

# Interim plan for Suffolk Local Government Reorganisation



March 2025



# Contents

## **Executive Summary**

- 1 Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk**
- 2 Our vision for Suffolk**
- 3 Current local government performance in Suffolk**
- 4 Why multiple unitaries is the only viable choice for Suffolk**
- 5 Future service transformation opportunities**
- 6 Reflecting the communities and economies of Suffolk**
- 7 Size and boundaries of new councils**
- 8 Indicative efficiencies**
- 9 Councillor numbers**
- 10 Local engagement**
- 11 Challenges requiring government support**
- 12 Supporting devolution**
- 13 Indicative costs**
- 14 Conclusion**



## Executive Summary

Following the invitation from MHCLG in February 2025, the five district and borough councils of Suffolk have collaborated to align on a vision for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) tailored to Suffolk's residents' needs. We support a multi-unitary approach.

Central to this is the aim of enhancing local democratic representation and service efficiency, aligning with Suffolk's distinct identities. We are united in our view that a single mega council covering the whole of the county cannot effectively serve the residents of Suffolk.

The five councils want to prioritise delivering high-quality, sustainable public services but recognise the need for further analysis and local engagement related to this work. It is recognised that LGR is a unique opportunity to reshape local government to better serve Suffolk's diverse communities and economies, rather than relying on previous outdated geographies and models.

By being innovative and creative we believe we can deliver better services that can help to bring solutions to the problems that have confronted us for so long, working in partnership with the Mayor and central government, and deliver cost savings. Our proposed multi unitary models create councils that will be above the average population of a current unitary and are the right footprint to deliver across our large, rural geography.



## 1. Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk

The five district and borough councils of Suffolk have a long-standing tradition of collaboration, both among themselves, with Suffolk County Council and the wider system. We are united in our commitment to achieving the best outcomes for Suffolk residents through local government reorganisation (LGR).

Following the invitation letter from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2025, the Leaders from each of the five councils have together considered the practical models for unitary local government in Suffolk and consulted with their own Councils. As part of this process, we have had discussions with Suffolk County Council and agreed to carry out initial stakeholder engagement together and share data to inform our Interim Plan.

Seven models were originally examined as it was important to consider all of the alternatives to identify the best way forward. Through a series of meetings and workshops, these models were reduced to a shortlist with a clear view of the value of multiple unitaries in Suffolk which we agree to in principle.

The collective view is that our approach to local government reorganisation will provide the best opportunity to achieve:

- Cost effective and high-quality services for Suffolk residents
- Long term financial sustainability
- Economic growth and support to local industry
- Housing growth needed by our communities
- Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment
- Governance and support systems which can adapt to future aspirations and sustainable growth
- Ambitions to drive progress, innovation, public sector reform and long-term success
- Structures to support and enable thriving communities and economies

We are working together in a single programme and have a clear, shared vision of how to deliver local government reorganisation for Suffolk.

## 2. Our vision for Suffolk

The priority for all five councils is the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services supported by the strongest possible local democratic structures. Local government reorganisation in Suffolk provides the opportunity to deliver a public sector reform agenda focussed on best value and optimising the benefits and impacts of services for residents.

In assessing the models the five councils have sought to:

- Best reflect a meaningful sense of place and identity to support local democracy whilst also ensuring the need to create economies of scale;
- Bolster the future financial sustainability of public services by considering the right scale and ability to drive this vision with system partners, as well as resilience in the short, medium and longer term;
- Respect the character of Suffolk which is reflected in its diverse geography and local community identities;
- Ensure focus on the future growth of, and opportunities in, Suffolk and more widely across East Anglia;
- Provide the resilient, accountable leadership and capacity that the Suffolk system requires to meet community needs and deliver public sector reform; and



- Give Suffolk’s communities, businesses and residents a strong voice, including on the Strategic Authority, and enable them to support the wider devolution agenda and delivery.

### 3. Current local government performance in Suffolk

Local government in Suffolk is under a number of pressures driven by financial issues, demand levels and performance.

Together, the district and borough councils have saved over £330m over the last 10 years through council mergers, shared services, innovation, use of technology and growth in sustainable income streams. While there is always more opportunity, savings of this scale are becoming harder to deliver within the current two-tier local government system as demand for statutory services rises at the same time as costs are experiencing significant inflation.

While the County Council has also delivered savings over this period, its Dedicated Schools Grant pressure is expected to be over £350m by 2029<sup>1</sup>. This pressure is expected to absorb all the County Council’s reserves if the current DSG override is not extended and additional income not secured through the government’s review of funding in 2025.

