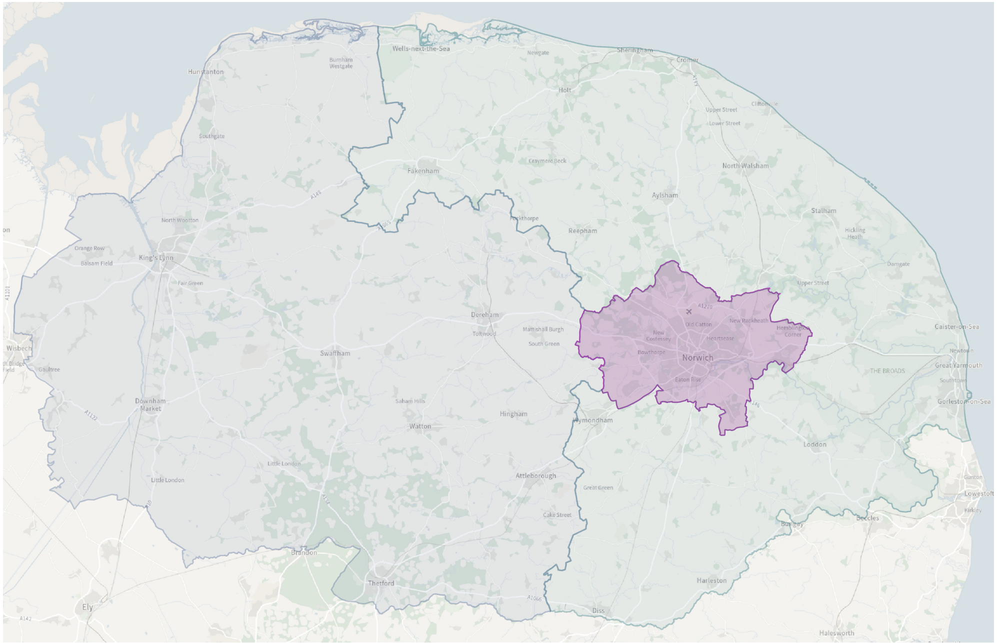
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION



THE PROPOSAL FOR GREATER NORWICH

Prepared on behalf of:
Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk,
Breckland District Council,
Broadland District Council,
Great Yarmouth Borough Council,
North Norfolk District Council,
and Norwich City Council

[SEPTEMBER 2025]

CONTENTS

1. Executive summary

Greater Norwich is Norfolk's economic engine, a city-region with international reach, world-class institutions, and a distinctive blend of creativity, science, and civic ambition. Its influence extends beyond the historic city to the dynamic urban fringes of East Norfolk, encompassing the Norwich Research Park, the University of East Anglia, Norwich University of the Arts, and a growing digital and finance sector. The area is a national leader in life sciences, cultural innovation, the creative industries, and knowledge-intensive employment.

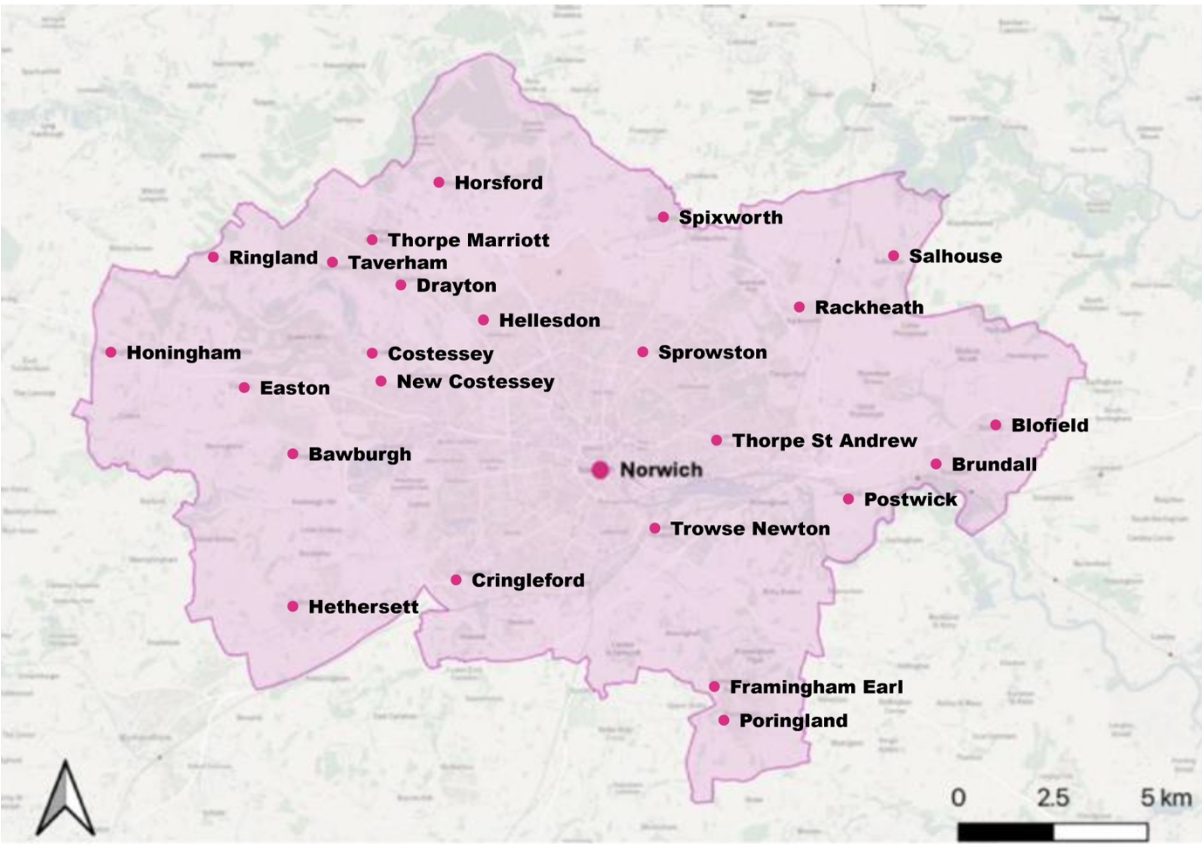


Figure 1: Map of the proposed boundary of Greater Norwich

Yet parts of Greater Norwich also experience some of Norfolk's deepest and most persistent deprivation. The area has high concentrations of social housing, limited access to affordable new homes, and significant health and social care challenges. Infrastructure and services have not kept pace with population growth, especially in fast-expanding fringe communities. The under bounded nature of the city restricts its planning powers and constrains efforts to manage growth in a strategic, integrated way, creating democratic deficits from residents who live within the urban area but who are excluded from decisions about the city under current structures.

Greater Norwich's opportunity is clear: to become a globally connected, inclusive city-region that drives both innovation and social progress. This means planning regeneration not just for economic value, but for wellbeing, mobility, and equity. Local services must be able to meet complex urban needs across housing, health, social care, early years, and education through coordinated neighbourhood-level delivery.

Creativity is central to this vision. It is not only a major contributor to the local economy, but also a driver of regeneration and identity. Norwich's cultural infrastructure, from the Norfolk & Norwich Festival, Norwich Theatre, The Forum and The Halls, anchors post-retail city centre renewal and supports creative-tech and arts-in-health initiatives. These assets support inclusive job creation and position Greater Norwich as a cultural leader within the wider East of England.

Critically, Greater Norwich complements the wider Norfolk system. Its research, creative, and professional services ecosystem supports the clean energy economy of East Norfolk and the agri-food and manufacturing base of the west. Labour markets, public services, and infrastructure are shared across district boundaries, reinforcing the need for governance reform that matches the real geography of people's lives.

With the right leadership and devolved powers, Greater Norwich can become a model for how a city-region drives local, regional and national prosperity while narrowing social inequalities. The city does not just need to grow; it needs to grow with purpose, and this structure unlocks that future.

2. Economic distinctiveness

Greater Norwich: Norfolk's economic engine, a city-region with international reach, world-class institutions, and a distinctive blend of creativity, science, and civic ambition. Our influence extends beyond the historic city into the dynamic urban fringes of East Norfolk, bringing together the Norwich Research Park, the University of East Anglia, Norwich University of the Arts, and a thriving digital and finance sector. The area leads nationally in life sciences, the creative industries, and knowledge-intensive employment.

Greater Norwich generates close to 40% of Norfolk's Gross Value Added[1] and sustains the county's highest employment density, with 566 jobs for every 100 residents.[2] Almost 60% of the population of the proposed Greater Norwich area is economically active. Yet despite this strength, average disposable household income here remains just £20,287 per head, lower than in both West and East Norfolk. Growth has not yet translated into inclusive prosperity.

Alongside these strengths lie some of Norfolk's deepest challenges. Over a fifth of our neighbourhoods are in the top 20% most deprived nationally.[3] More than one in five households live in the social rented sector, while access to affordable homes is limited. A third of households face deprivation in at least one dimension, with health and social care under acute pressure.[4] Infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth, particularly in our fast-expanding fringe communities.

The functional economic area extends well beyond current administrative boundaries. Increasingly, economic activity takes place across a wider area, with growth in suburbs and surrounding communities, while some central areas face challenges. This pattern mirrors other English city-regions rather than rural Norfolk and underlines the need for a whole-place approach to growth and public service reform. Establishing a new Greater Norwich Unitary Authority, shaped around how people actually live and work, is essential to unlocking the strategic investment required to deliver long-term growth ambitions. Doing so would also align with Norwich's wider city strategy and the national fast-growth cities agenda, ensuring Greater Norwich is positioned alongside its peers in attracting talent, investment, and innovation.

Our ambition is clear. We want Greater Norwich to be a globally connected, inclusive city-region that drives both innovation and social progress. That means regeneration shaped not only by economic value but by wellbeing, mobility, and equity. It means

---

[1] ONS, UK small area gross value added estimates, 2022

[2] ONS, Job density, 2023

[3] Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019

[4] Census, 2021

services that are integrated, citizen-focused, and delivered at the neighbourhood level, joined up across housing, health, social care, early years, and education.

We place creativity at the heart of this vision. Our cultural infrastructure, the Norfolk & Norwich Festival, Norwich Theatre, The Halls, anchors city-centre renewal and drives innovation in creative tech and arts-in-health. These assets are not just symbols of civic identity; they are engines of inclusive job creation and growth.

We also recognise our role in strengthening the wider Norfolk economy. Our research, creative, and professional services ecosystem underpins East Norfolk's clean energy strengths and West Norfolk's agri-food and manufacturing base. Labour markets, public services, and infrastructure already cross district boundaries. That is why we believe governance reform must be based on constitutional autonomy, mutual respect, and a relationship of equals.

With devolved powers and the right leadership, through a unitary authority aligned with a Mayoral Combined Authority, we are ready to deliver on our growth mission. We want the tools to plan and invest strategically across our urban core and fringes, to integrate housing, health, and education, and to ensure regeneration is purposeful and citizen-centred. A joined-up growth plan, covering economic development, sustainable transport, and affordable housing, would meet the needs of both the city and surrounding towns, while close collaboration with the Mayoral Combined Authority would secure regional priorities such as transport infrastructure and inward investment.

We have the ambition and the partnerships. With devolved powers, we will show how Greater Norwich can become a model city-region, driving productivity, narrowing inequalities, and proving that growth must not only continue, but do so with purpose, delivering outcomes felt in the lives and pockets of our residents.

