above:
- **Economic ambition**
  - **Enhancing public service delivery**
  - **Financial resilience**
  - **Connectivity**

## Establishment of a single tier of local government

28. The work we have undertaken in collaboration with our Norfolk District Council colleagues has established that a three unitary solution across Norfolk, including a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority, is the most advantageous solution. This takes into account:
- the natural geography of the county
  - the differing economies which require distinct levers to drive growth
  - the different challenges that our communities face.
29. Given the differences referenced above, the three unitary model for Norfolk allows each unitary to tailor its approach to deliver the best outcomes. And there is much to gain nationally from each area of Norfolk being able to drive forward growth in their distinct ways.
30. Greater Norwich is home to key growth sectors outlined in the Government's Invest 2035 Green Paper, including a nationally significant Life Sciences sector, and a rapidly maturing digital and tech sector. The city also has

significant opportunities and ambitions around housing growth, evidenced by current projects including East Norwich and Anglia Square.

31. Meanwhile Great Yarmouth is integral to the UK's energy security and is at the epicentre of the country's offshore wind capacity and growth potential. This provides a range of high value jobs (£154k GVA per head in Norfolk's energy sector) and has the potential to create 6,000 highly skilled jobs by 2032. Similarly western areas of Norfolk are vital for the nation's food security. Norfolk and Suffolk produce 60% of the UK's sugar and 17% fruit and vegetables and there are 42,000 agri-food jobs in Norfolk alone.
32. Similarly, the delivery of public services and community engagement can be tailored to the specific needs. This model allows each authority to better drive efficient and effective public service delivery, and greater adaptability to respond to their specific local challenges and opportunities in a way that a single or even two unitary model would not.
33. Drawing on data from the Office for National Statistics and Norfolk Insight, the table below shows how Norwich's demographic profile, economic conditions, and health outcomes are markedly different from those in the broader Norfolk region, highlighting the city's unique challenges and characteristics.

Theme	Norwich	Norfolk
Population density	3,704 people per square kilometre	172 people per square kilometre
Age structure	Median age is 34.9 years, with 69% of the population being of working age (16-64)	Median age is 46 years, with 59.1% of the population being of working age (16-64)
Proportion of population aged 65 and over	14.9%	24.4%
Ethnicity	More diverse, with 87% identifying as White and 13% belonging to non-White minorities	Higher proportion of White residents at 95%, with non-White minorities making up 5% of the population
Median salary	£34,603 per year, representing a 3.6% increase over the last year	£34,712 per year, representing a 6.3% increase over the last year
Gender pay gap	4.5% or £1,595	12.4% or £4,514
Claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64	4.2%	3.1%
Preventable mortality rate for males under 75 years	259.5	173.3
Preventable		

Theme	Norwich	Norfolk
mortality rate for females under 75 years	128.7	91
Suicide rate for males 10+ yrs	22.1	18
Excess winter deaths index - female - All ages	17.1	13.1
Excess winter deaths index - male - All ages	-14.4	7.9

34. These significant differences to the issues facing communities across Norfolk, can be better served by three unitary model, with a Greater Norwich unitary authority being to focus on local needs, tailoring services to those needs and leading to better outcomes and better value.

### **Be the right size to achieve efficiencies, and withstand financial shocks**

35. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority would be able to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shock, yet be agile enough to respond to local needs and opportunities. To date, Norwich's growth potential has been constrained by its boundaries. **A new Greater Norwich Unitary Authority area with a current population nearing 300,000 and projected housing growth to accommodate at least 50,000 more residents within the local plan period would:**

- integrate local plans and policies across the proposed new unitary area
- unlock housing opportunities
- deliver further sustainable development to meet future needs
- build on our already visible growth ambition.

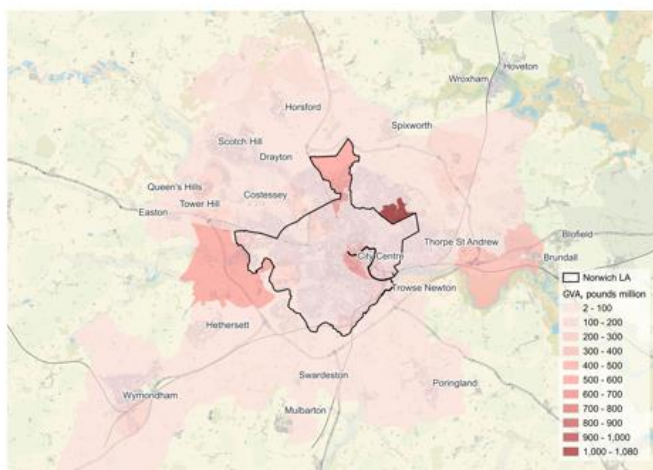
36. We believe, based on estimates of growth for the new unitary council, an additional 911,000 sqm of employment floor space could be delivered, equating to 38,000 jobs and an additional £2bn GVA. This would generate an additional £18m additional business rates per annum for Norwich (once fully delivered) that will support future investment. In addition, it would create c.26,000 new homes to support c.60,000 new residents generating an increase of £31m in Council tax and £2-3m New Homes Bonus per annum.

