



**Shaping
Suffolk
Together**

Case for Change

Three Councils For Suffolk

**Local
Government
Reorganisation**

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FOREWORD

Suffolk is a special and diverse place. Our residents deserve the very best local government and that can best be achieved through three unitary councils.

Unitary local government is simpler for everyone. It gives us an opportunity to transform how public services work in the 21st century and ensure councils are fit for the future.

Collectively, we span a broad political spectrum, but we have come together to shape a proposal that is rooted in our deep understanding of our communities. Our collaboration has been extensive and powerful, and we are confident that it has laid robust foundations for successful unitary local government across Suffolk.

We have developed a proposal which is based on the communities and places in Suffolk – a thriving county town with its supporting local settlements; a rich rural and coastal area connected by its market towns; and a modern, vibrant area with a strong heritage and connections to Cambridge. This is an important opportunity to build on our natural strengths. We must not miss the chance to fundamentally change the way we deliver public sector services for the better and improve people's lives. Our proposal has many positive aspects:

- It has a strong financial justification – savings, investment in services and payback in just 4.3 years.*
- It is founded on deep understanding of what residents want from councils.*
- It drives public sector reform to tackle inequalities and drive improved outcomes.*
- It sets out how three councils would improve Adults and Children's Services.*
- It reflects Suffolk's varied communities and economies.*
- It enables thriving connected economic areas.*

We are all proud of and committed to our proposal which reflects the county of Suffolk where it is today and where it is going in the future, rather than where it has been in the past. This collaboration extends beyond political leaders to partners and communities. Our proposal promises a new relationship between councils and the people of Suffolk. It looks beyond our boundaries to ensure Suffolk's communities are heard at the regional and national tables.

Three Councils For Suffolk is a robust proposal, rooted in the needs of communities, a solid understanding of the challenges and opportunities and one we look forward to implementing in the best interests of Suffolk.



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SUFFOLK AS A PLACE

Suffolk is a large and diverse county, spanning 3,853 km² and home to approximately 760,000 residents. While there are some similarities, it is a county of three significant areas, each with different challenges and opportunities that are vital for the local, regional and UK economy, environment, energy production and national security. With the population due to rise to more than one million by 2045, local government needs to have the capacity, ambition and ability to focus on the challenges, needs, and opportunities for each area.

Suffolk's population is notably older than the national average, with a higher proportion of people living in smaller households, shaping a unique social and economic landscape. Despite its size, Suffolk remains predominantly rural, with only 18 settlements exceeding 5,000 residents. The county is characterised by a rich tapestry of market towns, each with its own identity and role.

Suffolk's economic potential is matched by its geographic advantage. Strategically located in the East of England, it combines proximity to London with access to major transport corridors. The A14 connects Suffolk to the M11, Cambridge, and the Midlands, serving as a strategic freight and business route. The county is also home to the Ports of Felixstowe and Ipswich, and Lowestoft's offshore energy port, with London Stansted, Southend, and Norwich airports all within an hour's reach.

The county is home to nationally significant assets, including a world-renowned food and farming sector, internationally recognised visitor destinations, two National Landscapes, a National Park, and the global centre of horse racing at Newmarket. It also hosts critical infrastructure such as power generation, major ports, military airbases, and international trade routes. Suffolk is also part of the economically vital Cambridge sub-region, positioning it as a key driver of the UK economy with diverse needs and opportunities.

Looking ahead, Suffolk is poised for significant growth. If all housing outlined in current Local Plans and the Government's Standard Method is delivered, the population could rise to just over one million by 2045. This growth is supported by enhanced infrastructure, a new university, and a strong focus on innovation and skills.

Map of Suffolk showing places with over 5,000 population, major A roads and existing District and Borough Council boundaries



Economic Growth and Opportunity

Suffolk's strong economic ties with Cambridgeshire form a powerful corridor of innovation and enterprise, driving growth in high-value sectors such as life sciences, agri-tech, and advanced manufacturing. Building on this strength, Suffolk has submitted a bold application to become a national AI hub, centred around the Gateway 14 development in Stowmarket. This initiative aims to position Suffolk at the forefront of digital innovation, leveraging its strategic location, growing tech ecosystem, and strong partnerships with academia and industry.

links and collaborative investment initiatives are further integrating the Suffolk and Cambridgeshire economies, unlocking new opportunities for business growth, research, and skills development.

Suffolk also sits at the heart of the Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor (CNTC)—a 100km stretch between two globally renowned universities. This corridor is rapidly emerging as a premier destination for technology-driven businesses, supported by science parks, research institutes, and innovation networks. Suffolk's central location within the CNTC makes it ideally placed to benefit from and contribute to this dynamic hub.

Nationally important

Beyond Suffolk, our reach extends across regional and national networks. Through strategic partnerships, national policy engagement, and cross-sector initiatives, Suffolk's voice is amplified. Proximity to Cambridge's world-class universities enables dynamic knowledge exchange, while housing and business developments support expanding industries and globally significant Research and Development. Enhanced transport

Economic transport links

The A11 and A14 corridors serve as critical arteries for economic expansion, connecting Suffolk to national and international markets. These routes support a diverse industrial base, from logistics and agribusiness to precision engineering, and facilitate trade with the Midlands, the ports, and beyond. Continued investment in infrastructure is essential to unlocking further growth.

Proximity to London



- 60 minutes by train.
- Direct services from Ipswich and Stowmarket to London Liverpool Street.

Road Access



- Strategically located along the A14 corridor.
- Direct links to the M11, Cambridge, and the Midlands.
- Key route for freight and business travel.

Ports



- Suffolk is home to the ports of Felixstowe and Ipswich, and in Lowestoft as a leading port servicing the offshore energy industry.
- Major gateway for international trade.

Airports



- Suffolk is roughly 1 hour from London Stansted, London Southend and Norwich Airports.

Suffolk's manufacturing sector is a cornerstone of its economy, encompassing food production, advanced materials, and high-tech engineering. Home to leading firms such as Gressingham Foods, CLAAS UK, Nexen Lift Trucks, Challs, PCE Automation, Greene King, British Sugar, and MandH Plastics, the county boasts robust supply chains, a skilled workforce, and excellent connectivity. Innovation in automation, sustainable production, and advanced manufacturing is accelerating, supported by the development of a new Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Centre.

In parallel, Suffolk's agri-tech and food production sector is thriving, rooted in a rich agricultural heritage and strengthened by cutting-edge research in sustainable farming. Close links to Cambridge and Norwich position Suffolk at the forefront of precision agriculture, food innovation, and resilient supply chains, with its food processing and export businesses playing a vital role in both domestic and global markets.

To support this growth, Suffolk's education institutions—including the University of Suffolk, West Suffolk College, East Coast College, and Suffolk New College—are investing in the future workforce. With a strong focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), digital industries, healthcare, and technical apprenticeships, Suffolk is equipping its talent pipeline to meet the demands of high-growth sectors and ensure long-term economic resilience.

Travel to work

Census 2021 data reveal that distinct commuting patterns across Suffolk, highlighting both challenges and opportunities for strategic development. In Mid Suffolk, over half (54%) of the 26,275 residents who travel to a workplace commute more than 10km, more than double the proportion in Ipswich (24%), and significantly higher than the Suffolk average (41%), and the national average (32%). This reflects Mid Suffolk's rural character and its reliance on regional employment centres.

Key transport routes such as the A14 and A140 run through Mid Suffolk, connecting residents to major employment hubs in Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, and Norwich, all located more than 10km away for many commuters. Similarly, many West Suffolk residents live in the Cambridge Travel To Work Area (TTWA), with access to the city and its science and business parks via the A1307 and A14. These corridors are vital for enabling access to jobs and supporting economic mobility.

In contrast, Ipswich demonstrates a more compact commuting pattern, with nearly 60% of residents travelling less than 5km to work, highlighting the benefits of urban density and local employment opportunities.

Meanwhile, East Suffolk stands out for its long-distance commuting: around 10% of residents travel more than 40km to reach their workplace, double the average for England and Wales. This underscores the importance of enhancing transport connectivity and digital infrastructure to support remote and hybrid working models.

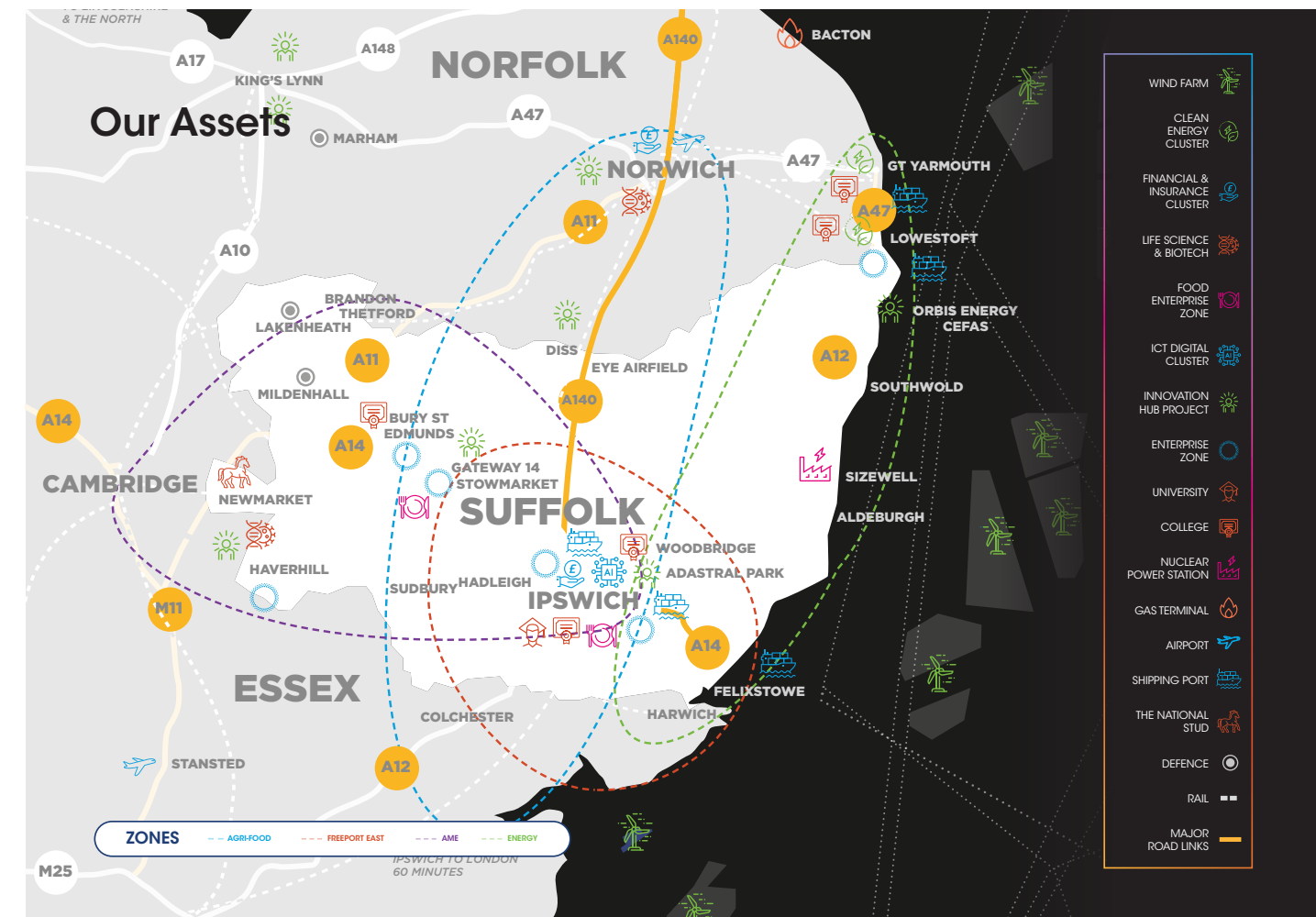
These patterns offer valuable insights, pointing to the need for targeted infrastructure improvements, sustainable transport solutions, and strategic housing and employment planning to support Suffolk's evolving workforce.



Economic Clusters

Map demonstrating the largest employment and housing sites as allocated in local plans

Source: Suffolk Economic Strategy, Suffolk Economy



Suffolk is home to several thriving economic clusters, with strengths in energy, technology, agri-food, and advanced manufacturing. These sectors are not only vital to the county's prosperity but also reflect the diversity and dynamism of its communities.

SUFFOLK'S KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

Suffolk is a largely rural county in the East of England which faces a number of challenges from a local government perspective. These interrelated challenges include an ageing population, changing demographics and limitations relating to infrastructure.

Demographic challenges

Suffolk faces a range of demographic and socio-economic challenges that impact public services and long-term sustainability. The county has an above-average proportion of residents aged 65 and over compared to the rest of England (24.1% vs. 18.7%)¹. By 2040, one in three people in Suffolk is expected to be aged 65 or over, with nearly one in five aged 75 or over².

Older residents in Suffolk also spend a significant proportion of their later years in declining health. Between 2018 and 2020, someone turning 65 in Suffolk could expect to live just over a decade in good health — around 13 years for men and 12.5 years for women. This highlights the need to improve health outcomes in later life.¹ Without the right early intervention, this places increasing pressure on adult social care, the NHS, mental health services, and the need for accessible transport and housing. The number of people living with dementia is projected to rise by 49% over the next 20 years, with most new cases among those aged 85 and over².

While Suffolk performs better than many areas nationally, sitting just outside the least deprived third of local authorities, deep-rooted inequalities remain across the county. Twenty-two neighbourhoods are among the 10% most deprived in England, including 12 in Ipswich, nine in Lowestoft, and one in Beccles³. These disparities create uneven demand for services and make it harder to address deprivation in smaller and rural communities.

Suffolk also has a lower proportion of working-age adults (59.3%) compared to the national average (63.0%)⁴, which contributes to a smaller tax base and a less economically active population. By 2043, there will be just 1.1 working-age adults for every child or person of retirement age².

While unemployment is low, Suffolk residents are less likely to be employed in high-skilled occupations (33.5% vs. 38.1% nationally)² and more likely to have lower levels of educational attainment. West Suffolk and Ipswich are in the bottom 20% of areas in England for education outcomes². These factors contribute to lower gross weekly pay and housing affordability challenges — in 2021, the median house price in Suffolk was 9.71 times the median salary².

Housing development has increased in recent years to meet demand, with household numbers forecast to rise by 16% between 2018 and 2043². However, growth is unevenly distributed. For example, Bury St Edmunds has seen 2,562 new homes built since 2015⁵, with associated increases in demand for school places, GP surgeries, hospitals and transport infrastructure.

Transport and connectivity

While Ipswich enjoys good rail connections to London and Norwich, services to Peterborough only run on alternate hours. Suffolk residents are penalised if a connection from the east coast main line at Peterborough is missed. An hourly service has long been promised but not delivered. Although there is an hourly service to Cambridge, the journey time is greater than that for London and uncompetitive with road. An extra hourly fast train as part of the East-West Rail route would improve links from Ipswich, Stowmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket via Cambridge and bring the end-to-end journey time to under an hour. It would also provide better connections with Felixstowe.

Bus services in rural Suffolk are poor with few buses running in the evenings. Most rural communities rely heavily on car travel, which can isolate older and vulnerable residents and limit access to employment and tertiary education among younger people.

The county has no motorways, and the only trunk roads suffer from key vulnerabilities such as the Copdock interchange between the A12 and A14, and the Orwell Bridge on the latter. Closures of this bridge cost the Suffolk economy an estimated £1 million per day⁶.

The ambition for economic growth, supported by the continuing trend for new homes in the area, will place even greater demand on our fragile transport infrastructure. Suffolk is host to one of Europe's largest deep-sea container ports at Felixstowe, which is heavily dependent on its road and rail links to the Midlands and North. If these are neglected, it will severely limit Suffolk's contribution to the nation's economy.



Environmental and Planning Pressures

Suffolk's rural environment is one of our key strengths, providing natural capital to contribute towards improved health and wellbeing outcomes for our communities and to grow our economy. Over 36 per cent of the county has special protections for its wildlife or landscape value⁷, which presents a rich biodiverse culture, but also constrains land available for growth.

Since 2013, the county has been officially designated as seriously water stressed. This has placed growing pressure on water supply and led to increasingly strict limitations on development. Currently, a moratorium is in place for non-residential development in parts of the county, which will remain until a new reservoir is completed—expected in 10 years.

In addition, broader restrictions on commercial development apply across the entire county. These constraints significantly limit our ability to meet the Government's growth ambitions.

Suffolk is increasingly vulnerable to coastal erosion and flooding, particularly in Lowestoft, which experienced a major tidal surge in 2013⁸. Investment is needed in flood defences, sustainable drainage, infrastructure resilience and highways maintenance.

Recent announcements on the need for significant increases in housing growth across the county will have an impact on the character of some of our communities but will have a wider impact on the local and regional infrastructure and some of the existing pressures will be exacerbated unless investment is prioritised to address these challenges.

There is a need to ensure that employment, education, health, leisure and wellbeing investment is embedded within new developments alongside the delivery of new housing to ensure that we create sustainable communities and retain the local distinctiveness that makes Suffolk one of the most desirable places to live in the country.

As a largely rural county, there is hidden rural deprivation, particularly in relation to access to services and rural isolation, as well as digital deprivation linked to delays in upgrading broadband connections to fibre as it isn't commercially viable to upgrade smaller communities or isolated properties in rural areas, leaving these communities struggling to get online and reducing employment, education or training opportunities as well as enforcing the digital divide between rural communities and those in better connected urban areas.

Across Suffolk, local characteristics present nuanced challenges to growth. Brandon, in West Suffolk is within the Brecks Special Protected Area (SPA), designated because of the landscape and habitat preferred by stone curlews and other priority species. It has all the building blocks of a thriving town including links to the A11 Cambridge to Norwich corridor and a railway station which links it to Stansted airport. However, the SPA and buffer severely restrict new development to largely brownfield development up to 10 units. This SPA extends to other parts of West Suffolk, such as Mildenhall, which is also affected by designated noise contours due to the United States Airforce base. Similarly, West Suffolk is home to the globally renowned horse racing cluster for which a large proportion of land in Newmarket is protected by local plan policies due to its economic, heritage and cultural value.

In Ipswich, in addition to multiple Conservation Areas across the town resulting from its historic significance and character, the Orwell Estuary is designated a Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for protected bird species and other marine and riparian habitats. These, and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), lie partly within Ipswich Borough and act to constrain growth in the south-eastern part of the town. The Ipswich Borough boundary is otherwise tightly drawn around the urban area, with few other opportunities for further major expansion within the administrative area.

Opportunities

Suffolk's unique and diverse character, encompasses:

- Vibrant urban centres.
- Dynamic Energy Coast.
- Historic market towns.
- Picturesque and rural villages.
- Thriving agriculture and food sector.
- Renowned visitor attractions.
- National Landscapes.
- A National Park.
- World-class horse racing.
- Vital ports.
- Large airbases.
- International trade routes.
- UK economic drivers.
- Housing growth.
- Logistics hubs.
- A new University.
- Rich heritage.
- Strong communities with local identities.

Making it both an exciting and complex county with lots of opportunities.

Suffolk's Economic Strategy sets out three key economic opportunities:

High Growth – Clean Energy, Agri-Food and Drink, and Ports and Logistics are key areas where Suffolk holds a competitive advantage. Suffolk plays a crucial role in the UK's energy transition, with significant investments in projects like offshore wind and nuclear power. It is also a major hub for agriculture, food and drink production, and sustainable practices, supporting the UK's food security. Its strategic ports - Felixstowe and Ipswich – are vital gateways for the UK's global trade, whilst Lowestoft is a leading port servicing the offshore energy industry.

Emerging Growth – ICT and Digital Creative, Life Sciences and Biotech, and Financial and Insurance Services sectors offer opportunities for job creation and economic expansion. Strengthening ties with nearby economies like Cambridge, Norwich, and London will further enhance growth in these sectors.

Value Growth – Key employment sectors such as Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, Construction, Health and Social Care, Horseracing, Agri-tech, and the Visitor Economy hold potential for boosting productivity and job quality. Investment in skills, innovation, and infrastructure is crucial to drive growth in these industries. We have a thriving ecosystem of companies dedicated to an array of technology advancements and solutions, which are playing a pivotal role in the UK's fight against climate change while driving technological transformation. There are significant opportunities to merging these diverse technologies to create integrated solutions that accelerate clean, productive, and sustainable economic growth.

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Achieving financial resilience and improved living standards for all.

PRODUCTIVE

Driving innovation and boosting economic efficiency.

INCLUSIVE

Ensuring equitable access to opportunities and shared prosperity.

CLEAN

Leading in clean growth for a prosperous, sustainable future.

SUFFOLK

Pioneering Tech Convergence

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

Attract £4 Investment for every £1 of government economic investment.

Build a multimillion-pound strategic project pipeline to attract investment and generate jobs.

Ensure local businesses access emerging opportunities through the Suffolk £ initiative.

Attract major companies with incentives, focusing on Enterprise Zones and Freeports.

BOOSTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

Create a spatial planning framework that integrates housing, transport, utilities, and green infrastructure.

Ensure infrastructure upgrades are in place with growth and decarbonisation.

Explore sustainable new housing settlements.

Leverage local expertise to advance connectivity beyond 5G.

Support efforts to secure road and rail improvements for enhanced transport links.

DRIVING ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION

Establish strategic clusters in key locations focused on sector specialisations and tech convergence.

Develop technology showcases across Suffolk to promote knowledge transfer, attract talent, investment, and visitors.

Provide impactful access to business support with specialist advisors, mentorship, and targeted interventions for start-ups, scale-ups, and high-growth businesses.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Implement initiatives that accelerate upskilling and reskill, attract talent, and align training with business needs.

Strengthen work readiness through business-education collaboration and maximising impact of existing and new initiatives.

Establish the UK's first Institute of Tech Convergence to foster innovation and address skill gaps.

Boost productivity through workforce health and wellbeing initiatives and build and inclusive talent pipeline.

CREATING PRIDE IN PLACE

Build and promote a strong Suffolk brand, showcasing strengths and opportunities.

Support Ipswich in its transformation to a modern, mixed use economic centre.

Launch 'EPIC Suffolk' charter to recognise businesses committed to economic, social, and environmental responsibility.

Expand the ambassador networks to boost Suffolk's national and international profile.

Inequalities in Suffolk

Based on the 2025 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Suffolk, the county faces several key inequalities that impact the health, wellbeing, and life chances of its residents. These inequalities present both a challenge and a significant opportunity to create the conditions for thriving people and thriving places. Some of the core inequality gaps identified in the JSNA are:

- Life Expectancy Gap - men in the county's most deprived areas die, on average, 8.2 years earlier than those in the least deprived. For women, the gap is 7.4 years¹⁹.
- Healthy Life Expectancy - older adults in Suffolk spend a significant portion of their later years in poor health, increasing demand on health and care services.
- Educational Attainment - areas such as West Suffolk and Ipswich are in the bottom 20% nationally for educational outcomes, limiting access to higher-skilled employment².
- Income and Employment - Suffolk residents are less likely to be employed in high-skilled occupations and earn lower gross weekly pay than the national average. This contributes to housing affordability challenges, with median house prices being 9.71 times the median salary².
- Access to Services - rural isolation and limited public transport reduce access to healthcare, employment, and education, particularly for older and vulnerable populations.

To build a resilient and prosperous Suffolk, we must create the conditions in which working-age adults, children, and older people can all flourish. This means tackling the deep-rooted inequalities that currently hold back individuals and communities.

There is a significant opportunity to narrow the gaps in health, opportunity, and outcomes by focusing on the underlying causes and social determinants of inequality. Prevention must be at the heart of this effort, ensuring that those most at risk of disadvantage are supported to live well.

By facilitating an environment where everyone has the chance to thrive, Suffolk can unlock the full potential of its people and build a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable future.

(Source: Suffolk Economic Strategy)

Local government in Suffolk

Since 1974 local government in Suffolk has been “two-tier” with a County Council and District and Borough Councils. In 1974, seven District and Borough Councils were created – Babergh District, Forest Heath District, Ipswich Borough, Mid Suffolk District, St Edmundsbury Borough, Suffolk Coastal District, and Waveney District. By 2012, six of the district and borough councils had paired with another council (Forest Heath with St Edmundsbury, Suffolk Coastal with Waveney, and Babergh with Mid Suffolk). Each pairing had a shared workforce and Chief Executive, but maintained separate governance arrangements. In 2019 Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury formally merged to create West Suffolk District Council and Suffolk Coastal and Waveney merged to create East Suffolk Council. This means there are currently five District and Borough Councils in Suffolk.

The boundaries used for the reorganisation of local government in the 1970s left Ipswich significantly under-bounded. A boundary designed in 1835 and implemented in 1836 was used for the Ipswich Borough. In the subsequent, almost 200 years, the settlement pattern around Ipswich has grown and changed significantly, as has its economic footprint. The creation of new unitaries is a good opportunity to address this boundary issue and provide greater focus and better outcomes for residents in all areas.

Each District and Borough Council in Suffolk serves distinct communities and geographies, reflecting the county’s diverse character. Viewing Suffolk as a single entity can obscure the significant differences in population density, most notably between the highly urbanised area served by Ipswich Borough Council and the much more rural, sparsely populated area covered by Mid Suffolk District Council.