3. Demographic distinctiveness

We are home to 278,285 residents[5], projected to grow to 333,403 by 2035.[6] Our population is younger, more diverse, and more densely concentrated than anywhere else in Norfolk. With a median age of 34.9 and over 20,000 students at the University of East Anglia and Norwich University of the Arts, we sustain a strong graduate base that supports high levels of participation in the labour market. We are a city-region defined by energy, creativity and potential.

This demographic profile is a strategic opportunity. Our younger, mobile population fuels innovation, supports high-value sectors like life sciences and digital, and sustains a vibrant cultural economy. But it also demands a different kind of public service model: one that is agile, preventative, and designed for urban complexity. LGR gives us the chance to design services that reflect this reality, and a new Greater Norwich Unitary Authority is the governance structure that can deliver it.

Yet this dynamism coexists with challenges that are concentrated and persistent. Twenty-one per cent of our neighbourhoods rank among the most deprived 20% nationally, and we account for 42% of all Norfolk neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10%.[7] More than a third of children in the area grow up in poverty, even though 58% have at least one employed parent. These conditions limit opportunity and place sustained pressure on public services.

Health inequalities are stark. Greater Norwich has one of the highest rates of preventable mortality in the region, and the life expectancy gap between women in the most and least deprived areas has widened from 2.2 to 8.4 years between 2010 and 2018. Twelve per cent of our residents experience frequent loneliness, compared to a national average of 7%, and economic inactivity due to long-term illness is above the Norfolk average.[8]

Educational outcomes mirror these divides. Norwich ranks as the tenth most unequal local authority in England for educational attainment. Disadvantaged children start school behind their peers and fall further behind through primary education. By the end of Key Stage 2, they are 13.6 months behind, one of the widest gaps in the country. These inequalities are structural and will not be addressed through incremental service

---

[5] Based on 2021 census data.

[6] Population projections based on Person-Per-Household Method, via GeoPlace LLP. Available at: https://www.geoplace.co.uk/case-studies/understanding-local-populations-between-censuses.

[7] Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019

[8] The economic case for a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority, 2025

adjustments; they demand coordinated leadership, strategic investment, and devolved powers.[9]

This is why a Greater Norwich Unitary Authority is essential, built on new boundaries which accurately reflect the geography of need and opportunity. Over half of Greater Norwich's GVA and nearly half of its jobs now lie outside the City Council area.[10] A new unitary would allow us to plan for growth, align housing and infrastructure with population trends, and deliver services that are tailored to the needs of our urban communities.

With devolved powers and the right leadership, we can deliver targeted neighbourhood services while managing growth strategically. We can design a system that is locally accountable, data-informed, and built around the lived realities of our residents. This is our opportunity to lead reform, unlock productivity, and deliver growth that is felt in the lives and pockets of working people.

[9] Ibid
[10] Ibid

4. Democratic representation & engagement

Greater Norwich's approach to democratic representation will be co-designed with our residents to ensure that communities have a meaningful voice in shaping decisions. It will consist of a single council for the unitary authority, supported by an engagement model rooted in the principle that governance must reflect the diversity of our communities and empower residents to shape decisions that affect their lives.

Councillor Numbers and Representation

We are proposing a councillor model that delivers both efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring Greater Norwich has the right number of elected representatives to run the new unitary across governance, accountability, and representation.

Currently, Norfolk has 399 councillors across its two-tier system. Our proposal streamlines this to 200 councillors across Norfolk, with 63 for Greater Norwich.

Unitary Area	Proposed Number	Likely Average Cllr: Electorate Ratio*	Electorate
Greater Norwich	63	1: 3,394	213,837
East Norfolk	65	1:4,080	265,188
West Norfolk	72	1: 3,298	237,434
Total:	200		716,459

Table 1: Councillor numbers Councillor Numbers

This number supports council functions, including Cabinet, scrutiny, and local governance. It provides the capacity needed to represent Greater Norwich on external bodies and partnerships, and to maintain strong local links with communities. Councillors will be expected to lead across multiple domains, from decision-making and scrutiny to partnership working and neighbourhood engagement. The model ensures there is sufficient capacity to populate committees, represent diverse geographies, and manage casework effectively, supported by dedicated member development and support functions.

Interim warding arrangements are being developed in line with LGBCE principles, including electoral equality, community identity, and effective local government.

Developing a neighbourhood representation model with our communities

The three-unitary model enables a neighbourhood-based approach at a scale which allows for close collaboration with communities and for neighbourhood models that are genuinely responsive to local needs and priorities. By working at this level, we can design bespoke approaches that reflect the diversity of our communities and the different ways in which they prefer to engage.

Existing town and parish councils will retain their independence and functions. In unparished areas Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) will operate as formal sub-committees of the new unitary council, led by ward councillors and open to participation from residents, community organisations, and service partners. Their remit could include local oversight, neighbourhood investment planning and community engagement.

Our approach is rooted in innovation and continuous improvement. We will work closely with our communities throughout implementation to shape this approach, engaging and listening to develop a model that is tailored, inclusive, and effective. We will draw on best practice from across the UK and beyond, and will test and learn as we go, adapting our approach to what works best for each neighbourhood.

This approach aims to:

- Ensure sustained engagement with underrepresented groups
- Create space for bespoke, community-led design
- Enable innovative partnerships across wider public service provision, including health, police, and the voluntary sector
- Support flexible and inclusive formats for participation, reflecting the different needs and preferences of our communities
- Centre health and wellbeing at the heart of local decision-making

Ceremonial and Civic Functions

We are committed to protecting our historic assets and civic traditions, including the mayoralty, regalia, and ceremonial functions, as part of LGR. This includes the preservation of historic assets, traditions and ceremonial roles - such as the mayoralty, civic regalia and formal functions - which are deeply embedded in our local identity and democratic culture. The government has confirmed its intention to preserve ceremonial responsibilities through reorganisation. However, this commitment must be reflected explicitly in the Structural Changes Order. This is particularly important for Norwich city which currently holds ceremonial status but is unparished.

To preserve these functions, we will seek to use a Charter Trustee Model. This will enable the continuation of civic traditions within the city boundaries even as governance transitions to the new Greater Norwich Unitary Authority. Charter Trustees will be responsible for upholding ceremonial duties and maintaining civic assets. While the new Greater Norwich Unitary Authority will encompass a wider geography, we will not seek to extend the mayoralty beyond the city itself. This is a moment to reaffirm the value of civic leadership and ensure that our communities retain the traditions that connect them to place, history, and public life.

5. New council target operating model

This section sets out the proposed operating model for Greater Norwich, outlining how the overall operating model will bring services together to innovate and achieve better outcomes for residents of Greater Norwich. It also includes highlights of our approaches to service delivery – a detailed summary of our future vision for services can be found in Appendix F.

5.1 Drivers of change

Greater Norwich's ambition to unlock local growth must be balanced with tackling the complex challenges the expanding city region will face, with deep-rooted deprivation resulting in a 15-year gap in life expectancy across the region. Demand for support from statutory services is rising across all cohorts, and with the highest proportion of unpaid carers and the risk of hidden need in the suburbs, there is an urgent need to ensure services are provided in a timely and localised way.

Demographic changes are accelerating the need for statutory support – with fast growth in both the older adult and working age populations reinforcing the need for preventative, community-based models of support. Greater Norwich records the highest demand for Children in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) plans, with rising costs creating an immediate need to embed prevention-focused practice. Young people do have access to good education links, providing a strong foundation to build upon in connecting them to growth opportunities. More children with Special Educational Needs (SEND) are educated in mainstream settings which indicates, despite rapid growth in Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs), there is a bedrock of inclusive practice.

Housing pressures are also particularly acute. Greater Norwich has the largest Private Rented Sector (PRS) in the county, with a particular concentration of one-bed home demand and unique pressures as a gateway city in safely housing asylum seekers and refugees. Whilst strong initiatives already exist across the area, they are fragmented between district and county responsibilities, leading to duplication and inconsistent outcomes for residents.

These drivers underline the seismic opportunity Greater Norwich has to reshape how services are delivered. There is genuine potential to reduce duplication, improve outcomes and create more resilient communities. Building on existing inclusive practice in local schools, a strong voluntary and community sector and the area's role as an economic and cultural hub, Greater Norwich can genuinely shift from crisis management to service reform.

5.2 Overview of the new unitary

Greater Norwich will be a globally connected, inclusive city-region that drives both innovation and social progress, aligning growth ambitions with coordinated neighbourhood-level delivery across education and housing.

As a unitary, Greater Norwich will be able to take a single, coordinated approach to addressing inequality – integrating public health, housing and wider resident support into one system of delivery. Decisions can be made with a deep understanding of local communities, whether in urban centres facing entrenched deprivation or in expanding suburbs where hidden need may be shaped by limited transport connections.

Through an integrated model, rising demand can be met with services that work in partnership with communities, with greater collaboration between services and partners to deliver more effective interventions.

Unitarisation for Greater Norwich will create the conditions for consistent, person centred and sustainable public services, improving outcomes for residents and enabling a thriving place.

5.2.1 The target operating model

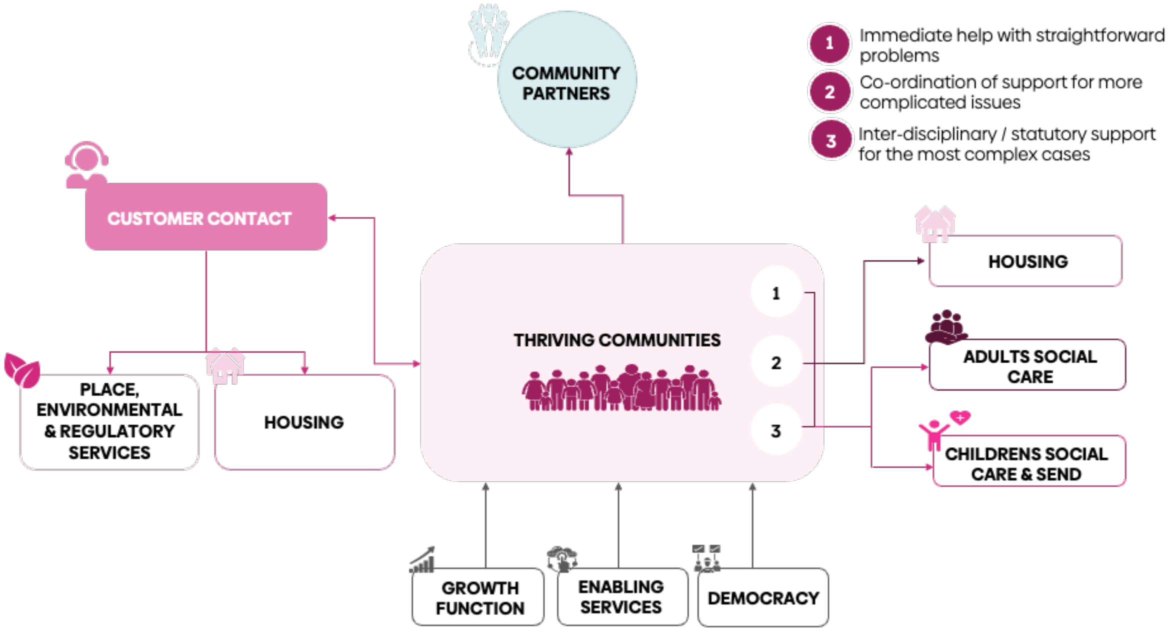


Figure 2: The Target Operating Model

Our vision for public service reform is one that breaks down siloed ways of working, shaping an organisation around the needs of residents, rather than expecting residents to navigate around tiers of government. It is one where each authority can play a greater role in delivering growth that focuses on those that need it most, whilst feeling the broader commercial benefits of this across the region. It enables fundamental redesign of services that focuses on the root causes of demand, rather than treating a need when it arises, informed by marrying predictive analytics and person-centred approaches to delivery. Finally, it builds trust through utilising community networks that residents recognise and it enables each authority to deliver on its ambitions.