Suffolk County Council’s 2024 Children’s Services inspection rated the quality of service as “requires improvement to be good” except for the experience and progress of children in care which was rated as “good”. Ofsted’s SEND inspection in 2023 judged there to be “widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which the local area partnership must address urgently.”

It is noted that of the 31 unitary councils achieving Good or Outstanding Children’s Services judgements, 22 of them serve populations of c.300,000 or less. Similarly, of the five unitary councils achieving good or outstanding Children’s Services judgements and having “arrangements [which] typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND”, four serve populations of c.300,000 or less.

Local government reorganisation presents us with a real opportunity to do things differently and move away from the constrained structures of the past. It should drive positive change across Suffolk by creating the organisations that our residents and communities need, and which will deliver financially sustainable, improved services and providing the right support at the right time for local residents.

### 4. Why multiple unitaries is the only viable choice for Suffolk

Suffolk is a large, geographically dispersed county, covering 3,852km<sup>2</sup>. It takes two and a half hours to travel from one end of the county to the other. If a single unitary were to be created, it would be the third largest current unitary council by geographic size. Combined with low population density, rurality and the ageing population of the region this would present a significant challenge to a single organisation in providing effective and efficient services locally.

A single unitary would not be able to drive growth in our varied economy. Suffolk encompasses the tourist coast, agriculture, nuclear and renewable energy, the world centre of horseracing, close links to the Cambridgeshire growth area and a university town, all of which have great potential and would be overlooked in a single economic plan. It will be very

<sup>1</sup> [Suffolk County Council 'not going bust' despite funding gap | East Anglian Daily Times](#)



difficult to lead effective public sector transformation across Suffolk's dispersed and diverse communities if a single unitary approach were to be adopted.

Regulator reports, including CQC and Ofsted, show no correlation between size of population and performance of services. This shows that scale does not improve outcomes or service delivery. A single unitary will not be able to deliver prevention and early intervention in a targeted way. Demand reduction and easing pressure on health and care requires behavioural change which needs to be locally targeted.

Suffolk has pockets of affluence and pockets of significant deprivation<sup>2</sup>. A single unitary would not be sensitive to the needs of local communities as the needs of Ipswich and Lowestoft as the largest population centres will always outweigh the rest of the area. This creates unequal provision and risks our ability to focus on other pockets of deprivation, resulting in increased pressure on the NHS and other public services.

A single unitary would significantly weaken democratic representation and community voices. The caseload that councillors would be required to manage would prevent them from understanding and being able to help the communities they represent. Further, the scale and diversity of the area about which councillors would make strategic decisions would be unwieldy. A multi unitary model would provide stronger democratic representation and be meaningful for and better understood by local people while still providing a one-stop shop for all council services in an area.

We need multiple, balanced constituent authorities across Norfolk and Suffolk to make the strategic authority a success. This will lead to healthy governance, accountability and decision-making, and we are working with colleagues in Norfolk to design unitaries that will maximise the opportunities that devolution will bring.

Multiple unitaries will provide the impetus to change local government in Suffolk for the better. Many services are under pressure and require improvement and we need to take the opportunity to design unitaries that can deliver under these conditions.

There are some clear benefits that will come from any model of local government reorganisation including simplicity for residents, clarity of accountability, integration and alignment of services and strong leaders making efficient decisions. This approach to local government reorganisation provides the right size for service delivery and the opportunity to drive change and improvement for our residents, communities and businesses.



<sup>2</sup> [Suffolk Observatory – Deprivation](#)

## 5. Future service transformation opportunities

Our multi unitary approach to LGR in Suffolk will deliver:

- **Locality:** Delivery and accessibility of services at a local level, supporting the principles of subsidiarity.
- **Representation:** Residents will still be able to speak to a local representative who understands their neighbourhoods. Decisions that impact them will be made locally ensuring local democracy is maintained and the focus on local relationships retained.
- **Sensible economic areas:** Building on the commonalities of key industrial sectors and links to wider economic geographies, which do not unfairly advantage or disadvantage communities.
- **Belonging:** People are proud of where they live. Council geographies will be meaningful, resonate with residents and respect historical and cultural identities. This connection between people and place will support local public sector reform.
- **Simplicity:** Regardless of scale, unitary councils will streamline resident interactions and will bring clearer accountability, efficiencies and integrated services, driving better outcomes for the individual.
- **Sustainability:** Local government built around the communities of Suffolk and which is fit for the future through service delivery at the right scale.
- **Transformation opportunities:** Enabling focus on prevention and public sector reform that will more effectively support both urban and rural needs e.g. homelessness, adult social care and highways. Establishing cost savings through efficiencies, service integration and services tailored to local strengths and needs.
- **Localism:** Opportunity to bring some of the more complex and challenging services currently delivered cross-county to a more local, responsive and manageable level e.g. SEND/ASC.
- **Boundaries:** Opportunity to operate over recognisable geographies, with strategic decision making; whilst not becoming so large that locality and local agendas, timely decision making, intervention and implementation are lost.
- **Prevention:** Through tailored and integrated services focused on need and reducing pressure on the NHS and Mental Health services. A multi unitary approach will strengthen the ability for local government to work with Integrated Neighbourhood Teams on health and social care. As reflected in the recent NHS Confederation paper on neighbourhood health, the best way to help address growing demands on health and care services, improving health and wellbeing, reducing health inequalities, and delivering on our wider socio-economic priorities is by engaging directly and locally with neighbourhoods and communities.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. Reflecting the communities and economies of Suffolk