Council	East Suffolk	West Suffolk	Mid Suffolk	Babergh	Ipswich	Suffolk	All purpose council average (56 councils - excl London)
Area (sq km)	1,294.87	1,034.73	871.06	611.59	40.29	3852.56	1,400
Population (ONS 2021, parish level)	246,061	179,934	102,688	92,343	139,642	760,668	265,028
Density (population per sq km)	190.03	173.89	117.89	150.99	3465.92	197.44	189

There are 308 elected councillors for the six councils in Suffolk, broken down as follows (correct on 1 September 2025)

Authority	Suffolk County Council	Babergh District Council	East Suffolk Council	Ipswich Borough Council	Mid Suffolk District Council	West Suffolk	Total across all Councils
Conservative	49	7	15	7	3	25	106
Green	9	10	16		23	1	59
Independent	3	9	3			9	24
Labour	6	1	12	38		15	72
Liberal Democrat	5	4	9	3	4	1	26
Reform UK	2						2
West Suffolk Independents	1					8	9
Mid Suffolk Independents					4		4
Non-Grouped / Not Specified						4	4
Vacancy		1				1	2
Total Seats	75	32	55	48	34	64	308

In West Suffolk Council, Labour, Green and Independent councillors, plus one non-affiliated, are grouped into the Progressive Alliance, which has formed the West Suffolk Working Partnership with the Independent Councillors.

Only half of the councils in Suffolk have majority administrations, with East Suffolk’s administration being made up of a Green, Liberal Democrat and Independents Group, West Suffolk being made up of a Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent coalition and Babergh being made up of a coalition of Green, Independent and Liberal Democrat councillors. The County Council has a majority Conservative administration; Mid Suffolk has a majority Green Administration and Ipswich a majority Labour administration.

HIGH DEMAND STATUTORY SERVICE DELIVERY

Due to the characteristics of Suffolk, there is high demand for the statutory services of Adult Social Care, Children and Young People's Services and Homelessness. Headline detail about each of these demand driven services is provided below.

Adult Social Care

Demand	<p>On average Adult Social Care has 10,550 people receiving a service (Care Market Strategy 2025-2030).</p> <p>Safeguarding: 7,236 safeguarding concerns received (up 16% from previous year, Suffolk safeguarding report 2023-2024) nationally there was a 5% rise in 23/24.</p> <p>Number of clients receiving long term support 18-64: Expressed per 1,000 resident population in Suffolk is 8.9 (9.0 is national average 23/24, LG Inform 2023/2024).</p> <p>Number of clients receiving long term support (65+): Expressed per 1,000 resident population in Suffolk is 47.5 (54 is national average 23/24).</p>
Workforce	84% of care workforce is female with an average age of 44 1,800 vacancies in the care market 23/24, an 18% reduction from the previous year
Regulatory review	Care Quality Commission (CQC) rating from March 2023: Good High scores in leadership, digital innovation, safeguarding, and partnerships Improvement required in equity of outcomes, access delays, and suitable accommodation availability.
Budget	~35% of the Suffolk County Council budget spent on Adult Social Care.
Opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Investing to enhance digital and preventative care and demand management through expanding sensor technology and virtual interventions in order to delay or prevent expensive formal care. Agile local delivery through local teams who know the community needs and respond quickly improving prevention and reducing demand. Leverage strong partnerships building on the positive CQC feedback to further integrate with NHS, voluntary, and community sectors.
Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce shortages due to uncompetitive pay and rural recruitment issues which can hinder service stability. Access delays due to contact centre pressures and assessment bottlenecks. Accommodation gaps due to insufficient dementia, nursing, and complex care placements locally.

Children and Young People

Demand	<p>Approximately 165,311 children and young people (aged 0-19) in Suffolk (Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year 2023).</p> <p>Number of children with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) rose from 12.4% (school-age population) in 2015 to 18.1% (20,268) in 2024¹⁰.</p> <p>Suffolk ranks 2nd lowest out of 11 similar counties for the combined prevalence of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans and SEND support in 2024.</p> <p>In March 2024, there were 3,737 children in need in Suffolk and 930 children in care.</p>
Regulatory review	In August 2024, rated 'requires improvement to be good' by Ofsted, in particular safeguarding and children in care were rated as good with areas such as early help thresholds, care leaver support, homeless 16-17s and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) consistency requiring improvement .
Budget	44.3% (627.2m) of Suffolk County Council's budget is spent on Children and Young People with the majority being made up of social care, youth justice, strategic commissioning, mainstream school travel, and inclusion. Dedicated Schools Grant (High Needs Block) deficit stood at £44m at the end of March 2025 and expected to rise by over 50% per annum. The forecast Dedicated Schools Grant Reserve total deficit by 2028 is £359m.
Opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Further investment to create stronger local early intervention with a place-based model tied to schools and community hubs. Improvement of SEND and mental health integrations via local partnership working. Enhanced care leaver support through locally coordinated and personalised pathways.
Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistent threshold application in the MASH leading to risk and equity concerns. Variable support for teenagers (homeless 16-17 years old and care leavers) with promised services not realised. Workforce pressures persist.

Homelessness

Demand	<p>Total Applications Assessed: ~9,795 households; Households Owed a Duty: ~5,113 (52% of assessed); Trend: Significant increases in demand, especially in Babergh and Mid Suffolk (74% rise since 2020/21).</p> <p>Main Causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of assured shorthold tenancy: ~723 cases • Family/friends unable to accommodate: ~671 cases • Domestic abuse: ~221 cases • Non-violent relationship breakdown: ~150 cases <p>Household Composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households Without Children: ~3,000 (59%) • Single Male Households: ~1,300 (26%) • Households With Children: ~2,100 (41%) • Care Leavers (18–20): ~50 cases <p>Support Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households Reporting Support Needs: ~1,667 (33%) • Mental health issues: ~640 (13%) • Physical ill health/disability: ~470 (9%) • Domestic abuse: ~255 (5%) • Care leavers: ~50 (1%) <p>Rough Sleeping Snapshot (Autumn 2024) Total Counted: 42 individuals (West Suffolk: 7, East Suffolk: 11, Babergh: 3, Mid Suffolk: 0, Ipswich: 10)</p>
Workforce	<p>Workforce Across Suffolk: ~228 officers 84.6% female, 16.4% part-time. Recruitment challenges for specialist roles.</p>
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated Spend: £23.2m on homelessness, housing advice, and temporary accommodation.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater collaboration around Homelessness Reduction. • Joint commissioning and data alignment. • Upstream prevention and local system-wide strategy development. • Enhanced local multi-agency collaboration and service accessibility with local teams and organisations able to better target resources for tailored solutions.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising homelessness due to cost-of-living and housing crises. • Specific local pressures on housing availability and affordability due to high second-home ownership in some coastal communities, the development of Sizewell C, and inflated rents due to US military rental allowances in the West exceeding local ability to afford properties. • High demand for single-person accommodation. • Increasing complexity of needs (mental health, substance use). • Short-term funding limits long-term planning. • Gaps in floating support and high-support accommodation.



CRITERION 1

A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government

INTRODUCTION

This proposal is for three unitary councils serving similar population sizes in Suffolk. It aligns to a similar proposal for three unitary councils in Norfolk, with both sets of proposals maintaining county boundaries rather than looking for solutions which cross county borders. There are currently 14 councils in Suffolk and Norfolk. The proposals for three unitary councils in each county reduce this to six, while maintaining the capacity and resilience to deliver on local, regional and national priorities.

Part 1 of this Case for Change has set out the context of Suffolk – a county of contrasts set to have over a million people living in it by 2045. It is this context that leads to the proposal to establish three, single tier councils across the county with the ability to meet the needs of different communities and economies.

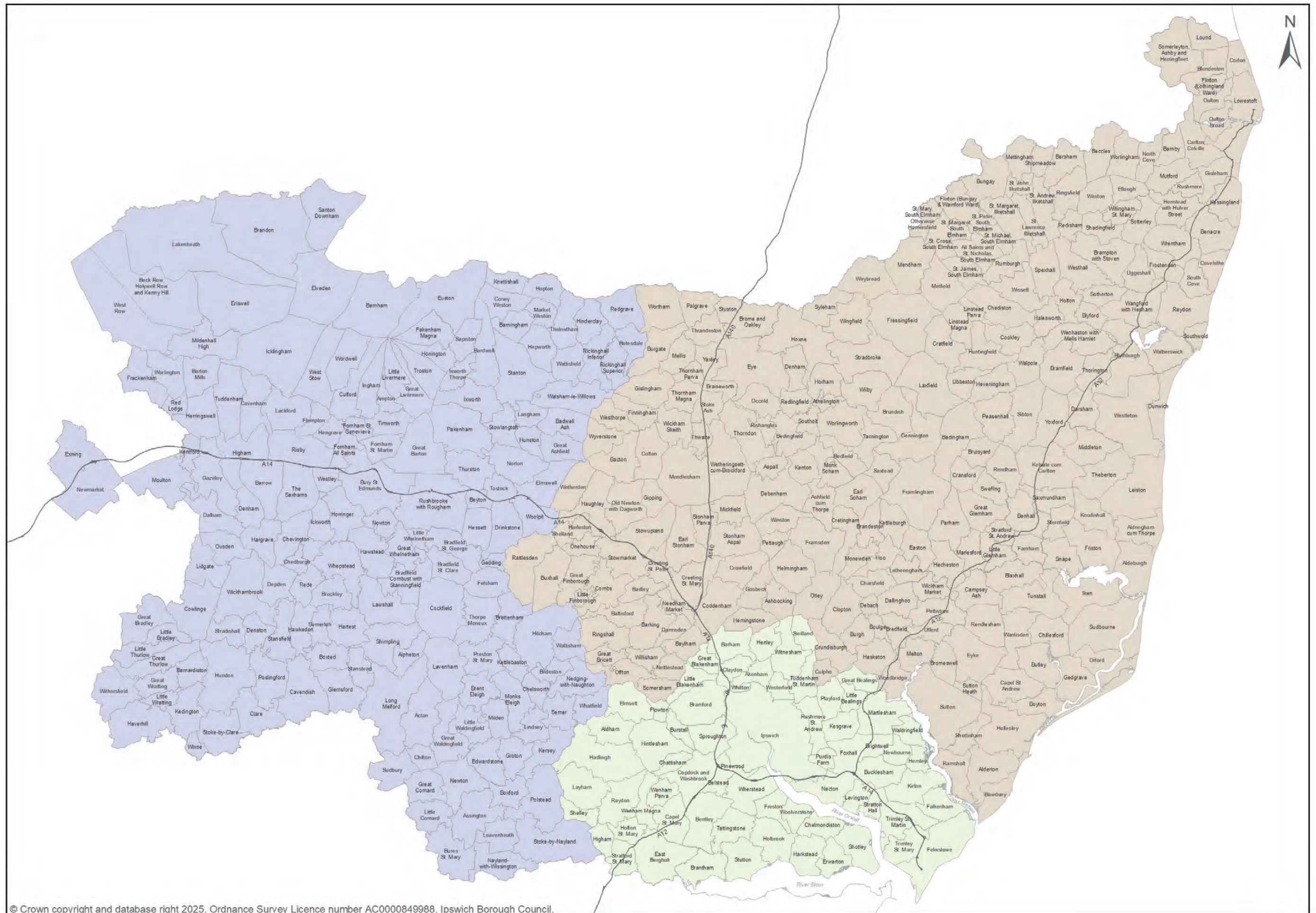
The county is shaped by three distinct areas - Western, Central and Eastern, and Ipswich and Southern - each with its own identity, economy, history, and priorities. These differences influence how residents interact with public services, how demand is generated, and how outcomes are achieved. Recognising and responding to these unique characteristics is essential for effective governance, service delivery, and accountability.

Our proposal for three unitary councils is designed to reflect and capitalise on these regional distinctions. By aligning governance structures with the specific needs and strengths of each area, we can deliver more responsive services, cultivate stronger community engagement, and unlock targeted economic growth.

This approach ensures that Suffolk's governance is not only efficient but also locally attuned, empowering each area to thrive on its own terms, while contributing to the county's collective success.



Map showing the proposed council areas



WESTERN SUFFOLK: AN AREA OF HERITAGE, INNOVATION, AND GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY

Western Suffolk is a distinctive and diverse blend of rural areas, historic and cultural significance, and economic dynamism. It is home to internationally recognised assets that contribute not only to the local economy but also to the UK's global standing in key sectors.

Bordering Cambridgeshire to the West and Essex to the South, Western Suffolk benefits from strong economic ties to Cambridge's world-leading research and innovation ecosystem alongside strong road and rail connections to the Midlands, London, and the wider South East.

Western Suffolk is a part of the Cambridgeshire Sub-Region and Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor – both areas are national economic engines. Both the A11 and A14 are international trade routes connecting the area with Cambridge, London, the Midlands, and the rest of the country.

The A14 growth corridor has seen significant recent investment, including in the Suffolk Business Park, home to a growing advanced manufacturing cluster, following investment in an Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME) incubator led by West Suffolk Council, alongside smaller industrial areas including Woolpit which is home to a large cluster of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and larger ports and logistics clusters at Lawn Farm. Allocations of additional employment land in the local plans will enable further growth along this strategic route.

According to 2022 data, advanced manufacturing is the largest of the growth sectors in the Suffolk Economy, with £1.9 billion gross value added in 2022. By 2050 that is due to more than double and contribute £4.7 billion to Suffolk's economy. The Government has outlined their ambition to nearly double the annual business investment in the AME sector to £39 billion in 2035 in their Industrial Strategy.

Western Suffolk is a rural area known for its agri-tech sector. It is home to CLAAS UK, a global leader in agricultural machinery, whose headquarters and training academy are based at Saxham near Bury St Edmunds. Each year, the CLAAS Academy trains students on a rigorous four-year programme, equipping them with skills and qualifications needed for careers as mechanics and technicians in the agri-tech sector. This investment in talent development not only supports the region's agricultural innovation but also strengthens Suffolk's reputation as a hub for advanced technical training and rural enterprise. In addition, global brand Greene King has started work on building a new £40 million brewery, investing in staying in Bury St Edmunds with the support of West Suffolk Council. The town is also home to major employer British Sugar which is the largest plant of its kind in Europe. Its advanced manufacturing plant processes over two million tonnes of sugar beet, produced by over 700 growers from across East Anglia, and produces electricity for the National Grid.

Bury St Edmunds is an important economic and social hub for surrounding villages and further afield – including the thriving communities of Thurston, Elmswell and Woolpit. Its other larger market towns, Haverhill, Sudbury, Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon, are home to a mix of local service businesses as well as global brands, household names and manufacturing companies important to the UK economy. For example, Steven Walters and Sons in Sudbury which has been weaving silk since 1720 and is officially the oldest silk mill in the UK – recently awarded the King's Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development.



The UK horseracing industry, contributes £4 billion annually to the British economy with Newmarket being the most significant cluster and global capital of thoroughbred horse racing. As such, Newmarket generates more than £255 million for the local economy and supports over 3,200 full-time equivalent jobs²⁵.

The proximity to Cambridge, in particular, is fuelling growth in high-value sectors and high-tech while the region's fertile land continues to support a robust arable, fruit, and vegetable driven agriculture industry. It is home to major international food and drink brands as well as vineyards in the Stour Valley, supporting English wine production and global company Treatt in Haverhill serving world brands.

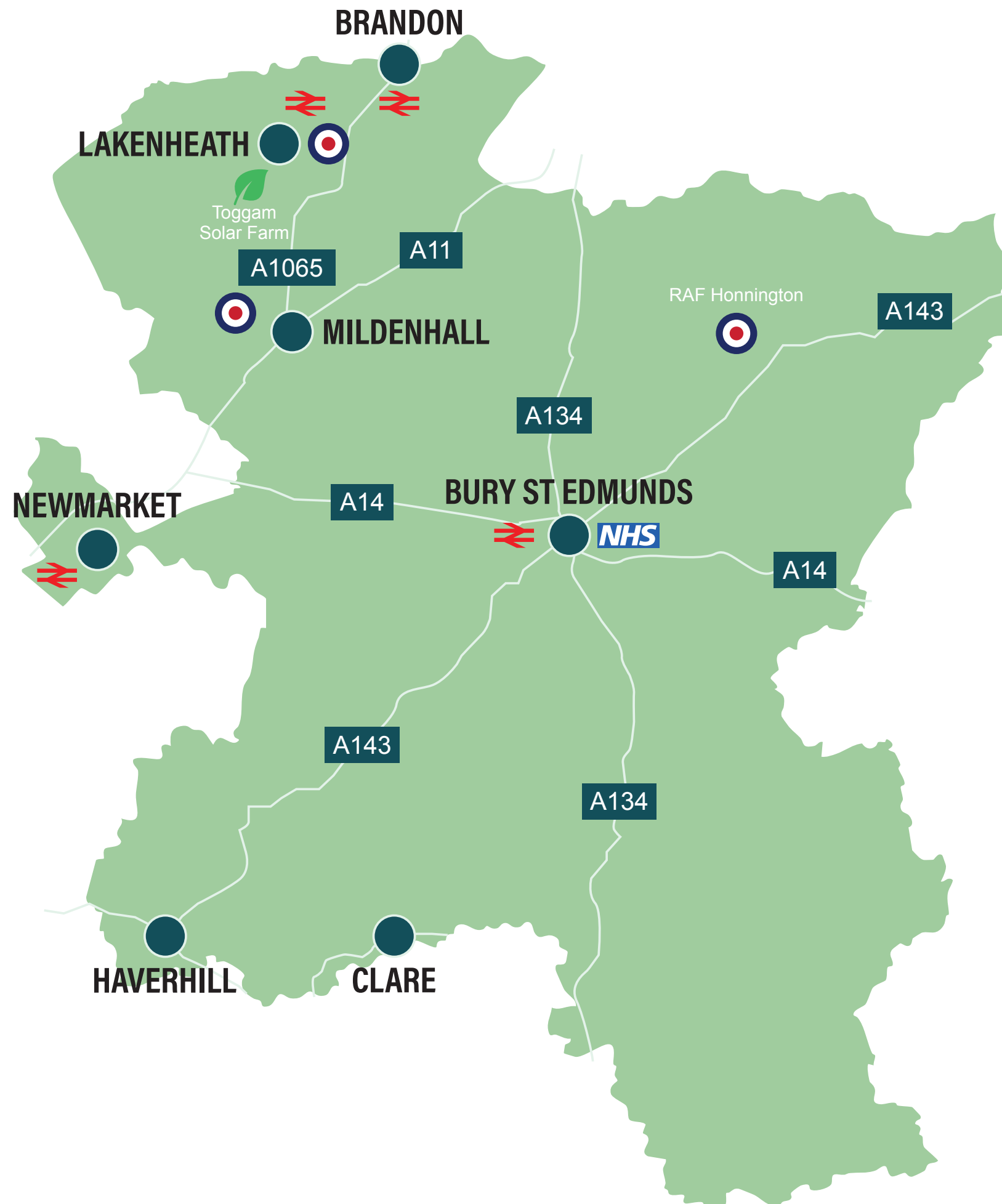
The area has special significance in terms of its landscape and environment, supported by authority owned and managed award-winning country parks. For example, Brandon and the Breckland region, holds significant environmental and ecological importance locally, for the UK and globally.

The tourism and visitor economy is of huge importance, worth over £650m a year to the local economy. In addition to horseracing at Newmarket, this includes Bury St Edmunds, with its cathedral, Abbey Gardens, brewing heritage

with Greene King, and cultural vibrancy; and Sudbury - the birthplace of 18th century painter Thomas Gainsborough and home to a world-class museum celebrating his work. Many of the tourism attractions are based in and around the area's beautiful market 'wool' and 'silk' towns. The smaller settlements of Clare, Cavendish, Kersey and Long Melford add to the visitor appeal. Lavenham one of the most important and best-preserved medieval villages in the UK. It is also a draw for Harry Potter and film fans from across the globe after playing the wizard's childhood home of "Godric's Hollow".

Western Suffolk also plays a vital role in national defence and international collaboration. The presence of major US Visiting Forces (USVF) operations at RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall, the largest US base in the UK, brings over 11,000 individuals to the area. These bases drive demand for housing, retail, and services, while also supporting strategic partnerships in technology, logistics, and security. Wattisham Flying Station, meanwhile, is home to the Army Air Corps' Apache attack helicopter force. With its unique combination of heritage, global industries, and strategic location, Western Suffolk is a region of national importance and international reach, offering exceptional opportunities for investment, innovation, and sustainable growth.

-  Rail
-  Military Bases
-  Market Towns
-  NHS Hospitals
-  Energy
-  Roads



IN SUMMARY

- Population: 254,700 (2021) rising to 342,255 in 2045.
- Area: 598.3 square miles.
- Large parts of council area covered by nationally significant and protected habitats.
- 170 parishes/towns.
- Home to four military bases, including 80% of the US military presence in the UK.
- International home of horseracing.
- Part of Cambridgeshire Functional Economic Area and housing market area, and Cambridge to Norwich Tech Corridor.
- Well-known UK brands, including Greene King, British Sugar, Claas, Turners, Nestle Purina, GCB Cocoa, Mel Aviation, Boxford Farms, Sudbury Silk Mills, Taylor Made Joinery, Konings, Siemens Healthineers and TruckEast.
- Tourism: Abbey Gardens, Lavenham Church, Little Hall and Guildhall and Crooked House, Gainsborough's House, Quay Theatre, NHRM, Ickworth House, Apex, Theatre Royal, West Stow, Center Parcs, Stoke by Nayland Golf Club and Spa, Stour Valley, Nethergate Brewery and Melford Hall in Long Melford, Kentwell Hall, Kersey and silk and wool towns.
- Mildenhall Hub – ONE Public Estate exemplar.
- West Suffolk Hospital.
- Major industrial areas at Sudbury, Woolpit including Lawn Farm.

CENTRAL AND EASTERN SUFFOLK: WHERE COAST, CULTURE, AND CLEAN ENERGY CONVERGE

Central and Eastern Suffolk is an energy, tourism, and food powerhouse - largely rural in character, with vibrant market towns, thriving villages, and rich natural and coastal assets. Its rural identity sets it apart from neighbouring urban centres – it is an area where sustaining thriving, prosperous economies require a careful balance between growth and preservation of natural features.

The coastline is a valuable natural resource, generally much more rural and nature-focused than Felixstowe's industrial port, but it does face development pressures like the Sizewell C nuclear power plant, grid infrastructure, and the threat of coastal erosion.

Central and Eastern Suffolk is a national centre for energy production, and Nationally Significant Energy Projects will be a key feature of the new council's work – maximising opportunities while at the same time seeking to minimise disruptive impacts. It hosts significant offshore wind farms, which continue to expand to increase their output, contributing to the country's renewable energy targets. Nuclear energy plays a major role, with Sizewell B currently operational and Sizewell C in development; the first British-owned power station in over 30 years, marking it as a key site for sustainable energy production.

Lowestoft sits at the heart of this transformation as the largest settlement in the area and the UK's most easterly point. The town is home to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), and the fast-growing port recently completed the £35 million Lowestoft Eastern Energy Facility. This investment has enabled the expansion of ScottishPower Renewables' offshore wind operations, reinforcing Lowestoft's pivotal role in the UK's transition to net zero.

The area is also home to East Coast College (Energy Skills Centre) and Suffolk Rural College at Otley, while a new College on the Coast in Leiston is planned as a community benefit of Sizewell C. Meanwhile the state-of-the-art Stowmarket Innovation Gateway is set to have a focus on green and digital/AI skills – providing cutting-edge training opportunities to address critical skills gaps.

Tourism is a key economic driver, worth over £900m across the area. The Suffolk coast is designated as a National Landscape, while Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), forests, heaths and a mix of protected landscapes and habitats offer huge biodiversity and wellbeing benefits to communities and visitors. It is also home to the Broads National Park and Waveney Valley.

It boasts beaches, nature reserves such as Minsmere, and cultural events - including Latitude and the First Light Festival. Venues such as the John Peel Centre for Creative Arts in Stowmarket and Snape Maltings showcase and inspire a broad range of creative talent.

Central and Eastern Suffolk's inland areas are equally rich in character and opportunity. The market towns of Stowmarket, with its creative arts centres, Food Museum and direct rail link to London in just 75 minutes, Woodbridge, nestled on the River Deben near Rendlesham Forest, and Sutton Hoo, provide the gateway to the area.

Agriculture, food and drink production thrive in Central and Eastern Suffolk, with specialisms in horticulture, cereal, sugar beet, pig, and poultry farming. It is also a key hub for food processing and the drinks industry – for example, supporting major UK drinks brands Aspall and Adnams.

Many businesses pioneer innovative agri-tech and sustainable practices, a significant specialism driving climate adaptation. Gateway 14 at Stowmarket, is part of Freeport East and a catalyst for economic growth – already home to world-leading firms in sustainable building materials. There is also a strong logistics sector across the area.

Strong road links across the new council area include the A146, A143 and A1120, the latter two linking to A140 – the main road between Ipswich and Norwich.

Communities in Central and Eastern Suffolk are strong and proactive. Our Town and Parish Councils, voluntary organisations and community groups work closely with the principal authorities to deliver positive outcomes for residents.

The area faces a water scarcity challenge - the region is the driest in the UK – which currently restricts development. For example, Essex and Suffolk Water is operating a temporary prohibition of new non-domestic supplies in and around the town of Eye, expected to be in place until 2033. Planned infrastructure, such as new reservoirs, aims to support growth and preserve the delicate balance between environment and economy.

Access to key services can be a challenge for some parts of the area so partners have had to think creatively about providing services to rural communities, including through mobile services, and enabling demand responsive transport.