37. The Greater Norwich Development Partnership has a strong track record, with recent detailed masterplans and planning approaches to support the city's biggest development sites, including:

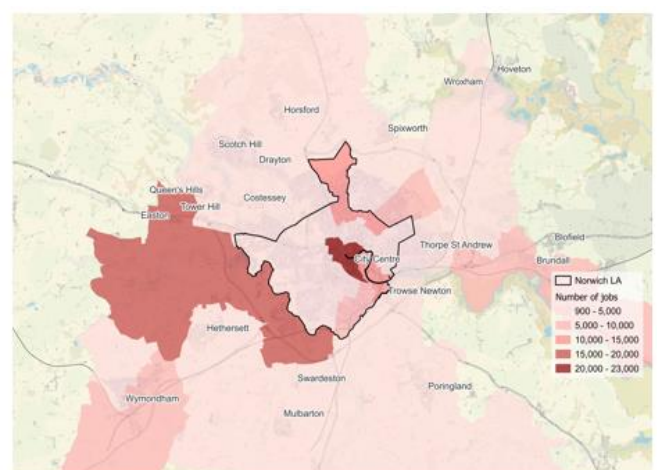
- Anglia Square – 1,100 homes, 2,200 jobs, community amenities and retail facilities, attracting £34m Government funding and partnership in Norwich
- East Norwich Strategic Regeneration Area – 3,500 to 4,000 new homes, 6,000 new jobs and community amenities

- a pipeline of public and private sector sites to support housing and raise the profile of the heritage of the city, and engagement with the communities it serves.

38. A unitary authority in Norwich will be more effective in driving economic growth in the urban business sector and will align skills to the requirements of the future jobs market, building on the relationships it holds with local anchor institutions such as the Universities. Crucially, this local focus will allow us to overcome the blockers which exist specifically in an urban environment. This capability will only come with a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority.
39. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority would provide a unified voice for residents, businesses, and investors, essential for a region that significantly contributes to the Norfolk and Suffolk economy. **The current Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) already identifies sites with the potential to accommodate tens of thousands of new jobs and generate a £2bn GVA boost.**
40. Building on our proven track record of delivery, the new unitary authority would be able to capitalise on this. The urban area’s growth rates have matched some of the UK’s largest regional cities in recent years. Between 2010 and 2022, Greater Norwich’s economy grew by 64%, a rate only exceeded by Manchester, Bristol and Belfast amongst the Core Cities Group. The impact of this growth is that the Norwich City Council boundary now fails to reflect the city’s economic geography. Over half (54%) of Greater Norwich’s GVA is located outside the city council area – up from 47% in 2010. This is matched by employment trends, which show that 47% of Greater Norwich’s jobs are now located outside of the City Council area.



GVA by LSOA (£m), 2022



Employment density, 2023

Sources: ONS Sub-regional Accounts, ONS BRES

41. 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.

42. Greater Norwich is a £9.9bn economy, hosting 158,000 jobs and 10,500 businesses. It is Norfolk's primary urban centre and over half of the county's population (53%) live in the Norwich Travel to Work Area. Beyond Norfolk, Greater Norwich is key to regional prosperity. Across the proposed Norfolk and Suffolk Strategic Authority area, Greater Norwich contributes over a quarter of the region's GVA, and 22% of its jobs.
43. While there is a strong strategic rationale for some of these shifts, poorly coordinated strategic planning has accelerated displacement and undermined the employment function of Norwich city centre. Since 2018, there has been a 17% decline in city centre employment, while employment in peripheral business parks has surged. Left unaddressed, this threatens the long-term vitality of the city centre which is widely regarded by local stakeholders as the jewel in the crown of the region's economy.
44. Through fostering closer links with the city's university sector and health and social care sectors, we will put in place long term plans and actions to support local business, supply chains and university spinouts. This will define a targeted regional skills pipeline, ensuring training and education are aligned with key sectors to benefit the wider Norfolk economy and communities.
45. Critically, by incorporating growing urban areas and strategically expanding to accommodate potential future growth, under-bounding risks are mitigated, and a larger, more sustainable council tax base is established. Furthermore, a unitary authority in Norwich will be more effective in driving economic growth in the urban business sector and aligning skills to the requirements of the future jobs market, further bolstering business rates in support of the delivery of services.

