

## REPORT TO CABINET

<b>Open/Exempt</b>		Would any decisions proposed:			
<b>Any especially affected Wards</b>	Discretionary	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide		YES/NO	
		Need to be recommendations to Council		YES/NO	
		Is it a Key Decision		YES/NO	
Lead Member: Cllr Alistair Beales E-mail: <a href="mailto:cllr.Alistair.Beaales@West-Norfolk.gov.uk">cllr.Alistair.Beaales@West-Norfolk.gov.uk</a>			Other Cabinet Members consulted: Yes		
			Other Members consulted: Yes		
Lead Officer: Kate Blakemore E-mail: <a href="mailto:Kate.Blakemore@West-Norfolk.gov.uk">Kate.Blakemore@West-Norfolk.gov.uk</a> Direct Dial:			Other Officers consulted: S151 Officer Monitoring Officer A range of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from across the six district councils.		
Financial Implications YES/NO	Policy/ Personnel Implications YES/NO	Statutory Implications YES/NO	Equality Impact Assessment YES/NO If YES: Pre-screening/ Full Assessment	Risk Management Implications YES/NO	Environmental Considerations YES/NO
If not for publication, the paragraph(s) of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Local Government Act considered to justify that is (are) paragraph(s)					

Date of meeting: 16 September 2025

### Final Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk

#### Summary

Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, Norfolk's acceptance onto the Devolution Priority Programme early 2025, and the submission of Interim Plan proposals in March 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution invited Norfolk's councils to submit final proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Norfolk by 26 September 2025.

The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Broadland District Council, Breckland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council have prepared a final proposal for a three-unitary model for LGR in Norfolk, in accordance with the direction of those authorities agreed previously as part of March's interim plan submission.

This report summarises the key milestones and development work to date in preparing our Business Case in relation to the final plan submission and next steps. The final proposal is annexed to this report. It has been developed collaboratively, under the oversight of the respective Leaders and Chief Executives and in line with the Government's guidance and with the support of Inner Circle Consulting, who were jointly procured by these six authorities to support the development of this business case.

### **Recommendations to Full Council:**

1. Notes the content of this report and the '*Future Norfolk: People, Place, Progress – Final Proposal for a Three-Unitary Model for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk*' (**Final Proposal**) annexed to this report.
2. Endorses the Final Proposal for a three-unitary model for local government reorganisation in Norfolk.
3. Delegates to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, the authority to make any necessary non-material amendments to the Final Proposal and to submit the Final Proposal to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

### **Reason for Decision**

To respond to the statutory invite from the Secretary of State to submit a final proposal for local government reorganisation in Norfolk.

This proposal offers a compelling and credible pathway to reform that is financially sound, strategically aligned, and rooted in local identity. It positions Norfolk to deliver better outcomes for residents, strengthen democratic leadership, and contribute meaningfully to the Government's wider devolution and public service transformation agenda. It is believed that this proposal has the potential to deliver lasting benefits for communities across Norfolk, and to support a model of governance that is fit for the future.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Following the English Devolution White Paper (Dec 2024) and Norfolk's inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme (early 2025), District Councils began assessing Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) options, evaluating one, two, and three-unitary models against six government criteria.
- 1.2 Between 18–20 March 2025, six District Councils (Broadland, Breckland, West Norfolk, Great Yarmouth, North Norfolk, Norwich City) endorsed a three-unitary model. South Norfolk supported a two-unitary model. On 21 March, both proposals were submitted to the Minister.
- 1.3 Meanwhile, Norfolk County Council submitted its own considerations for a one or two-unitary model, and on 9 June, signalled its intent to pursue a single unitary authority.
- 1.4 On 7 May 2025, Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) requested that Interim Plans be developed into full business cases, to be submitted by 26 September 2025.
- 1.5 To support this, six districts jointly procured Inner Circle Consulting to independently develop the final business case for the three-unitary model,

leveraging their expertise in County Council functions (e.g. adult and children's services).