Central and Eastern Suffolk is a place of contrasts and, often hidden, inequalities. More than 30,000 people in Lowestoft live in the 20% most deprived areas nationally² (one of the Core 20 areas) – whilst there are areas with some of the highest house prices in the region (which brings its own challenges for the local population).

The population across the area is older than both the national and regional averages. This requires an additional focus on understanding and meeting the needs of an ageing population, including housing, health and care support, social connections and digital deprivation.








Although Suffolk's age profile is skewed towards the 50+ age group, the county also places strong value on its younger population. There is a clear commitment to maximising opportunities and aspirations for young people, while promoting youth voice and democratic participation. Efforts to achieve this are being co-designed with young people themselves, ensuring that their needs are met by building on existing mechanisms for youth engagement and empowerment.

Coastal management and environmental protection are critical, with significant challenges due to coastal erosion and flooding, requiring investment in sea defences and sustainable coastal management to protect homes, businesses and infrastructure.

The area's thriving tourism economy brings undeniable benefits, but it also presents challenges - particularly in areas where the prevalence of Airbnbs and second homes is contributing to housing pressures.

With its unique combination of natural assets, clean energy leadership, and cultural vitality, Central and Eastern Suffolk is an area of national significance and local pride, offering compelling opportunities for investment, innovation, and inclusive growth.



-  Rail
-  Ports
-  Beaches
-  Natural Beauty
-  Energy
-  Coastal Protection
-  Roads



IN SUMMARY

- Population: 253,416 (2021) rising to 336,334 in 2045
- Area: 703.2 square miles
- 239 parishes/towns
- Approximately 9,960 businesses
- Largely rural identity compared to neighbouring urban centres.
- Energy powerhouse: A national centre for energy production through nuclear power at Sizewell, solar farms and offshore wind.
- Vibrant market towns acting as economic and social hubs.
- Strong tourist economy: Rich mix of nature, culture (e.g. Latitude Festival, John Peel Centre for Creative Arts and Snape Maltings), beaches, and rural experiences.
- Coast: National Landscape area, Minstermere nature reserve and coastal resorts - but facing erosion, flooding and development pressures.
- Food and farming: Strong agricultural heritage, food production and processing - plus well-known UK brands including Adnams and Aspall.
- Skills and innovation: Growing centre of excellence for renewable energy and green skills - e.g. East Coast College, Stowmarket Innovation Gateway, College on the Coast, Suffolk Rural.

IPSWICH AND SOUTHERN SUFFOLK: A STRATEGIC ANCHOR FOR GROWTH, INNOVATION, AND GLOBAL TRADE

Ipswich, the historic county town of Suffolk, is a dynamic urban centre with deep roots and a forward-looking vision. Located just 50 miles northeast of London and connected by a 60-minute mainline rail link, Ipswich is a key driver of Suffolk's economy and a hub for education, healthcare, logistics, and innovation.

Ipswich is a town where heritage, creativity, and innovation converge. Its historic centre, captured in John Speed's 16th-century maps, retains its Tudor charm with landmarks such as Christchurch Mansion and Wolsey's Gate, the remains of Cardinal Wolsey's College founded in 1528. Just beyond the town lies Constable Country, an area of outstanding natural beauty immortalised by John Constable, one of England's most celebrated landscape painters. His evocative depictions of the Suffolk countryside, particularly around Dedham Vale and Flatford Mill, continue to inspire visitors and artists alike, reinforcing the region's cultural legacy.

This deep-rooted heritage is complemented by modern architectural excellence, notably the Grade I listed Willis Building, an early example of British high-tech architecture designed by Sir Norman Foster. The regenerated Ipswich Waterfront has become a vibrant marina and leisure destination, while the town's cultural scene is nationally recognised, with seven Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations contributing to a thriving creative economy.

Ipswich is also a centre for learning and innovation. Its post-16 education ecosystem, led by the University of Suffolk and Suffolk New College, plays a vital role in driving skills development across Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), digital

industries, and the creative arts, ensuring the town continues to nurture talent and meet the evolving needs of its economy.

Ipswich's role as the county town and a major urban centre reinforces its strategic importance in health, public services, and economic development. It is home to Ipswich Hospital, a key healthcare provider for Suffolk and North East Essex, and hosts the Integrated Care Board (ICB), placing the town at the heart of regional health planning and delivery. With strong transport links, a diverse population, and proximity to a growing cluster of life sciences and professional services, Ipswich offers a unique environment for integrated, responsive, and inclusive healthcare leadership. This centralised presence supports better outcomes for communities while aligning with the town's wider strengths in education, innovation, and enterprise, making Ipswich a dynamic and forward-looking centre for wellbeing and growth.

Ipswich Town Football Club (ITFC) is in the heart of the town and plays a significant role in raising the town's profile nationally and internationally. Its promotions to the Championship and then Premier League in 2023 and 2024 gave a significant



economic and cultural boost to the town as well as global TV and social media coverage, resulting in increased tourism.

Ipswich plays a vital role in driving economic growth, with a workforce of around 81,000 people contributing over £5 billion in Gross Value Added

(GVA). Key industries such as insurance, ICT, creative services, and port-related activities form the backbone of the town's economy³. However, Ipswich also faces challenges. The unemployment claimant rate stands at 4.6%, which is notably higher than the Suffolk average of 2.9%. This highlights the need for continued investment in skills development and inclusive growth to ensure everyone can benefit from the town's economic potential⁴.

Southern Suffolk is a centre of technological excellence. The Suffolk New College Tech Campus and the University of Suffolk's Digitech Centre are equipping the next generation with skills in digital, STEM, and emerging industries. The area is also home to BT's Global Research and Development HQ and Innovation Martlesham, winners of the first UK's National AI Awards, a cluster of over 100 high-tech Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) recognised by the Department for International Trade as a UK centre of excellence in 5G and digitalisation. BT also plays a leading role in the region's emerging space sector.

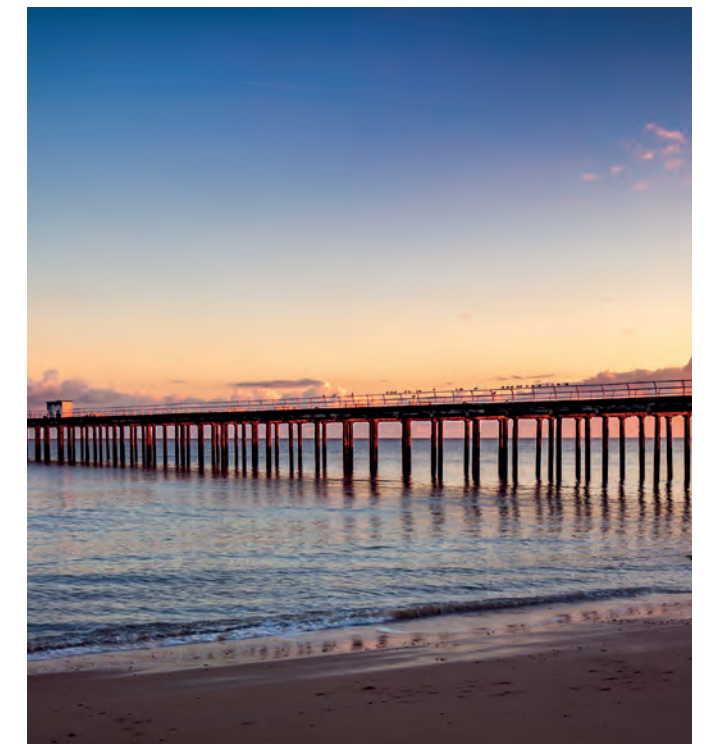
Ipswich and Southern Suffolk are home to two nationally significant ports that underpin the region's economy and its role in global trade. The Port of Ipswich, located 12 miles inland on the River Orwell, handles over 2 million tonnes of cargo annually and is the UK's leading grain export port. It also supports key sectors by importing essential materials such as fertiliser, cement, and aggregates.

Just downstream, the Port of Felixstowe stands as the UK's largest and busiest container port, managing 48% of the nation's containerised trade and connecting with over 200 countries and territories⁵. With deep-water access for the world's largest vessels and Britain's largest intermodal rail terminal, running 54 freight trains daily, it plays a critical role in the UK's logistics infrastructure and economic resilience⁶.

Together, these ports are linked by the A14 trunk road and Orwell Bridge, forming the backbone of Suffolk's logistics sector. They also anchor Freeport East, a nationally designated hub for global trade, innovation, and regeneration, positioning the region as a key driver of inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

However, Felixstowe is more than a port town, it is a thriving seaside destination with a blue flag beach, pier, promenade, spa gardens, and a growing food and leisure offer. Landguard Fort, a historic coastal defence site, adds to the town's tourism appeal. The Town Council provides strong local leadership and is a key partner to the current principal authorities.

Surrounding Ipswich is a network of well-connected towns, each with its own distinct identity and proactive Town and Parish Councils. These towns are vital to the economy and quality of life across Ipswich and Southern Suffolk, not only as residential and commercial hubs, but also as cultural and economic assets.



The area benefits from a rich tourism offer, including the internationally recognised Constable Country and the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which attract visitors from across the UK and beyond. The River Orwell also plays a key role in the local economy, supporting a thriving yachting and maritime sector, from marinas and sailing schools to boat building and marine services, which contributes to both leisure and employment.

Together, these towns and assets form a dynamic ecosystem that supports Suffolk's ambition to be a place where people, businesses, and communities can thrive.



Rail



Ports



Hospitals



Universities



Special Protection Area (SPA)



Natural Beauty / Green Spaces



Technology



Shotley Peninsula



Roads



IN SUMMARY

- Population: 252,552 (2021) rising to 322,807 in 2045
- Area: 185.6 square miles
- 67 parishes/towns
- Seven National Portfolio Organisations
- Royal Charter: Granted by King John (1200AD) within the grounds of Ipswich Minster
- Greenspace/Parks: Tree City of the World status since 2023
- Felixstowe Port: Largest UK container port
- Cultural and Heritage: Ipswich Museum, The Hold, Ipswich Town Centre, Ipswich Waterfront, New Wolsey Theatre, Regent Theatre, Spa Pavilion, and the Corn Exchange
- Hadleigh: Ancient Market Town receiving its market charter in 1252
- Home to Constable Country, an area of outstanding natural beauty immortalised by John Constable
- Infrastructure and Transport: Ipswich Hospital – major acute health provider. Transport links A12/A14 corridor and rail connections. Great Eastern mainline connecting Ipswich, London, Norwich, and Cambridge etc. Ipswich rail interchange – freight hub.

Developing boundaries of Three Councils for Suffolk

The context of Suffolk, with a significantly “under-bounded” county town, means that to develop this proposal we have carried out an in-depth review of the relationships between each parish, village, town, and area. We have not been able to rely fully on existing council boundaries as to do so would disadvantage the functional economic area centred on Ipswich. Ipswich’s current boundary was set in 1835/6 and was reinforced in the 1972 local government review when the boundary was deliberately maintained so as not to encourage the town to expand. However, there has been expansion all around the boundary with this expansion being controlled by other councils. This has meant that Ipswich has become an area where 87% of its homes are in council tax bands A-C⁸, which has little scope for growth but still delivers £5bn GVA to the economy⁷.

The proposed boundaries for three unitary councils redress this by properly reflecting the three functional economic areas in the county – a county which powers, feeds and connects the rest of the country. Financial analysis by KPMG demonstrates that there is an appropriate tax base for each of the three councils. There is also sufficient space for housing and employment growth – not only through delivering existing Local Plans but scope to achieve the higher housing targets (issued by the Government through the revised standard method published on 12 December 2024) and more. Three councils provide the vehicles to deliver the necessary growth in each sector, in support of local, regional, and national objectives.

Each of the three council areas has its own economic and community strengths. Each builds on the commonalities of key industrial sectors and links to wider economic geographies, which do not unfairly advantage or disadvantage communities. This approach enables locality driven focus on future economic growth to strengthen our economy and lead the UK towards a more prosperous future.

This proposal aims to reduce duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy that slows down progress for Suffolk and will provide an opportunity to ensure services and decision making are at the heart of our communities. This can only be truly achieved through our proposed three unitary model as this is the only option that provides appropriate representation of the diverse economies and communities of Suffolk.

The three unitaries will ensure that local agendas are front and centre to drive local growth that aligns with the specific needs of individual economies within that unitary. This model will enable the unitary councils to strengthen the overall local economy, contributing to the UK’s broader growth objectives.

It is also important to note that the three unitary areas proposed reflect other key public sector bodies footprints across the county, with the Policing Command Area and the Community Policing Area being split into West, East and South teams; Suffolk Fire and Rescue split into North, South and West teams; and Health teams covering the North East, West and Ipswich and East. This model has been adopted by other public sector bodies to ensure resources are targeted to support and address local concerns and need, and our three proposed unitaries will dovetail into these models.

Three Councils for Suffolk provides a solid foundation for enhanced public sector delivery

Suffolk’s size and geography present a unique challenge: it can take over two and a half hours to travel by car from one end of the county to the other, and considerably longer by public transport. This distance creates a natural disconnect between communities, with residents in one part of the county often having little connection to, or reliance on, services or employment in other areas.

As a result, many people identify more strongly with their local area than with the county as a whole. This has significant implications for how public services are accessed, delivered, and experienced.

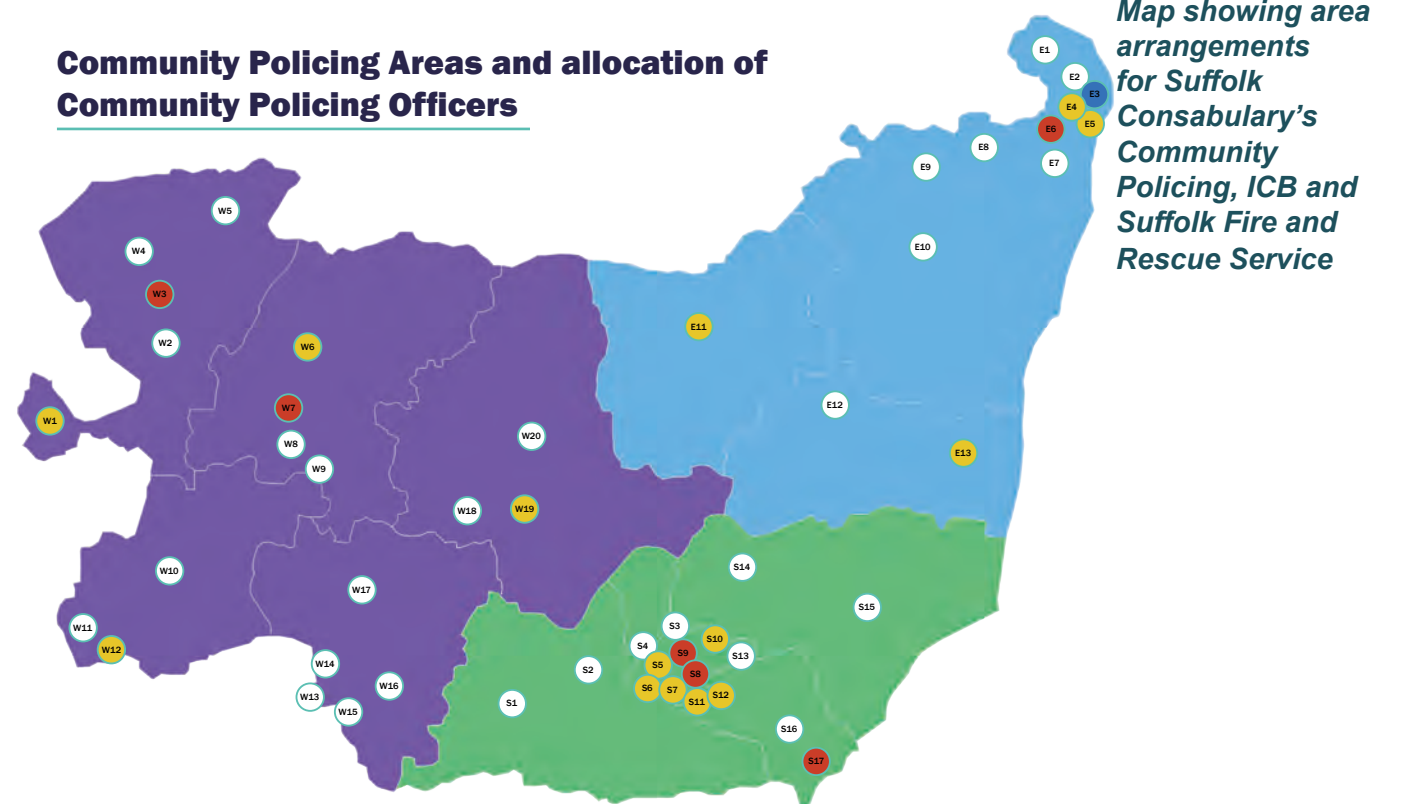
Recognising this, county-wide bodies such as the police, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Suffolk County Council, and the Chamber of Commerce have long operated on area-based footprints and teams. This approach allows services to be tailored more effectively to the needs, identities, and priorities of different parts of the county. It is also considered by these organisations to be the optimal scale for operational delivery.

These area arrangements, typically three across Suffolk, enable improved responsiveness, efficiency, and outcomes, particularly when supported by a sub-layer of integrated neighbourhood delivery. While none of these arrangements exactly match those proposed for the three councils (as they are shaped by operational rather than economic considerations), they are broadly similar. The Government’s devolution framework is now acting as a catalyst to reduce complexity by enabling co-terminus arrangements through partnership working.

Examples of this include Suffolk Constabulary’s Community Policing, the ICB, and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, all of which are organised into three geographic areas:

- East area (based around Halesworth and Lowestoft).
- Ipswich/Southern Area (Ipswich, Felixstowe and Woodbridge).
- West Area (based in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill).

Community Policing Areas and allocation of Community Policing Officers



The ICB currently covers Suffolk and North East Essex, while a separate ICB for Norfolk and Waveney also includes part of North East Suffolk. NHS England has approved a new cluster arrangement that brings these two ICBs under shared leadership and governance. Although they remain legally separate for now, a reorganisation is expected soon.

This change is likely to result in a single ICB for Suffolk and Norfolk, supported by Integrated Health Organisations (IHOs). These IHOs would manage local healthcare budgets and could align with the boundaries of the new unitary councils. Each IHO would be backed by existing Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, which currently focus on adult services but could expand to support people of all ages and families. This would enable our shared ambition to develop the existing Integrated Neighbourhood Teams beyond their current adults focus into a focus on all ages and support to families.

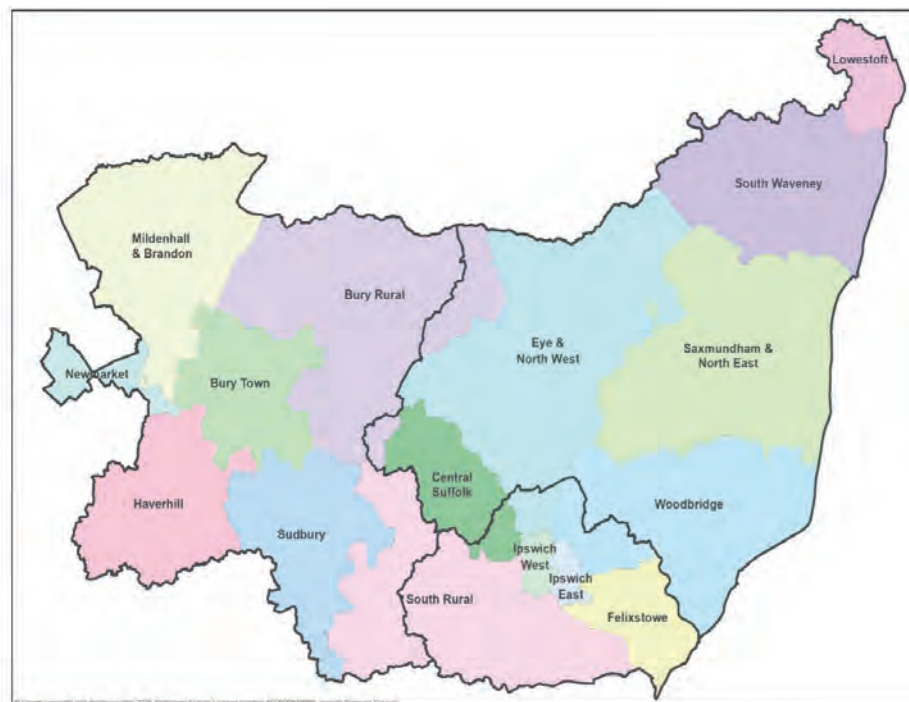
Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (currently part of Suffolk County Council), also breaks service delivery into three areas – north, south and west with 35 fire stations within those three areas.

Similarly, the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust for mental health services has three “localities” for service provision covering East Suffolk, West Suffolk and Norfolk.

Adult and Children’s Services at Suffolk County Council are organised into three geographical areas. This originated in alignment to the three previous clinical commissioning groups covering Suffolk (Ipswich and East, North and West Suffolk) and has continued to be an effective model of organisation. Locality teams include Neighbourhood, Hospital and Flexible Care and Support Teams.

Suffolk has led the way in adopting the national One Public Estate model with councils and public sector partners sharing buildings across the county e.g.:

- Ipswich - Endeavour House (Suffolk County Council, Babergh and Mid-Suffolk District Councils, Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board, Ipswich and East Suffolk Health Alliance, Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust) and Landmark House (Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Police)
- Mildenhall – Mildenhall Hub (a national exemplar project shared by West Suffolk Council, Suffolk County Council and the



Proposed unitary council boundaries and their similarity to existing ICB Integrated Neighbourhood Team areas

- police with multiple education, health, leisure government and voluntary sector partners).
- Bury St Edmunds – West Suffolk House (Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk Council, West Suffolk Health Alliance).
- Lowestoft – Riverside (Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council).

It is clear that there is significant opportunity to build on the current area-based approaches across the public sector. This would deliver refined arrangements which are co-terminus with the proposed council areas bringing economic and community geographies and service delivery geographies together providing a solid foundation for public sector reform.

Council Tax and Business Rate Retention for the three unitary councils

Our analysis shows that the tax base (made up of council tax and business rates) is sufficient in each proposed council area. The Business Rates table below models current business rate income and shows there is sufficient scale to more than cover the retained business rates element, which is the only element local authorities are allowed to keep. It also gives a good base for future growth, which under the current pooling rules would provide some future local benefit, although we recognise that the continuation of this opportunity will depend on the outcome of the Fair Funding Review.

Proposed Unitary Authority Area	Net	Gross
Central and Eastern	£91.4m	£123.7m
Ipswich and Southern	£131.1m	£157.5m
Western	£107.8m	£134.4m
Total (Suffolk)	£330.3m	£415.6m

The Council Tax base table below sets out modelling for the three unitaries taking into account assumed growth to March 2028.

Proposed Unitary Authority Area	Council Tax base (circa)
Central and Eastern	102,700
Ipswich and Southern	86,500
Western	92,900
Total (Suffolk)	282,100

In developing this proposal an analysis of options to harmonise council tax has been carried out to ensure that this is achievable without requiring increases to any resident's Council Tax beyond the current referendum threshold of 4.99% for unitary councils.

Our analysis demonstrates that it would be achievable for each new council to fully harmonise Council Tax in the first year i.e. 2028/29. Our analysis is based on:

Evidence-Based Forecasting: The model uses current Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) assumptions to project starting council tax levels for each existing authority. This ensures the approach is grounded in realistic financial expectations.

Local Adjustments Accounted For: Only the District / Borough element of Council Tax bills needs to be equalised as part of reorganisation as the far larger element charged by Suffolk County Council is already consistent across the county.

In all districts other than Ipswich, council tax is split between the County Council, the police and Crime Commissioner, District Council and a Town or Parish Council. In Ipswich, Council Tax is split between the County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Borough Council.

Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) has provided the services that a Town Council does elsewhere and so the charge that might otherwise be made by a Town Council has been included in the IBC Council Tax element. It is assumed that in 2028 Ipswich will have its own Town Council (covering the current Ipswich Borough area) which will charge residents for the services it provides and that this charge will be in line with the average charge by a Town Council in Suffolk, which by March 2028 would be £200. Therefore, in the model for equalisation of Council Tax in the new unitary councils, it is assumed that the amount which equates to the previous Ipswich Borough Council element will be reduced by an equivalent amount - £200.

This ensures fairness and avoids duplication of charges for residents.

Budget Comparison, Not Budget Resolution: The model compares equalised Council Tax levels against current budgets, but it is not possible to close the projected Suffolk County Council gap of £222 million by April 2028. Council Tax alone would have never been able to achieve this.

Viability and Flexibility: The preferred model is deliverable within existing financial plans.

Referendum Cap Compliance: All proposed annual increases remain below the national referendum cap of 4.99%, ensuring legal compliance and affordability for residents.

The model equates to weekly increases for Band D properties ranging from £0.53 to £1.78, depending on the council area that the property is currently in. Harmonisation within one year also enables each new council to make decisions about future Council Tax increases from 2029/30 onwards without needing to continue to take the need for harmonisation into account.

Three Councils for Suffolk uses sensible geographies to meet housing supply and local needs

One of the government’s core missions under the banner of ‘kickstarting economic growth’, is ‘rebuilding Britain’¹¹. Central to this ambition are two major commitments: delivering 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England this parliament; and to reform the planning system so that it is pro-growth and pro-infrastructure. Revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework and the laying of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill are central to achieving the ambitious housing targets.