### **Boundary considerations**

46. We have identified, in conjunction with partner districts a preferred option driven by the urban character of the areas surrounding the City of Norwich, which will need further test and scrutiny collaboratively going forward.
47. The creation of a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority will require a re-drawing of boundaries to include the city centre itself, and adjacent urban areas that form an integral part of Norwich's daily life, with people commuting for work, accessing cultural amenities, and engaging with the city's vibrant economic offer.
48. The new boundary will capture primary economic drivers outside the current city limits, including the urban area's fastest-growing areas. It will enable a coordinated and streamlined planning approach to prevent city centre decline and enable a unified response to the Invest 2035 ambitions across key sectors like financial services and life sciences. It is crucial for the city's future that new proposed boundaries are revised and do not leave the city under-bounded again within a few decades.
49. Population estimates for this preferred approach are captured in the table below. They are calculated using housing allocations from the Greater Norfolk Local Plan (GNLP); the government's new Standard Methodology; plus,

additional growth opportunity areas, including potential new settlements.

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Current (2024)</b>	<b>2038 Population (GNLP)</b>
Greater Norwich Unitary Authority	293,926	346,000
Norfolk Authority two*	322,178	346,083
Norfolk Authority three*	325,158	349,283

\* Note: figures for neighbouring authorities reflect calculations in the Norfolk Districts' Joint Interim Plan

### **Financial benefits and savings against high-spend budget areas**

50. We have aligned this proposal to the framework in the joint interim plan but further analysis on numbers of democratic representation, costs and efficiencies will be a focal point of the next stage of the review. There is real opportunity to deliver savings and radical change from the move to a unitary framework across Norfolk. The districts joint interim plan has identified efficiencies and savings across the system of £27.5m a year across Norfolk.
51. A new Greater Norwich Unitary Authority will drive significant savings through better control of demand management and a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention across redrawn urban boundaries. The focus must be on reducing the need for costly crisis intervention, especially focused on key high-spend areas (social services, SEND) and shifting the model of delivery towards preventative services that can support greater independence (early years, community support, mental health services).
52. Key to delivering savings will be our ability to reform the care market in and around Norwich. Norwich is the epicentre of the care market - based on the February CQC register, there are 322 residential and nursing care homes in Norfolk; 164 of these are within 15 miles of Norwich (134 residential and 30 nursing) – over half of all care homes in the county.
53. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority will realise financial savings by:
  - streamlining processes and eliminating duplication across areas
  - whole organisation design and transformation
  - building capacity and resource
  - securing the right skills and resources
  - using its commissioning, regulatory and convening powers to shape markets and drive innovation
  - leveraging market changes and stimulating market growth
  - stimulating or providing funding for training and development
  - promoting innovation.
54. A stable, strong care market can be a driver of local economic growth - through this, we can create jobs, attract investment, and support the participation of carers in the workforce.

## Non-financial benefits

55. While we understand the financial forces driving Local Government Reorganisation, we are clear that there will also be many benefits of a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority which go beyond monetary savings and are of critical importance to the people of Norwich:
- **Economic growth and sector development:** a restructured local government framework will enable Norwich better to plan for and support economic growth, unlocking the potential of key sectors which contribute to national prosperity. A more locally focused approach will strengthen productivity, drive employment growth and enhance sector specialisation, leading to greater economic resilience.
  - **Housing growth and delivery:** by aligning planning powers and investment strategies, Norwich will be better positioned to realise its housing growth potential. A streamlined governance structure will support the acceleration of housing delivery, ensuring that targets for new homes, including affordable housing, are met to time and budget.
  - **Addressing barriers to opportunity:** we will tackle long-standing barriers to social mobility, particularly in education and skills development. A more integrated approach will help improve educational attainment and reduce the proportion of adults with no formal qualifications, supporting long-term wellbeing and economic inclusion.
  - **Reducing health inequalities:** a more joined-up approach to health and social care, as a result of a unitary set-up, will allow for more effective interventions in tackling health inequalities and the wider social determinants of health. We will be able to tackle deprivation levels and economic inactivity related to poor health, improving overall wellbeing and life expectancy by integrating services, working in partnership with other agencies and organisations including the NHS, blue light agencies and the VCSE sector. As a City Council, we already have excellent relationships with these groups.
  - **Long-standing performance weaknesses:** a county-wide focus has meant that the unique socio-economic conditions of the urban area have not been effectively addressed – there will be opportunities to consolidate good performance where it is already delivering all outcomes for residents.
  - **Wellbeing:** a place-based approach to city development and greater citizen participation in decision-making will enhance overall wellbeing. This aligns with HM Treasury’s supplementary guidance on wellbeing as an alternative measure in future business cases.
  - **Transport:** there will be opportunities to enhance transport infrastructure and to promote sustainable travel, contributing to a reduction in car usage and improved connectivity.