We want to take the opportunity that LGR presents to set up the right unitary and strategic authorities that represent and deliver for Suffolk. This is a once in a generation opportunity to review local government and it needs to be right for local communities rather than being based on older models and geographies.

Suffolk's unique and diverse character, encompassing vibrant urban centres, the dynamic Energy Coast, historic market towns, picturesque and rural villages, thriving agriculture & food sector, renowned visitor attractions, National Landscapes, a National Park, world-class horse racing, vital ports, international trade routes, UK economic drivers, housing growth, logistics hubs, a new University and rich heritage, makes it both an exciting and complex county.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/case-neighbourhood-health-and-care-0>



This diversity demands a multi unitary local government structure that ensures dedicated focus, capacity, and expertise across all key sectors, tailored to varying local need. Such an approach is essential for driving sustainable growth, enhancing skills development, accelerating housebuilding, and successfully delivering Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and contributing to the UK economy, all while preserving the unique identity and strengths of Suffolk's many communities.

Suffolk is a county of distinct and diverse identities, each contributing to the region's complexity. While not an exhaustive list, these variations highlight the need for dedicated, locally tailored governance to support sustainable growth and prosperity across its varied landscapes.

### **Ipswich**

As the commercial and cultural heart of Suffolk and its county town, Ipswich is a dynamic and diverse urban centre that blends historical heritage with modern development. Its regenerated waterfront, thriving professional services sector, industrial and logistics hub and emerging digital industries position it as a key driver of regional economic growth, which delivered £4.1bn GVA to the UK economy in 2022.<sup>4</sup> Ipswich is the country's leading grain export port, a port which has played a nationally significant role since the 7th century. With ongoing investment in infrastructure, retail, and cultural assets, Ipswich continues to evolve as a hub for business, logistics, creativity, and innovation, reinforcing its role as a strategic anchor for the wider Suffolk economy. However, Ipswich is constrained by its Victorian boundaries which limit its development potential.

### **Newmarket / Horse Racing**

Newmarket stands as the premier location in the world for the training and breeding of thoroughbred racehorses and is recognised as having a unique and vital place in the British economy, contributing more than £4bn per annum. The international home of horse racing, with a globally renowned equine industry that contributes more than £240m annually to the local economy, employs over 3,000 direct full-time equivalent employees. It is a centre for breeding, training, and racing and the town attracts significant investment, specialist skills, and visitors from across the world. Strong links to research, veterinary science, and equestrian innovation further cement its reputation as a leader in the field. The equine industry also enhances Newmarket's cultural identity, with prestigious events and historic venues celebrating its racing heritage.

### **Sizewell**

Sizewell plays a pivotal role in the UK's energy sector, with its existing nuclear power station and the proposed Sizewell C project marking it as a key site for sustainable energy production. The development of Sizewell C is set to bring significant investment, job creation, and skills development to the region, reinforcing Suffolk's position as a leader in low-carbon and renewable energy. As part of the Energy Coast, Sizewell contributes to national energy security while offering economic opportunities for local businesses and communities.

### **Felixstowe Port**

The Port of Felixstowe is the UK's largest and busiest container port, serving as a critical gateway for international trade. Its strategic location and world-class logistics infrastructure make it a vital hub for imports and exports, driving economic growth across the region. Continuous investment in port expansion, automation, and connectivity strengthens its competitiveness, supporting supply chains across the UK and beyond. Felixstowe's role in global trade enhances Suffolk's position as a leader in logistics and port-related industries.

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<sup>4</sup> [Ipswich | Centre for Cities](#)





The port is a part of Freeport East, along with the Gateway 14 business, innovation, and logistics just off the A14 at Stowmarket.