- 1.6 Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) from each district coordinated input across key service areas to ensure a shared evidence base, as required by government. This included subject matter experts in HR, Finance, and other areas.
- 1.7 Regular meetings of Council Leaders and Chief Executives provided oversight and strategic input, while also progressing detailed design work at the local level.

## **2. Current Position**

- 2.1 Each council can only make one final proposal for unitary local government across the whole of Norfolk and final proposals can either be submitted individually by a council or jointly with other councils that were invited.

## **3. Summary of Submission**

- 3.1 This report and attached appendices set out an overarching proposal for LGR in Norfolk pulled together jointly by us at the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk along with Breckland, Broadland, Great Yarmouth, North Norfolk and Norwich City Councils.
- 3.2 Along with the overarching proposal it outlines the establishment of three new unitary councils: Greater Norwich, East Norfolk, and West Norfolk. Each proposal for a new Council is designed to deliver more responsive public services, strengthen democratic leadership, and unlock long-term economic and social benefits for communities, but nuanced to consider the uniqueness of each of the three areas.
- 3.3 Finally, the proposal includes an extensive set of Appendices, designed to provide detailed workings and evidence to support the overall submission.

## **4. Government Criteria**

- 4.1 Within the English Devolution White Paper the government laid down six criteria for LGR, further emphasised in the feedback letter received after the interim plan submission in March.
- 4.2 This proposal meets the Government's reorganisation criteria, offering strong alignment across key areas:
  - **Improved Local Services:** Creating three distinct unitary councils will enable tailored, place-based service delivery focused on prevention, integration, and local priorities, moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach.
  - **Strong Leadership & Accountability:** Councils rooted in their communities will enhance democratic representation, rebuild trust, and

ensure decisions reflect local values.

- **Economic Growth:** The new councils will align with the emerging Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Strategic Authority, supporting coordinated investment, local enterprise, and regional competitiveness.
- **Financial Sustainability:** A projected net benefit of £220m over eight years and annual savings of £49m from year four onwards. West Norfolk enters with the strongest financial position, offering resilience and flexibility.
- **Local Identity:** Proposed boundaries reflect existing community identities and economic areas, promoting cohesion and effective governance.
- **Optimal Size and Scale:** Each council will serve 300,000 – 400,000 residents, balancing strategic capacity with local connection.
- **Service Reform & Innovation:** The model prioritises locally designed, integrated services over traditional consolidation, supporting national goals for prevention and citizen-focused delivery.

## **5. Developing the Case for the West**

### **Boundaries**

- 5.1 In developing our final submission, work needed to be undertaken to understand the boundaries of the new unitaries. To establish these new Councils consideration needs to be given to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and specifically the use of existing district boundaries as building blocks to the new Councils.
- 5.2 Members are therefore asked to note that ahead of the main submission to government there is an initial section (part 1 – Unmodified boundaries & request for modification, at Appendix 1 of this report) that sets out a three unitary solution based on current district boundaries and seeks to request a modification of existing boundaries to enable our proposal to be as efficient and effective as possible in delivering LGR for our residents and communities along with complying with relevant legislation.

### **Blueprint for the New West Unitary Council**

- 5.3 The new council will adopt a resident-focused, integrated model, break silos and simplifying access to services. This approach will prioritise growth, inclusion, and health equity, aligned with Marmot principles, prevention and early intervention.

### **Customer Services**

- 5.4 “Every door is the right door” we’ll get your enquiry to the right place no matter how it comes into the Council. We will ensure residents can access services how and when they need whether digitally, by phone, or in person. Advanced

use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will support 24/7 digital access while enabling personalised support for vulnerable residents.

### **Children Services**

- 5.5 Services will be localised and aligned with the West's health footprint. This will support early intervention, reduce exclusions, and improve educational outcomes while retaining essential countywide partnerships for safeguarding, fostering, and specialist provision.