To this end, the operating models we are proposing for the three unitaries are structurally similar, rooted in the same design principles. However, their successful implementation is reliant on an approach that deeply understands local needs and is tailored to the specific realities of each of area.

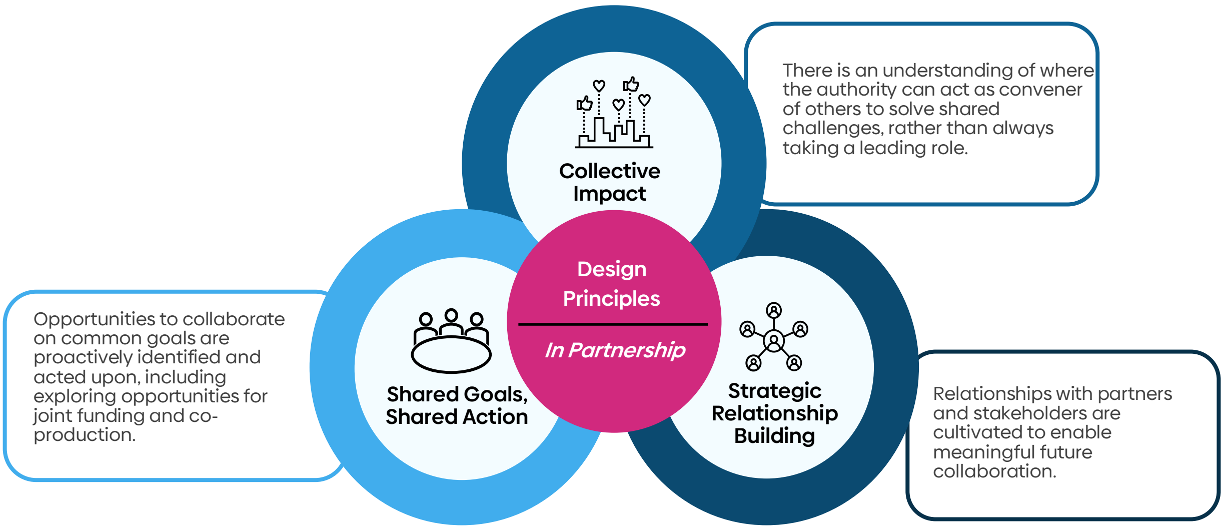


Figure 3: Design principles

Full design principles can be found in Appendix J.

5.2.2 Thriving communities

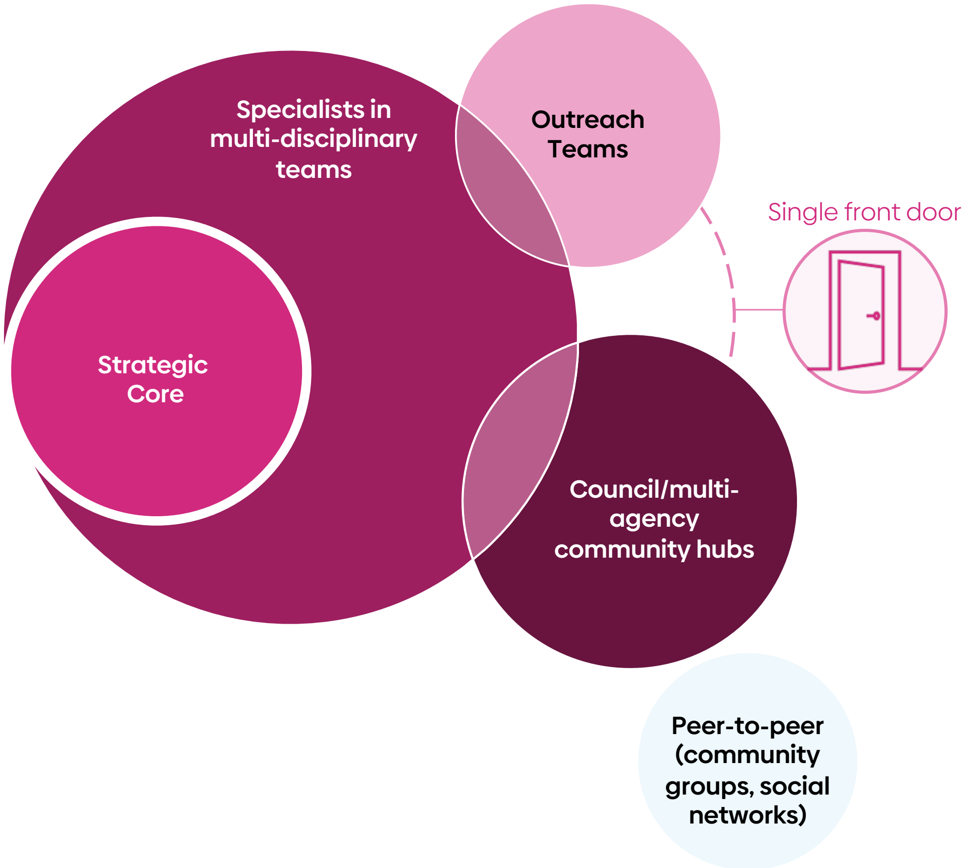
In Greater Norwich, the Thriving Communities department will bring together core services such as housing, social care, education, health, and work in lockstep with VCSE partners to unlock better outcomes for residents. This approach will co-locate services in community-based hubs where appropriate and work closely with NHS neighbourhood teams, schools, and voluntary groups. Outreach in rural areas, alongside digital and phone access, ensures all residents benefit from a clear “no wrong door” offer, with earlier, joined-up support available in trusted local settings.

The department delivers locally tailored support directly responding to the diverse pressures facing Greater Norwich, including safeguarding concerns, hidden need in rural communities, and growing demand on carers. Support is relational and strengths-based[11], taking account of the whole picture of housing, health, work, and family life. Multidisciplinary teams will coordinate responses so residents only tell their story once, with case leadership shifting seamlessly as needs change.

[11] An approach that focuses on an individual's existing strengths, assets, and potential to achieve their desired outcomes, rather than solely on their deficits or needs

Greater Norwich Thriving Communities Department

Operationally, this early intervention and prevention-focused department has 5 functions:



Strategic Core: Sets strategic direction and ensures the unitary is outcomes-focused, prevention-led, guided by evidence, effective commissioning, and strong partnerships. Leverages data to spot emerging risks, target investment, and coordinate efforts across the unitary, while tailoring commissioning to the needs of rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Specialists in multi-disciplinary teams: Provide targeted expertise, from safeguarding and mental health to housing and school engagement, within collaborative case management. Work alongside universal and community-based staff to ensure timely, appropriate interventions for complex or escalating needs.

Outreach Teams: Bring early intervention directly to those with limited access, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Provide home visits, school-based programmes, and proactive outreach to identify hidden needs and address them before they escalate.

Single front door: A unified access point by phone, online, email for self referral, referral by partners, or as a result of proactive outreach. Handles routine queries, provides low-complexity information, assistance and guidance, and connects residents to the right support or partner, ensuring people get support quickly without navigating complex systems.

Council/multi-agency hubs: Local, integrated service points in neighbourhoods and schools offering in-person support such as parenting programmes, benefits advice, and wellbeing initiatives. Trusted local staff work closely with schools, health professionals, and community partners.

Figure 4: Greater Norwich Thriving Communities department

The department will operate through five core functions that align data, people, and services around residents. Predictive analytics, supported by AI, will identify households, streets, and communities at risk 12 to 18 months before crisis, guiding timely interventions such as stabilising family life under safeguarding pressures or supporting carers before they reach breaking point.

For staff and partners, the model enables flexible team working with shared data, stronger collaboration, and less duplication. For residents, it means earlier, more connected help that strengthens families, supports carers, and improves wellbeing. Over time, this will reduce demand for costly statutory interventions, delivering better outcomes for residents and a more sustainable system for Greater Norwich.

In practice, this will look and feel like:

Resident Journey | ***Thriving Communities in action in Greater Norwich***

Strategic Core – Intelligence and Targeting

The Data and Insights function identifies streets where families are showing early signs of stress, such as rising school absences, housing instability, and repeated GP visits for stress-related illness. Predictive analytics indicate some households are at risk of compounding needs within 12 to 18 months. In response, the Corporate Core directs mobile teams and VCSE partners to begin outreach, strengthens staffing in the nearest hub with a housing adviser and family support worker, and engages schools, health visitors, and the local police in planning a coordinated response.

Mobile Outreach Teams – Proactive Outreach

A mobile team visits the identified streets with a Community Connector and a local charity worker. They knock on doors, join a school coffee morning, and host a drop-in at the church hall. Conversations focus on what is working as well as what is challenging.
Through this, they meet the Smith family: two parents and three children. Dad has recently lost his job, Mum works part-time, rent arrears are building, the eldest child is disengaging from school, the youngest has asthma, and the middle child is showing signs of anxiety.

Community Hub – Holistic Conversation

A week later, Mrs Smith goes online to request help with school transport costs and arrears advice. The triage officer reviews her case in the shared resident record, including notes from the mobile team, books a follow-up at the community hub, and invites a local VCSE parenting support facilitator to join, ensuring early links to wider community support.

Single Front Door – First formal contact

At the hub, a case worker meets the Smiths to review their situation in the round. They discuss rent arrears, the children's school attendance, Mum's wish to increase her hours but needing childcare, and Dad's job search and confidence. Because all services share the same case management system, the case worker can immediately bring in a housing adviser, a school attendance officer linked to the children's schools, and a VCSE mental health worker for the middle child.

Multidisciplinary Team – Coordinated Wrap-around

That week, the MDT meets virtually to finalise the family's plan. The housing team leads on arrears and landlord liaison, the school liaison arranges attendance support for the eldest and links them to an after-school club, a VCSE mental health partner begins weekly anxiety workshops for the middle child, and an employment adviser supports Dad with CV and interview skills. Case leadership follows the family's needs, starting with housing and later shifting to wellbeing once stability is achieved.

Stepping down to community-led support

Over the following months, the Smiths' situation improves. Rent arrears are cleared, school attendance rises, Mum increases her work hours, Dad secures a part-time job, and the children join local sports and activities. With this progress, the family no longer needs formal MDT support. Their case is stepped down to community networks such as sports clubs, a parents' group, and the church hall café, with the assurance they can return for help if challenges arise.

Figure 5: Thriving Communities department functions

5.2.3 Housing and homelessness

The proposed model of service delivery would bring together homelessness, housing teams and commissioned services into a prevention-focused model while preserving the HRA and social landlord function within its own specialist function.

This service would:

- Integrate homelessness and housing services into the Thriving Communities department with a greater focus on prevention and multi-disciplinary working. This will reduce the level of homelessness, the number of residents being placed in temporary accommodation and reduce the number of people waiting for permanent accommodation.
- Utilise Greater Norwich's HRA and landlord infrastructure to manage, maintained increase stock across the unitary, including much needed additional one-bed homes.
- Strengthen private rental sector (PRS) influence and enforcement through selective and additional HMO licensing.
- Use a blended development approach: in house, arms-length (for example using Big Sky Living and Broadland Living), and partnership delivery to meet need and stimulate growth, especially in fringe urban areas.