### **Lowestoft**

Located on the north-east coast, the town of Lowestoft is the country's most easterly point. It hosts the HQ for the Centre for Fisheries, Aquaculture and Science and a fast-growing port. The recent £35m investment in the Lowestoft Eastern Energy Facility has led to the expansion of the Scottish Power Renewables base for their offshore wind farm operations centre. Alongside renewables, the town has a thriving visitor economy and boasts a growing cultural reputation including the First Light Festival, investment in a new cultural quarter through the Towns' Fund and will host a Messum's Gallery on the High Street from 2026.

### **Cambridgeshire Sub-Region**

Suffolk's close ties with the Cambridgeshire sub-region create a dynamic economic corridor that supports collaboration in high-value industries, including life sciences, agri-tech, and advanced manufacturing. The sub-region is a UK economic engine which helps drive growth locally, regionally, and nationally. The region benefits from knowledge exchange with Cambridge's world-class universities and innovation hubs, positioning Suffolk as a key partner in the wider East of England growth strategy. Suffolk businesses and areas of housing, in and around the sub-region, help support it and the continued growth of its businesses and world beating developments. Enhanced transport links and joint investment initiatives further integrate the economies of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, creating new opportunities for business, research, and skills development.

### **Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor**

Part of Suffolk is in the middle of the Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor (CNTC), between two world-leading universities, with the accompanying research institutes and science parks expected to be built around them, all complemented by an ecosystem of businesses and networks that support innovation, commercialisation, and manufacturing. It offers 100km of opportunity stretching from Cambridgeshire to Norfolk, with Suffolk centrally placed to benefit from and contribute to the growth of this dynamic hub of tech focused businesses. Business and political leaders share an ambition to make the CNTC region a top-tier destination for technology businesses, talent, and investors from around the world.

### **A11 / A14 Growth Corridors**

The A11 and A14 corridors serve as vital arteries for economic expansion, linking Suffolk to key national and international markets. These transport routes support a diverse range of industries, including logistics, advanced manufacturing, and agribusiness, while also facilitating trade with the Midlands, the Ports of Felixstowe and Ipswich, and beyond. Investment in infrastructure improvements along these corridors is essential for unlocking further growth, enhancing connectivity, and attracting businesses looking for well-connected locations with access to skilled labour.

### **United States Visiting Forces (USVF)**

Suffolk hosts significant USVF operations, contributing to both the local economy and international defence collaboration. Bases such as RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall support thousands of personnel and their families, driving demand for housing, retail, and services. The presence of USVF also establishes strategic partnerships in technology, logistics, and security, reinforcing Suffolk's role in national defence infrastructure.

### **Manufacturing**

Suffolk's manufacturing sector is a cornerstone of its economy, spanning industries such as food production, precision engineering, and advanced materials. The region's strong supply chains, skilled workforce, and access to major transport links make it an attractive location for manufacturing investment. Innovation in automation, sustainable production, and high-



tech manufacturing continues to drive competitiveness, positioning Suffolk as a leader in modern industrial development. This includes the provision of a new Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering centre in Suffolk to help meet a growing UK need.

### **Agri-Tech and Food Production**

Suffolk is home to a thriving agri-tech and food production sector, benefiting from its strong agricultural heritage and cutting-edge research in sustainable farming practices. With close links to research hubs such as Cambridge and Norwich, the county is at the forefront of precision agriculture, food innovation, and supply chain resilience. Suffolk's food processing and export businesses also play a crucial role in both national and international markets.

### **Higher Education and Skills Development**

Suffolk's education institutions, such as the University of Suffolk, West Suffolk College, East Coast College, and Suffolk New College, play a key role in driving workforce development. The county is investing in skills training, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and maths), digital industries, healthcare, and technical apprenticeships, ensuring that local talent can meet the demands of high-growth sectors.



## **7. Size and boundaries of new councils**

A multi unitary approach is the only viable way to achieve our vision and provide an opportunity for meaningful local engagement for the residents and businesses of Suffolk. These models create a local government fit for the future, built around geographic and community identities and enabling strong democratic representation, targeted services, opportunities for service efficiency and wider public sector reform. These models create councils that will be close to the average population of a current unitary and are the right footprint to deliver across our large, varied geography. For this reason, we are still evaluating two different models.



## 7.1 Three unitary approach

Three balanced unitary councils serving similar sized populations, reflecting the respective identities, demographics and needs of the east and west of Suffolk and of the Ipswich area.