Suffolk is exceptionally well placed to help deliver this agenda. Over this Parliament, based upon current Five-Year Housing Land Supply figures, Suffolk is projected to deliver 18,613 new homes. Yet this only scratches the surface. Work is already under way on new local plans across the county, based on the government’s standard method, which could deliver around 76,230 dwellings over the period 2030-45. Suffolk, therefore, offers a significant opportunity to drive forward national housing and growth priorities.

To unlock this potential, Suffolk needs a structure that combines strategic scale with local responsiveness. Three unitary authorities would provide exactly that. Each unitary could focus on the distinct demographic, economic, and housing needs of its communities, ensuring growth is properly supported by the right infrastructure and services. This targeted approach would also allow meaningful engagement with residents, making the case for new development in ways that protect and strengthen local towns, villages, and rural communities.

This approach builds on Suffolk’s proven track record. For example, the Ipswich Strategic Planning Area (ISPA) brings together Babergh, Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk, and Ipswich Borough to plan for housing and economic growth across the county’s most dynamic urban area. ISPA has successfully delivered multiple local plans and significant housing growth precisely because the partner authorities bring deep local knowledge — understanding the geography, infrastructure challenges, and community needs, and working with residents to deliver sustainable development.

The lesson from ISPA is clear: local insight and trusted relationships are essential to delivering housing growth at pace and scale. A single county-wide unitary would risk losing this local responsiveness, diluting the knowledge and connections that make delivery possible. By contrast, three unitary authorities would combine the benefits of scale with the agility and community trust that are vital for success.

Three unitary authorities in Suffolk will enable targeted and responsive housing focus on the respective needs and requirements of each distinct area, as well as targeted engagement with local communities to support them in accepting the case for new development. Having a unitary council focused on the local area will ensure that housing growth can respond to and be driven by the unique demographic and economic needs of each area, putting in place the appropriate infrastructure and access to services that are required and ensure local communities and small villages are not negatively impacted.

Predicting population change in each of the three new councils

Our deep understanding of housing and planning for Suffolk means we are clear about how housing growth will impact on population. This knowledge impacts on our approach to population predictions, based on Census 2021 data, housing completions, local plans and the standard method, rather than standard statistical projections. This decision followed an evaluation which showed that using housing data provided a more accurate reflection of Suffolk’s planned contribution to national housing targets, compared to statistical projections that did not fully account for these plans. Full details of our population predictions are found at Appendix 1 but the table below provides a summary of the calculation for each proposed new council.

The patterns of housing and population growth in the three new councils up to 2045 are significant and in total bring Suffolk’s population to in excess of 1 million people. Three councils which within 20 years of implementation serve populations ranging between 322,807 and 342,255 are perfectly sized to achieve economies of scale while retaining local connections.

Table: Based on planning data from the five borough/district councils distributed against proposed population split for new unitaries

Unitary	Population 2021 (Census 2021 Parish)	Dwellings completed 2021-24	Number of new dwellings to be built over next 5 years (from 5 Year land Supply document) 2024-29	Number of new dwellings to be built under standard methodology (2030-2045 (15 years)) (published March 2025)	Total number of new dwellings 2021-45	Estimated population 2045
Western Suffolk	254,700	4,266	6,990	26,890	38,146	342,255
Ipswich and Southern Suffolk	252,552	2,347	5,006	23,192	30,545	322,807
Central and Eastern Suffolk	253,416	4,037	6,617	26,148	36,802	336,334

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

Our Vision: Three Councils for a Stronger Suffolk

Establishing three unitary councils for Suffolk will deliver high-quality, sustainable public services underpinned by the strongest possible local democratic structures driving better outcomes. **Large enough to deliver, local enough to care.**

This model is designed to reflect the county's diversity, empower communities, and ensure that services are responsive, efficient, and future-ready. Importantly, it will meet the criteria and missions set by the Government with the delivery of local and national priorities at its heart.

The Suffolk Principles for Local Government Reorganisation: 1. Local Leadership with Meaningful Representation:

It is vital that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) establishes design principles for new councils that are tested throughout their development. Early in our LGR work we established our "Suffolk Principles" and have applied these throughout the development of this Case for Change.

1. Local Leadership with Meaningful Representation

- Decisions and services should be delivered at a local, responsive, and manageable level, tailored to the unique needs of each community.
- Residents and businesses must retain access to locally elected representatives who understand their neighbourhoods and advocate for them on the wider political stage.
- Governance should be rooted in local accountability, with decisions made as close to communities as possible.

2. Thriving, Connected Economic Areas

- Councils should reflect and support shared economic geographies, enabling growth in key sectors without disadvantaging any community.

- A localised focus on economic development will help strengthen Suffolk's economy and contribute to national prosperity.

3. Community Identity Shapes Governance

- Council boundaries must be meaningful and recognisable, respecting historical, cultural, and community identities.
- Strong connections between people and place support effective public service reform and civic pride.
- Strategic decisions should be informed by a deep understanding of local needs, enabling tailored approaches across Suffolk's diverse communities.

4. Sustainable and Resilient Structures

- Councils must be fit for the future, with the scale and leadership to deliver services effectively and adapt to change.
- They should be resilient to economic and social shocks, with the capacity to support neighbouring areas when needed.
- A future-focused model will enable innovation, demand reduction, and collaborative public sector reform.

5. Financially Viable and Efficient

- Councils must generate sufficient revenue to be financially sustainable and capable of investing in services.
- The model must deliver efficiencies and economies of scale, ensuring value for

money and long-term viability.

6. Driving Public Sector Reform

- A new structure should enable collaboration and integration across the public sector, including the NHS, to transform service delivery.
- It must support a shift towards prevention, reducing demand for high-cost services such as adult care, homelessness, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- The focus must be on outcomes, tackling inequalities and addressing both rural and urban deprivation.

7. Supporting Devolution and Strategic Leadership

- Councils must have the capacity and capability to support the Norfolk and Suffolk Mayor in delivering strategic priorities.
- Suffolk must have equal and effective representation within the Mayoral Combined Authority to ensure its voice is heard and its interests are advanced.

Delivering Our Vision: A Blueprint for Modern, Responsive Local Government in Suffolk

To realise our vision for three unitaries in Suffolk, we focus on four key enablers that will drive transformation, strengthen local democracy, and deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses.

1. Strengthened Place-Based Leadership

Suffolk has a unique opportunity to combine locally responsive governance with the strategic alignment required within a Mayoral region. This will be achieved by:

- Leveraging the deep local knowledge of communities and assets, including town and Parish Councils.

- Retaining and building on strong local relationships that already exist.
- Enabling agile, place-based policy responses that reflect the distinct needs and priorities of each area.
- Keeping leadership close to the people it serves, while aligning with broader regional ambitions.

2. Transformed Public Service Delivery

LGR must be a catalyst for public sector transformation, not just structural change.

We will:

- Deliver services at the right scale—close enough to communities to be responsive, but large enough to be efficient.
- Invest in preventative, relational, and asset-based approaches that are proven to deliver better outcomes at lower cost.
- Build a foundation for sustainable, effective, and modern public services that meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

3. Smarter Collaboration

A three unitary model enables targeted collaboration where it adds the most value—such as in emergency planning, safeguarding, and waste disposal—while preserving local focus and accountability.

Suffolk has a strong track record of partnership working. Structures like Suffolk Public Sector Leaders, which bring together local government, health, and community safety agencies, will continue to provide strategic and system leadership. Collaboration will enhance, not replace, local accountability.

4. A Culture of Continuous Improvement

Each new council will begin its journey prioritising service continuity from day one. But our ambition goes much further.

We are committed to a culture of continuous improvement, with a clear focus on:

- System redesign that supports long-term reform and sustainability.
- Accelerated progress towards prevention and innovation.
- Embedding a mindset of learning, adaptation, and excellence across new councils.

This vision and the guiding principles have shaped the development of our proposal alongside:

- Working with KPMG, Mutual Ventures, PeopleToo and the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) to explore models of delivery for complex statutory services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- Working with colleagues at Suffolk County Council to understand the baseline position of their current service provision and to share the baseline position on district and borough services.
- Working with KPMG on a detailed financial model to test the disaggregation and implementation costs of new unitaries.
- Analysing resident feedback - what the most important things to them are in respect of Local Government Reorganisation.
- Researching the performance and approach of other unitary councils.
- Bringing district and borough colleagues together in workstreams to explore design and reform of public services.
- Engaging with the District Councils Network and Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) on policy matters relating to LGR.
- Engaging with residents, businesses, partners, the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector (VCSFE) and Town and Parish Councils

Our proposal for three unitary councils is grounded in a deep understanding of Suffolk's diversity, shaped by what residents have told us matters most, and underpinned by robust financial analysis and a clear vision for the future of local government.

This is not just a structural change—it is a strategic, evidence-led solution designed to deliver better outcomes for Suffolk's people,

strengthen local democracy, and support the local, regional, and national economy. It reflects the realities of our communities and the opportunities ahead, offering a model of governance that is responsive, resilient, and ready for the future.

Determining the right size of councils for a successful Suffolk

In addition to government criteria and guidance the District and Borough Councils worked together to develop Suffolk Principles for Local Government Reorganisation. These have been reinforced in their importance through engagement with local people.

These Suffolk Principles are set out above but are summarised as:

Local Leadership with Meaningful Representation

1. Thriving, Connected Economic Areas.
2. Community Identity Shapes Governance.
3. Sustainable and Resilient Structures.
4. Financially Viable and Efficient.
5. Driving Public Sector Reform.
6. Supporting Devolution and Strategic Leadership.

It is clear that these principles and the government's criteria are best met by a multi-unitary approach in Suffolk. A multi-unitary approach cannot be achieved while also achieving councils at the guided level of 500,000. An analysis was completed with KPMG of multi-unitary options:

- **Option A** is a single unitary council which we consider to be too big to drive the improvement in services that Suffolk requires, including in key statutory services such as Adults and Children's
- **Option B** is two unitary councils with Ipswich and East Suffolk being joined into one, and Babergh, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk being combined into a second unitary council. This proposal created imbalanced unitary councils and did not recognise all of Ipswich's economic area
- **Option C** is two unitary councils with Ipswich's footprint expanded and the rest of the county forming a second unitary. This

proposal created an imbalance in unitary sizes and did not meet the principles agreed by District and Borough councils. While it worked for Ipswich it did not work for the rest of Suffolk.

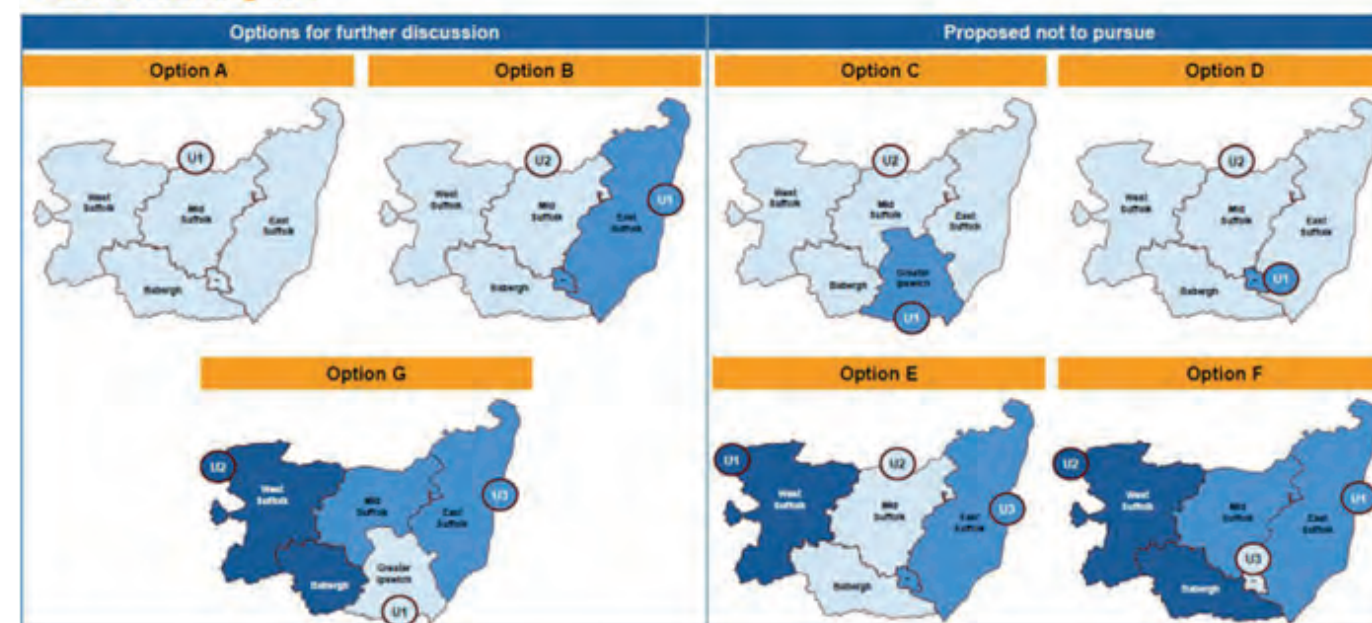
- **Option D** is two unitary councils with Ipswich remaining on the footprint set in 1835/6. This created one unitary of c.500,000 population with Ipswich being too small to be viable and did not address the historic boundary of Ipswich nor its economic area.
- **Option E** is three unitary councils with Ipswich and East Suffolk merged, Babergh and Mid Suffolk merged and West Suffolk remaining on its existing footprint. This created three different sized unitary councils, did not recognise the whole of Ipswich's economic area and did not meet the Suffolk Principles.
- **Option F** is three unitary councils with Ipswich on its existing footprint, too small to be viable, and not recognising Ipswich's economic area; East Suffolk and Mid Suffolk merging and West Suffolk merging with Babergh. This imbalance did not meet either government criteria or the Suffolk Principles. The Shotley Peninsula in particular did not "fit" with West Suffolk.
- **Option G** is the drawing of new boundaries for three new unitary councils applying the Suffolk Principles and meeting the government's criteria. At this time the boundaries shown were conceptual.

Options A, B and G were progressed into more detailed appraisals with Option G as the preferred option to achieve the Suffolk Principles and Options A and B used as "control" options throughout. An assessment of why Options A and B are wrong for Suffolk can be found in Appendix 2.

We recognise that in order to create three councils with new boundaries, we need to first propose the formation of three new councils using existing council boundaries and then ask the Secretary of State to use their powers to modify the boundaries. We have set out an Unmodified Proposal in a separate document which also requests the necessary modifications. The required modifications are necessary for the primary reasons of aligning boundaries to communities and economies and the financial sustainability of new councils.

The proposed three councils with modified boundaries have starting populations of c.250,000 – in excess of the current average population served by a unitary councils in England (240,000). By 2045, when Suffolk is expected to have more than 1 million residents, it is estimated that the three unitaries will each serve populations of between 322,000 and 342,000. The total budget for local government services in Suffolk in 2028 is forecast to be c£1 billion with each of the three unitaries controlling £300-400 million.

Practical long list



Three Councils for Suffolk deliver sustainable efficiency

Three unitaries in Suffolk provide the right balance between efficiency and scale, and local delivery and responsiveness. When combined with a Mayoral Strategic Authority this model provides the most sensible footprint for successful public service reform and creates a local government fit for the future. It provides the strongest model for making the best use of public resources to deliver policy by achieving an appropriate mix of cost, quality, and sustainability. It enables Suffolk to achieve Best Value by creating appropriate economies of scale, efficient service and programme delivery, effective governance and services, and ensuring equity for Suffolk's diverse communities.

The area covered by the new Norfolk and Suffolk Mayor totals 9,169km². This is the largest geographic area covered by a single Mayor. While the Mayor will set the strategic direction for Norfolk and Suffolk, and determine priorities for investment etc., the Strategic Authority is not designed to be a delivery body. To successfully deliver its objectives and priorities it will need capable and resilient unitary councils across the two counties. These unitary councils should have a deep connection to their local communities, and the capacity to ensure the required growth is delivered and delivered well. Such capacity reduces delivery risk and risk of cost overruns, through each council's governance framework. It means that projects in different parts of Suffolk can be delivered by different councils without competing with each other for specialist expertise or leadership.

New councils will continue to work within a "Suffolk system" enabling collaboration and resilience where it matters. The success of our longstanding approach to system working is best exemplified through our work (starting in 2021) to strengthen the county's response to gangs, county lines, and criminal exploitation. Acting on behalf of the wider Suffolk system, the Safer Stronger Communities Board successfully secured £1.35 million in funding to launch a three-year Suffolk Criminal Exploitation Programme. This initiative was built around seven core pillars: leadership, prevention and education, intervention, innovation, safeguarding, community response, and enforcement.

In its first two years, the programme delivered tangible impact. The One Stop Cop initiative reached over 12,000 pupils across Suffolk, raising awareness of criminal exploitation. Dedicated hubs provided more than 875 outreach sessions, engaging with 6,500 young people. Enforcement efforts led to over 500 arrests linked to serious organised crime, the closure of 20 county lines, and the seizure of £1.8 million in drugs and weapons. Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation Panels were established in West, South, and East Suffolk, supporting 200 young people identified as being at risk.

Building on this momentum, further funding was secured in September 2023, to extend the programme for another three years. This renewed investment enables partners across Suffolk to continue evolving their response to this complex and ever-changing challenge—deepening collaboration, enhancing community resilience, and protecting vulnerable individuals from exploitation.

The three new unitaries are at a scale that can deliver resilient and sustainable public services but are local enough to really know the populations they serve and be accountable to them. This will enable them to understand and respond to the root causes of demand for public services. There will be the capacity and expertise to tackle challenges and respond to communities. Criterion 3 sets this out in more detail.

Key to achieving value for money is the "rightsizing" of each council's workforce. Each of the three councils is expected to have its own team of statutory and other senior officers charged with overseeing the leadership and delivery of high-quality council functions, including those which contribute to the delivery of growth and the provision of statutory services such as Children's Services. These senior managers will provide the necessary capacity and expertise to drive delivery and value for money across Suffolk, and to support each other across boundaries when needed, potentially reducing reliance on expensive interims to cover vacancies and long-term absences. They will have a deep understanding of the communities within their council area and work with councillors to ensure delivery of high-quality, cost-effective services that meet communities' needs.



Strong political leadership and engagement will be achieved through three councils. Political leaders will be strongly connected to the areas they are responsible for and highly engaged with their communities, bringing a rich tapestry of local knowledge to decision making and the reshaping of public services to meet the diverse needs of Suffolk's economies and communities.

Three councils will enable a move to a relational public service model where services are designed around human relationships, prioritising trust, empathy, and long-term outcomes. Such services are:

- Person centred - tailored to individual needs, not standardised processes.
- Community rooted - based on local knowledge, networks and collaboration.
- Outcome focused - measuring success on long-term wellbeing and resilience of individuals and communities.
- Trust building - focused on sustained relationships between residents and professionals.

A relational approach to public service delivery leads to better outcomes, greater cost effectiveness through reduced long-term demand,

and higher levels of public satisfaction resulting from increased trust in public services. Three councils would have the capacity and expertise to shift to this approach as they will have a deep connection to their communities, and the ability to move beyond transactional delivery to person-centred and place-based models, working in partnership to develop differentiated approaches and achieve value for money.

The proposed unitaries will be the right size to focus on and deliver prevention and public service reform tailored around the actual and future needs of communities, as well as to deliver additional social value through procurements supporting environmental measures and apprenticeships, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and local spend through procurement strategies tailored to each unitary area.

Three Councils will be best placed to tackle the environmental challenges associated with climate change. They will allow each area to focus on specific local challenges such as water scarcity, biodiversity loss or coastal erosion, whilst providing greater resilience to work together collaboratively within Suffolk and beyond on the wider challenges faced.

Three Councils for Suffolk achieves financial resilience

With rising demand for public services and increasing national pressure on funding, the current two-tier model of local government is no longer financially sustainable. LGR presents a critical opportunity to rethink how services are funded and delivered, both now and in the future.

Savings are becoming increasingly difficult to achieve while maintaining service quality, as demand continues to drive up delivery costs. A move to a three unitary model offers a chance to streamline governance, consolidate functions, and unlock efficiencies. While this transition requires upfront investment and may not realise the maximum short-term savings of other options, it is essential to evaluate whether the long-term benefits and preventative investment outweigh the costs.

Financial modelling for the proposed three unitary model in Suffolk demonstrates financial sustainability and value for money, with a defined implementation cost profile and a payback period of under 4.5 years. Overall, this positions the three unitary model to withstand financial shocks and supports investment in services that lay the foundation for future public service reform and financial sustainability across the public sector system.

Three councils for Suffolk can withstand financial shocks

Our financial analysis (developed in partnership with KPMG) shows that the three unitary model will generate annual savings after 5 years of £34 million, equivalent to 3.5% of the total net budget across Suffolk's current County and District Councils. These savings result from integrating our services, rationalising our contracts, ICT systems and estates, and designing councils that more efficiently meet the needs and reflect the strengths of our local areas.

We will also allow an annual investment of £20 million, from these savings, to invest in the disaggregation of county services, primarily related to adult and children's social care to bring service delivery to the frontline. Despite this investment, the financial model still delivers a net annual benefit of £14 million which demonstrates that the financial benefits of LGR outweigh the annual disaggregation investment associated with a three unitary model.



Value for money and efficiency

Although the exact savings will depend on the level of ambition and decisions made by the three unitaries once formed, our financial modelling indicates that transitioning to Three Councils for Suffolk has the potential to deliver substantial savings whilst maintaining good quality, local services that our residents and communities deserve and in many cases rely upon.

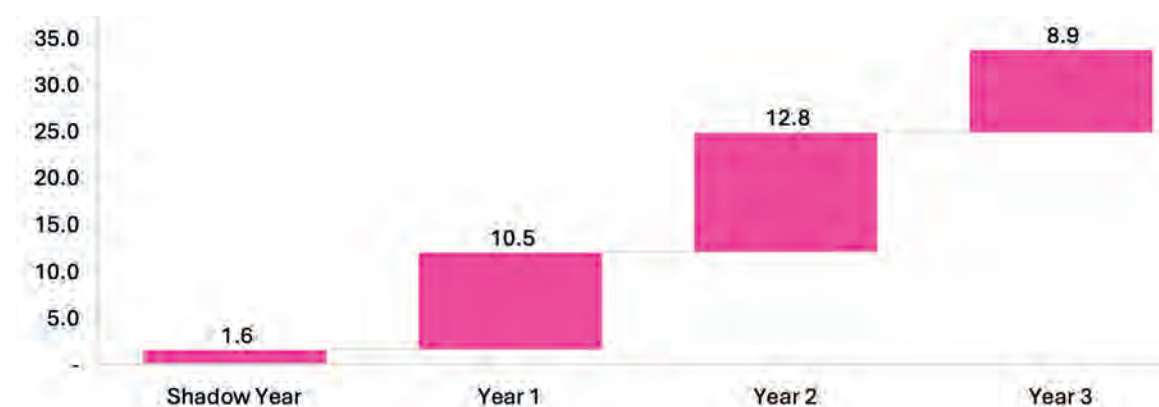
Specifically, this approach to council reorganisation is projected to deliver annual savings of £34 million following the initial implementation phase, primarily through the consolidation of leadership, corporate services, procurement, IT systems, and customer engagement functions, as outlined below.

Mid case savings scenarios

	Mid (£ 'm)
Optimising Leadership	2.0
Right-Sizing the Organisation	7.4
Consolidating Corporate Services	6.7
Service Contract Consolidation	3.0
Procurement and 3rd Party Spend	3.0
Proportionate Democratic Services	2.7
Improved Digital and IT Systems	0.7
Asset and Property Optimisation	2.0
Customer Engagement	2.0
Consolidating Fleets and Optimising Routes	1.0
Further Service Transformation	3.0
Total	34

The waterfall chart below illustrates the projected financial savings from implementing the three unitary model for LGR in Suffolk. It shows a phased increase in savings, beginning with £1.6 million during the Shadow Year, likely reflecting early efficiencies followed by significant annual gains of £10.5 million in Year 1 and peaking at £12.8 million in Year 2. By Year 3, savings stabilise at £8.9 million, resulting in annual cumulative saving by year 5 of £34 million. This progression highlights a strong return on investment and supports the model's financial viability over a short payback period.

Annual Savings Build-up (£'million)



Reinvesting in demand management strategies

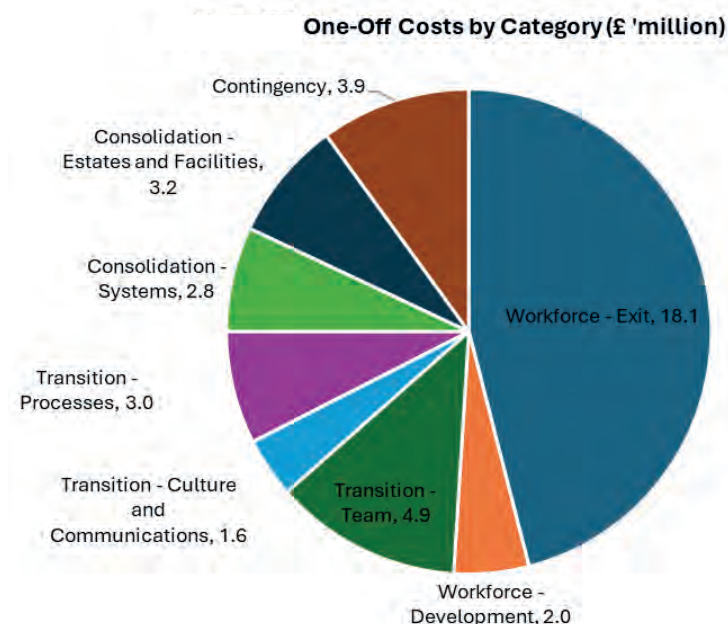
It is essential that efficiencies generated through consolidations, such as those mentioned above, are not viewed solely as fiscal savings but as a means to reinvest in managing rising demand and to support the wider public system challenges. Demographic shifts, increasing complexity of needs and public expectations for responsive services continue to put pressure on local systems in Suffolk, as well as increasing the cost-of-service delivery.