Greater Norwich's position as Norfolk's economic hub, gateway city, and university centre provides the platform to lead on housing reform, combining urban growth, targeted affordable housing delivery, and homelessness prevention. By becoming a unitary, Greater Norwich will have all the connectors needed between transport, skills, health and social care to become truly preventative. Ultimately connecting the services to people in a way that is personal and tailored to the unique needs of Greater Norwich without being swept up in simple austerity design for efficiency.

Building on Success: Pathways Norwich
Pathways is a multi-agency service in Norwich that brings together outreach, advice, and tailored support for people who are at risk of or are rough sleeping. It operates on a "no wrong door" approach, meaning people can get help from any of the partner organisations and be linked into the right support without having to navigate many complex services. Partners include local charities, health services, and the council. This effectively provides multiple front doors into support services and is a great example of work that would scale with the new unitary and is at risk

5.2.4 Adult social care

Greater Norwich must have its own sovereign Adult Social Care department to have the decision-making responsibilities to enable this new model of service delivery which will facilitate better management of demand, increased control of costs, and strengthened market sustainability.

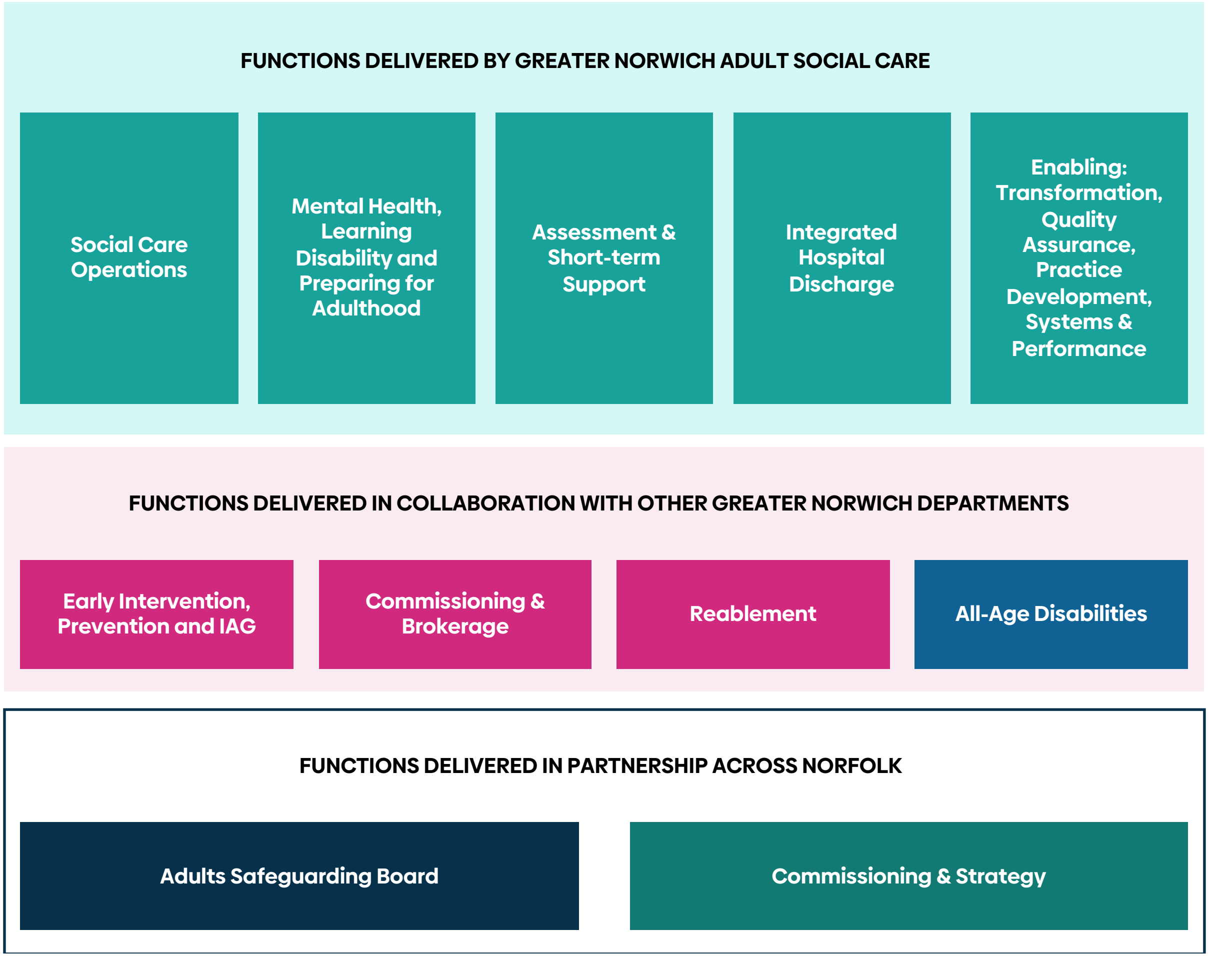


Figure 6: Functional model of Adult Social Care across the unitary

For this to be effective Greater Norwich will implement a person-centred, strength-based approach which builds upon existing assets e.g. family and friends' networks and what is available in the local community. Given Greater Norwich will have the largest urban centre, localised multi-agency networks will deliver targeted proactive outreach in the most deprived areas. While collaborating with East and West Norfolk to manage the wider market, Greater Norwich will have greater flexibility to tailor care delivery locally, focused on urban areas and rural areas aligned to the local needs and community assets.

Coordinated working with health partners, including the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital, will ensure joined-up care in communities and support timely discharge. Greater Norwich will also work with the Integrated Care System to deliver future models of neighbourhood health, to work together to prevent the need for long-term health and care support. Prevention-first pathways will maximise local community provision to reduce/delay demand for statutory care.

Existing county wide partnerships where there is a strong case for continuing (e.g. the Adults Safeguarding Board) will be retained to bring together statutory and non-statutory organisations and support these through their connection to a more localised service delivery model. Market sustainability will be addressed through a joint commissioning function, working with providers like Norse Care. The new model will have a greater focus on learning disability through the All-Age Disabilities team which will provide smooth transitions, improve independence, and integrate housing, skills, and employment support.

This model restores the primacy of place, delivering person-centred, sustainable Adult Social Care tailored to Greater Norwich.

Building on Success: Community Connectors in South Norfolk & Broadland
Community Connectors are currently based in GP surgeries across the area who build trusted relationships with residents and can support them to meet their needs through signposting. This may be through the local leisure offer or to other community groups. They also have regular meetings with GPs to discuss cases and agree both medical and non-medical solutions to support residents to manage their needs to avoid the need for other types of care. These localised initiatives demonstrate the positive impact of joined-up, early help and prevention and show what is possible when a range of partners work well together. The new model will build upon existing good practice and what is working well in Greater Norwich.

5.2.5 Children's social care

With a younger population and a need to focus on family support, Greater Norwich must have its own individual Children's Social Care service, which will be closely integrated with the Thriving Communities department. The service will deliver Early Help, informed by an understanding of whole household needs, to provide holistic community-rooted support for the whole family. This will align with the government's requirement for Family Hubs and will take this further by providing targeted support aligned with offers from across the council.

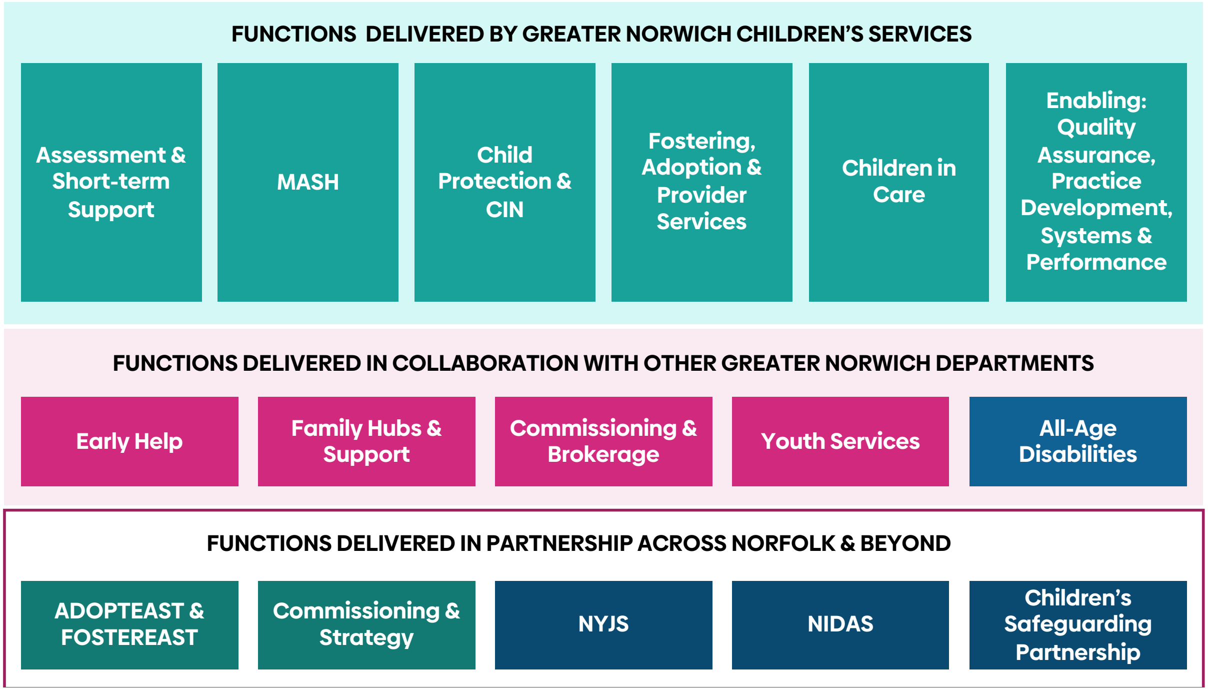


Figure 7: Functional model of Children's Social Care across the unitary.

The model prioritises family-based care through kinship care (where extended family or close family friends provide a family home for children), retaining foster carers and a step-down from residential home placements where that is in the best interest of the child. Through collaboration and integration with Housing, Greater Norwich will be able to leverage their assets and relationship with the rented sector to deliver stronger housing pathways to those leaving care – and connect them to the economic opportunities the city is cultivating – preventing young people falling through gaps between organisations.

Whilst Greater Norwich has a compelling case to deliver innovative local services, partnership working will be retained to tackle those issues that transcend unitary boundaries. This includes retaining a county-wide Children's Safeguarding Partnership, collaborating with East and West Norfolk on strategy with local implementation. Unitarisation provides Greater Norwich with the opportunity to develop its own local community provision, building capacity in the local market. This will be supported by partnership commissioning boards to manage competitive markets (such as residential care and agency staff costs) and to collaborate on the future of in-house provision and out of area placements with East and West Norfolk.

Greater Norwich's integrated, prevention-focused model will enhance outcomes, sustain the care market and ensure that children, young people and families receive timely and connected support.

5.2.6 Education & SEND

SEND & Education will be integrated into the Social Care and Thriving Communities departments. This holistic approach supports families at risk of exclusion or becoming Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET), and connects them to mental health, housing and employment support. Planning for independence, including any required transitions to Adult Social Care and between education settings, will begin early.