## **Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens**

56. A Greater Norwich Unitary Authority presents a unique opportunity to design public services tailored to Norwich's distinct demographic and socio-economic needs through the delivery of high-quality, sustainable public services.
57. Urban and rural areas face fundamentally different housing and infrastructure challenges. A governance structure that conflates and politicises these issues will struggle to respond at the right pace and scale - impacting the ability to accelerate housing delivery, infrastructure and key employment sites.
58. A single, county-wide unitary risks diluting Norwich's urban priorities within a larger, predominantly rural authority - reducing the city's ability to align economic growth, infrastructure, and housing delivery with the Mayor's devolved powers. There is precedent for the needs of urban and rural communities being represented within a combined authority across the UK - eg York and North Yorkshire.
59. The city is already building strong foundations for delivering enhanced public services, recently updating its City Vision and establishing bold economic strategies and engaging key stakeholders/ partnerships.
60. The alignment with our Inclusive Economy Vision, coupled with a focus on housing growth, will unlock long-term savings and accelerate positive outcomes for our communities. We will pursue further opportunities for reform, such as enhanced digital service delivery and preventative care to deliver better value for money, enabling more effective resource allocation and a better return on public investment.
61. A Greater Norwich unitary authority will enhance crucial services by enabling more localised, approaches. For homelessness, it will strengthen collaborative strategies and resource coordination; for SEND and children's social care, it will allow targeted interventions and improved early support; and for adult social care, it will facilitate tailored services and locally co-produced models, all leading to improved outcomes and more efficient resource use.
62. Financial savings will be realised by streamlining processes and eliminating duplication, but the potential transformational opportunity that a Greater Norwich unitary authority represents is even greater, as set out below:

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Indicative Saving (per annum)</b>
Adult Social Care	£4-5m
Children's Social Care	£3-4m
Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	£3-4m

63. By bringing decision-making and resource allocation closer to our communities and giving individual communities a louder voice, a Greater Norwich unitary authority will not only improve service responsiveness but also build a more sustainable model of public service delivery based on localism and the strengths of local collaboration.
64. Larger authorities, with dispersed urban and rural centres facing different challenges spread out over a wide geographical area, can find it difficult to align service delivery models where a local understanding of people and place is critical. For example, working effectively with voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations - integral to delivering preventative services which drive significant savings and improved outcomes - is inherently more effective at a local level.

### **Councils working together, meeting local need and informed by local views**

65. Building strong, collaborative partnerships will be crucial in delivery of Government ambitions and priorities. As highlighted in the Joint Interim Plan, a three-unitary model builds on the Norfolk districts' track record of collaborative working.
66. Although a Greater Norwich unitary authority will be focused on urban character areas, there is strong potential for economic alignment and complementary functions across the region, identifying clear areas for cross-boundary co-operation whilst enabling authorities to retain autonomy to improve the life chances of their residents.
67. Norwich's politics and priorities are different from the rest of the county. It has a track record of acting responsively as an efficient and well-run council and this depends on maintaining communities of interest within the boundary.
68. Norwich is a unique economic centre with distinct heritage and deep-rooted specialisms in financial services, research and innovation and creative industries, alongside a thriving net-zero economy. It operates as an urban economy within a large rural hinterland. It is home to 31% of Norfolk's businesses and has a diverse and growing talent pool.
69. The city's current administrative boundaries do not reflect its true economic footprint or potential. Despite this, Norwich has outperformed many larger UK cities in key growth indicators. Expanding its governance capacity will allow the city to accelerate agglomeration effects, attract investment, and drive regional prosperity across an area that is similar in character, needs and identity.
70. A unitary authority that is defined by the character of its place and economic function will be equipped to better maintain a sense of real place, community and identity. This approach ensures that by working across the three unitary councils, services can be agile enough to respond to local need with specific and targeted intervention that is not diluted across competing priorities.