This model would:

- Drive economic growth through unitaries supporting different and individual economies including the urban challenges and opportunities of Ipswich, the coastal and rural east and agriculture and connections with the Cambridgeshire subregion in the west.
- Provide opportunities for the economic growth of Ipswich by connecting it to its functional economic area, rather than relying on a boundary set in 1836.
- Provide authorities that are the right size and shape to focus on public sector reform, health inequalities and deprivation in the urban, rural and coastal environments.
- Provide the best democratic representation of any form of unitary local government in Suffolk. While the number of councillors is likely to almost halve from the current 300+, helping to meet the efficiency objective, it will retain the best possible connection between communities and their elected representatives.
- Provide three constituent members to the Mayoral Strategic Authority presenting strong voices representing the communities and functional economic areas of Suffolk including a platform for Ipswich as the county town and largest urban centre by far. This is expected to match the number of constituent authorities representing Norfolk.
- Enhance the focus of housing growth on areas with appropriate infrastructure and access to services rather than impacting small villages.
- Enable key infrastructure challenges such as the Orwell Bridge to be tackled in partnership with the Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk; as well as NSIPs to be delivered through the delivery capacity of three councils.
- Enable focus on the tourist economy and energy coast through which Suffolk is supporting UK energy sufficiency and becoming a clean energy superpower.
- Enable focus on agriculture and agri-tech, manufacturing, the horseracing hub at Newmarket and economic connections between key towns and into the Cambridgeshire sub-region.

The unitaries in this model would be similar in size by population to the average current unitary therefore strong enough to withstand economic shocks but small enough to be local and tailored to the needs of their communities. Our analysis shows that there is no correlation between the size of a unitary and its performance or financial viability. What matters is the quality, capacity and local focus of leadership and how services are delivered. By having three unitaries Suffolk will have strong political leadership and officer capacity. This will drive delivery of public sector reform, housing delivery and government missions for our residents.

Finally, the unitaries would be the right size to focus on and deliver prevention and public service reform based on need and tailored around the actual needs of communities rather than historic and out of date local government boundaries.

This is a Type B proposal under the legislation as to properly reflect Ipswich's functional economic area and make sense of local identities, a boundary review will be required to create each unitary council's new boundaries.

		Population (2023)	Population est. (2045)
U1	Ipswich	259,652	320,693
U2	West	255,577	311,156
U3	East	261,213	293,784



## 7.2 Two unitary approach

Two unitary councils reflecting the respective identities of the east and west of Suffolk.

This model delivers two balanced unitaries in terms of population, able to focus on the respective needs and priorities of the communities of eastern and western Suffolk. The population sizes are well above the unitary average and are appropriate for effective service delivery as our population grows.

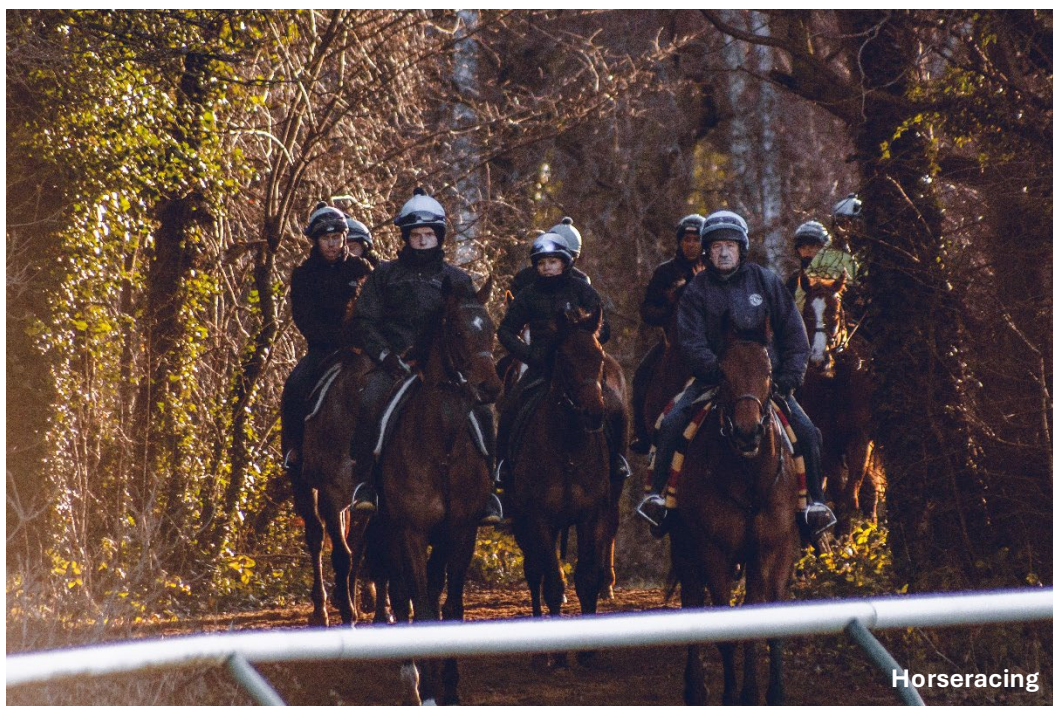
The economies of both unitaries are balanced (both producing Gross Value Added (GVA) of £10.4bn) providing strong and equal representation in a strategic authority. Though if as expected Norfolk has three unitary councils, Suffolk would have fewer constituent members than Norfolk on the Mayoral Strategic Authority.

