



Council
Thursday, 13th February, 2025 at 5.00 pm
in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market
Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

Reports marked to follow on the Agenda and/or Supplementary Documents

1. **DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION** (Pages 2 - 6)

REPORT FURTHER AMENDED TO CHANGE THE DATE OF ELECTIONS IN 3.2 OF THE REPORT

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REPORT TO COUNCIL

Open/Exempt				
Lead Member Leader – Councillor Alistair Beales Email: cllr.alistair.beales@west-norfolk.gov.uk				
Lead Officer: Honor Howell – Corporate Governance Manager E-mail: honor.howell@west-norfolk.gov.uk			Other Officers consulted: Alexa Baker – Monitoring Officer Kate Blakemore – Chief Executive	
Financial Implications NO	Policy/Personnel Implications NO	Statutory Implications NO	Equality Impact Assessment req'd NO	Risk Management Implications NO

Date of Meeting : **13th February 2025**

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL – DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Purpose of Report

The following Notice of Motion was agreed at full council on 30 January 2025.

The Council strongly opposes postponement of County Council elections due in May 2025 as people should not be denied their right to vote.

This council agrees to hold an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council on 13 February to debate devolution and local government reorganisation.

This report is to provide members with background, context and up to date information on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Norfolk and Suffolk, including actions and steps taken to date in response to the Government’s [English Devolution White Paper](#), published in December 2024.

The Government announced on 5th February 2025 that Norfolk and Suffolk were part of the Devolution Priority Programme and as such, county council elections due in May 2025 have been postponed for one year. The Government has set a challenging date for initial proposals for LGR of 21st March 2025, with full business plans to be submitted by 26 September 2025.

Recommendation

- 1) The Council acknowledges that Norfolk is on the accelerated programme for Devolution, which consequently means there will be Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for all Norfolk Authorities, including this Borough Council.
- 2) This Council will engage with the other Norfolk Districts and the County Council on the preferred model of LGR which will provide the best outcome for West Norfolk Residents

- 3) An outline business case for the final preferred model will be brought to Full Council for approval prior to submission to Government in late March 2025.
- 4) That the creation of a King's Lynn Town Council is explored by officers with a view to this being part of the preferred model of LGR should that be appropriate.

Reason for Decision

To enable the Leader and Chief Executive to proceed with discussions on Devolution and the options for LGR, ensuring that any proposal for Local Government Reorganisation is representative of the unique characteristics of West Norfolk and ensures the best outcomes for its residents and businesses.

1 Background

1.1 A Notice of Motion was agreed at Council on 30 January 2025.

The Council strongly opposes postponement of County Council elections due in May 2025 as people should not be denied their right to vote.

This council agrees to hold an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council on 13 February 2025 to debate devolution and local government reorganisation.

1.2 This report is to provide Councillors with the key facts about Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation to aid debate.

2. English Devolution White Paper

2.1 The [English Devolution White Paper](#) was published on 16 December 2024. It set out the Governments direction of travel in respect of Devolution. The White Paper is expected to be laid before Parliament to be turned into legislation early in 2025.

2.2 The White Paper sets out that in the new devolution framework. All combined authorities will be referred to as 'Strategic Authorities' with the aim that all areas in England will have Mayoral Strategic Authorities. A strategic authority is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries.

Strategic Authorities will have defined areas of responsibility, namely.

- Transport and local infrastructure
- Skills and employment support
- Housing and strategic planning
- Economic development and regeneration
- Environment and climate change
- Health, wellbeing and public service reform

- Public safety

2.3 The Government has set out parameters for the potential size of a Strategic Authority. It must cover a sensible functional economic area and have a minimum population of 1.5 million. Norfolk’s population is approximately 916,000.

2.4 The Government confirmed in the White Paper that they will facilitate a programme of LGR for the 21 remaining two-tier areas, creating larger unitary authorities with the aim being that unitary authorities will have replace two-tier councils by the end of this parliament. The White Paper’s stated reasons for pursuing reorganisation are:

- Delivering efficiency savings
- Service transformation
- Reducing workforce pressures
- Increasing local accountability

2.5 There is an expectation set by the Minister that all affected areas develop locally led proposals for the reorganisation, with councils working together to identify the best option for this area. These plans should complement devolution, rather than delay it, avoiding submitting competing proposals within a given geography.

2.6 The stated expectation is that for most areas, this will mean creating unitary councils with a population size of 500,000 or more. The White Paper does not indicate a specific rationale for this threshold. It asserts that it is the right level to ‘achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.’

3. Timescales

3.1 Ahead of the English Devolution Bill, Government invited County Council’s to apply to be on the Government’s Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) The deadline for applications was 10th January 2025. Applicants were required to be prepared to work ‘at pace’ to implement a Strategic Authority, delaying County Council elections, due in May 2025, to enable this to take place. Both Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council held Extraordinary Council meetings immediately after Christmas and resolved to request to join the DPP. The Government confirmed on 5th February 2025 that Norfolk and Suffolk were on the Priority Programme and that county council elections would be postponed for one year whilst the Strategic Authority was set up and to allow Mayoral elections and council elections for the Shadow Unitary Authority to take place in May 2026.

3.2 Current Timeline

Action	Expected Date	Actual Date
Applications for inclusion on the DPP	10 January 2025	10 January 2025
MHCLG confirm if included on DPP and elections postponed	By 31 January 2025	5 February 2025
MHCLG write to Council Leaders inviting proposals for LGR and setting out criteria	By 31 January 2025	5 February 2025

Outline proposals and associate business cases to MHCLG	21 March 2025	
Full LGR business case to MHCLG	26 September 2025	
Inaugural mayoral elections for Strategic Authorities in the DPP	May 2026	
Shadow Unitary Authority elections	May 2027	
New Unitary Councils in place	May 2028	

4. Actions and work to date

4.1 The Chief Executive and the Leader have been engaged in ongoing discussions with Leaders and Chief Executives from both Norfolk and Suffolk District Council's, as well as Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils on a joint approach and working collaboratively for the good of the residents across both counties.

4.2 An officer working group has been established for the Norfolk District Councils.

4.3 The Chief Executive and Leader held a briefing for all councillors.

4.3 To assist with the development of the initial proposal, the Norfolk District Councils have appointed Deloitte LLP to work with us to consider the different options for Norfolk and prepare an outline business case for LGR. Deloitte commenced this work on 3rd February and will be engaging with Leaders and Chief Executives across Norfolk to begin exploring the various options.

4.4 Norwich City Council are still working with Norfolk District Councils on LGR proposals but following their motion at council to support the 'creation of a new unitary authority for the Norwich urban area, which understands and responds to the needs of the residents in the Norwich urban area', they have appointed separate consultants to explore this option.

4.5 Officers are reviewing the draft Annual Plan and the Transformation Strategy to consider any impacts and to prioritise plans in light of LGR and the resource capacity required to progress the project.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Devolution and LGR have been the subject of ongoing discussions in Norfolk for many years. It is clear, on this occasion, that plans for Devolution and associated LGR are expected to proceed rapidly and will take place this time. To ensure the proposed model for a unitary council(s) achieves the best outcome for the residents and businesses of West Norfolk, it is essential that we engage fully with this process and that the Leader and Chief Executive have a clear insight into any issues or concerns of the West Norfolk councillors to help inform those discussions.

5.2 Any decision on proposals for reorganisation for Norfolk will be brought to Full Council for due consideration and approval. A Joint Panel will be convened to consider the preferred option prior to Cabinet and Council. It is the expectation of

government that proposals are submitted collaboratively with other councils in Norfolk, with each Council following its own governance framework to achieve this.