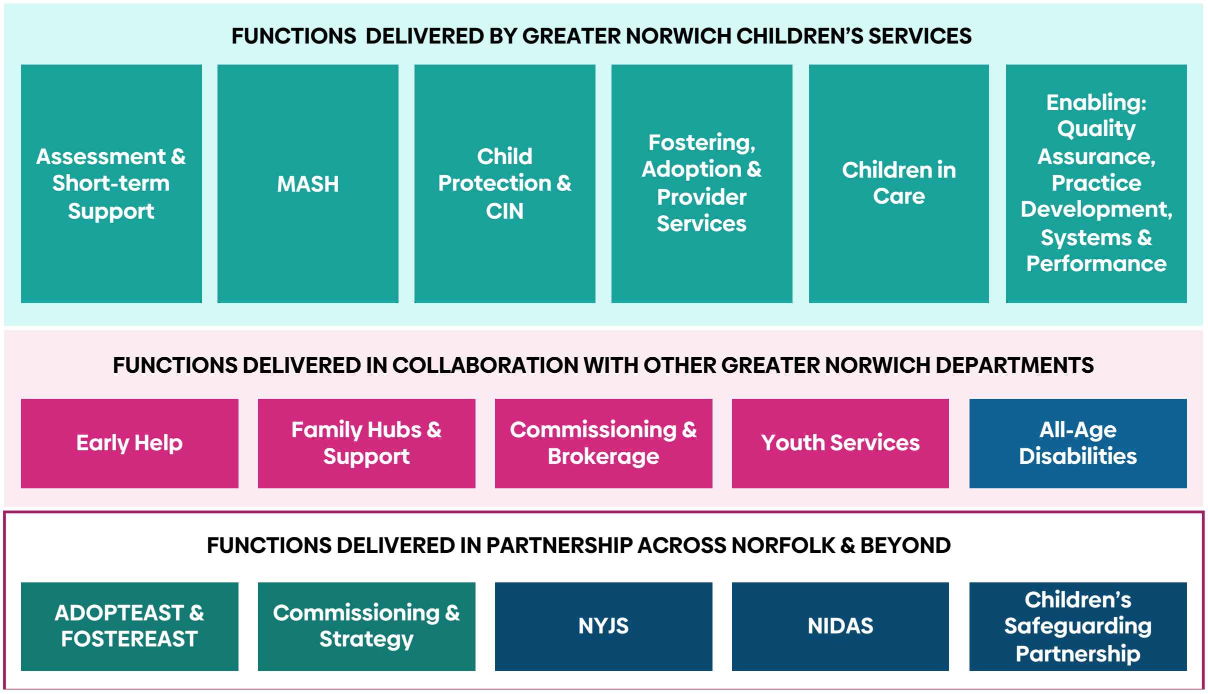


Figure 8: Functional model of Education & SEND across the unitary.

The model will be rooted in local schools and communities, delivered by multi-disciplinary teams including educational specialists and family practitioners. Family and Community Hubs will support families before statutory processes begin, whilst SEND case workers will play a central role in building long-term relationships with families. 'Teams Around Schools' will provide inclusion support, prevent school placement breakdown and reduce exclusions. Cross-county collaboration will continue in areas like recruiting specialist roles and managing provider markets, whilst ensuring local services remain responsive – including close collaboration with place planning to understand the education needs of new populations targeted through Greater Norwich's growth ambitions.

A local approach to SEND services will enable deepened relationships with schools, health and, most importantly, families, offering the opportunity to reset and deliver co-produced, community-driven services in Greater Norwich.

5.2.7 Environmental & regulatory services

The model brings together all the services that can make a major contribution to create vibrant, healthy, and meaningful places that enhance people's well-being and connection to their community. The model will enable this urban centre to develop, overcoming barriers that have previously impeded growth.

PLACE SERVICES

Figure 9: Place Services

The proposed model is a pragmatic, interim state that factors in contractual constraints but enables a placemaking[12] approach, whilst allowing Greater Norwich to invest time in developing and implementing a new model in the longer-term.

Many services will be in-house but given the constraints of long-term contracts already in place for waste collection and disposal, street scene and highways, there will be a mixed economy. This includes the services mentioned above, and Building Control and Parking. The County Council is in the process of procuring a long-term contract with a supplier for a range of highways services which will likely commit the unitary to an outsourced model for the immediate future.

Environmental Services will draw upon the existing, successful pan-Norfolk partnerships to deliver recycling and waste transfer stations (via the joint venture Norfolk Environmental Waste Services), shared parking services, CNC Building Control and Norse. In addition, Greater Norwich will work closely with the Mayoral Combined Authority on strategic, regional transport initiatives.

[12] Placemaking is the process of shaping public spaces and communities. It is a multifaceted approach involving collaboration and design to create spaces that a foster a deeper connection between people and their environment, leading to spaces that people want to visit, live in, and care for.

Greater Norwich will have the ability to strategically plan and implement transformational change across all its placemaking services. This will take time to properly plan and execute, which works well with the long-term contractual commitments that it will inherit.

Adopting this Place model, whereby environmental and place-based services can collaborate closely, will enable Greater Norwich to develop a tailored and joined up approach to making the neighbourhoods and wider area excellent places for residents, communities and visitors to thrive, whilst addressing challenges such as safeguarding its parks and increasing the supply of affordable homes.

5.2.8 Growth

Greater Norwich will have a central role to play in fostering inclusive growth within the area.

Any ecosystem of support to help grow the local (and regional) economy will need to span all future levels of government. This includes local initiatives (such as Business Improvement Districts and town centre regeneration schemes, growth programmes and skills support), services delivered by the unitaries, regional programmes (that will likely be delivered by a Mayoral Combined Authority) and national partnerships (such as Innovate UK).

Economic Development would also need to work closely with these services and partners to remove barriers and create an environment that fosters growth. There are opportunities to support this through better use of data and having a shared picture of local businesses that the council engages with (e.g. shared Customer Relationship Management).

Greater Norwich would complement the MCA with an appropriately scaled tailored approach, responsive to local needs and alive to local opportunities. For example, through delivery of initiatives to rejuvenate the city centre, and support working age adults in areas of high deprivation to overcome barriers to employment and secure well-paying jobs.

In the longer term, once any Mayoral Combined Authority is established, unitaries may wish to explore the opportunities to work closely in partnership and pool resources to deliver regional inclusive growth for Norfolk and Suffolk. However, this would be after vesting day and once any Mayoral Combined Authority was agreed.

This model will set Greater Norwich up to deliver tailored economic support to its area and address challenges such as rejuvenating its city centre and ensuring everyone feels the benefits of growth, whilst collaborating with other unitaries and the Mayoral Combined Authority to boost growth in the wider region.

5.2.9 Enabling services

Greater Norwich will have core enabling services that are set up to provide the right support to the wider organisation. These enabling Services are either centralised (e.g. HR & OD, Finance) or adopt a hub and spoke model (Transformation & PMO, Data & Insight) as a means of keeping control of scarce resources and maintaining a resilient, flexible resource whilst also fostering a community of practice and common standards across the organisation.

Wherever possible enabling services are delivered in-house as standalone functions to maximise control and flexibility to evolve as the council's needs change over time. There are some exceptions where a mix of models is in place – this includes Legal, Procurement and Audit.

Although there are opportunities to realise efficiencies from moving to a single unitary, it is important to make sure enabling services retain the capacity to support the new council in delivering an ambitious transformation programme to realise the wider benefits for residents and communities.

Enabling services will be set up to support the unique requirements of Greater Norwich. For example, Asset Management will include specific capability to support management of a large portfolio of commercial assets and linking with the housing portfolio.

There are further longer-term opportunities for Greater Norwich to collaborate with the two other unitaries, where it makes sense to pool resources, they share the same needs and can benefit from economies of scale or increased purchasing power.

The enabling services model will set up Greater Norwich in the best possible position to deliver high quality services whilst also driving transformation and public sector reform that will improve outcomes for residents and communities whilst helping to close the budget gap.

6. Financial resilience

The proposed Greater Norwich unitary would combine Norwich City and parts of Broadland, and parts of South Norfolk into a single authority. It would take in 100% of Norwich's population, alongside 70% of Broadland and 29% of South Norfolk, creating a total population of 278,285 – the lowest population of the three proposed unitaries. With a tax base of 91,328 in 2025/26, Greater Norwich also begins from the smallest revenue-raising platform.

Despite its scale, Greater Norwich is distinctive. It encompasses Norfolk's only major urban centre, Norwich, with its concentrated deprivation and complex social needs, while also drawing on more suburban and rural areas in Broadland and South Norfolk. This contrast between a smaller, deprived core and broader, lower-deprivation surroundings defines the financial challenges facing the authority.

This section focuses on the financial resilience and viability of Greater Norwich. It examines expenditure patterns, income generation, council tax harmonisation, and the balance sheet, before assessing the authority's ability to withstand financial shocks and deliver sustainable services over time.

6.1Baseline financial position

Building on the methodology set out in the main report, we have drawn on the 2025/26 Revenue Account (RA) returns to model the funding and expenditure profile of a prospective Greater Norwich unitary authority. This analysis provides the following indicative baseline position:

£m (2025/26)	Greater Norwich
Revenue Expenditure	531.84
Revenue Income	(525.46)
Net Position	**-6.38**

Table 2: Indicative baseline position for Greater Norwich

This baseline position shows that Greater Norwich begins with a modest deficit of around £6.4m based on 2025/26 assumptions and data. While the shortfall would still require attention, it is relatively small in the context of local government and can be addressed through routine financial management measures, alongside council tax harmonisation and wider resilience planning.

The analysis shows that Greater Norwich can stand as a viable unitary authority. Greater Norwich has the potential not just to manage its starting position, but to build a financially stable platform for innovative and preventative local government.

Expenditure Profile

The starting point was the aggregation of the RA 2025/26 data across all eight existing Norfolk councils. From there, allocations for the largest service blocks — Adults, Children's, and Education — were derived using demand, capacity, and unit cost data provided by the county at LSOA level. While this dataset was incomplete and inconsistent, it allowed us to map demand patterns against the new Greater Norwich boundaries and to allocate expenditure accordingly.

The analysis revealed that Greater Norwich consistently carries the lowest demand pressures of the three proposed unitaries. In education, it has the smallest school-aged population, with the lowest proportion of both primary and secondary pupils and the lowest share of children with Education, Health and Care Plans. Although it has the highest number of post-16 pupils, overall demand is relatively light, and this results in the lowest education expenditure allocation.

A similar pattern is seen in adult social care, where Greater Norwich records the lowest demand for nursing care across both working-age and older adults, and the lowest demand for residential care for older adults—just 22 per cent of Norfolk's total. Domiciliary care demand is also comparatively modest, particularly among older residents, and unit costs across all types of care are the lowest in the county. As a result, Greater Norwich accounts for only a quarter of Norfolk's total adult social care expenditure, markedly less than the other proposed unitaries. Its adult social care spend per head is just £421.39, comfortably the lowest in Norfolk.

Children's services present a more balanced picture, with Greater Norwich sitting broadly in the middle range for costs associated with residential placements, internal fostering and IFRA arrangements.

The combination of lower demand in education and adult social care — alongside relatively modest children's costs — means Greater Norwich records the lowest overall expenditure of the three proposed unitaries.

Funding Profile

Greater Norwich's income base is drawn from the familiar sources available to all local authorities: council tax, business rates, commercial property income, central government grants (both general and service-specific), and a range of fees, charges and other locally generated income. To calculate the likely income position, we disaggregated the RA 2025/26 submissions for all eight existing councils. County-level income lines, particularly those relating to Aggregate External Finance (AEF), required further breakdown: schools and social care-related grants were split according to the demand patterns previously established in our expenditure modelling, while more general grants were apportioned using population or, where relevant, deprivation indicators. In cases where reserves or appropriations could be linked to specific functions (for example, schools reserves), we aligned them with the relevant demand data.