The eastern authority connects the coast and the key ports of Felixstowe, Lowestoft and Ipswich. This would provide focus on trade as well as the tourist economy and energy coast through which Suffolk is supporting UK energy sufficiency and playing a major role in delivering the Government's mission to make the UK a clean energy super power.

The western authority has an economy focused on agriculture and agri-tech, manufacturing, the horseracing hub at Newmarket and economic connections between key towns and into the Cambridgeshire sub-region.

This model is based on existing district boundaries potentially making implementation and transition easier. It is a Type B proposal under the legislation, like the three unitary model, as to properly reflect Ipswich's functional economic area and make sense of local identities, a boundary review to the west and north of the current Ipswich Borough Council boundary would be required.

		Population (2023)	Population est. (2045)
U1	East	386,478	457,990
U2	West	389,964	467,643



## 8. Indicative efficiencies

The district and borough councils have recent experience of restructuring, with East Suffolk and West Suffolk District Councils forming in 2019 through a merger of the two previous districts of Suffolk Coastal and Waveney and Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, respectively. As a result, they are fully aware of the considerations required to ensure a successful process for all stakeholders involved and where best to target efficiencies and savings.

Over the last 10 years, the district and borough councils have generated over £330m of savings achieving this through council mergers, shared services, innovation, use of technology and growth in sustainable income streams. This track record means we have the experience and capability to transform public service provision at a local level and achieve hyper efficient unitary local government.

We also have a strong track record of leveraging new income in different ways. This has been a reflection of being nimble and entrepreneurial enough to take appropriate risks and drive not just income but economic and social benefit. We would look to embed that culture and approach in the new unitaries.

This experience has informed the council's thinking around key considerations for the LGR process and the models that will best support this vision.

The transition to a multi unitary model will deliver indicative savings in the range of £16-28m, which can be categorised at a high-level into workforce, service specific and general savings, as outlined below:

### 8.1 Workforce

- Final submissions will need to address workforce implications of the multi unitary model. Our approach will ensure that we build on our track record of appropriate structures focused on delivery, retaining and developing talent and maximising efficiency.

### 8.2 Service specific savings

- Consolidate corporate service functions.
- Enhance and integrate services such as Public Health, housing, Adults and Children services through combining workforce, infrastructure and expertise, identifying leading practice and reducing duplication of effort using some of the existing area-based approaches in place.
- Integrate procurement and enhance overall value through leveraging bulk purchasing power and securing favourable terms with suppliers. Smaller footprints will enable meaningful social value, tailored to the needs of local communities, to be built into procurement.
- Appropriate utilisation of private sector delivery partners at scale and through building on existing successful partnerships.
- Review existing collaborations and continuing to grow their efficiency and effectiveness through partnership working.
- Consider all opportunities to collaborate on future service delivery and transformation where this is in the best interest of residents and can be supported either across unitaries or through the strategic authority.
- Sell and repurpose surplus properties to generate capital, ensuring alignment with the councils' overall objectives and community needs.
- Combine unified digital platforms to automate repetitive tasks, streamline workflows, and eliminate manual processes.



- Consolidate vehicle fleets and optimise routes to enhance efficiency, reduce costs and minimise environmental impact.
- Combine financial management activities to secure better borrowing terms and optimise costs.

General service savings will be guided by local insights and will be realised through the consolidation of services and identifying best practice across the proposed new unitary authorities. The right form of local government reorganisation can unlock and stimulate public sector reform and better working across the public service ecosystem.

## 9. Councillor numbers

There are currently 2,520 people per councillor in Suffolk (average councillor number per population across districts/borough and county). We have modelled 56-58 councillors per unitary for a three unitary model and 84-86 councillors for a two unitary model.

This retains a population per councillor of under 4,500 which is the strongest democratic representation of any model of reorganisation which Suffolk could adopt, and is in line with the average for current unitary councils.

Any council larger than these models risks poor democratic representation or being unwieldy due to councillors struggling to be heard or to play an active political role.

## 10. Local engagement

We believe that the people of Suffolk deserve a real say in how their local democracy will run. This will be a focus of the next stage of work.

We have started this phase by partnering with the County Council to write to a selection of key stakeholders to understand their priorities for local government reorganisation. Their initial feedback will help us develop our models. The exercise was carried out from 25<sup>th</sup> February to 7<sup>th</sup> March 2025. County, district and borough council Leaders wrote to fifteen strategic organisations asking for their views on the priorities and challenges for new unitary organisations in Suffolk. Ten responses were received by the deadline.