## **Support devolution arrangements**

71. The Government's ambitions for devolution aim to drive growth, enhance well-being, and boost household incomes. Designed with local communities in mind, devolution seeks to put politics back in the service of working people.
72. The evolving devolution landscape is unlocking new powers, funding, and autonomy for regions. However, true success goes beyond securing a devolution deal - it requires the right structures to fully harness these opportunities. Lessons from established devolved regions underscore the importance of strong local authorities with the capability, governance, and local expertise to shape markets, attract investment, and drive inclusive growth in key national sectors.
73. A Greater Norwich unitary authority would significantly strengthen devolution efforts by ensuring the region has the governance and strategic focus needed to maximize devolved powers. As a high-growth, knowledge-intensive urban centre, Greater Norwich generates over a quarter of the proposed Norfolk and Suffolk Strategic Authority area's GVA, making it an economic powerhouse. A unitary authority would provide a strong, unified voice within a Combined Authority, safeguarding urban priorities from being overshadowed by a predominantly rural administration.
74. High-growth, knowledge-intensive cities like Norwich are the powerhouses of the UK economy. Securing a seat for a Greater Norwich unitary authority within the future Combined Authority is essential to maximising the benefits of devolution. As the only Key City in the East of England, Norwich must be at the heart of delivering the region's devolution ambitions to drive economic growth and enhance public services.
75. A focused approach will enable strategic planning that aligns with the mayor's priorities while maintaining local responsiveness - empowering Norwich to lead transformational change in housing, transport, regeneration, and economic development. With a £9.9bn economy and growth rates that have matched major UK cities (a 64% increase between 2010 and 2022), a Greater Norwich unitary authority would unlock the city's vast potential. The Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) has already identified sites capable of supporting 36,437 additional jobs and delivering a £2bn GVA boost.
76. By fostering industry clusters and accelerating growth in specialised sectors like FinTech and digital industries - where Norwich has seen a 13.2% rise in businesses since 2015 - a unitary authority would be best placed to attract investment, strengthening both regional diversity and the UK's broader economic resilience. Crucially, it would resolve the current anomaly in which over half (54%) of Greater Norwich's GVA is generated outside the existing city council area, ensuring that growth is effectively captured and managed for the benefit of the entire region.

## **Stronger community engagement and genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment**

77. As set out elsewhere in this document, there are significant differences

between the communities of Norfolk. The proposal for a three unitary option enables each to focus more clearly on the communities within their area. Crucially, communities are also more likely to feel a genuine sense of place, and, as evidence shows, therefore feel more willing to engage in their local area.

78. Public services more tailored to need, as referenced in criteria 2, also help to build the sense amongst a community that they are understood, and that the relevant council has a genuine interest in understanding issues and working together to resolve them. That sense of mutual trust and understanding is integral to communities feeling they can engage, that they can have impact, and that they will be understood. The culture of an organisation is often as, if not more, important than the specific council processes through which communities can engage and get involved.
79. This engagement with communities is an indispensable building block of developing public services fit for the 21st century, with services that are co-produced by residents, built on strong local connections, and based on evidence and insight.
80. A Greater Norwich unitary will be strongly positioned to spearhead place-based and insight-led co-production across the city, delivering impactful models of early intervention and prevention that are designed by the people who need them, informed by partners across health, the VCSE and blue light services, and developed in the context of the current and future needs of the city's communities
81. A Greater Norwich Authority can leverage many established networks, build on already successful engagement methods and channels, and continue to foster a culture of listening to communities and enabling them to do more for themselves.
82. This approach builds upon Norfolk's strong foundation of existing collaborative partnerships, demonstrating a proactive and inclusive approach to resident involvement. These partnerships, focused on collaborative service delivery, addressing community needs, promoting health and wellbeing, and safeguarding vulnerable individuals, provide valuable insights for a new unitary structure. These include initiatives like:
  - CNC Building Control and nplaw, which showcase how collaborative service models enhance community engagement and deliver better outcomes for people.
  - The Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) exemplify partnership that involve residents in finding solutions to local challenges.
  - Active Norfolk and the Norwich Health and Wellbeing Partnership highlight the importance of community involvement in promoting healthy lifestyles.
  - Safeguarding partnerships ensure vulnerable voices are heard.

## **To conclude**

83. We welcome the Government's feedback and remain committed to working closely with our colleagues across Norfolk and Suffolk to refine and strengthen our proposals. Our priority is to secure the very best outcomes for the communities we represent, ensuring their needs are met with ambition, collaboration, and a clear focus on delivering real benefits.