A particular focus was placed on the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). Here, deprivation data was used to allocate funding, reflecting the approach taken in the government's Fair Funding Review consultation. The most recent Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) from 2019 show Norwich to be among the most deprived areas nationally: one in five neighbourhoods falls within the bottom decile, and over a third of residents live in some of the most deprived LSOAs in England. When these indicators are mapped onto the Greater Norwich boundaries, they reveal that 21% of its neighbourhoods are highly deprived, compared with 13% in East Norfolk and 11 per cent in West Norfolk. Indeed, Greater Norwich alone accounts for 42% of all Norfolk's most deprived LSOAs. This explains why more RSG was apportioned to Greater Norwich than to the other two authorities and aligns with recent analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), which suggests that urban authorities such as Norwich are likely to benefit from the eventual implementation of Fair Funding 2.0.

For business rates, we apportioned district-level income on a district basis, with only Broadland and South Norfolk requiring a split. This was achieved using LSOA data provided by finance officers. At the county level, income was divided on a population basis, following agreement among finance officers that this was the most representative method given the available data. On this basis, Greater Norwich accounts for 29% of business rates in the Norfolk area.

It is important to note, however, that the forthcoming reset of the Business Rates Retention system is likely to significantly alter future distributions. Deprivation is expected to play a greater role in apportionment, which would be favourable for Greater Norwich.

This financial modelling exercise highlighted the volatility of different assumptions used for splitting expenditure and income in a reorganisation scenario. Whether Greater Norwich begins in deficit or surplus depends less on its underlying demand profile—which is relatively favourable—and more on how government ultimately reshapes the funding system. What can be said with confidence is that deprivation is likely to carry greater weight in future settlements, placing Greater Norwich in a strong position to secure additional central government support.

Core Spending Power

Core Spending Power (CSP) provides the clearest measure of the resources available to local authorities to deliver services, bringing together the Settlement Funding Assessment, council tax, and central government grants as set out in the Local Government Finance Settlement.

On this measure, Greater Norwich records the lowest CSP of the three proposed unitaries. This reflects a smaller tax base, which naturally limits the scale of locally raised income, alongside a modest level of central government grant. However, deprivation ensures that Greater Norwich attracts a greater share of Revenue Support Grant than East or West Norfolk, partially balancing these factors.

Overall, CSP suggests that Greater Norwich starts with slightly fewer resources per head than its counterparts, but the difference is not significant. Its long-term position will depend less on this starting point and more on future reforms—such as Fair Funding 2.0—which will be central to securing a sustainable and fair settlement.

6.2 Council tax harmonisation

A defining financial challenge for Greater Norwich lies in the very different council tax levels inherited from its constituent authorities. In 2025/26, Norwich City's Band D council tax stands at £306.11, by far the highest in Norfolk and more than double the rates in South Norfolk (£175.14) and Broadland (£134.91). Yet despite being the county's main urban centre, Norwich has the smallest tax base of the three, with only 39,166 Band D equivalent properties compared with 54,097 in South Norfolk and 49,789 in Broadland. This reflects a housing stock with fewer large properties and a higher proportion of flats, student housing and lower-band dwellings.

	2025/26	
Local Authority	**Band D**	**Tax Base**
South Norfolk	175.00	54,097
Broadland	134.91	49,789
Norwich	306.11	39,166
Norfolk County Council	1,755.63	324,009

Table 3: Greater Norwich district councils Band D and Tax Base 2025/26

The combination of a high precept but a relatively narrow base means that Norwich's overall yield is not as strong as might be expected. Conversely, South Norfolk and Broadland each benefit from much larger tax bases, but their lower Band D rates hold back overall revenue. When brought together into a single unitary, Greater Norwich therefore begins with the lowest council tax revenues of the three new authorities.

Our harmonisation modelling explored five different approaches to aligning council tax rates across the new unitary over a ten-year horizon. The results show that outcomes vary significantly depending on the chosen methodology.

Importantly, this analysis does not make a recommendation. The five scenarios presented are intended to illustrate a range of legally compliant options and their potential fiscal impact. It will be for each shadow authority, once established, to determine its preferred approach to harmonisation based on its local context, policy priorities, and political judgement.

Results for Greater Norwich:

Scenario	Net Revenue Gain Compared to Baseline (£m)
Low to Max	7.19
High to Min	-160.60
Weighted Average (Day 1)	-81.86
Weighted Average + 5% (Day 1)	19.13
Fastest Harmonisation (5% Cap)	-63.54

Table 4: Greater Norwich Council Tax Harmonisation Results

Greater Norwich is the only one of the three proposed unitaries to generate positive outcomes under two scenarios: Low to Max and Weighted Average plus 5%. Under the Low to Max pathway, all districts align to Norwich's very high Band D. For most areas this represents a substantial uplift compared with the baseline, though Norwich itself sees an effective freeze. The benefits are not immediate: the scenario only begins to outperform the baseline in 2031/32, when the 5% referendum cap applied to the new unitary overtakes the 3% district cap in the baseline. This explains why the overall gain is relatively modest.

To illustrate what each scenario would mean for residents, we modelled the change in Band D charges under each scenario. These can be found in Appendix C.

Conclusion

Council tax harmonisation presents one of the most complex financial challenges for Greater Norwich. With Norwich City starting from the highest Band D in Norfolk but the smallest tax base, and Broadland and South Norfolk offering larger bases but much lower rates, any convergence produces sharp distributional impacts.

The modelling shows that only two scenarios — Low to Max and Weighted Average +5% — deliver positive revenue gains, though these come at the cost of steep increases for Broadland and South Norfolk households. By contrast, High to Min, Weighted Average, and Fastest Harmonisation all reduce resources, in some cases substantially, weakening Greater Norwich's already fragile fiscal base.

The authority therefore faces a delicate balance: while harmonisation offers the opportunity to stabilise revenues, it also risks placing significant burdens on residents depending on the chosen pathway. This underlines that Greater Norwich's fiscal sustainability will depend less on cost reductions and more on difficult choices about its revenue strategy and how equitably it distributes the impact of harmonisation across very different starting positions.

6.3 Building an organisation fit for the future

For Greater Norwich, the transition to unitary status is not simply a structural exercise, but a fundamental opportunity to reshape how services are delivered for a smaller, more urban population base. With the lowest population and tax base of the three proposed authorities, and the lowest overall Core Spending Power, Greater Norwich must build an organisation that is financially resilient, efficient, and innovative if it is to remain sustainable in the long term.

This requires creating a council that is leaner, more agile, and better able to meet residents' needs in a rapidly changing social and financial environment. The balance for Greater Norwich is particularly delicate: it must generate sufficient efficiencies from consolidation while also investing in new capacity, digital capability, and innovative service models to underpin long-term viability.

The picture for Greater Norwich:

Year	Financial Year	One-Off Costs	Recurring Costs	Recurring Savings	Net Impact	Cumulative Net Impact
0	2026/27 - 2027/28	-11	0	0	-11	-11
1	2028/29	-6	-2	5	-3	-14
2	2029/30	-9	-2	11	0	-14
3	2030/31	-5	-2	14	7	-7
4	2031/32	-1	-2	16	13	6
5	2032/33	0	-2	17	15	20
6	2033/34	0	-2	17	15	36
7	2034/35	0	-2	17	15	51
8	2035/36	0	-2	17	15	67

Table 5: Eight Year Profile of Savings and Costs of Transition

Transition costs & savings

Greater Norwich faces around £11m in one-off transition costs across the pre-vesting period (2026/27–2027/28), covering shadow authority set-up, ICT migration, and workforce restructuring. In addition, there is a permanent £2m per annum disaggregation cost from splitting county-wide services and South Norfolk and Broadland's services.

Recurring savings build progressively:

- Year 1 (2028/29): modest efficiencies of £5m are achieved, leaving a net deficit of around £3m.
- Year 2 (2029/30): savings increase to £11m, with the authority almost in balance, carrying forward only a small residual deficit.
- Year 3 (2030/31): structural savings of £14m outweigh costs, generating a net in-year surplus of £7m, reducing the cumulative deficit close to zero.
- Year 4 (2031/32): recurring savings of £16m are fully embedded, moving the cumulative position into surplus.
- From Year 5 onwards: annual savings stabilise at £17m, creating a steady recurring benefit.

On this trajectory, the payback point is reached in Year 4 (2031/32), when cumulative benefits outweigh the upfront investment. By Year 8 (2035/36), Greater Norwich achieves a recurring annual net benefit of around £15m and a cumulative surplus of £67m.

These savings are driven by workforce consolidation, system integration, and investment in digital capability, supported by prevention-led service models to reduce long-term demand. However, disaggregation costs remain a structural burden, particularly given Greater Norwich's relatively smaller resource base.

Strategic Conclusion

Costs	
Total one-off investment	£32m
Recurring additional costs	£2m
Benefits	
Total recurring savings	£17m (by 33/34)
Cumulative savings (over 8 year period)	£67m
Net position	
Net financial impact	£67m
Break-even point	Year 4 (31/32)

Table 6: Summary of the financial implications for unitarisation and public sector reform of the proposal

For Greater Norwich, the case for reorganisation is about converting significant upfront costs into long-term resilience. Although early years see deficits, the modelling demonstrates that once efficiencies are embedded, the authority can deliver a sustained net annual benefit of £15–17m and a cumulative surplus of nearly £70m by Year 8. Crucially, these reforms create a financially viable authority able to reinvest in innovation and preventative service delivery.

6.4 Balance sheet position

A local authority's balance sheet is a critical measure of its overall financial health and resilience. A strong balance sheet provides stability, enabling councils to invest in infrastructure, manage risk, and respond to shocks without jeopardising service delivery. Conversely, a weak or overextended balance sheet can leave authorities vulnerable, forcing difficult choices about borrowing, asset sales, or service reductions.

In the context of local government reorganisation, balance sheets take on added significance. The process of balance sheet disaggregation — that is, unpicking the existing county and district-level assets, liabilities, and reserves and reallocating them to the new unitary bodies — will shape the starting financial position of each authority. Decisions about how debt, pension liabilities, cash reserves, and fixed assets are split will directly affect each unitary's capacity to invest, its exposure to risk, and the sustainability of its financial strategy.

While our intention was to build a robust and detailed understanding of the balance sheet position for each of the proposed unitary authorities, we were not able to do so in practice. The County Council did not provide the necessary data on assets, liabilities, and reserves, despite repeated requests. Without this information, it was not possible to model balance sheet disaggregation at the level of rigour we had originally planned.

In the absence of a full dataset, we adopted a pragmatic approach by applying population-based splits to approximate the distribution of county-level balance sheet items across the proposed unitaries. While this method offers a broad indication of scale, it does not capture the geographic variation in asset holdings, service liabilities, or borrowing commitments that would ultimately influence the financial resilience of each new authority. For clarity this analysis includes HRA borrowing.

This limitation should therefore be borne in mind when interpreting the results: the figures presented provide a high-level view rather than a definitive statement of the future balance sheet positions.

Greater Norwich Indicative Position (2028/29)

(£000s)	Amount
General Fund Unearmarked Reserves	21,357
General Fund Earmarked Reserves	64,541
Long-Term Borrowing*	485,434
Short-Term Borrowing*	9,863
Non-Current Assets	1,882,731

Table 7: Greater Norwich Indicative Position (2028/29)

**Includes HRA borrowing*

To aid understanding of the balance sheet position, we have devised five key financial performance indicators tailored to a local authority context. These indicators move beyond the headline numbers to present a richer picture of financial resilience and sustainability. Each indicator is supported by a RAG rating framework, with thresholds informed by literature reviews and recognised best practice. Sources are cited under each indicator. To ensure comparability, the figures used throughout are based on the 2028/29 financial year.