The following themes and priorities emerged from the engagement. Stakeholders felt that the new unitary council(s) should focus on the delivery of improved public services that were high quality, efficient and effective and that supported economic growth and prosperity and tackling inequality across communities and places. At the heart of the new agenda there needed to be a focus on improving community safety, skills and sustainable transport, as well as promoting the County and attracting inward investment.

A key priority was seen to be the safeguarding of the sustainable and effective delivery of social care services in Suffolk. There should also be a focus on prevention, and integration between health, education, mental health and social care, as well as with other services such as crime prevention, public protection, environmental and landscape protection and emergency response. At the strategic level, there needed to be integration between the role of any new unitary council(s) and that of other services and organisations in terms of planning and strategic decision making. In particular, there needed to be joint working with town and parish councils, with appropriate support and training ahead of any changes in responsibilities.

Respondents said that delivery needed to remain 'local' and be guided by local voices and that there needed to be clarity around responsibility for services. Residents should have equitable access to provision and a 'one stop shop' to access services should be provided.



The council(s) should take decisions quickly and consistently and in an informed and streamlined way, with less bureaucracy. There should be a focus on efficiency and on being financially and operationally sustainable. Respondents suggested that the new unitary council(s) should have a strong focus on joined-up thinking, integrated working, partnership working and collaboration, including exploring the potential of shared back-office functions. When working in a system-wide way, this should be complemented with local voices. It was suggested that the new organisation(s) should adopt place-based and asset-based community development approaches, should make use of the knowledge, skills and contacts of businesses in advancing economic growth and should draw on the vital role of the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector.

Key to the success of the new organisation(s) would be communication and engagement, in support of a climate of openness, transparency, accountability and trust, to support democracy. Offering value for money should also be a key requirement for the new council(s).

As key challenges, stakeholders felt that the sustainability of social care would be a key challenge facing the new organisation(s), as well as ongoing financial pressures. The council(s) would need to establish ways of connecting with communities and ensuring local voices were heard, as well as connecting at the strategic level with the Mayoral Combined Authority.

Respondents also offered some helpful initial feedback on process and transitional issues which are not summarised here but will need to be addressed in the final business case.

We are planning to conduct further extensive engagement with communities and relevant stakeholders related to our assessment of the two proposed models and to support the design of services within the new councils. We are designing appropriate approaches, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all demographic groups.

We are working together as Leaders and Councils. We are engaging with key partners in public service delivery and working together via strategic support which we have jointly commissioned. We have a long history of collaboration in local government in Suffolk and are united in our principles of what local government reorganisation needs to achieve and its role in improving outcomes for our residents, businesses and communities.



## 11. Challenges requiring government support

Under part one of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act of 2007, it is recognised both models are Type B proposals, creating councils that reflect functional economic areas, communities and service delivery, that will require changes to current district boundaries to set up authorities that reflect those local identities and economies, and are fit for service delivery and growth in the future. Government support to establish the timelines and mechanisms by which this can be quickly and efficiently achieved will be necessary.

## 12. Supporting devolution

The councils of Norfolk and Suffolk are working together for devolution to enhance our regional economic growth and productivity. By collaborating, there will be greater local control over decision-making and priorities across the two counties. This partnership will unlock the potential of the region by using shared resources and addressing common challenges.

Our approach to local government reorganisation would provide multiple constituent authorities to the strategic authority presenting strong voices representing the communities of Suffolk.

Norfolk and Suffolk devolution is focussed on:

1. **Economic Growth & Productivity:** Boosting local economies and attracting investment, and working in partnership with Norfolk and Suffolk Business Boards to develop comprehensive, joint strategies.
2. **Physical Assets and Infrastructure:** Improving transportation networks and infrastructure to enhance connectivity and support growth.
3. **Employment and skills:** Ensuring that residents are able to use the full potential of their skills in driving productivity and growth.
4. **Coherent planning and housing:** Developing a housing offer that maximises growth and better supports people's health and wellbeing.
5. **Action on flood risk:** Creating a fully integrated approach to flood and coastal management and devolution of flood and coastal erosion risk management.
6. **Finance:** Greater local autonomy creating a system that is more locally self-sufficient.

Establishing a strategic authority between Suffolk and Norfolk will bring economic scale and clout, creating an economic entity on a similar scale as City regions such as Liverpool and Sheffield, with a much faster growing population. We will drive innovation across the public sector and bring a strong voice for our largest economic centres of Norwich and Ipswich, while also reflecting the role of our other major towns and their economies, our market towns and rural areas.