### **Adult Social Care**

- 5.6 Adult services will also be devolved to a local model, focused on early intervention through data-driven insights. The aim is to reduce reliance on high-cost care placements by intervening earlier and more effectively, while maintaining shared arrangements for complex needs and commissioning.

### **Prevention & Early Intervention**

- 5.7 A dedicated department will focus on proactive support, using predictive analytics to identify and assist at-risk individuals before problems escalate, and statutory interventions are needed. Multi-agency teams will deliver joined-up, community-based services that improve wellbeing and reduce future demand on statutory services.

### **Financial Modelling for the West**

- 5.8 The proposed West Norfolk unitary authority combining King's Lynn & West Norfolk, Breckland, and part of South Norfolk is projected to start with a £10.69 million budget surplus based on 2025/26 figures, providing a strong platform for investment and transformation.
- 5.9 Council tax harmonisation is a key variable, with five scenarios modelled. Only the "Weighted Average +5%" scenario delivers a net financial gain. While no recommendation is made as this will be a decision for the new Councils, the analysis highlights the need to balance resident fairness with long-term financial stability.
- 5.10 Transition costs are estimated at £27 million over 3 years, covering ICT and workforce changes. These will be funded locally through reserves and assets, with no reliance on central government. By Year 4, the authority is expected to break even, achieving £15 million in annual savings by Year 8 through streamlined operations and prevention-led services.
- 5.11 Risks include low unearmarked reserves, limiting flexibility, though debt levels remain affordable with modest debt servicing costs. Overall, the modelling confirms that West Norfolk is financially viable with the potential for long-term sustainability provided harmonisation is well-managed and reforms are implemented effectively.

## 6. Stakeholder Engagement

- 6.1 The main proposal sets out the significant amount of consultation that has been undertaken around this proposal. Including 5,403 survey responses, 2,000 partner engagements, 62,100 website views, and a social media reach of 438,100. With many supporting the three-unitary proposal. Key feedback showed that the public want:
- Strong accountability, local representation, and access to decision-makers.
  - Services that reflect community needs, protect local identity and support local economies: and
  - Financial sustainability, efficiency and flexibility in future councils.
- 6.2 Formal consultation will subsequently be undertaken by the MHCLG on any of the proposals that are deemed compliant, following submission on the 26 September 2025.

## 7. Implementation and Transition

- 7.1 The outline timetable for implementation and transition post submission of final plan is as follows:
- **Statutory Consultation:** All final proposals for Norfolk, single, two-unitary, and three-unitary models are expected to be included in the statutory consultation process subject to compliant submissions.
  - **Decision-Making:** Ministers and Parliament will decide which proposal, if any, is implemented. This decision may include modifications and will require cross-government agreement.
  - **Legislation:** The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will draft a Structural Changes Order (SCO) to establish the new unitary system and dissolve predecessor councils.
  - **Transition Period:** Existing councils will operate as normal until Vesting Day, while preparing for the transfer of assets, staff, and responsibilities. Shadow authorities will lead implementation planning, including service restructuring and council tax harmonisation.
  - **Go-Live Date:** The target vesting day is 1 April 2028. Elections will be held in the transition year to ensure new councils are democratically accountable during the implementation phase
- 7.2 Work is already underway within the Council to ensure that we are ready for this next period of LGR, aside from whatever number of unitary Council are eventually decided on, with proposals around our “LGR readiness” and next steps likely to be presented to Members before Christmas 2025/early Spring 2026.

## **8. Options Considered**

- 8.1 Alternative unitary models were considered during the development of the Interim Plan submission and previously considered by full Council, therefore reconsidering the number of unitary Councils is not an applicable option at this time.
- 8.2 The option to do nothing and not provide a submission to Central Government could be considered, as a submission is not a statutory requirement. However, by deciding not to make a submission, the LGR process will not stop. The Secretary of State will still receive and consider the submissions from other Norfolk Councils.
- 8.3 If the Final Proposal is not submitted, then this would have the significant impact that King's Lynn and West Norfolk's distinct interests and identity, including our geography, economy rural and district communities, heritage assets and infrastructure needs would not be fully promoted and represented to the Secretary of State. This would not be in the best interest of this Borough's residents and local economy.
- 8.4 The preferred option is that the Council submits a proposal that it considers will provide the best outcome to its residents and local economy in the event of a structural change to local government in Norfolk.