Reinvestment of efficiencies into demand management strategies and a relational public services model will help to build long-term sustainability, improve outcomes for residents and ensure the benefits of LGR are not eroded by escalating service pressures.

Implementation cost

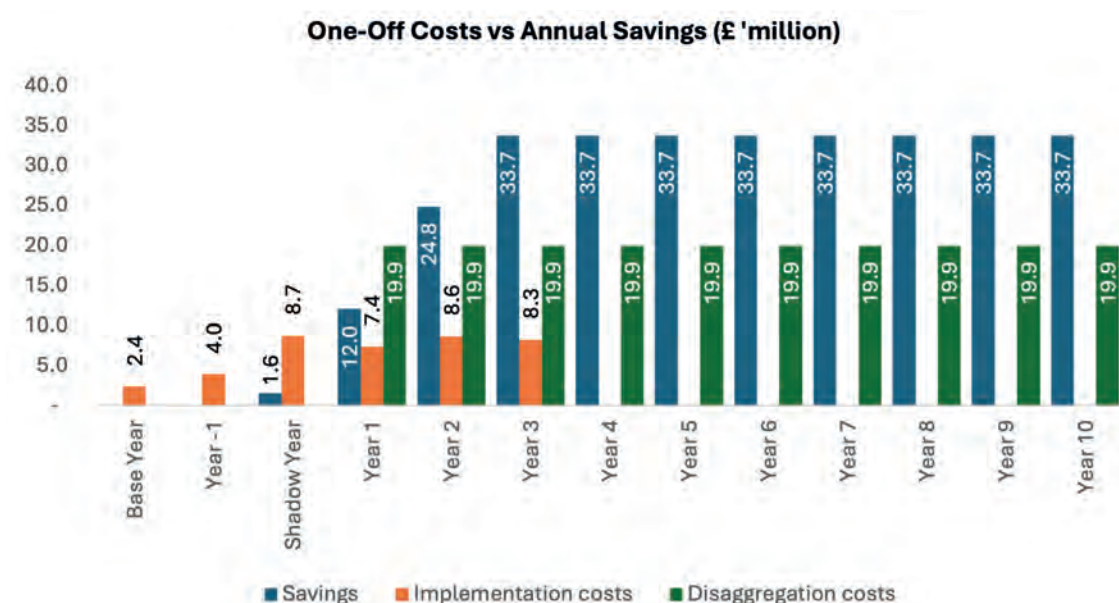
Implementation costs reflect the estimated investment required to receive the benefit of the potential savings. The transition to three unitaries would require a total one-off investment of £39 million.

The total one-off implementation cost for the three unitary model can be broken down into the following categories. These costs are benchmarked against previous LGR programmes and include uplifts for additional governance and IT requirements due to the three unitary structure.



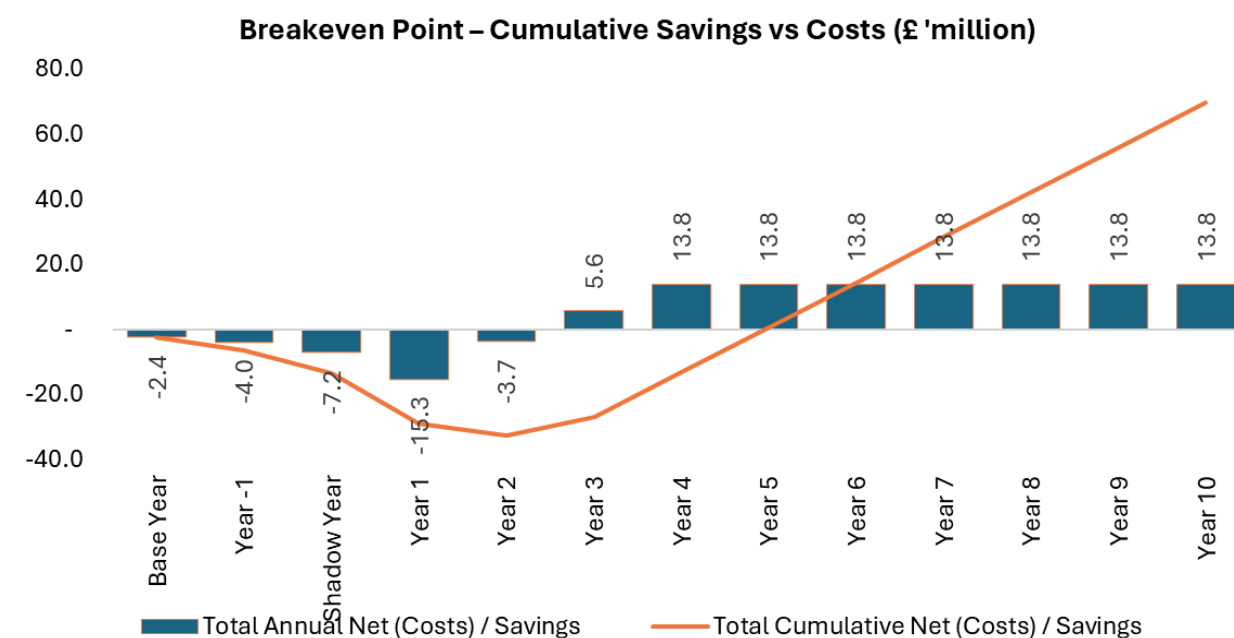
Investment in the disaggregation of county services

We will invest £20 million of the expected savings back into local services every year, particularly into adult social care, children's services, highways and services that support the unique places of Suffolk. LGR must set the right foundations for Suffolk to be successful in the future in delivering sustainable good quality services, so we will invest in delivery capacity, leadership, modern technology, and in continuous improvement.



Payback period

The three unitary model achieves a payback period of less than 4.5 years, meaning the upfront investment will be recovered through savings within five financial cycles. With this payback period, the upfront investment is quickly recovered which frees up recurring savings to support the cost of delivering frontline services and future transformation.



Financial conclusion

The proposed three unitary model for Suffolk presents a financially sustainable and operationally efficient solution to the challenges facing local government in Suffolk. With a payback period of under 4.5 years, it offers a powerful value for money case under Government Criteria 2 and aligns with national expectations for resilient and efficient public service delivery.

Further work will be required as part of the implementation of new unitary councils to address the costs of disaggregating services currently provided by Suffolk County Council and aggregating services currently provided by district and borough councils. This includes allocating debt profiles, assets, reserves, cash, liabilities, dealing with Housing Revenue Accounts, and Wholly Owned Companies.

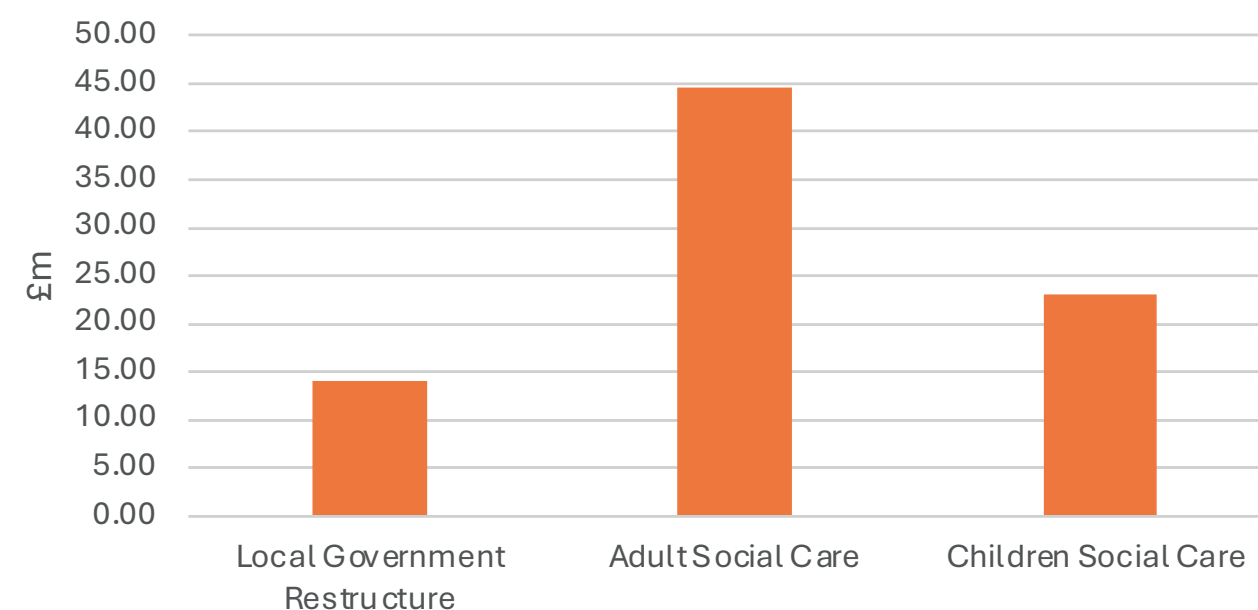
Specifically, we recognise the challenge that all councils will face in terms of the pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant and high needs funding, currently held at County Council level. The Local Government Association (LGA) / County Councils Network (CCN) report, “Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England” found that, despite bespoke financial support for some councils via the Department for Education’s ‘safety valve’ programme cumulative deficits are projected to rise to £5 billion by 2026. The Public Accounts Committee concluded that “local authorities bear an unsustainable financial burden.” This is a national issue where reform is required.

Beyond core savings of £14 million (net) annually, the model forms a strong foundation for long-term financial and service resilience. The creation of three unitaries enables focused local leadership, supports economic growth, and is underpinned by community-centred service delivery. Crucially, it enhances the ability to invest in prevention and early intervention, while establishing stronger collaboration with partners such as the NHS, police, charities, and community groups, ensuring better outcomes for the people of Suffolk and supporting the broader public sector reform agenda.

The review of current Adult Social Care and Children’s services performance across Suffolk, by independent advisors SCIE (Social Care Institute of Excellence) and Peopletoo, has identified further potential future savings opportunities in addition to the annual core savings of £14 million. The review identified a range of Adult Social Care and Children’s Services that are costing more than or performing worse than the “nearest statistical neighbour average” for councils of the size being proposed. The detailed findings are discussed later, in Criterion 3 – high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

Bringing service cost and performance in line with the nearest neighbour average, through more localised services, has been identified as a key opportunity that could save £67.5 million annually. It would be for the new councils to decide whether and how to reinvest this saving into services. However, at headline level the total savings opportunity between the core savings of £14m and the additional £67.5m brings the total of available savings to £81.5m per year from year 6 while achieving average cost and performance in important areas of Adult and Children’s Service and having a positive impact on vulnerable people.

Potential Overall Savings Opportunity £81.5m p.a. from year 6



Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens

THREE COUNCILS FOR SUFFOLK ENABLES EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE LOCAL SERVICES

Unitary local government enables truly joined up service delivery by ensuring that linked services are provided by one organisation. There are recognised benefits to housing and adult care being in the same council rather than split between tiers of councils for example, and the same is true of regulatory services designed to protect the public such as trading standards and environmental health. Joined up service delivery within unitary councils reduces risks of vulnerable people such as care leavers falling between the cracks.

The added benefit of Three Councils for Suffolk is that these joined up services are focused on the needs of specific communities and localities and founded on a deep understanding of them. For

example, improving the life chances of a teenager in an urban area such as Lowestoft is different to improving the life chances of a teenager in a rural area such as Bacton, with little local Further Education provision, poor public transport and limited accessible job opportunities. In addition, by focusing on local areas, three councils will ensure that there is appropriate economic growth to support local communities through provision of housing and jobs.

Suffolk's residents identify strongly with their local area, from rural villages and market towns to coastal communities and urban centres. Three councils in Suffolk keeps decision-making and accountability close to our populations, enabling services to be tailored to specific community priorities and challenges. These varying needs means that localised policies rather than one size fits all approach is vital in delivering high quality, sustainable, efficient, and effective services.

Local, integrated services can significantly benefit our communities by enabling a more responsive, efficient and community-focused service delivery model. Localism empowers the three councils to tailor services to local needs, fostering greater accountability and public trust, reducing demand

and cost over time, ensuring that quality of life is improved across each area.

Localised and improved Statutory Services

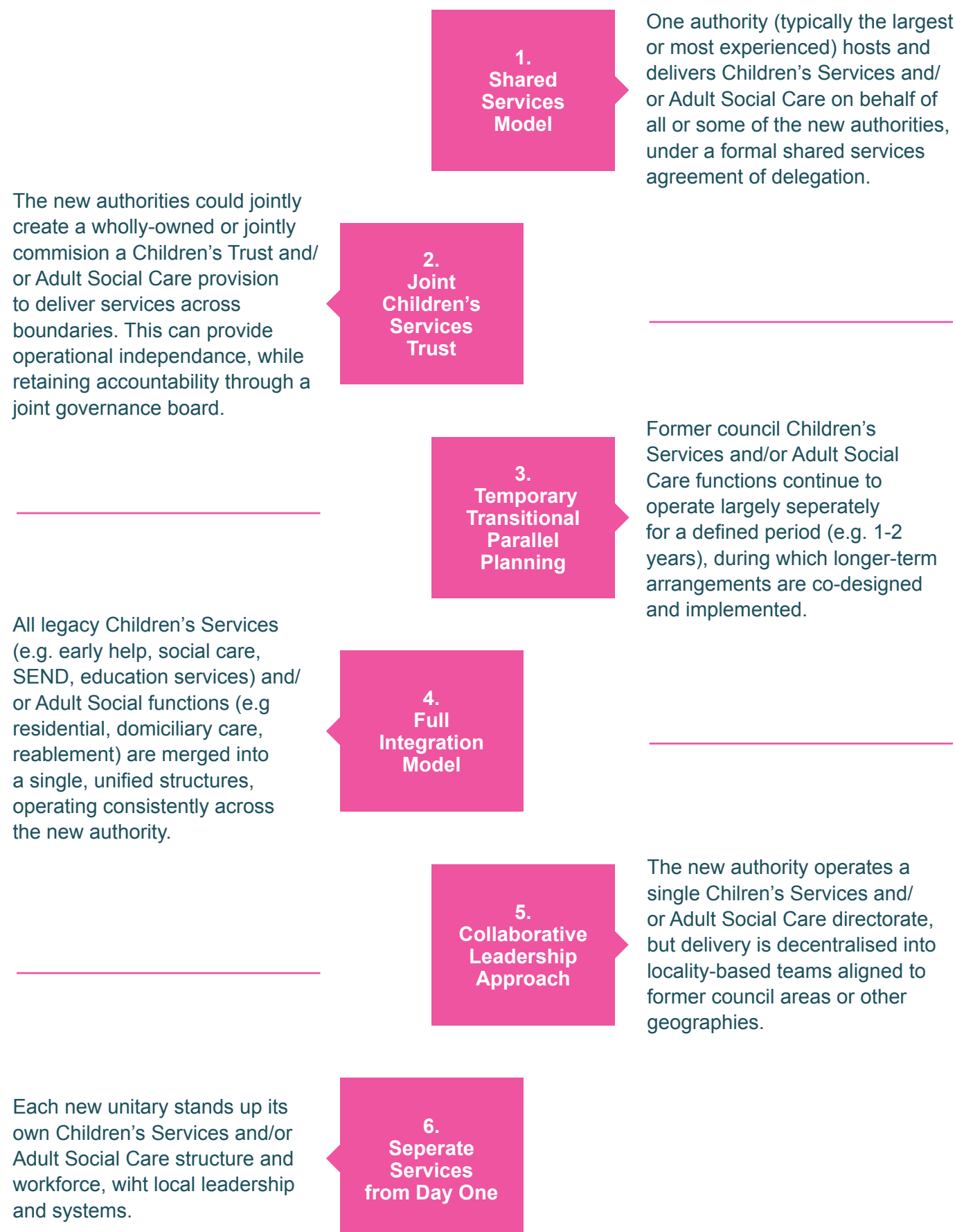
Three Councils for Suffolk means three sets of dedicated statutory services focused on distinct areas of the county. These areas vary significantly as do the needs of the communities within them. Each council would have its own statutory directors who would be expected to work collaboratively with their counterparts in the other councils and to provide greater resilience to the Suffolk System, while holding a deep understanding of the needs of the communities they serve. The clear investment in these statutory posts is accounted for within our financial appraisal but it should also be recognised that existing structures have senior posts dedicated to areas of the county and so there is opportunity to streamline management positions into three effective structures which bring statutory posts closer to the people they provide services for.

Three Councils for Suffolk has the potential to strengthen the leadership and workforce arrangements of statutory services. The marrying of cultures and values and a focus on a smaller geographic areas is likely to motivate and invigorate the workforce, as well as reduce costly travel time. Three councils will also preserve much needed capacity in local government delivery, provide resilience across the system and enable learning between organisations. The continuation of strong collaboration across the Suffolk System is a key feature of the three-council approach. Current accountabilities of, for example, Directors of Adults and Children's Services for large populations present a significant challenge and burden; and the opportunity to bring senior leaders closer to frontline practitioners and service users is something which can reduce risk for individuals and create greater support networks between professionals.

In reaching these conclusions we have worked with Mutual Ventures to assess a range of different models for service delivery. These have been heavily focused on Adults and Children's Services as the highest risk and costly unitary council functions but are equally valid for other statutory services.



DELIVERY MODEL OPTIONS



The options appraisal concluded that "Separate Services from Day One" best met the needs of Suffolk but that there would be some functions such as Safeguarding which should be delivered through a partnership approach with a lead authority model. This approach balances the need to ensure that each council can develop its statutory services in accordance with the needs of its communities while reducing risk and balancing the resourcing requirements from partners such as health and the police.

Government has been clear in Ministerial correspondence regarding 'Considerations for Partnership Working in social care for new unitary authorities'. Partnership working is central to our approach and we see building on existing and creating new partnerships with the NHS as a key opportunity in a three council model. We see synergy between the strategic (Mayoral and Integrated Care Board); 'Place' (Unitary and Health Alliances, Providers and, potential, integrated care organisations); and 'Neighbourhoods' (Neighbourhoods and Communities and Integrated Neighbourhood Delivery Teams). Working together with the NHS at every level of geography provides a genuine opportunity for new models of delivery and addressing some of the most intractable outcomes in our society in terms of keeping people healthy, safe, independent and productive for longer.

There are short term risks to the disaggregation of these statutory services, but these risks can be managed and mitigated by strong planning and values driven priorities for service delivery. All change carries risk, especially change taking place in services which support vulnerable people. As such the first priority within the change process is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those vulnerable people. The option of status quo presents its own risks – risks of not innovating and not reducing demand because the focus remains solely on responding to current demand and the cost of it.

Adult Social Care (ASC) Services

We have thoroughly reviewed the current performance of ASC services across Suffolk working closely with independent advisors SCIE (Social Care Institute of Excellence) and Peopletoo.

Whilst current service performance was rated "good" by CQC. It is also clear that there are a range of service challenges that severely threaten the long-term future sustainability of ASC services in Suffolk. The response to these challenges requires a bold transformation of ASC services and new delivery models.

A three-council solution provides the best platform to deliver a robust response to these challenges and will help to ensure the delivery of better outcomes for individuals in receipt of Care and Support. It will also enable more responsive and efficient services.

In particular, the three unitary model provides a better service delivery platform to:

- Manage future demand by driving locally driven preventative approaches across all ASC service activities and reducing long-term care costs.
- Fully embed place-based and local community delivery models (working closely with the voluntary sector and the NHS) thereby improving our ability to tailor services to local needs and local capacity and in turn deliver a better, more sustainable workforce model.
- Further develop and enhance the strategic commissioning model and approach to market management to deliver more efficient and effective, local care and support services.

All of these changes will deliver better service quality and better outcomes for residents and drive savings and efficiency gains for ASC services across Suffolk of £44.5m per year (in addition to the LGR savings identified in Criterion 2).

Service Vision and Strategy

Our vision for Adult Social Care is strongly aligned with the government's long-term vision.

We aim to transform ASC so that it delivers better person centred, integrated and community-based outcomes.

We believe that this requires ASC operating models and ways of working that are close to communities and who provide services that are tailored to people's needs.

These models need to be built around strong community engagement, local relationships and partnership working models that are integrated, agile and preventative in the way they work.

Our proposed model for ASC delivery is entirely consistent with the three shifts desired in the Government's Fit for the future -10 Year Health Plan for England (2025).

These features are essentially to enable the effective management of demand and the main drivers of cost that are key to keeping ASC services sustainable.

Key ASC Service Challenges in Suffolk

There are three main challenges facing the delivery of strong, integrated ASC services across Suffolk outlined below.

The three unitary council configuration is critical to systematically addressing these challenges.

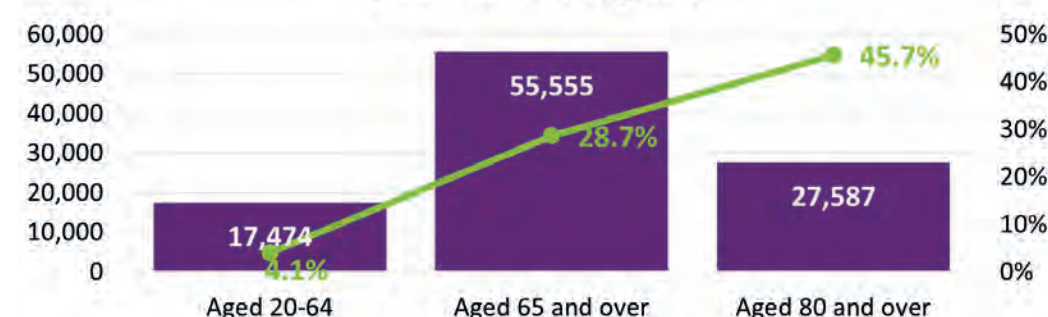
► Challenge 1 - Manging demand and cost for ASC in Suffolk - reducing long-term care costs and embedding a preventative model

ASC services across England are facing huge pressure with demand expected to rise considerably over the next 15 years. This is largely due to expected population increases (particularly in older adults), growth complexity of care need in working age adults, transitions and increases in the costs of care.

This trend is already causing budgetary challenges for the ASC services in Suffolk, and this will continue at pace if not fully addressed.

ONS data shows the projected population by age group up to 2040. This increase is also reflected in other data sources such as Poppi and Pansi 2025.

Projected population growth by age group 2040
(baseline 2025 figures)



Source: ONS national population projections: 2022-based

Note: ONS population projections are published by five-year age groups and we have used 20+ population as best fit for those aged 18-64



Recent analysis by Newton Europe also predicts that there will be a very significant increase in spend with an additional cost pressure at £250m (72%) across Suffolk by 2040 (against base demand in 2025). In this context, it is vital that there is a very clear strategy and plan to address this stark challenge.

We envisage all three councils working with local communities, NHS bodies and the voluntary sector in each area to tackle this challenge through joint working and multi-disciplinary delivery models.

Analysis of the performance of the existing system (using LG Inform analysis from 2023/24) suggests that current ASC spend in Suffolk is above the average of its nearest statistical neighbours and that this appears to be driven by comparatively high long-term care costs.

The analysis also shows that the long-term care costs are rising significantly year on year (at 20%) in Suffolk.

Equally, short-term care costs, the use of signposting, universal services and direct payments look comparatively under-utilised in Suffolk compared to its nearest neighbours.

This strongly suggests there is a significant opportunity to improve the triage of incoming demand more effectively, to drive a more

preventative approach and encourage greater choice and control for residents.

A three unitary model would provide a stronger local knowledge base that enables more effective triage, helping direct people to short-term or community-based solutions early, rather than defaulting to long-term care packages. This is vital for controlling demand and improving independence.

These locally based multi-disciplinary triage arrangements would be embedded in each unitary authority to ensure easy and timely access to ASC services which is fundamental for delivering effective early interventions and managing rising demand.

Many people interact with ASC at the point where care and support needs begin to emerge making it crucial that services offer clear, responsive pathways, high-quality advice and quick access to assessments.

It is expected that the new councils would drive a greater emphasis on a "home first" model—focused on supporting people to remain at home for longer and reducing the reliance on Residential and Nursing Care (which is again vital to maintaining independence and optimising care and support costs).

This approach is more effectively embedded in place-based systems where local health, housing, social care, and voluntary sector services can coordinate responses more quickly to meet local needs. Working with local partners the new councils would drive preventative interventions based upon risk stratification and local population health approaches to address local inequalities and promote earlier interventions. These approaches have been shown to be very effective at delaying, reducing, and avoiding demand in other places with high demand such as North East Essex, Sheffield, and Leeds.

The new councils would also look to drive more choice and control for residents over the ways they receive their care by looking to drive up the use of direct payments.

Place-based care systems, by reducing bureaucratic barriers and building trust at a local level, are well positioned to achieve this goal.

The three unitary model will enhance the ability to act quickly and engage directly with residents and make it more likely to be effective in supporting personal budgets, self-directed care and user-led planning.

This approach also supports unpaid carers—whose contributions are critical to the sustainability of ASC. In place-based systems, carers are more likely to receive meaningful support and to be involved in the co-production of services. Local proximity also facilitates better coordination of training, wellbeing support, and peer networks.