Indicator: Unearmarked Reserves as % of Net Revenue Budget

- **What it is:** This indicator assesses the proportion of unearmarked (unrestricted) general fund reserves a council holds, expressed as a percentage of its annual net revenue expenditure. It represents the level of financial flexibility the authority has to absorb unexpected pressures.
- **Why it matters:** Unearmarked reserves are the council's most accessible form of financial resilience. They provide a vital buffer against unforeseen events such as sudden drops in income, spikes in demand for services, or inflationary cost increases. A low level of reserves exposes the authority to greater risk of financial instability and can limit its ability to respond effectively to shocks. Maintaining a robust reserve position is therefore widely recognised as fundamental to good financial management.

Rating	Threshold
🟢 Green	Greater than 10%
🟠 Amber	Between 5% and 10%
🔴 Red	Less than 5%

Table 8: Thresholds for ratings for unearmarked reserves as % of net revenue expenditure

Sources: CIPFA Briefing – Resilience in Local Authorities

Finding for Greater Norwich: 5% — 🟠 Amber

At 5%, Greater Norwich sits at the amber threshold, meaning it has some capacity to withstand financial shocks but is at the lower end of prudent practice. This suggests that while the authority could absorb a limited one-off pressure, it would have far less resilience in the face of sustained or multiple shocks and would need to take corrective action more quickly than councils with stronger reserves.

Debt per Capita

- **What it is:** This indicator measures the total level of long- and short-term borrowing held by a council, divided by the population of the prospective unitary authority. It reflects the notional share of debt attributable to each resident. *This includes HRA borrowing.

- **Why it matters:** Debt per capita provides insight into the financial burden being carried on a per-person basis. While borrowing can be an entirely legitimate tool to fund long-term capital investment, higher levels of debt can constrain future financial flexibility. They also bring ongoing obligations in the form of interest payments and repayment costs, which reduce the resources available for frontline services.

Rating	Threshold
Green	Less than £1,000
Amber	Between £1,000 and £2,000
Red	More than £2,000

Table 9: Thresholds for ratings for debt per capita

Sources: NAO report on financial sustainability of local authorities – emphasises affordability relative to taxpayer base

Finding for Greater Norwich: £1,780 — Amber

At £1,780 per resident, Greater Norwich falls within the amber category. This level of debt is not excessive compared with some other authorities and reflects borrowing to support a strong asset base. However, it does indicate a moderate financial burden on residents and signals that future borrowing capacity may be somewhat constrained. While manageable, the position will require careful monitoring to ensure affordability is maintained as wider financial pressures increase.

Indicator: Debt to Non-Current Assets

- **What this is:** This indicator assesses the proportion of a council's non-current asset base that is funded through borrowing. It is calculated by dividing forecast long- and short-term debt by forecast non-current assets. The result provides insight into the council's financial leverage and balance sheet resilience.
- **Why it matters:** A higher debt-to-asset ratio indicates greater reliance on borrowing to support the council's financial position, potentially signalling reduced flexibility and increased vulnerability during periods of financial stress. A lower ratio suggests more conservative borrowing practices and a stronger, more resilient balance sheet.

Rating	Threshold
Green	Less than 30%
Amber	Between 30% and 50%
Red	More than 50%

Table 10: Thresholds for ratings for debt to total assets

Sources: CIPFA Capital Risks Metrics, CIPFA Advisory Note: Reinforcing Good Practice in External Borrowing, NAO (2016) Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities

Finding for Greater Norwich: 26% — 🟢 Green

With debt equivalent to 26% of its total assets, Greater Norwich is firmly within the green range. This indicates that the authority's borrowing is modest relative to the scale of its asset base, reflecting a prudent and sustainable approach to leverage. The low ratio provides reassurance that the council has substantial asset backing against its liabilities, offering balance sheet resilience and scope to withstand future challenges without becoming over-reliant on debt.

Debt to Annual Council Tax Revenue

- **What it is:** This indicator measures the ratio of a council's total long- and short-term borrowing to its annual income from council tax. It provides a perspective on how much debt the council is carrying relative to one of its most reliable and locally controlled sources of revenue.
- **Why it matters:** Council tax represents a stable, recurring income stream that underpins financial resilience. A high debt-to-council tax revenue ratio can signal affordability risks, as more of the council's core income would need to be diverted to service debt, leaving less available for frontline services. A lower ratio indicates that the council's debt levels are more proportionate to its recurring revenue base, suggesting stronger affordability and sustainability.

Rating	Threshold
🟢 Green	Less than 2x
🟠 Amber	Between 2x and 3x
🔴 Red	More than 3x

Table 11: Thresholds for Debt to Annual Council Tax Revenue

Sources: [Room 151 – is local government debt trajectory sustainable?, Woking Case Study]

Finding for Greater Norwich: 2.32x — 🟠 Amber

At 1.62 times annual council tax revenue, Greater Norwich falls within the amber category. This indicates that while borrowing remains broadly affordable, the level of debt is material and requires careful management. The indicator highlights a moderate risk that debt repayments could place some pressure on the authority's financial flexibility, potentially constraining choices on future service funding. This scenario assumes council tax harmonisation to the highest-yielding model — the Weighted Average + 5% approach — which strengthens the recurring revenue base but does not eliminate the need for close monitoring of debt sustainability.

Annual Revenue Costs of Debt as % of Net Revenue Budget

- **What it is:** This indicator measures the proportion of a council's net revenue budget spent on servicing debt, including both interest payments and statutory repayments of principal (Minimum Revenue Provision – MRP).
- **Why it matters:** Debt servicing competes directly with frontline spending. As a greater share of the revenue budget is absorbed by debt costs, the council has less flexibility to respond to financial pressures or to invest in services. A lower proportion signals stronger affordability and resilience, whereas higher levels can point to potential sustainability challenges, particularly if income growth is weak or further borrowing is required.

Rating	Threshold
🟢 Green	Less than 5%
🟠 Amber	Between 5% and 10%
🔴 Red	More than 10%

Table 12: Thresholds for Annual Revenue Costs of Debt (as % of Net Revenue Budget)

Sources: The Times – Warning of more council bankruptcies as debt doubles

Finding for Greater Norwich: 5% — 🟠 Amber

At 5%, Greater Norwich sits exactly on the amber threshold. This suggests that while debt remains broadly affordable, it already absorbs a material share of the revenue budget. The position is not yet critical, but it highlights the importance of careful treasury management and of avoiding additional borrowing pressures which could push the ratio further into amber or red territory.

6.5 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was established under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 as a ring-fenced account, separate from the General Fund. It records all income and expenditure relating to the ownership and management of a council's social housing stock. Typical income streams include rents from tenants, service charges, and government grants or subsidies. Expenditure covers housing management costs, repairs and maintenance, capital investment in the stock, and the servicing of housing-related borrowing. The HRA plays a central role in delivering local housing strategies: maintaining and improving existing homes, ensuring compliance with housing standards and decarbonisation targets, and in some cases funding the development of new council housing.

For Greater Norwich, the assumption is that Norwich City Council's HRA will be wholly subsumed into the new unitary authority, since no boundary changes are proposed for the city. This means the HRA, and its financial trajectory, will directly underpin the new authority's housing strategy from vesting day.

Norwich City Council's HRA accounts for 2023/24 record income of £74.87m against expenditure of £73.96m, alongside loan charges of £6.54m. The reported deficit of £2.52m highlights a structural pressure within the HRA: debt servicing is already consuming a material proportion of resources (around 9% of income), constraining the ability to reinvest. With the council managing around 14,150 homes and services for 3,400 leaseholders, the scale of operations is significant, but so too are the pressures.

Part of this strain reflects the legacy of national policy. The government's enforced four-year rent reduction policy under the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, followed by the rent cap in April 2023, has eroded the council's rental income base. These interventions, combined with rising inflation, the costs of decarbonisation, and new regulatory obligations, have forced Norwich to rely more heavily on borrowing to sustain investment. The risks are compounded by external factors such as the cost-of-living crisis, the ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit, and the continuation of Right-to-Buy legislation — all of which could depress future rental streams.

Although the HRA was forecast to deliver a £5.53m surplus of income over expenditure in 2023/24, the council had already earmarked this, alongside £1.21m of existing reserves, to fund capital investment in new social housing. Importantly, the HRA also held a reserves balance of £42m as at 31 March 2024. This provides a significant buffer that can be drawn upon to support capital programmes, manage shocks, or smooth the trajectory of borrowing over the business plan period.

The financial strategy for the HRA is based on a long-term business planning framework that models revenue and capital costs over 30 years. This provides resilience but also highlights a sobering trajectory: debt levels are expected to rise rather than fall across the plan period, with affordability deteriorating unless mitigating actions are continually pursued.

Despite these challenges, Norwich's HRA retains strengths. The lifting of the national HRA debt cap has created headroom for further borrowing, and the council's business plan demonstrates that, within prudential limits, there is capacity to expand the housing programme. Combined with a developed Housing Strategy and recent practical experience in new build delivery, the council is positioning the HRA as both a landlord function and a growth tool. In principle, significant earmarked reserves could be deployed for new stock acquisition or development, while ensuring compliance, decency standards, and preparation for Awaab's Law remain the overriding priorities.

In short, the Norwich HRA represents both an opportunity and a risk for the new Greater Norwich unitary. It brings with it a substantial income base, a large housing stock, and strategic capacity for new build. Yet it also carries an inherited legacy of suppressed rents, rising debt, and growing cost pressures. Its long-term sustainability will depend on tight financial management, careful balancing of borrowing and investment, and the success of ongoing mitigating actions. With this discipline, however, the HRA could underpin not just the city's housing offer but also the wider growth and regeneration strategy of the new authority.

6.6 Conclusion: financial resilience and long-term viability

Greater Norwich begins life with a forecast deficit of £6.38m in 2025/26, but this should be seen in context: budget gaps of this kind are common across the sector, and the new authority would have the means to address it. Its relatively modest demand pressures in adults and education provide a more favourable cost base than its peers, while its high levels of deprivation position it strongly to benefit from the government's next phase of Fair Funding reforms. On current assumptions, Greater Norwich could move from deficit into surplus if resources are redistributed more in line with need — a prospect supported by national analysis suggesting urban authorities such as Norwich stand to gain.

Council tax harmonisation remains the most significant financial lever available. While some scenarios entail sharp impacts on residents, others — particularly Weighted Average +5% — show Greater Norwich capable of generating additional revenues of nearly £20m over ten years. The challenge for the shadow authority will be to select an approach that secures long-term sustainability while distributing impacts fairly across communities.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) adds further weight to Greater Norwich's position. Norwich City Council's HRA — which will be fully subsumed into the new authority — manages over 14,000 homes and generated income of nearly £75m in 2023/24. With £42m of reserves and significant borrowing headroom, the HRA provides both a buffer and an opportunity: a mechanism to invest in housing growth, decarbonisation, and improved standards. Yet it also brings risks, as the long-term affordability of the account is under pressure from historic rent caps, rising debt, and the costs of maintaining and upgrading stock. Managing the HRA prudently will be critical to balancing immediate landlord obligations with the chance to expand affordable housing supply.

On the balance sheet, Greater Norwich enters with a manageable debt profile, strong asset coverage, and affordable borrowing relative to its council tax base. While reserves are lean, this is not unusual in today's local government environment. With careful management and early efficiency gains, the authority would be able to strengthen its financial resilience over time.