## **9. Policy Implications**

- 9.1 The proposal detailed in the final submission will have wide reaching policy implications for the residents of Norfolk, particularly for Early Intervention and Prevention, Children and Adult Services, Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provisions.
- 9.2 There will be organisational policy implications for all Norfolk District Councils and Norfolk County Council.
- 9.3 However, given that this report relates to the submission of our final proposal to the MHCLG, and that a decision is still to be made, further consideration on the policy implications will need to be given following the formal decision from the Secretary of State and the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution. This decision is expected sometime in March 2026.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1 The MHCLG allocated £321,389 in capacity funding to support the development of LGR submissions in Norfolk. This funding was intended to help cover the costs of preparing the proposal, including analytical work, stakeholder engagement, and coordination across councils involved in the reorganisation process.
- 10.2 The capacity funding has been allocated across the 3 proposals being submitted for Norfolk with a total of £106k to support the Three Unitary Model

for Norfolk. Each of the 6 district and borough councils supporting the case for the three unitary model is required to contribute a further £24.5k to fund the cost of the proposal.

- 10.3 The transitional costs for the proposed West Norfolk unitary authority are expected to be funded locally, without reliance on Central Government support. One-off transition costs are estimated at £27 million in the first three years which will cover the setup of the shadow authority as well as ICT migration and workforce restructuring with recurring costs of £2 million per year anticipated due to the disaggregation of countywide services. These costs are expected to be met through existing reserves and realisable assets held by the constituent councils.
- 10.4 The proposal notes that West Norfolk has sufficient financial capacity to absorb these costs internally, though careful judgement will be needed where assets also generate ongoing revenue income.

## **11. Personnel Implications**

- 11.1 None at present, as this report relates to the submission of the final LGR proposal. However, it should be noted that during the transition process, councils will need to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to planning and delivering transformation, reviewing business-as-usual activities to create capacity and developing key organisational enablers such as staff structures, operating models and corporate plans. LGR transition requires significant programme management capacity and capability. Once it has been decided what the future of local government in Norfolk will be, the personnel implications will need to be thoroughly considered.

## **12. Environmental Considerations**

None

## **13. Statutory Considerations**

- 13.1 The LGR process is determined using provisions under section 2 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.
- 13.2 The legal process governing local authority restructuring is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Once a decision is taken on which model to implement in Norfolk, MHCLG will prepare the necessary legislation – the Structural Change Order (SCO) – for parliamentary approval. The SCO will establish the new single tier of local government in Norfolk and make provision to abolish the predecessor councils.
- 13.3 SCOs place on the County Council and district councils a duty to consult and co-operate with each other, take any steps necessary to prepare for the transfer, and provide any information that any of those councils may reasonably request to enable the implementation.

## **14. Conclusion**

- 14.1 Under the oversight of the Leaders and Chief Executives of Broadland District Council, Breckland District Council, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council, a compelling, evidence-driven final proposal for a three-unitary model for LGR in Norfolk has been prepared in line with the Government's guidance.
- 14.2 Members are asked to review and endorse the final proposal set out in the Appendices in principle and delegate to the Leader and Chief Executive Officer the finalisation and submission of the Final Proposal to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution in accordance with the prescribed process.

## **15 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

Pre-screening report template attached

## **16 Risk Management Implications**

- 16.1 Strategic risks R15 and R16 on the Council's corporate risk register relate to this matter and set out how the organisation is seeking to mitigating and manage them.
- 16.2 The Secretary of State can decide to take forward proposals that are submitted by areas with or without modification. Furthermore, The English Devolution White Paper notes that the Government has the power to initiate and implement LGR, even if local councils choose not to propose changes.
- 16.3 It is, therefore, important to submit a compelling, evidence-based vision for LGR to the Government that fully reflects the needs, opportunities and challenges of Norfolk's diverse places and communities.