► Challenge 2 - Community, partnership working and delivery models

Whilst partnership working models across Suffolk are already well developed there is an opportunity to improve joint working arrangements and consistency with the NHS and voluntary sectors and achieve a clearer and more consistent place-based working model.

There is a great opportunity to improve place-based partnership working through the introduction of a more integrated, holistic and multi-disciplinary model enabled by joint, co-located teams across Suffolk. This model is vital to managing demand and increasing the focus on prevention outlined above.

There is also an opportunity to expand partnership working with housing, benefits and welfare services to deliver a more holistic support model to individuals and local communities which will be a key dividend of LGR.

We expect to organise ASC delivery around localities with small, local populations and based upon locally recognised communities. This could align with local health neighbourhood models, primary care networks or other locality structures recognised by other public sector partners.

Most public service partners in Suffolk work on similar place-based models as the configuration that we are promoting through the three unitary council model. With realignment of geographies and dedicated teams, localised approaches and interventions would manage demand and to meet the needs of local people and places.

Social Care Institute for Excellence's (SCIE) analysis of the outcomes of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Local Authority Assessment reports also suggests that place based local authorities with strong community networks can be very effective, at:

- Assessing people's needs.
- Community and partnership working.
- Safeguarding.
- Learning and innovation.

This would be much harder to achieve in a larger, more remote unitary council configuration where such arrangements could only be achieved with additional layers of management.

Developing the care workforce is also critical to future-proofing services. The current ASC workforce is under significant pressure in Suffolk (as it is in many parts of the country) with recent data suggesting there are waiting lists for assessments and significant backlogs in care package annual reviews. This pressure is set to increase significantly over the next 15 years as demand rises for ASC services.

Workforce productivity needs to improve and there needs to be a clear focus on enhancing skills, confidence, and overall capacity. There is great potential to improve workforce productivity by modernising and standardising working practices and further embedding strength-based practice models.

SCIE analysis supports this view and demonstrates that across local government, the NHS and other sectors that there are often opportunities to improve productivity levels by up to 30% by using data more effectively and utilising AI and digital tools.

Local Government Reorganisation and the introduction of three unitary councils will enable a significant service innovation agenda in ASC including:

- Enhancing resident experience through digital communications, notifying them of the next steps in their care pathways and seeking feedback on their experiences.
- Providing options to transact through digital channels to support assessment and review processes.
- Providing individuals with “one stop” digital accounts to manage (and where appropriate, self-direct) their care and support.
- Using assistive technology to provide and evidence base for decision making and supporting the delivery of better care outcomes.
- Driving workforce productivity through automated transcribing of case notes and decision support tools.
- Using AI agents and chatbots to enhance delivery and efficiency at the front door and to provide up to date and responsive Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).

New councils will drive this process by fostering agile, innovative, collaborative, empowering and learning-oriented organisational cultures. They will build workforce skills, understanding and knowledge of how to use data and technology effectively to support productive working.

This approach will help staff adapt to change, embrace new ideas, improve service delivery and deliver more holistic and creative care decisions and this, in turn, will deliver better outcomes for residents. This model is more achievable through locally based councils. While Suffolk County Council's (SCC) current delivery model for Adult Services includes area-based teams, these areas are not directly aligned to the proposed three council areas. It will be necessary during the transition period leading to Vesting Day for SCC to realign the area boundaries within Adult Services to match those for the new councils. This will enable a smooth transition to the new councils in April 2028.



In addition to the area based teams in Adult Services, there are currently some county wide specialist teams which all areas access. During the transition period, these services will be assessed to identify whether they should be split into three or, kept as a Suffolk wide service using a shared service model with one council taking the lead. In particular, we expect that the three councils would share a Safeguarding Board and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) ensuring the highest standards of safeguarding across the whole of Suffolk, and streamlining the resource required from partner agencies such as the Integrated Care Board and Suffolk Constabulary to contribute to multi-agency approaches. Essentially this means that the existing safeguarding arrangements do not change across Suffolk. Similarly, the new councils will work with hospitals on streamlined and consistent discharge processes that support Adults to live independently wherever possible.

► Challenge 3 - Strategic Commissioning and Market Management

The right strategic focus is vital to effective commissioning. Commissioned service costs account for the vast majority of spend in ASC services. There is a real opportunity to develop more outcome based and integrated commissioning models and expect to operate with a consistent commissioning approach across the three unitary authorities, not least because we know that some providers work on a Suffolk wide footprint.

Achieving this shift is key to the sustainability of ASC services and will require a multi- initiative approach including:

- A greater strategic focus on prevention is central to improving public health and reducing demand on social care services.
- Preventative measures will need to be embedded into all of our key social care contracts, encouraging providers to promote healthy living and expand community engagement.
- Aligning commissioning strategies with public health priorities, such as reducing health inequalities and promoting healthier lifestyles across all age groups.
- The greater use of local providers, local community assets and integration and partnerships with other local public providers and the NHS.

There is significant opportunity to change and improve the approach to commissioning and to optimise commissioning costs (the vast majority of ASC spend) by introducing new commissioning models and developing local care markets.

SCIE analysis clearly demonstrates that current care unit costs in Suffolk are significantly higher than those being achieved in unitary authorities of similar sizes to those proposed within the three council model.

Long term care numbers and costs 2023-24					
	Numer of Suffolk residents in receipt of long-term care at end of the year	Average long term care cost Suffolk	Average long term care cost of a unitary with 250-350k population	Difference in the average long-term care cost of 250 – 350k population and Suffolk	Potential cost reduction arising from a 3 unitary Suffolk approach
Working Age Adults	3465	£45,238	£39,881	£5,357	£18.6M
Older Adults	6100	£31,385	£27,144	£4,241	£25.9M

Source: Adult Social Care Finance Return (ASCFR) 2023-24



The analysis, based on national ASCFR data for Place Based Unitary Councils (with populations appropriate to the proposed 3 new unitary councils) demonstrates the potential to reduce long term care costs by £44.5m per year over current costs across Suffolk. This cost reduction is in addition to the analysis of savings included in Criterion 2.

Achieving this shift requires a more community focused model with a greater emphasis on market shaping and management. This will mean working with more locally based care providers, the voluntary sector and the development of a micro-care eco-systems in each of the three council areas. This is a huge transformational opportunity that can only realistically be delivered with a three council solution.

The People too analysis suggests potential benefits are likely to be considerably lower in other unitary council configurations, such as single county wide unitaries.

It will be necessary to identify areas where we can join up with integrated and joint commissioning with the NHS. Key areas will include public health priorities, such as reducing health inequalities and promoting healthier lifestyles across all age groups.

Preventative measures will need to be embedded into all key social care contracts, encouraging health and care providers to promote healthy living and expand community engagement through intergenerational activities, physical activity and shared community spaces.

New councils should have a real emphasis on supporting small and innovative providers, including voluntary, community, social enterprise and disabled people's organisations into the care market.

Community co-production and capacity building are also vital to designing services that reflect local needs. All of these activities will require the further development of existing commissioning models and approaches currently used across Suffolk.

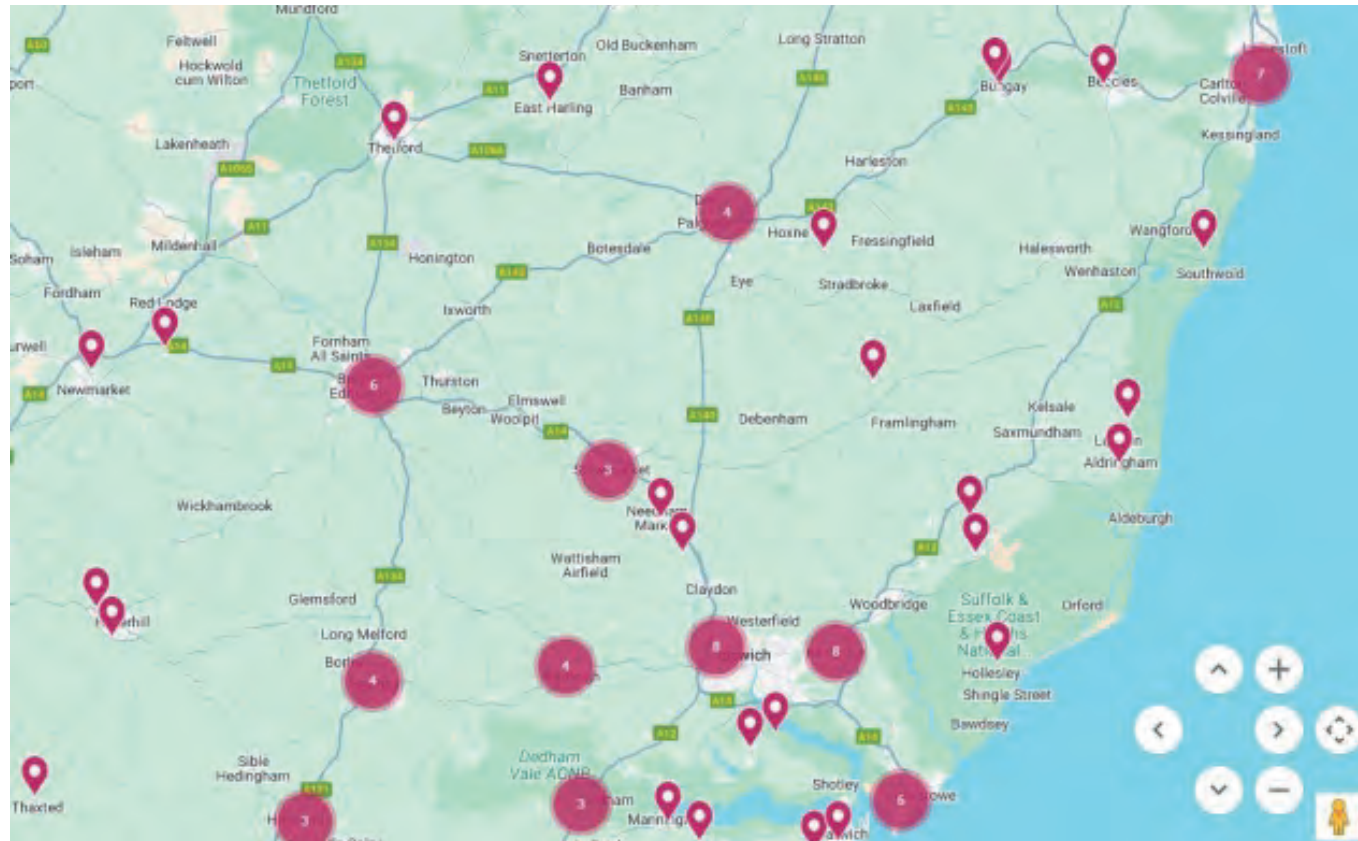
Our objective is to find the right balance of economies of scale whilst delivering on a localised, relatable footprint that are meaningful to local communities. These arrangements should also enhance independence and enable more people to live at home for longer.

There are also significant challenges within the care provider workforce across Suffolk. Research suggests there are high vacancies and turnover rates for social care workers in Suffolk that exceed the national average and that there are challenges

in filling and maintaining these roles.

These challenges can be addressed in some part by having decisions makers closer to delivery. Having a workforce that reflects the local populations they support can only be achieved through local working. This sentiment was echoed throughout discussions with the voluntary sector and their ability to drive up volunteering, improve trust, and mobilise local resources to support care delivery.

Where care services are contracted to the private sector, during the transition period, an assessment will be made of where each contract will be held. For example, contracts with care providers who only work in Felixstowe will be novated to the Ipswich and Southern Suffolk council. There are c170 Care Homes in Suffolk with a spread across the proposed three council areas, and the highest provision in Ipswich / Felixstowe, Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds.

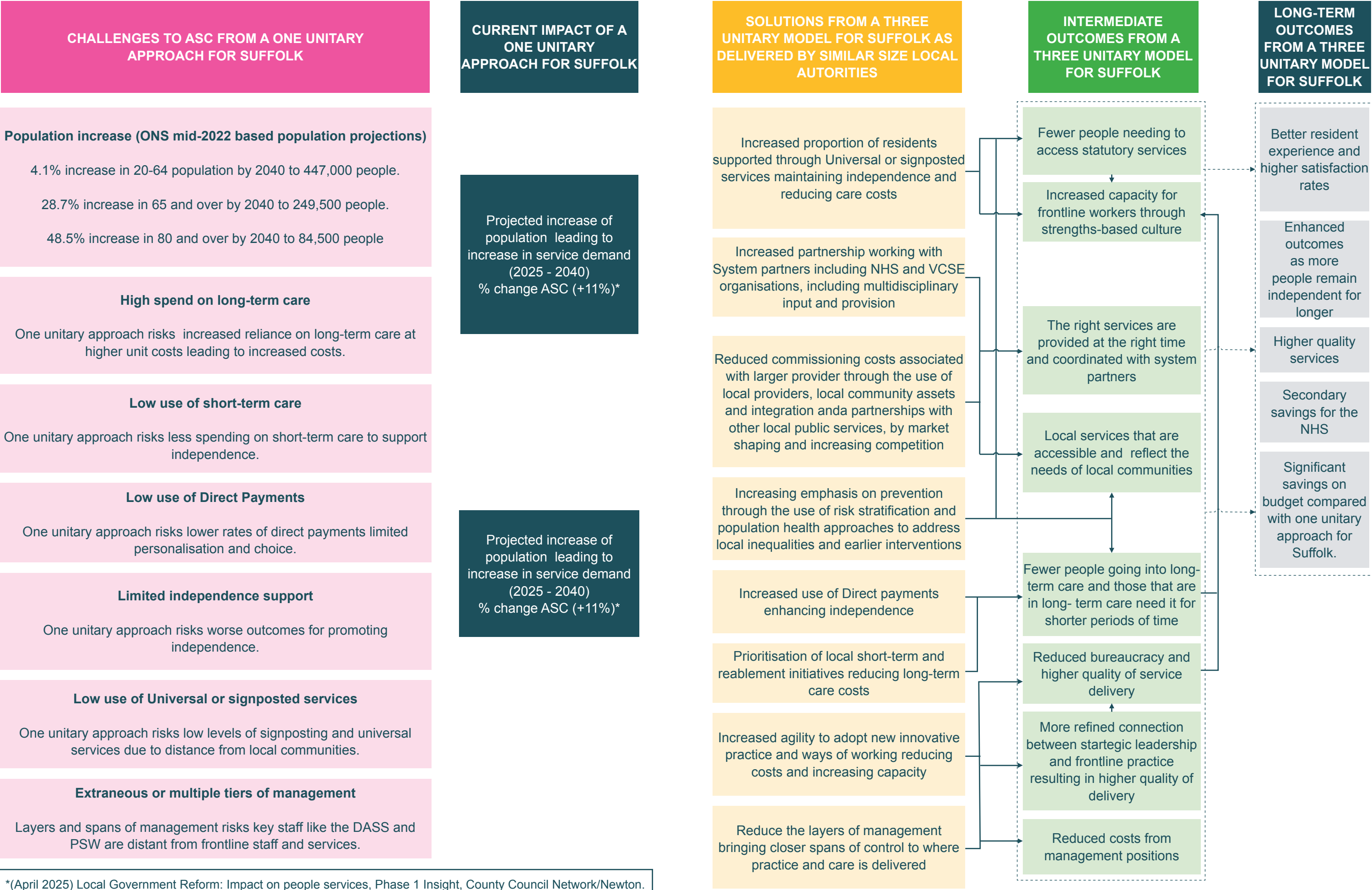


Contracts with care providers who work across more than one new council area can be novated to a lead authority and accessed by other councils through a shared commissioning / procuring model to ensure continuity of service delivery. It is possible that the three councils could work together on shared commissioning for specialist provision. Generally, each council will continue to take the needs of individuals locally into account to find the best provision for them.

It is anticipated that councils will have access to dynamic purchasing systems to achieve better value for money in challenging market conditions. Local market development and local commissioning will further improve value for money. A three-council model will provide resilience between local markets and, where appropriate, could be used for sharing approaches to out of hours / emergency response. This balance of local focus and resilience will open the doors to new micro-providers and bespoke local arrangements.

Transforming ASC into a relational model with local focus, reducing care need and supporting people to live well is a complex task. The theory of change model below summarises the journey:





*(April 2025) Local Government Reform: Impact on people services, Phase 1 Insight, County Council Network/Newton.

Children’s Social Care, SEND and Education Challenges Across Suffolk

SCIE has thoroughly reviewed the current performance of children and young people’s services across Suffolk, and a number of challenges have emerged that threaten the ability of children and young people’s services to deliver statutory responsibilities, drive desired outcomes and to remain financially sustainable.

In order to respond to these challenges a new service and delivery model is required that harnesses local strengths, works with the government agenda for reforms and builds strong relationships with children, young people, their families and communities.

Three Councils for Suffolk is the best configuration to respond to these challenges. In particular, the three unitary authority configuration will provide a better platform to:

- Maintain a close focus on local communities to promote early help and community support.
- Maintain quality and oversight by ensuring that leaders are close to practice, building local strategic relationships and ensuring that strategic outcomes are implemented at a local level.
- Develop strategic commissioning approaches and capital spending programmes to ensure that sufficiency, value and outcomes are achieved in key areas including school places, SEND placements and local provision.

Vision and Strategy

Central government has a clear vision for children’s social care reform, this is encapsulated in the policy paper Keeping children safe, helping families thrive and the Families First for Children Pathfinder¹².

Key elements which are central to this national policy direction, include:

- Tackling child poverty.
- Investment in the children’s social care workforce.
- Making the care system child-centred.
- Regulating and improving the commissioning market.
- Rebalancing the children’s social care system towards early help and prevention.

This policy direction aligns exactly with the vision for a three unitary authority approach for Suffolk. There is a natural connection between the vision and approach for children and young people’s services and the approach for adult social care delivered through the three unitary model approach. It enables a better strategic alignment between the children’s and adults’ approaches to implement strategy that can reinforce improvements and share resources where there are direct alignments.

It is also worth noting that the three unitary council model provides further alignment with the three shifts of the NHS 10-year plan¹³:

- From hospital to community.
- From analogue to digital.
- From sickness to prevention.

This alignment will be important for joining up with NHS partners, for ensuring the integration of services, for joint commissioning, for the public health agenda and also for the children and young people’s health services.

Key children and young people’s service challenges in Suffolk

There are three major challenges impacting on Suffolk, with a three unitary configuration being critical to systematically addressing these challenges

Challenge 1 Managing demand and costs

The costs and demand for Children’s Social Care have escalating significantly in recent years with an £18.1 million increase for Suffolk in 2025-26 . There are a number of reasons for this, including inflation and growing demand for services.

Falls in Kinship Usage

A significant current challenge in Suffolk is the falling number of individuals in kinship care. This has fallen in the past 2 years to 2% of children exiting the care system being placed under a special guardianship order. We understand the normal expected range to be between 12% - 14%¹⁴.

When children are supported to safely leave the care system by reunification to their birth family or via kinship routes to extended family, the higher costs and worse outcomes of other permanent placement types are avoided, in particular with regards to fostering and residential children’s accommodation. A low rate of kinship care leads to a higher rate of more expensive care.

Three new unitaries will be well placed to improve this situation by having a closer relationship with communities, implementing rigorous practice methods including family group conferencing but also but ensuring that leadership focus is backed up by clear grasp of the data.

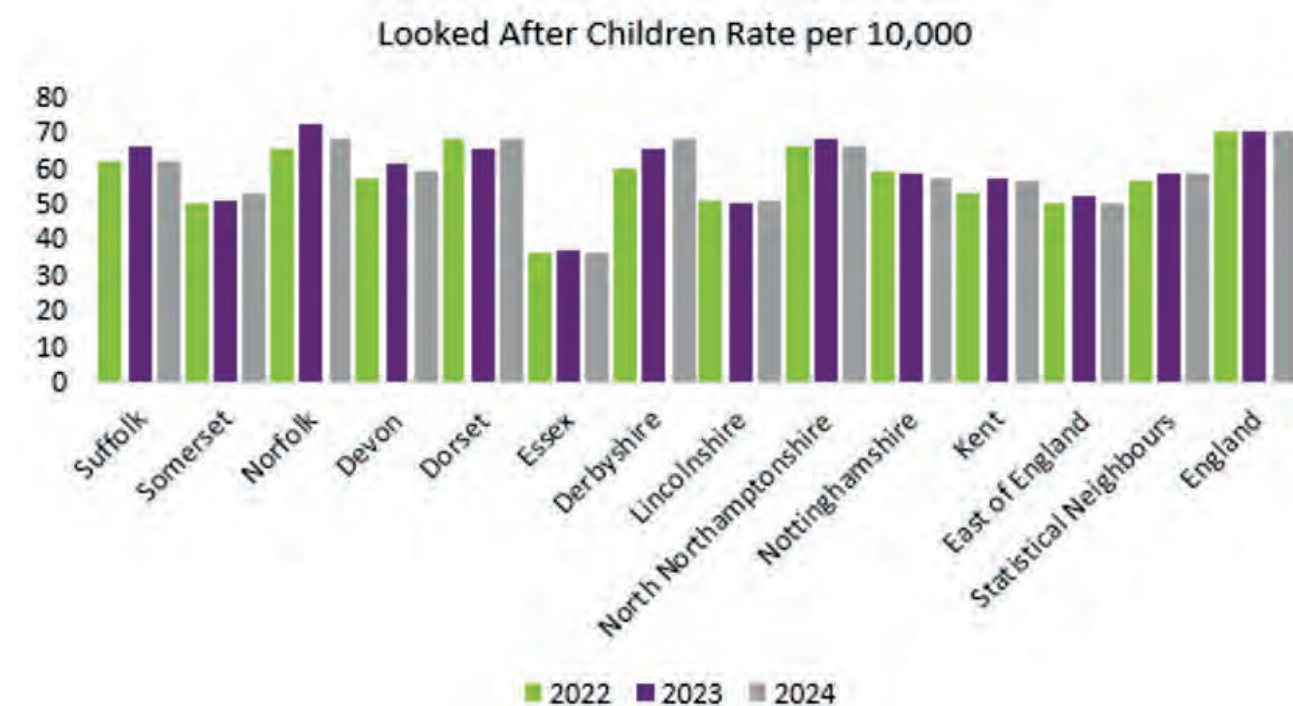
A one unitary approach risks the continuation of the status quo, a greater degree of remoteness from communities and higher numbers of children for leaders to monitor outcomes. The closer community trust and ties of the three unitary approach, alongside the right community support provision, will ensure that the relationship is in place to encourage more kinship care.

Given the cost to every local authority that children looked after placements represent, getting placement sufficiency and the balance of placement types right is essential to managing costs, and could realise £23 million of annual savings after 5 years. This cost reduction is in addition to the analysis of savings in Criterion 2.

Year	Number of additional children supported through Kinship instead of CLA	Full year saving to CLA (based on 2023/24 LAC S251 outturn weekly costs remaining as is at £1,640)
Year 1	19	£1.5M
Year 2	18	£4.7M
Year 3	18	£9.4M
Year 4	18	£15.6M
Year 5	17	£23.2M

Looked After Children (LAC)

Currently, Suffolk has a rate of 62 children per 10,000 in the care system. This is 7% higher than statistical neighbours and 24% higher than the regional average¹⁵.



There was a 51% rise in the last year of residential children's accommodation in Suffolk and the higher rates of children looked after places strain on the sufficiency of placements, as sourcing of placements struggles to meet demand.

If this cost continues to increase and the number of children in children's homes remains the same, then by 2028-29 this would account for a further £15.4 million per year increase.

Three unitary authorities are best placed to develop local solutions to this challenge, as this will require a commitment to preventative services and community level support. Being closer to local communities, the unitaries will be ideally placed for these relationships. This will include developing robust family group conferencing approaches to develop family-based alternatives that reduce the need for care.

Currently, the weekly outturn costs for Children Looked After (CLA) are rising and have been rising for the last three years. If the number of looked after children remains the same (930 in 2024) but the weekly cost continues to rise as per the last three years, then the additional costs would be £40.1 million per year by 2028-29.

Three unitary authorities will be best placed to avert this additional cost by focusing on early help, a strategic commissioning approach, and ensuring that kinship care is promoted. Being closer to communities is the essential element that allows these three solutions to operate, because it is in the communities that the family support services will be located, that the kinship care opportunities will emerge and that local providers will be developed.

Fostering

Nationally fostering sufficiency is an issue, with foster carer recruitment posing a challenge¹⁶. This has seen a national increase in reliance on residential care and more local authorities investing in more residential accommodation. Low levels of internal foster care lead to more expensive provision being used to a greater extent, including independent fostering agencies and residential children's care.

In line with the regional fostering alliance (Foster East), we believe the new unitary authorities will be best placed to encourage Suffolk residents to foster at greater levels because of their greater understanding of the communities.

