



Options appraisal Executive summary

Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk

June 2025

Local Government Reorganisation

Norfolk currently has a two-tier local government system: one county council and seven district councils. The county council manages county-wide services like highways, adult social care and education, spending around £1.6bn annually. The district councils handle services such as bin collection, planning and housing, with a combined spend of £284m a year.

In February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution invited councils in two-tier areas - like Norfolk - to propose ideas for replacing this system with a unitary council system. This change would bring all local government services in an area under one organisation, supporting the Government's aim to create simpler, more effective structures that deliver better services and outcomes for residents.

This is not about absorbing or merging current councils, but about building a new, modern structure that is more efficient, joined-up, and fit for the future.

This change would:

- **Simplify services** with each resident having one council, one election, one contact point, and clearer accountability.
- **Improve value for money** by removing duplication and focusing resources on frontline services.
- **Create a stronger, joined-up local system** that works more closely with key partners like the NHS and Police.
- **Support better outcomes** by tackling issues—like health, education, housing and transport—through joined-up, place-based leadership.

This presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and to make sure we get it right, we have committed to a thorough, evidence-based review of all the options. Since March, we have been working hard to identifying a sustainable, efficient structure that meets Norfolk's diverse community needs.

This sets out our preferred option - based on the evidence we have gathered - for a new structure of local government in Norfolk.

What the public told us

To understand what matters most to residents, young people, and town and parish councils, we talked with you at events, partnership groups and through online engagement.

The top priorities that came out were that local government reorganisation should:

- **Deliver value for money**
- **Improve services**, and
- **Avoid fragmentation of services**

Young people also highlighted the need for simpler structures, better funding, improved transport, youth services, and education — while expressing concern about fairness, disruption, and the impact on safeguarding.

Town and parish councils stressed the importance of protecting local identity, ensuring strong local representation, and maintaining influence in decision-making, especially over planning and local assets.

The five options we considered

Five potential models have been considered for unitary government in Norfolk. These include:

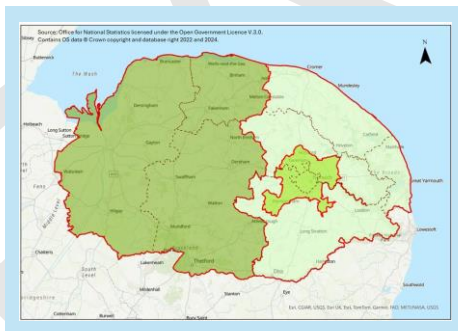
A Single Unitary Council covering the whole of Norfolk:



Two Unitary Councils – with three options considered:



Three Unitary Councils: Greater Norwich, East and West:



Our approach

To identify the best future structure for local government in Norfolk, we focused on options that meet both the Government's requirements and Norfolk's local priorities — carefully considering financial, economic, service delivery, geographic, and community factors.

- **Delivers good value for money** and helps improve council finances by reducing duplication and increasing efficiency.
- **Reflects sensible economic and geographic boundaries**, ensuring no part of the county is disadvantaged.
- **Provides high-quality, sustainable public services** — especially for vital areas like adult social care and children's services — while minimising disruption and risk.
- **Protects local identity** and encourages strong community engagement and involvement - recognising that this will need to be a key consideration in any unitary structure, whether it involves one, two, or three councils.

- **Supports long-term growth and resilience**, by recognising where Norfolk's key business sectors are based and how people access jobs and opportunities.
- **Works alongside the Government's wider plans for devolution**, including the proposal for a new Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk with greater local powers and funding.

This assessment has been shaped by a wide range of evidence, including national data, independent research, input from stakeholders, and local insight. Together, this has helped us identify the option we believe is best placed to meet Norfolk's needs — now and in the future.

One Unitary Council for all of Norfolk

The clear choice for Norfolk's future is: A single unitary council for the whole county.

After thorough analysis, the most effective and forward-looking option is to create a single unitary council for Norfolk. This would see the creation of a new council to provide the services and responsibilities of the existing county council and seven district councils across the whole of Norfolk.

It will improve services, give local people more say on decisions that affect them, reduce waste and duplication and deliver savings, freeing up the most money to be reinvested to deliver the best results for Norfolk.

It fully meets the Government's criteria and sets the foundation for a stronger, simpler, and more efficient future for Norfolk.

Why One Unitary Council is right for Norfolk

It's the best value	• It has the lowest set-up costs and the fastest return on investment (within a year) • It delivers the greatest long-term savings, £36 million every year — more than any other option. In comparison, two unitary councils could save only £9 million in net terms, while three would actually cost £12 million more each year than current. • This means more money can go directly into the services people rely on—like social care, roads, and education—rather than into administration or bureaucracy.
It's simpler and more efficient	• One council = no confusion about who does what. • No need to break up complex county-wide services like social care, highways or children's services – less disruption, lower costs and lower risk to these vital services. Splitting up county-wide services will incur an additional cost of around £20 million and £34 million a year if there were a two or three unitary councils.
It's fairer	• No postcode lotteries—everyone in Norfolk gets the same high-quality services and council tax levels, no matter where they live. It's a fairer, more consistent system for all.

It strengthens public services	• This model keeps Norfolk's public services working together—by matching the council boundary with key partners like the NHS and Police. • It makes joint planning easier, cuts duplication, and helps deliver more joined-up support for communities. • It lays the groundwork for stronger public service reform and unlocks the full potential of devolution - making it easier to join up services like health, social care, and housing, so people get the right support at the right time, all in one place.
It supports growth and respects Norfolk's identity	• It reflects the real ways in which people live, work, and access support, reflecting real-world connections rather than arbitrary boundaries. • It maintains the strong economic links between greater Norwich and the rest of the county. • It preserves and strengthens Norfolk's historic and economic identity, avoiding new borders that could stifle growth or divide the county's strong sense of place.
It keeps local connections	• One council for Norfolk doesn't mean distant or one-size-fits-all - it means smarter, more efficient government—where strategic county-wide planning works hand in hand with locally tailored services, rooted in communities. • Local voices and partnerships will remain central to decision-making, ensuring services stay responsive and closely connected to the people they serve.
It provides clear accountability	• One council means one set of elections, one group of councillors, and clear responsibility. Residents will always know who to turn to.
It delivers what matters most to Norfolk residents	• It reflects what people in Norfolk say they want: better value for money, better services, and less waste. • It is a structure that's simpler, more agile, and better equipped to meet the challenges of today—and the opportunities of tomorrow.

What next?

In advance of the formal submission of the Council's final proposal to Government on 26 September 2025, work will focus on developing this preferred option into a **comprehensive proposal**. This will include a detailed plan for ensuring the new council promotes **stronger community engagement** and delivers **genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment**.