The economies and sector strengths of our two counties are similar and are stronger by working together - we are proof that cross border collaboration can work.

We already have an Enterprise Zone with sites in both counties supporting Business Improvement Districts, two City Deals for Norwich and Ipswich, a shared Local Transport Body and Skills Board, both County Councils and business.

To ensure this strategic authority is effective and truly transformative for the region, it needs representation from across the counties and a multi unitary model is the best way to ensure this. Our past achievements and successes through collaboration are grounded in having several voices, constructive challenge and local stakeholder representation at the table, as evidenced by our effective Local Enterprise Partnership, and a multi unitary model will ensure this is maintained.





### 13. Indicative costs

The transition to new unitary authorities is expected to result in high-level costs which can be categorised into transition and consolidation, as outlined below.

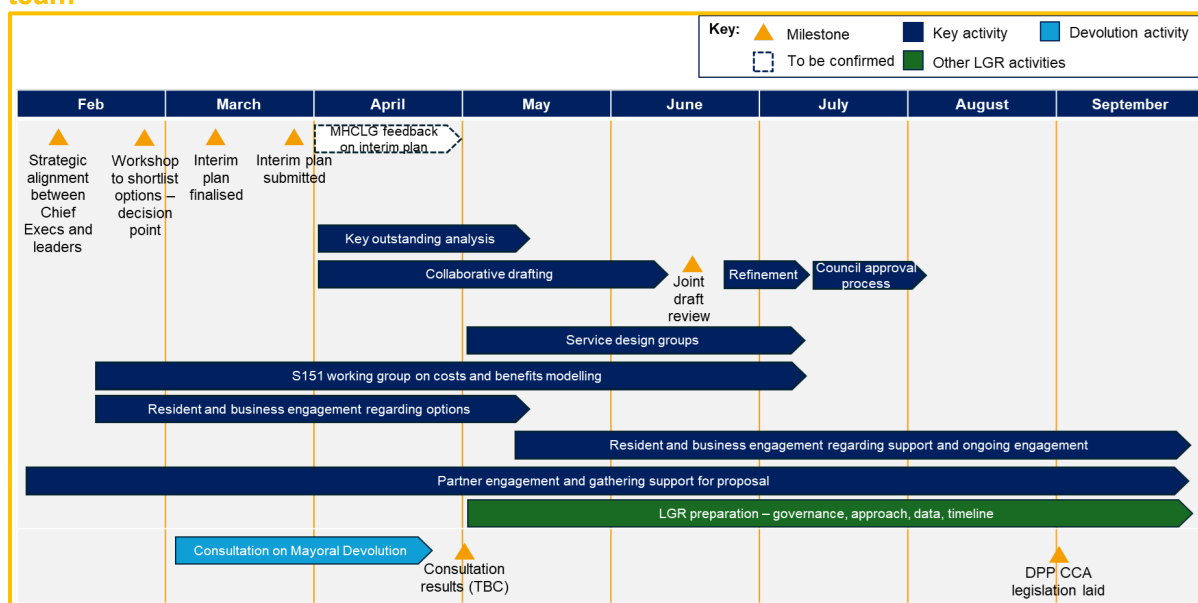
#### 13.1 Transition

- Embedding an implementation programme team which includes legal, contract negotiation, project and programme management, and specialist support (e.g. change management; organisational development).
- Expenses for developing communications, branding, training, and information about the new unitaries to inform the public, stakeholders, and employees about proposed changes and to address concerns.
- Work required to harmonise processes and ensure effective service transition, including constitutional changes, democratic transition, and the development of new policies and procedures.

#### 13.2 Consolidation

- Alignment of contracts, systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration, commonality of cyber security, and training for new systems.
- Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.

#### 13.3 High-level plan for preparing final proposal and standing up an implementation team



The indicative cost of the full proposal would be at least £500k including strategic partner support, funding for local engagement and communication activities, and overall programme management. Back-filled roles related to data, policy, communication, project management and capacity required for LGR prioritised from elsewhere are not included within this cost.

## 14. Conclusion

The district and borough councils of Suffolk are embracing the opportunity of reorganisation as we see this as not only an opportunity to transform how public services are provided across the county, but also an opportunity to rewire local government to deliver bespoke and better outcomes for local people.

Multiple unitaries are needed in Suffolk to deliver:

- Cost effective and high-quality services for Suffolk residents;
- Long term financial sustainability;
- Economic growth and support to local industry;
- Housing growth needed by our communities;
- Stronger democratic representation, community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment;
- Governance and support systems which can adapt to future aspirations and sustainable growth;
- Ambitions to drive progress, innovation, public sector reform and long-term success; and
- Structures to support and enable thriving communities and economies.