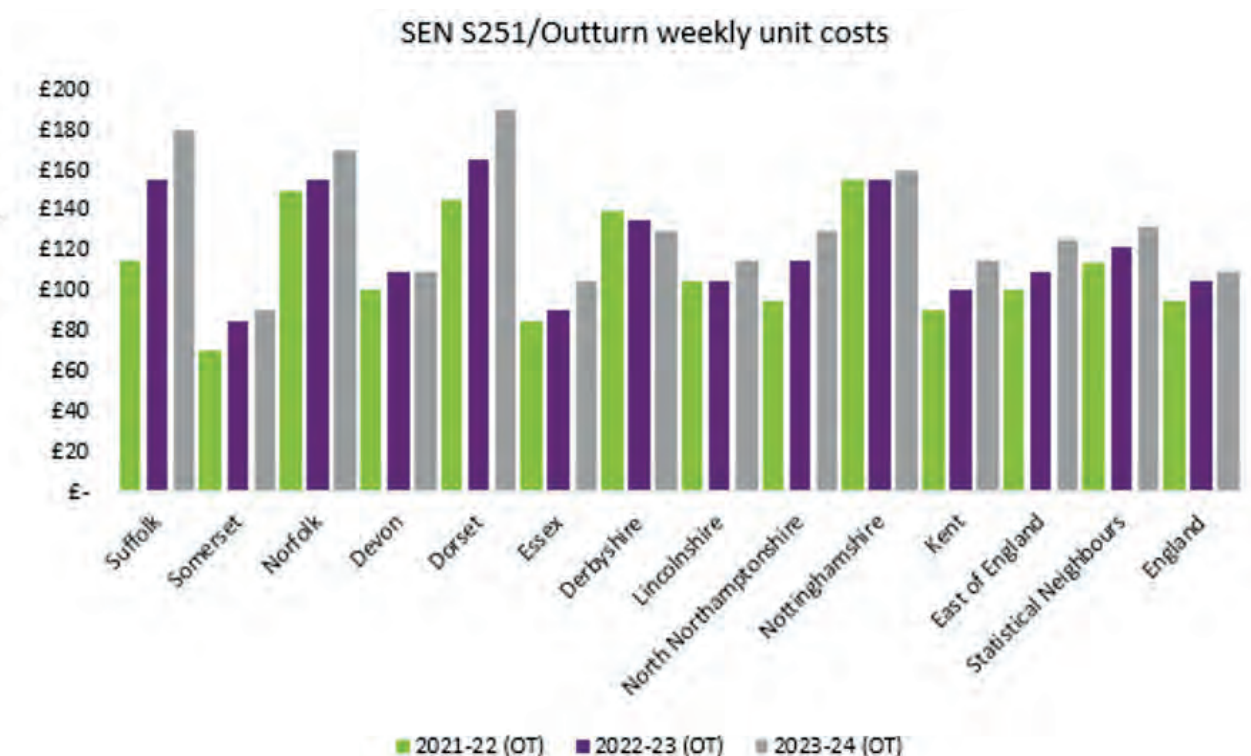
Evidence from the State of the Nation's Foster Care survey showed that having access to local support networks promoted foster care, so smaller communities promoting these networks can play a role in ensuring fostering placement sufficiency¹⁷.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

There is a demand challenge at the heart of children and young people's services. Whilst there is a predicted 8.6% fall in children and young people's population in Suffolk by 2040¹⁸, there is also a forecast rise in demand for services, including a 20% predicted increase in the demand for SEND services.¹⁹ Corresponding to this increased demand is forecast growth in expenditure of 102% growth in by 2040 for SEND services.

The difficulties in managing demand are not unique to Suffolk, being a national issue, with Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) rates increasing by 10% in the last year according to Department for Education statistics.¹² However, the county wide 2024-25 children's services overspend was fuelled by a £47 million overspend by SEND of the Dedicated Schools Grant.¹³

Currently Suffolk's weekly SEND outturn cost is £180 per child which is 37% higher than statistical neighbours and 64% higher than the England average.



A three unitary model enables the development of local provision and support, whilst keeping close connections to their communities. This developed understanding of local need, which arrives from the right sizing and local focus of unitary authorities, underpins market shaping and strategic commissioning approaches to better manage demand and reduce costs.

Managing SEND demand well relies upon local relationships between all stakeholder services and local communities. An inclusion agenda that supports families to access peer support and local community support on a universal and targeted supported services level prevents problems from escalating to the point that more intrusive and statutory services are required.

Three new unitary authorities would enable a “relationship-reset” with the community of SEND parents, that will pave the way for better designed local early help provision that meets need whilst being cost effective.

These approaches would enable a three unitary model to align SEND costs with the benchmark for other unitary authorities with populations of 250-350k. This could realise £25.7m of savings a year. This cost reduction is in addition to the analysis of savings included in Criterion 2.

A leading think tank, Pro Bono Economics¹⁴ have concluded that a “radical” reset is needed to rebalance the system towards early help support to prevent false economies that reductions in early help provision have proven to be. The close relationships that the three new unitary authorities will develop with their communities will ensure strategic targeting of investment, they are best placed to work with local communities to understand the needs and how they prefer to access it will be necessary to ensuring that investment is responsible and bears fruit.

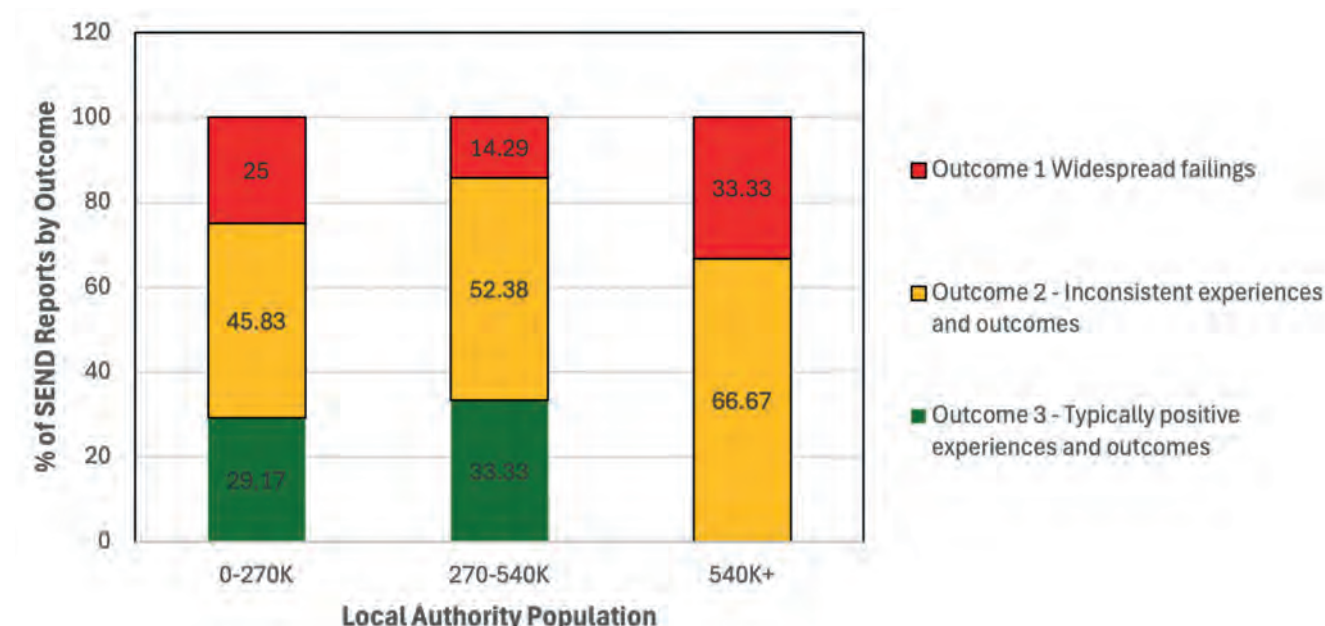
In addition to demand pressures in SEND, there are demand pressures within the education system, with 600 new school places required for 2026-27. This was further developed in the Suffolk SEND strategy²⁰ where a priority for those who contributed to the SEND strategy was “increased specialist school places.”

Three unitary authorities are best placed to manage this investment in school places. By forming a close relationship and understanding of the community, school capital investment can be co-designed based on well understood population needs. Again, by forging new, closer relationships to the communities, the three councils are best placed to understand the needs and develop the range of services required for the community, including those traditionally underserved children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), autism and complex needs.

► Challenge 2 Ensuring Quality and Oversight

Delivering services for children and young people is a core responsibility for unitary councils.

The most striking analysis provided by academics from the University of Sheffield shows that in SEND, local authorities with populations between the sizes of 270-540k are most likely to produce “typically positive experiences and outcomes” in joint CQC and Ofsted SEND inspections.



This points towards a “sweet spot” for delivering quality and maintaining oversight, where the right size of unitary authority can retain the local intelligence, the grip on progress and also have the resources required to deliver improvement programmes.

The most recent Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) from Ofsted of Suffolk children’s services was deemed to be “requires improvement” and this was true in three of the four inspection categories. It was deemed to be good with regards to children in care.²¹

Areas for improvement highlighted by the inspection team are include:

- Consistency in the application of thresholds in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- Quality of work with 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless.
- Timeliness of pre-proceedings and proceedings work leading to delays in permanence for children.
- Quality and consistency of pathway plans with care leavers.
- Communication of the local care leaver offer.
- Assessment and accessibility of support for care leavers’ post-21.

Three councils are best placed to tackle these difficulties. The three unitary model has a distinct advantage in ensuring that 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless have their needs met. They will be able to design a protocol jointly between their housing and children's services functions that means that needs are met locally. Smaller authorities will have fewer children in these categories and leaders can monitor the level and quality of support for these high-risk young people more effectively.

The practice shift towards early help will also support these young people to ensure that family relationships are maintained. The same practice model that promotes family group decision making and kinship options will also support reduction in homelessness for young people.

The same advantages are also true for the three key improvements required for care leavers and care experienced young people. Each smaller new unitary will be able to understand its care leaver group more clearly, stay closer to their needs and ideas and be able to communicate to them more closely.

The three new unitary authorities will be best placed to create an accessible, dynamic and meaningful set of supports for their cohorts of care experienced young people by utilising their community assets, including their housing provision, their employment opportunities, their community and leisure assets. The councils will be able to offer care experienced young people community opportunities, employment, training and housing in a joined-up, localised fashion.

The CQC and Ofsted joint SEND inspection in November 2023¹⁸ gave an outcome of widespread and/or systemic failings with local practice as the reason for the grading. The three unitary model is best placed to respond to several of the challenges set out in the report. The size of the new unitary authorities will mean that the governance systems will have sufficient oversight, and processes will be well understood with a focus on outcomes and improvements rather than simply activities.

Weak relationships with parents in Suffolk, including the parent carer forum has been evidenced in the SEND inspection report. This challenge can be best addressed by local leaders who can be more visible to communities and reset relationships with parents, children, young people, and relevant stakeholder groups.

A three unitary authority approach is best suited for rebuilding these relationships. Not only will these improved relationships increase positive sentiment, but they will lead to improved services through better information, ideas and co-production.

► Challenge 3 Delivering and commissioning services for Suffolk's evolving needs

As noted above, current weekly residential unit costs for Suffolk have substantially increased. Managing unit costs within commissioning will be a key priority for the new unitary authorities.

Three councils will be best placed to reverse this commissioning pattern by establishing a new strategic commissioning approach, based on outcomes-based commissioning and the development of smaller, local providers.

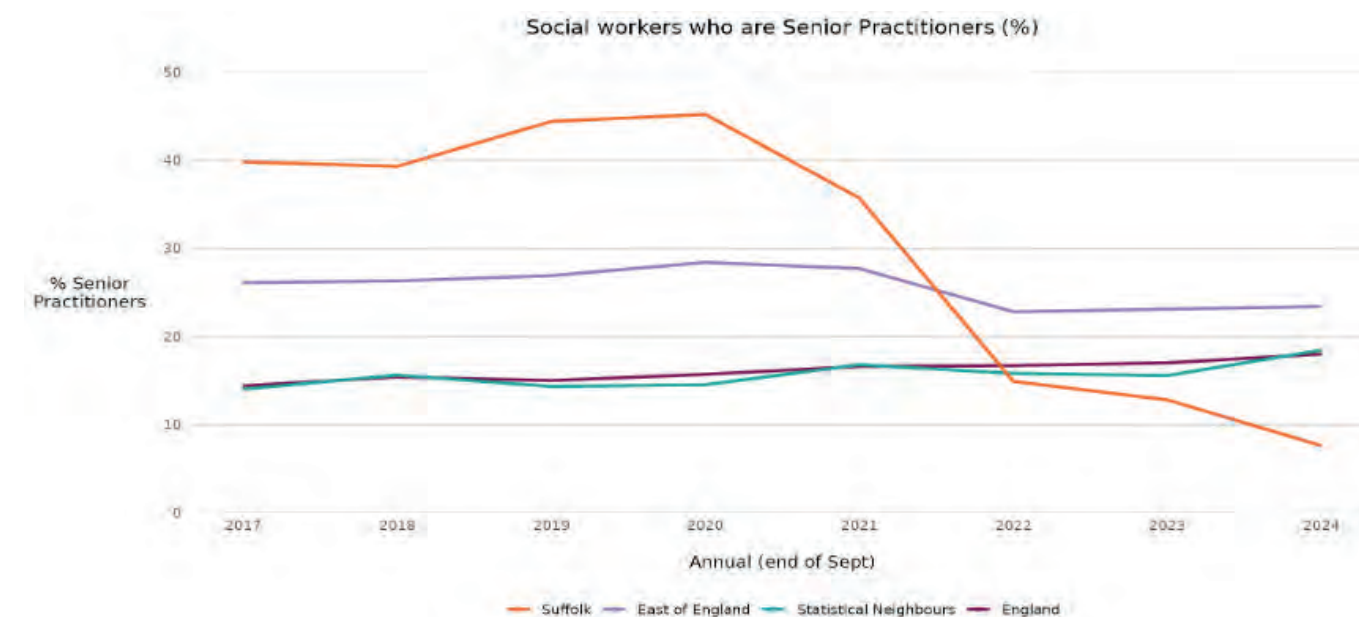
Suffolk is a thriving and modern county with a rich heritage and long history. A three unitary approach is able to draw on this depth of community to create thriving neighbourhoods and places for people to bring up their children, and for young people to build their own lives. Whilst some young people will always move away, there will be many reasons for them to return at later stages.

The three unitary councils will develop a more outcome focused and integrated commissioning approach aligned to national policy focusing early help, as well as aligning with public health to meet local needs. A three unitary model will lead to closer local relationships across the market, so commissioners will be able to shape the market, with the commissioning approach built on an outcome focused basis.

Three councils are better able to focus on the specific local needs of their areas, so that commissioning can be aligned with local demographics, local risks and local opportunities. There remains an opportunity to coordinate this with adult services, and public health services where possible for further savings.

We believe the three new councils will be best placed to build and sustain local partnerships that will be crucial for the early help model and the new approach to commissioning. By focusing on local commissioning, community assets will be strengthened, and a virtuous cycle of the community first approach will be embedded. Early help can often focus on official organisations and fail to properly support the peer and community sector, but the three council model enables a local approach to commissioning and market shaping with peer and community endeavours supporting families without the need for more formal interventions reducing costs.

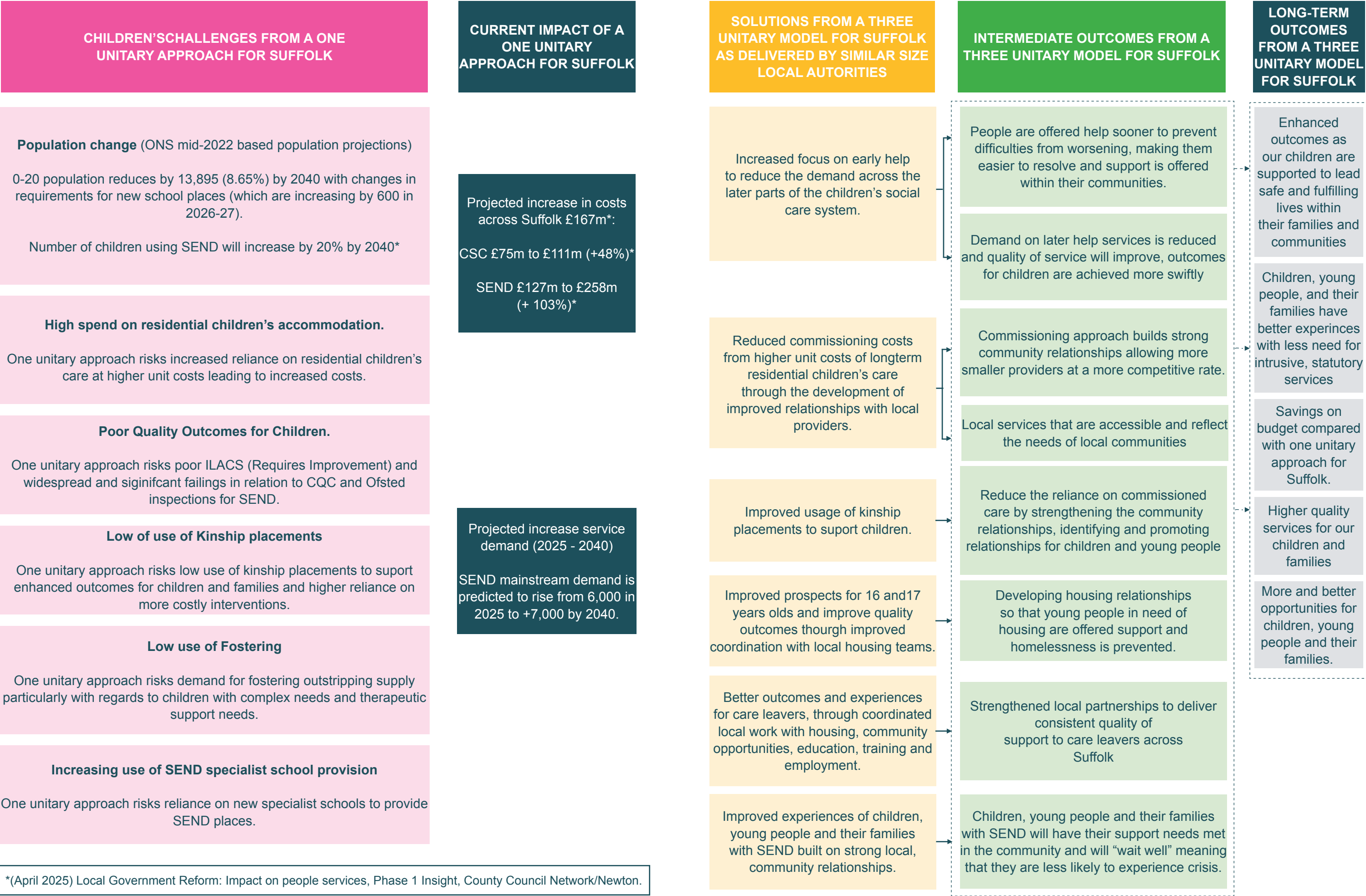
Delivery of children and young people's services is reliant upon a well-managed workforce, with sufficient expertise and experience to achieve the desired outcomes. As demonstrated in the chart below, there has been a significant decline in the number of senior practitioners working across Suffolk, leading to a risk of a lack of experienced workers to deal with the volume and complexity of incoming demand. The three proposed councils are better positioned to support less experienced workers, with the benefit of fewer social workers for each Principal Social Worker and Assistant Director to support and fewer layers of management between frontline workers and senior experienced staff.



At the senior leadership level, the three unitary councils are well sized to build key strategic partnerships with health, education, police and other stakeholders so that services can be delivered effectively.

Like Adult Services, large parts of Children's Services are currently delivered on area footprints including social care and family support. As the area footprints do not directly correlate with the new council boundaries, there will be a need to realign teams ahead of Vesting Day in the same way as there is for Adult Services. Particular attention will need to be paid to the pathways for young people in care who will become care leavers either during the transition period or in the first couple of years after Vesting Day, and how Corporate Parenting responsibilities transition between authorities.²²

There are a number of specialist teams within Children's Services which work on a county wide footprint. Each of these will be assessed as to whether they can be split into different areas while maintaining sufficient specialist expertise or whether a lead authority model would deliver better outcomes for children and young people.



*(April 2025) Local Government Reform: Impact on people services, Phase 1 Insight, County Council Network/Newton.

Public Sector Collaboration and Reform

We intend that the three new councils will work closely with the health sector in an expansion of the current, largely adults focused, Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. Taking a neighbourhood level approach to meeting families' needs prevents siloed working and will lead to better outcomes and reduced costs across the public sector. This may mean a neighbourhood team made up of health professionals, care providers, housing specialists, occupational therapists, physical activity specialists, voluntary befrienders, benefit and employment advisors and debt advisors – with the exact make up of a neighbourhood team being designed to meet a neighbourhood's needs.

An example of the type of outcomes that could be achieved through this type of approach can be found in the Stepping Home East project, a partnership between East Suffolk's Housing Service and the NHS supporting people with their move out of hospital. This partnership has saved 654 bed days and provided net savings of over £0.5m in 2024/25. The ability to do this at scale, bringing together Housing, Health and Social Care presents significant opportunity for the NHS and local government and improves the quality of life for patients and residents.

Our model is based on strong alignment with existing and emerging systems:

- At a strategic level with the Mayoral Strategic Authority and Integrated Care Board, both of which will work at a Norfolk and Suffolk geography.
- At a provider level with Hospitals and community health provision and 3 unitary councils.
- At a local level with integrated teams, working with GPs in neighbourhoods.

Three councils for Suffolk will deliver local delivery and service integrations such as:

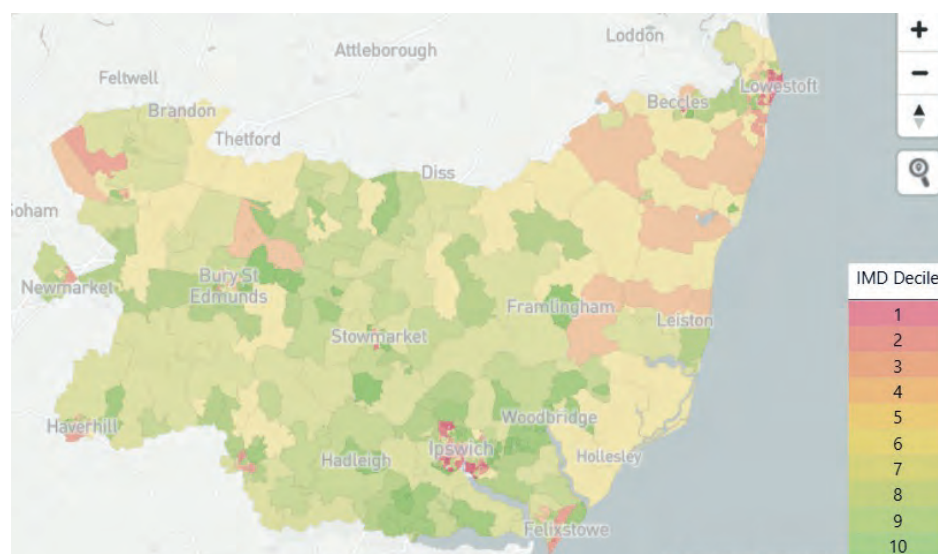
- **Adult Social Care:** Local area co-ordination models with integrated

neighbourhood teams between social care, housing, GPs, and community groups to build trusted relationships with vulnerable adults, helping to prevent crisis, unnecessary hand-offs, and reduce isolation through community-led support such as volunteering networks.

- **Children and Young People:** Early help teams such as schools, youth workers, community hub teams, housing officers, and health visitors working in local clusters around individuals and families will allow faster, more personalised and trusted family support, preventing escalation into statutory services.
- **Housing:** Local housing officers working closely with social workers, voluntary groups, and GPs to support rough sleepers and prevent homelessness through targeted wraparound support and early intervention.
- **Highways:** Local highways teams with the ability to prioritise problem hotspots such as parking, road safety, and appropriate signage in villages and market towns based on lived experience and community feedback.
- **Enforcement and prevention:** Innovative approaches to tackling local issues through integrated working across Trading Standards, licensing, anti-social behaviour, and public health teams.

A vision for Rewiring Public Services

Ultimately, LGR provides an opportunity to rewire public services to work better, focus on local issues to drive improved outcomes for residents and businesses and deliver value for money. We have a once in a 50-year chance to make



sure services such as health, leisure, and social care are integrated together to meet the needs of our residents. Historically, whilst there has been collaboration on initiatives, services in Suffolk have operated in silos, leading to duplication and inefficiencies, and it is crucial that we are not constrained by historic ways of working.

Our vision is:

To make children's lives better

In relation to children's services, particularly urban areas where demand is higher and challenges are more concentrated, LGR provides the opportunity to reshape services around the complex and varied needs of its community. Three councils will allow integration at a more strategic level allowing for better alignment between councils, education providers, housing and health services and voluntary sector partners to address the needs of children and young people in Suffolk. This will be achieved for children with additional needs through co-ordinating education, early intervention and family support more effectively across agencies. For example, reducing long travel distances for students which hinders them from integrating into their communities. Similarly, reorganisation into three councils will enable a more joined up approach to support care leavers, addressing the issue of care leavers becoming homeless at 18 through shared responsibilities across housing, employment and social care teams. Strategic collaboration between councils will allow for shared specialist services and smarter commissioning leading to better outcomes for children, more parental confidence in services and improved value for money through a clearer focus on prevention and streamlined delivery across local systems.

To develop a new model of responsive social care and support for vulnerable groups

Through bringing together district and borough and county functions, particularly housing, adult social care, and community support there is potential to bridge long standing gaps that often leave individuals navigating fragmented systems, where there is confusion over responsibilities. Three Councils for Suffolk will enable a whole life approach to care, where services are better coordinated across all stages of life, from early intervention to later life support, preventing costly crises occurring. This will create a space for relational practice that is more responsive to individual needs and local contexts, through e.g. local community groups, leisure services, allowing professionals to build sustained, trusted relationships with residents rather than delivering isolated interventions. This place-based approach reduces reliance on crisis services and targets resources more effectively to reduce demand.