## **17. Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted**

- 17.1 A dispensation was granted to 'Twin-Hatters' i.e. Members of County Council and this Council, from the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct in relation to their interests and conflict of those interests by virtue of being Members of both Councils.

## **18 Background Papers**

- 18.1 Cabinet agenda pack and minutes: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2025 – which set out the Council's Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation and the decisions made around it: [Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 19th March, 2025, 10.00 am](#)

## Stage 1 - Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment

For equalities profile information please visit [Norfolk Insight - Demographics and Statistics - Data Observatory](#)

Name of policy/service/function	Final Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk				
Is this a new or existing policy/service/function? <i>(tick as appropriate)</i>	New	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Existing		
<p>Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened.</p> <p>Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations, and identify relevant legislation.</p>	<p>The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution has invited Norfolk's councils to submit a Final Proposal for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Norfolk by 26 September 2025.</p> <p>The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk in collaboration with five other Norfolk District Councils (Broadland District Council, Breckland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council) have prepared a Final Proposal that responds to the Government's ambitions set out in the English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024. Our proposal for a three-unitary model in Norfolk is based on the three distinct geographies and communities – West, East and Greater Norwich.</p>				
Who has been consulted as part of the development of the policy/service/function? – new only <i>(identify stakeholders consulted with)</i>	<p>We worked collaboratively with Broadland District Council, Breckland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council to develop our proposal. The district councils procured Inner Circle Consulting to support us in developing our final submission – building on our Interim Plan that was submitted in March 2025.</p> <p>During the development of our proposal, extensive stakeholder engagement was undertaken, including a resident survey, dedicated webpage, bespoke stakeholder events and one to one meetings.</p> <p>Leaders and Chief Executives were extensively involved in the development and oversight of the final submission.</p>				
<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>				
1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Disability				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Sex				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please tick the relevant box for each group.	Gender Re-assignment				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p> <p><b><i>If potential adverse impacts are identified, then a full Equality Impact Assessment (Stage 2) will be required.</i></b></p> <p><i>*For more information on health inequalities please visit <a href="#">The King's Fund</a></i></p>	Marriage/civil partnership				✓
	Pregnancy & maternity				✓
	Race				✓
	Religion or belief				✓
	Sexual orientation				✓
	Armed forces community				✓
	Care leavers				✓
	Health inequalities*				✓
	Other (eg low income, caring responsibilities)				✓

**Please provide a brief explanation of the answers above:**

This report relates to the submission of our final LGR proposal to the MHCLG. The Secretary of State will ultimately decide what the future of local government in Norfolk will look like, following receipt of all relevant proposals. This decision is expected in spring 2026. Once this decision has been made and we know which of the proposals has been accepted, we will be more informed on what the potential impacts may be and therefore a full and thorough Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted at this stage.

Question	Answer	Comments
<b>2.</b> Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?	TBC	
<b>3.</b> Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	TBC	
<b>4.</b> Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section	TBC	<b>Actions:</b>
		<b>Actions agreed by EWG member:</b> .....

**If 'yes' to questions 2 - 4 a full impact assessment will be required unless comments are provided to explain why this is not felt necessary:**

**Decision agreed by EWG member:** .....

5. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	TBC	Please provide brief summary:	
Assessment completed by: Name	Charlotte Marriott		
Job title	Interim Corporate Governance Manager Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for LGR (KL&WN)		
Date completed	28 August 28 2025		
Reviewed by EWG member	Amy Pearce	Date	9 September 2025

✓ Please tick to confirm completed EIA Pre-screening Form has been shared with Corporate Policy  
[corporate.policy@west-norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:corporate.policy@west-norfolk.gov.uk))