Taken together, the analysis shows that Greater Norwich can stand as a viable unitary authority. Its path to sustainability rests not simply on cost control but on a transformative plan grounded in growth, prevention, and public service reform. With these reforms, and with the prospect of fairer national funding settlements, Greater Norwich has the potential not just to manage its starting position, but to build a financially sustainable platform for innovative and preventative local government.

7. Assessment against government criteria

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT & OUR APPROACH		
A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.	Under this proposal a single tier of local government is achieved as three new unitary authorities are created from the current two-tier, eight authority system – an East Norfolk, a West Norfolk and a Greater Norwich. In developing this case for a three-unitary Norfolk, an options appraisal has been undertaken of the alternatives using the government's Local Government Reorganisation criteria to ensure the best option is proposed for the region.	*Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 5 in this proposal*
Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage of disadvantage for one part of the area.	The proposal presents a sensible economic area for the new Greater Norwich unitary, as the area is Norfolk's economic engine, a city-region with international reach, world-class institutions, and a distinctive blend of creativity, science, and civic ambition. Its influence extends beyond the historic city and includes the University of East Anglia, Norwich University of the Arts. Norwich is a member of the 'Fast Growth Cities' programme, members of which are recognised for their exceptional economic performance, innovation capacity and growth potential. Yet the under bounded nature of the existing city council area restricts its	*Section 3 in this proposal*

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
	planning powers and constrains efforts to manage growth in a strategic, integrated way. Whilst it will have the smallest tax base of the three areas, this is off-set by benefits from deprivation-led funding formulas through Fair Funding 2.0 and business-rates reset.	
Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.	A new unitary which reflects the urban area of Norwich will help to increase housing supply as the additional land proposed to be included in Greater Norwich will unlock areas on the urban fringe for new development to meet local need. In planning terms, the three unitary model solidifies the current partnership with South Norfolk & Broadland developed through the joint Local Plan with new powers over infrastructure such as highways and education which the current districts do not have.	Sections 3, and 5.2.3 in this proposal. Appendix F – Greater Norwich Blueprints. Section 5.2 Appendix D - Boundaries
Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.	The development of the proposed has been informed by a comprehensive engagement exercise including council members and staff, key stakeholders, and residents across Norfolk, resulting in the proposed new council target operating model with associated benefits. An assessment has also been made on the financial implications of reorganisation which estimated the costs, savings, and income implications of the three-unitary model and is set out in the financial resilience section.	Section 5 in this proposal Appendix F – Greater Norwich Blueprints

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
Proposals should clearly describe the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these areas expected to achieve the outcomes described.	Greater Norwich's ambition to unlock local growth must be balanced with tackling the complex challenges the expanding city region will face. A new unitary council provides the opportunity to shift from crisis management to service reform, building on existing inclusive practice in local schools and a strong voluntary and community sector which can reduce duplication by bringing together core services and lead to better outcomes for residents.	Section 5 in this area proposal Appendix F - Greater Norwich Blueprints.
UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT CRITERIA		
Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	A new unitary for Greater Norwich presents an opportunity to reshape how services are offered for predominantly urban population base which is smaller than those in the West and East. This requires a council which will be leaner, more agile, and better able to meet residents' needs. It will achieve this by creating sufficient efficiencies from consolidation while also investing in new capacity, digital capability, and innovative service models to underpin long-term viability.	Section 6 in this proposal Appendix C - Financial Appraisal
As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 of more.	The total population of Greater Norwich is 278,285 residents.	*Section 3 in this proposal*
There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area,	While the population of the unitary is below the 500,000 figure typically cited in government guidance, our economic,	*Sections 2 and 3 in this proposal*

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.	demographic, and service delivery distinctiveness warrant a bespoke governance model. The case for unitarisation is built not on strict adherence to population size, but on functional need and strategic opportunity, reflecting distinct opportunities and challenges, and the imperative to align services with the real geography of people's lives	*Appendix D - Boundaries*
Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.	The proposal for Greater Norwich provides an opportunity to reshape how services are delivered to a smaller, urban population base than in the West and East and so means creating a council that is leaner, more agile, and better able to meet residents' needs. Efficiencies can be made through workforce consolidation, system integration, and investment in digital capability, supported by the Early Intervention and Prevention model to reduce long-term service demand. Once these efficiencies are embedded, Greater Norwich can deliver a sustained net annual benefit of £15m and a cumulative surplus approaching £70m.	*Sections 5.2, 6.3 and 6.6 in this proposal*
Proposals should set out how will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward	Greater Norwich faces around £35m in transition costs spread across the first three years of operation. Through workforce consolidation, system integration, and investment in digital capability, supported by the Early Intervention and Prevention model to reduce long-term service demand, the cumulative benefits will outweigh the upfront investment by year 5,	*Sections 6.3 and 6.6 in this proposal.* *Section 7 in the main proposal.* *Appendix H – Implementation Plan*

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
transformation and invest-to-save projects.	and by year 8 will achieve an annual net benefit of £15m.	
PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY		
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	As a unitary, Greater Norwich will be able to take a single, coordinated approach to addressing inequality – integrating public health, housing and wider resident support into one system of delivery. Decisions can be made with a deep understanding of local communities. Through an integrated model, rising demand can be met with services that work in partnership with communities with greater collaboration between services and partners to deliver more effective interventions. Unitarisation for Greater Norwich will create the conditions for consistent, person centred and sustainable public services, improving outcomes for residents and enabling a thriving place.	*Section 5 in this proposal* *Appendix F – Greater Norwich Blueprint*
Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.	In developing the service delivery models for each new unitary area, delivering services at a scale and proximity to better serve citizens have been the key objectives. However, considerations have been made to avoid unnecessary fragmentation or disaggregation of key services where a joined-up approach is the optimum solution. For example, each unitary has their own sovereign social care service to deliver local services but collaborate on key areas such as Safeguarding Partnerships and	*Section 5 in this proposal* *Appendix F – Greater Norwich Blueprint*

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
	Commissioning through partnership boards.	
Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.	A new unitary for Greater Norwich provides a unique opportunity to deliver public service reform through locally-defined, person centred services, for example through a single body and approach to tackle the challenges of inequality by bringing together public health, housing and support for people; and an integrated early intervention approach that joins up statutory services to provide targeted preventative support.	*Section 5.2 in this proposal* *Appendix F – Greater Norwich Blueprint*
Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.	The proposals for Greater Norwich have considered the impact on a range of crucial public services and how the new unitaries can deliver better public services, including: • A community-based early intervention and prevention model • Consolidated management & maintenance functions, expanding the HRA as capacity allows, and a blended approach of in-house and Arm's Length Organisation (ALO) delivery. • A localised approach for adult social, children's social care and SEND where each unitary has their own social care service to deliver to local services with collaboration on some key areas to avoid unnecessary disaggregation.	*Sections 5.2.1 - 5.2.6 in this proposal.* *Section 9 in the main proposal* *Appendix F – Greater Norwich Blueprints* *Appendix H – Implementation Plan* *Appendix I – RAID Log*

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
LOCAL ENGAGEMENT		
Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.	The engagement programme for Future Norfolk aimed to build an informed understanding of the three-unitary model, with an ambition to strengthen democratic accountability, respect local identity and deliver sustainable, adaptable public services. From the outset, we moved from early awareness-raising and listening around the three pillars—People, Place, Progress - that lead us towards a confident, coordinated presentation of views aligned within our proposal that met the Government's criteria.	*Section 6 in the main proposal*
It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.	A number of methods and strategies were specifically designed to ensure meaningful and constructive engagement which are outlined in full in section 6 of the main proposal.	*Section 6 within the main proposal*
Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.	'Place' was one of the key pillars of the engagement strategy to ensure that the proposals actively and meaningfully considered issues of local identity. Respecting local identify and cultural and historic significance was a key part of the engagement programme.	*Sections 2, 3 and 4 in this proposal.* *Section 6 in the main proposal*
Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put	Section 6 of the main proposal provides evidence of the outcomes of the engagement programme, which included over 5,000 survey submissions, 17,800 website visitors,	*Section 6 within the main proposal*

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
forward and how concerns will be addressed.	and a reach of nearly 500,000 on social media.	
BOUNDARY CHANGE		
Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.	Our current boundaries do not reflect the true geography of our functional economy. A growing share of economic activity has shifted to the outskirts, fuelling suburban expansion while leaving parts of our city centre stagnating. This makes us more like other English city-regions than rural Norfolk, and it calls for a whole-place approach to growth and public service reform. Creating the new Greater Norwich Unitary Authority is essential to reflect how people live and work and to unlock the strategic investment needed to deliver our growth ambitions.	*Sections 2 and 3 in this proposal* *Appendix A – Options Appraisal* *Appendix D – Boundaries*
DEVOLUTION SUPPORT		
New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	The three-unitary model for Norfolk, alongside three in Suffolk, strengthens devolution by combining strategic regional leadership with strong local representation. It enables balanced decision-making, supports shared priorities like infrastructure, skills, and housing, and ensures diverse voices inform regional governance. This structure fosters inclusive growth and operational resilience while maintaining local accountability and effective collaboration across both counties.	Section 8 within the main proposal

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.	The three-unitary model for Norfolk strengthens devolution by enabling balanced representation within a Mayoral Combined Authority shared with Suffolk. It supports strategic regional planning while preserving local delivery and democratic accountability. With six unitaries across both counties, the model enhances collaboration, aligns with shared economic and infrastructure priorities, and ensures diverse voices inform regional decisions. This structure fosters inclusive growth, operational resilience, and a coherent approach to investment, skills, housing, and transport—unlocking the full potential of Norfolk and Suffolk through coordinated governance.	Section 8 within the main proposal
Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.	The proposed three-unitary model for Norfolk, alongside three in Suffolk, creates a Mayoral Combined Authority with six balanced constituent councils. This structure ensures proportional representation across diverse urban, rural, and coastal populations, avoiding dominance by any single area. It reduces the current 16 councils to six, striking a balance between scale and democratic accountability. The model builds on existing collaboration and preparatory work, aligning with devolution timelines and priorities to ensure a smooth transition and effective governance from the outset.	Section 8 within the main proposal

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	In response to government guidance and local aspirations, Greater Norwich endorses a hybrid governance model that integrates Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) with existing Parish and Town Councils. NACs will operate as formal sub-committees of the new unitary council, led by ward councillors and open to participation from residents, community organisations, and service partners. Their remit could include local oversight, neighbourhood investment planning and community engagement. In parished areas NAC's will work in partnership with Parish and Town Councils representing their statutory roles and ensuring alignment of priorities. In unparished areas, NACs will serve as the primary vehicle for neighbourhood-level engagement and decision-making, providing a structured forum for the co-production of solutions with the council and partners.	Section 4 within this proposal
Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.	The Neighbourhood Governance Strategy will set out a layered approach to engagement, combining formal NACs with informal networks and participatory tools. This likely includes community assemblies, youth voice platforms, and co-designed sessions that reflect the lived experience of residents. The strategy will be	*Section 4 within this proposal*

LGR government criteria	How the Greater Norwich proposal meets it	Relevant section of the proposal
	engaged upon and piloted ahead of wider rollout. Methods for engagement will be tailored to each area, reflecting the different approaches required across urban and rural areas.	
Where there already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.	Parish and Town Councils will retain their independence and functions. Where present, they will be invited to participate in NACs as co-opted members, ensuring coordination without compromising autonomy. The strategy allows for future community governance reviews to explore new parish creation, particularly in urban areas, but this will not be the default solution.	*Section 4 within this proposal*

Table 13: Assessment against Government criteria