To provide housing and community infrastructure where it's needed most

Three Councils for Suffolk would have a powerful opportunity to reform housing and community infrastructure delivery in each area while working in a connected regional landscape with the Mayoral Strategic Authority. By combining local knowledge and accountability with greater strategic capacity, three councils will better align planning, investment and public land use to meet the distinct needs of Suffolk's diverse communities.

To improve Health and wellbeing to keep people living independent and productive lives for longer

Three Councils for Suffolk would enable improvement in health and wellbeing outcomes through enabling more place based and data driven approaches to population health with prominent issues between areas being different such as smoking levels and levels of deprivation. A three council model is well aligned to aspirations of the NHS 10 Year Plan, including the development of Integrated Health Organisations.

With three councils being close to their communities, they will leverage local health data and insight to target resources where they are needed the most, addressing health inequalities and improving access to prevention and early intervention directly. Closer proximity to primary care networks, voluntary groups and leisure providers supports strong partnerships and enables tailored local initiatives that promote active lifestyles, mental wellbeing and community resilience.

A three unitary model for Suffolk unlocks the full potential of joined up healthcare. With Suffolk and Norfolk set to share a single Integrated Care Board, and major hospitals such as James Paget serving communities across both counties, this model ensures that councils aren't working in silos but rather side by side with the NHS. The proposed model, strengthens local links with Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and GP networks, making it easier to tackle issues earlier and closer to home.

To integrated Transport and Highways to make journeys easier

A three council model creates a strong platform for improving the delivery of highways and transport services across Suffolk within the strategic landscape of the Mayoral Strategic Authority. Through consolidating responsibility for roads, maintenance, car parking, and transport planning within each unitary, councils will achieve better co-ordination of roadworks, reduced disruption and ensure that investment is targeted where it has the greatest local impact. By using local knowledge, teams and funding focused on that local unitary area road maintenance and road safety provision is likely to be quicker, more targeted and better designed to meet the needs of the community – combining physical improvements as well as the potential for behaviour change.

In addition, having a local unitary authority means transport solutions and policies can be better targeted to meet the needs of a particular area or better integrated with other community-based schemes. This includes ensuring that public transport such as bus services provide resilient connections between rural and urban areas to support travel to work and leisure opportunities, improve Suffolk's carbon footprint and reduce rural isolation as well as make health services more accessible.

Three councils will be able to work with the Mayor and Strategic Authority to identify and deliver key infrastructure solutions to tackle Suffolk's single points of failure such as the Orwell Bridge which impacts not only on local congestion and the Suffolk economy but also on national logistics infrastructure and resilience.

To Embed a culture of Innovation

A three council model offers Suffolk the chance to drive greater innovation in service delivery, enabling councils to adopt new approaches that are more agile, efficient and better tailored to local needs. In a three unitary model, a culture of innovation will be preserved and expanded with each unitary empowered to explore the most effective mix of in-house provision, local delivery vehicles and commissioned services.

What public sector collaboration and reform means for key services

Adult Social Care

Currently, Suffolk provides 'Good' overall Adult Social Care with strong leadership and a culture of innovation. However, rising demand, staffing pressures and gaps in care accommodation present risks to the service. Addressing rural workforce and infrastructure challenges is critical to sustaining and improving services.

Reorganising Adult Social Care into three councils will create a more locally responsive, agile structure that retains the strengths of collaboration while addressing many of the systemic challenges Suffolk currently faces. It will enable service reform through design around local populations, and improved co-ordination between care, health, and community support groups that are already shaped in teams that match our proposed unitary footprint. Coverage of a smaller geographic area would provide better opportunity for collaboration, more certainty around service delivery and an attractive employment opportunity for staff. Reduced travel time means a greater focus on customers as more time can be spent on addressing their needs.

The 10-year Health Plan for England¹³ provides a timely and strategic opportunity for us to reshape and improve the way Adult Social Care is delivered across Suffolk. The plan's emphasis on neighbourhood based, integrated care and a shift towards prevention directly aligns with our ambition to deliver more efficient, responsive and person-centred care through the creation of three unitary authorities. The 10-year plan also sets out the ambitions for a new NHS operating model with emphasis on working in closer partnership with us and other local public services.

- **Local responsiveness to growing and varied demand:** Each council will have the ability to tailor services based on its population profile such as rural isolation, coastal ageing and urban deprivation enabling more targeted planning and commissioning.
- **Workforce recruitment and retention:** A three council model will allow for creative workforce solutions such as partnerships with local educational institutions, flexible contracts or transport schemes in rural areas which will help to address high vacancy rates and staff turnover in hard-to-reach areas.
- **Reduced access delays through prevention:** Closer integration with local health, housing and voluntary partners to support early intervention and reduce reliance on acute care which will address pressures on contact centres and delays in assessments or care packages. This will provide better joined up support for individuals to remain independent in their own homes for longer and continue to interact with their local community activities rather than formal care.
- **Tackling care accommodation gaps effectively:** A three council model will take a more proactive role in shaping care markets and developing specialist housing options in response to local need which addresses shortage of suitable dementia and complex care provision. Further supporting this, many care markets are local in nature and as such do not provide a discount for scale. For scale, there are frameworks and the use of dynamic purchasing systems that can extend beyond single council boundaries.
- **Efficiency of disaggregation:** Market development will be easier to do in a three council model due to its local nature and ability to commission locally. It will be easier to stimulate supply and provide reassurance to new entrants that investment is less risky in particular areas.
- **Preserving integration and avoiding fragmentation:** Shared countywide functions such as safeguarding boards, digital platforms and procurement frameworks will help to maintain consistency and economies of scale so services will remain joined up, safe and cost-effective across boundaries.
- **Smarter use of data and digital tools:** A three council model will better use local population health data to plan services, target prevention, shape behavioural change campaigns and support innovative models like virtual wards, sheltered housing or sensor-based home care to enable more personalised care.



Children and Young People

Suffolk serves a diverse population of ~165,000 children and young people, with rising demand for SEND and mental health support and increasing pressure on placements and workforce capacity. These findings underscore the need for a more locally responsive, community integrated model of delivery which is something that a three unitary model will provide by bringing services closer to children and families while working together as unitaries to maintain consistent standards and oversight across the county.

Reorganising Children and Young People's Services into three councils offers a unique opportunity to deliver more responsive, community centred and equitable support to Suffolk's diverse child population. A three-council model will strike the right balance in preserving strategic co-ordination across Suffolk while embedding services more deeply in place-based systems.

- **More responsive, localised early help:** Each council will design early intervention pathways tailored to the needs of its local community and schools avoiding the current one size fits all model that doesn't account for differing social, educational and economic needs across areas. Each council will embed a no-wrong front door approach which simplifies the experience for residents needing to engage with Children's Services.
- **Improved SEND integration:** Three Councils for Suffolk will focus on developing more mainstream provision and will work more closely with schools, health services, other neighbourhood-based services and parents to deliver faster, more tailored support closer to home. A three-council model will be easier to align with Integrated Care System (ICS) footprints for children's health.
- **Targeted youth support and engagement:** Youth services will be improved to reflect rural, urban or coastal settings making them more accessible and relevant, increasing participation and interaction with key groups as well as making best use of local assets, both built and natural, to support young people where they live.

- **Stronger relationships with schools and families:** A smaller council footprint will allow professionals to build better links with local schools and families and will provide the agility and capacity to facilitate integrated working between education, social care and community services. A three council model reduces the distance between service leadership and frontline delivery which fosters trust and responsiveness.
- **Workforce recruitment and retention improvements:** Locally driven workforce strategies will include recruitment pipelines with local universities and targeted retention schemes.
- **Care leaver and teen transition support:** Three councils will deliver personalised transition pathways for care leavers and homeless teenagers through stronger local co-ordination and will be better placed than a single unitary to respond quickly and flexibly.

In summary, through anchoring services in local places and driving service integration, a three council model offers the best opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people across Suffolk.

Housing and homelessness

Suffolk faces significant housing affordability and homelessness pressures, worsened by rising rents, stretched housing-related support budgets and varying district capacities. There were 333,543 households in Suffolk according to the 2021 census, an increase of 23,000 households between 2011-2021. More dwellings have been created (including new builds and conversions) in Suffolk over the last decade than the England average (7.4% in Suffolk compared to 6.2% as England's average).²³

A three-council model will provide local responsiveness allowing each council to tailor housing and homelessness strategies, integrate planning through aligning housing delivery with roads, schools, and care services to avoid fragmentation and early intervention through embedding multi-agency contact earlier in the cycle.

Environment Services

In addition to the overarching complex challenge of climate change, Suffolk faces a range of specific, complex environmental challenges coastal erosion, flooding, agriculture land use pressures, energy transition and commitment to carbon neutrality. The county is home to Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, National Landscapes (formerly AONBs), nationally significant energy infrastructure (e.g. Sizewell C and offshore wind), and diverse natural habitats that require co-ordinated cross boundary protection.

Currently, Suffolk's environmental responsibilities are split between Suffolk County Council and the District and Borough Councils who work well together through joint initiatives such as Suffolk climate emergency plan, shared services on waste management, biodiversity and carbon reduction strategies and multi-agency working on flooding, coastal protection, and transport decarbonisation.

There are also pockets of specialism that have been developed locally, such as technical skills and expertise on solar energy in West Suffolk. Given the extensive experience the West have in this area, they have already expanded their Solar for Business scheme to the east of the county, at the request of two other District Councils, as it was easier to build on existing expertise and an established team than for others to start from scratch. Establishing three unitary councils allows each to focus and invest in development that suits their region, the outputs of which can easily be expanded to support the wider county and the wider region, through the Strategic Authority, sharing renewable energy experience and expertise for the benefit of all.

Overall, a three council model will allow for:

- Clearer leadership and accountability for local climate and environmental outcomes, replacing the current structure with single place-based responsibility.
- Stronger alignment between planning, transport, waste, and environmental policy within each unitary, enabling each unitary to deal with its own unique challenges.

- Improved ability to coordinate with national bodies on flooding, infrastructure, and coastline management with a stronger, locally focused voice.
- Greater capacity to develop and implement local green growth strategies such as circular economy initiatives, green jobs and low carbon infrastructure.
- Opportunities for enhanced local engagement, education and awareness and co-production with communities on nature recovery, tree planting, and resilience building.

In summary, a three unitary model will enable more coherent and effective environmental action across Suffolk through leveraging existing successful partnerships, allowing councils to move to strategic place-based environmental leadership which is essential in the face of accelerating climate pressures and legislative requirements.

Highway Services

Suffolk's road network is one of the most extensive in the East of England consisting of 6,701 km of roads around half of which are C roads or unclassified due to the rurality of the county. Key issues include the co-ordination of roadworks and capacity to authorise highway development, road condition and pot-hole repairs.

Three Councils for Suffolk would:

- Provide effective locally responsive maintenance through being better placed to support local priorities and target spend for local areas as weather patterns, terrain and road use vary across the region.
- Deliver focused local delivery to enable integration with existing services such as growth and planning with the ability to plan closures effectively with better co-ordination and minimal disruption.
- Use local community intelligence for joined up working with other partners such as the police, building confidence and trust through small scale delivery of local needs e.g. school parking.
- Build and influence local behaviours such as promoting cycling.
- Work with the strategic authority in the longer term in its transport authority capacity.

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

OUR APPROACH TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, Suffolk County Council swiftly declared its intention to pursue a single county-wide unitary authority as the only viable model for LGR. This unilateral position effectively closed the door to a collaborative, evidence-based assessment of alternative options with the District and Borough Councils. The County Council's stance was further reinforced by a public statement on 25 February 2025, formally rejecting the possibility of joint working on alternative governance models.

In contrast, Suffolk's District and Borough Councils came together with a shared commitment to collaboration, community engagement, and long-term strategic thinking. United by a common purpose, we developed a vision and set of guiding principles for Local Government Reorganisation that align with ministerial criteria while reflecting the distinct needs and aspirations of Suffolk's diverse communities.

Our approach is rooted in the belief that LGR is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine public services, modernise governance, and build structures that are fit for the future. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all solution, we are advocating for a model that is responsive, place-based, and outcomes-driven—one that reflects the realities of Suffolk's geography, economy, and people.

We developed a set of Suffolk Principles (set out on page 93) and explored these with local people. Our engagement has been widespread and included:

- An open survey of residents which received 2208 responses.
- Meetings with Town and Parish Councils as key stakeholders and representatives of communities across the county.
- Roadshows in market towns.
- A website setting out the Three Councils for Suffolk proposal and inviting comments.
- Discussions with colleagues from the Integrated Care Board and Hospital Trusts.
- Business briefings.
- Discussions with Suffolk Association of Local Councils.
- Discussions with Suffolk Care Forum.
- Discussions with Suffolk Foster Carer Association.
- Discussions with MPs.
- Discussions with further and higher education institutions.

Our engagement tells us that:

- There are concerns about a single unitary council being too large to understand and deliver on local priorities across the county and too large to innovate and improve services.
- There are concerns about the scale of a single unitary and its risk profile.
- There is hesitancy from communities surrounding Ipswich about being within the same council area as the County Town. This appears mostly based on myths about Council Tax increases, that housebuilding will be so extensive that surrounding towns and villages become joined on to Ipswich, community identity, and the County Town taking priority for spending.
- There is a strong sense that councils with a smaller footprint will deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses as relationships will be stronger. Rural communities in particular are concerned about being overlooked.
- There is scepticism about predicted cost savings.
- There is concern that there will be too few councillors to cover the workload and ensure proper representation of community needs.

The proposal for Three Councils in Suffolk best addresses the issues raised in our engagement and it is informed by local views. The residents survey closed before the District and Borough Councils finalised their headline proposal for three councils with details of the results featuring on the website.

Three Councils for Suffolk – a proposal informed by residents' views

In May 2025, the five District and Borough Councils launched a joint survey to gather the views of residents, businesses, community groups and organisations about future local government arrangements in the wake of devolution and reorganisation. The survey ran until end of July 2025 capturing the public sentiment on service priorities. The tables below show the most important attributes for new councils with the first table identifying the most important attribute from each response and the second identifying the top three attributes from each response. Full analysis of the survey results can be found in Appendix 4.

% ranking each attribute as MOST IMPORTANT

Results by district/borough (based on where respondents live)	TOTAL	Babergh District	East Suffolk District	Ipswich Borough	Mid Suffolk District	West Suffolk District
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	36%	38%	34%	40%	33%	46%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	19%	14%	23%	15%	19%	19%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	12%	13%	10%	14%	13%	13%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	9%	10%	10%	11%	9%	7%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	6%	6%	6%	7%	6%	6%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	6%	4%	7%	5%	7%	7%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5%	8%	4%	4%	6%	3%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	5%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	395	653	345	383	349

% ranking each attribute IN THE TOP 3 MOST IMPORTANT

Results by district/borough (based on where respondents live)	TOTAL	Babergh District	East Suffolk District	Ipswich Borough	Mid Suffolk District	West Suffolk District
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	57%	56%	53%	63%	55%	60%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	51%	47%	54%	42%	56%	50%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	41%	39%	42%	40%	41%	40%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	36%	39%	42%	40%	41%	40%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	27%	28%	29%	29%	25%	27%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	26%	24%	29%	24%	21%	28%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	25%	28%	26%	23%	26%	24%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	23%	22%	21%	26%	24%	22%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	15%	16%	14%	13%	16%	15%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	395	653	345	383	349

Addressing concerns expressed by residents in engagement

Some of the concerns about devolution and Local Government Reorganisation expressed by survey participants fall outside the scope of this Case for Change. For example, it is not possible to keep current council arrangements. It is also not possible for us to address concerns expressed in this survey regarding the potential for a single unitary council covering the whole of Suffolk.

The Three Councils for Suffolk proposal is founded on the things that local people told us were most important to them:

- **BEING LOCAL** - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area.
- **MONEY** - Ensuring Council Tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live.
- **QUALITY** - Improving the overall quality of public services.

Many of the responses which highlight concerns link to these priorities. For example,

In respect of the Being Local priority, feedback indicated that respondents want to see more opportunities for ongoing engagement and influence and to ensure that new councils respond to local need. These comments are the cornerstone of our proposal for three councils and particularly our proposals around neighbourhood working and governance.

In respect of the Money priority, feedback falls into two categories:

That Council Tax will rise, particularly in areas which will be part of the Ipswich and Southern Suffolk unitary. Through discussion we have identified that this is based on a myth about Council Tax levels in Ipswich. While the Band D Council Tax in Ipswich is the highest in the country, it is also true to say that Ipswich has the lowest average Council Tax in Suffolk. This is because it has 87% of its properties in Bands A-C.

It should also be noted that Ipswich does not have any Town or Parish Councils which would levy their own precept as all services are delivered by the Borough Council. It is likely that by April 2028 Ipswich will have a Town Council (subject to the outcome of a separate Community Governance Review) in order to ensure it is not the only part of Suffolk without representation at this level when unitary local government is introduced. The Town Council would provide some services currently provided by the Borough Council and therefore these services would not transfer to the Ipswich and Southern Suffolk council.

It is likely that in this scenario an Ipswich Town Council would charge a similar precept to that of the average Town Council in Suffolk, expected to be around £200 in 2028. Therefore, if this were charged separately to the current Ipswich Borough Council element of Council Tax it would make the Band D rate for Ipswich in 2025/26 £219.58 rather than £419.58. This is very close to the Band D rate for the district councils in Suffolk. For example, Babergh District Council’s Band D precept is £193.73.

As a result, Council Tax rates within new unitary councils can be easily harmonised within the first year of unitary councils without residents experiencing a higher increase than might otherwise be expected in the current local government system.

That savings cannot be made or cannot be made without services deteriorating. The proposal for Three Councils for Suffolk is fully costed and delivers a range of savings and investments into services. Importantly, it enables public sector reform which will help to manage local government finances well into the future by tackling high demand / high-cost services while delivering improvements in outcomes for local people.

In respect of the Quality priority, respondents raised a number of areas they felt could be improved. These include public transport provision, the condition of roads, town centres, infrastructure, street cleaning, and community safety. The Three Councils for Suffolk proposal ensures that these issues are addressed by councils which understand how these issue impact local communities and can give them appropriate priority.

Three councils for Suffolk – a proposal informed by Suffolk businesses

Suffolk Chamber of Commerce represents 1,000 businesses across Suffolk. It set out its principles for local government reform in July 2025. These principles are best delivered by three councils:

Principle	Description
Greater Efficiency	With a reduction in the number of councils, and through prudent investment in new technologies, we would expect ongoing efficiencies to be realised in back-office functions and therefore greater investment in improvements in relevant day-to-day business-facing functions, including planning, environmental health, and licensing.
Three Councils for Suffolk will deliver this through:	
Reducing the number of councils in Suffolk from six to three presents a significant opportunity to deliver estimated annual efficiency savings of £34 million. This streamlined model will enable councils to operate more effectively, with leaner structures that are better equipped to focus on delivering high-quality core services—rather than navigating the complexities of a two-tier system.	
For example, by aligning planning and highways functions within a single council for each area, decision-making will be more coherent and responsive. This integration will foster more joined-up, place-based planning that reflects the unique character and needs of each locality.	
Crucially, this model strikes a balance between efficiency and local responsiveness. Unlike a single-council approach, which risks imposing a “one size fits all” framework across diverse communities, the proposed structure supports tailored solutions in areas such as planning, environmental health, and licensing. It offers the benefits of scale without sacrificing local identity or accountability.	
This is not just a cost-saving measure—it is a strategic investment in a more agile, responsive, and sustainable model of local government.	

Principle	Description
Better Economic Development Delivery	LGR in Suffolk offers an opportunity to reformat existing economic development functions to align better with the ambitions of the Suffolk Business Board, achieve greater countywide impact through better cross-border coordination and improved involvement of business representative organisations, such as Suffolk Chamber, in delivering key programmes and projects.
Three Councils for Suffolk will deliver this through:	
<p>The Suffolk Chamber of Commerce is already structured around four place-based forums and several sector-specific groups—providing a strong foundation for collaboration. Transitioning to Three Councils for Suffolk will enable a more direct and effective alignment with these forums, fostering deeper partnerships between local government and the business community.</p> <p>Each new council will be well-positioned to engage meaningfully with the Chamber on the issues that matter most to local businesses. This structure enhances responsiveness, allowing councils to tailor support to the distinct economic priorities of their areas while also collaborating across boundaries to champion shared sector strengths.</p> <p>Crucially, this model complements the wider regional economic strategy. Working in tandem with the Mayor and the Mayoral Strategic Authority, all economic development functions will be aligned—creating a unified approach to business support, investment, and growth. This joined-up system will reduce duplication, increase impact, and ensure that Suffolk’s economy is greater than the sum of its parts.</p> <p>By enabling focused, place-based engagement and strategic regional coordination, Three Councils for Suffolk will deliver a step-change in how we support businesses and drive sustainable economic growth</p>	
Principle	Description
SME friendly procurement	LGR in Suffolk affords a chance to both standardise and reset local councils’ procurement policies and approaches in order to give greater weighting to social value criteria and boost the Suffolk SME circular economy, including via closer cooperation with the Suffolk Supply Chain.
<p>Suffolk’s District and Borough Councils already demonstrate national leadership in local procurement and SME engagement. According to recent data from Tussell, Ipswich Borough Council ranks first in the Eastern Region for local spend—and is among the top 10 councils nationally. Similarly, Babergh District Council directs over 60% of its contract spend to SMEs, also placing it in the top 10 nationally.</p> <p>This strong track record provides a powerful foundation for the future. Three new councils can scale and strengthen these best practices—ensuring procurement continues to drive inclusive economic growth, support local businesses, and maximise value for money.</p> <p>With aligned strategies and shared ambition, the new councils will be well-positioned to embed local and SME-focused procurement at the heart of their economic development agendas—amplifying impact across the Suffolk and East of England economy.</p>	

Principle	Description
Forums for Suffolk Wide collaborative working	We would expect that the broadly collaborative culture across the public sector in working with Suffolk Chamber and other business representative organisations, such as the Suffolk Business Board and the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders’ Group be continued and further improved upon to ensure that the needs and experiences of businesses are central to the new councils’ delivery plans.
Three Councils for Suffolk will deliver this through:	
<p>The creation of Three Councils for Suffolk presents a unique opportunity to not only preserve but significantly enhance the collaborative culture that already exists in Suffolk. This new structure will enable each council to build even closer, more responsive relationships with key business representative organisations such as the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce.</p> <p>With more focused geographic and economic footprints, each council will have the capacity and agility to engage meaningfully with local business communities—ensuring that the needs, insights, and experiences of businesses are embedded in strategic planning and service delivery. At the same time, the three councils will be well-positioned to work together on shared priorities, enabling a joined-up approach to sector-wide challenges and opportunities.</p> <p>This model supports a more dynamic and place-sensitive form of economic governance—one that is both locally grounded and regionally coordinated. It ensures that the voice of business remains central to decision-making, and that public services are shaped in partnership with those who drive Suffolk’s economy forward.</p>	
Principle	Description
Advocacy alignment	Furthermore, we would expect that the political and managerial leadership in any Suffolk unitary system remains aligned with the evidenced countywide economic advocacy asks of Government coming out of Suffolk Chamber’s The Suffolk Convention 1 summit last year (and subsequent summits) and ensures an effective and coherent relationship with the Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Combined Authority.
<p>The Suffolk Convention’s call for a unified, mission-led approach to economic advocacy—centred on Suffolk’s growing strengths in clean energy—is best delivered through three councils. In part this is because there would be three council leaders on the Mayoral Strategic Authority advocating for Suffolk and supporting the Mayor to be heard nationally.</p> <p>Each new council will have the capacity to engage deeply with local stakeholders, while working together to champion Suffolk’s clean energy assets as a national strategic priority. This structure enables a powerful combination of place-based leadership and countywide coordination, ensuring that the political and managerial leadership remains fully aligned with the ten economic advocacy asks emerging from The Suffolk Convention 2024.</p> <p>Crucially, this model strengthens Suffolk’s ability to work in lockstep with the Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Combined Authority, ensuring that investment in clean energy, infrastructure, skills, and connectivity is both targeted and transformative. It provides the agility to respond to local needs and the coherence to drive a unified lobbying message—supporting the Convention’s emerging One Suffolk Voice campaign and ensuring consistency in every engagement with ministers and civil servants.</p>	

One Suffolk Voice campaign and ensuring consistency in every engagement with ministers and civil servants.

Without Suffolk's clean energy potential being fully realised, the UK cannot meet its net zero targets or secure long-term energy resilience. Three Councils for Suffolk will provide the governance clarity, local insight, and strategic alignment needed to accelerate this mission—delivering for Suffolk, the East of England, and the nation.

Three Councils for Suffolk – a proposal informed by Suffolk's Town and Parish Councils

Town and Parish Councils are the most local tier of government—deeply embedded in their communities and uniquely placed to understand local needs. As Suffolk's principal councils are reorganised, it's vital that Town and Parish Councils are supported through the change. We have carried out extensive engagement with Suffolk's Town and Parish Councils and worked in partnership with Suffolk Association of Local Councils. Our engagement tells us that Town and Parish Councils would welcome:



1. Closer Relationships, Greater Influence

With three councils, Town and Parish Councils will benefit from more accessible and responsive leadership. Smaller, place-based councils are better equipped to build meaningful relationships with local parishes, as there is greater democratic representation at unitary level than there can be with a single unitary council for the whole of Suffolk—ensuring their voices are heard and their insights shape decisions.

2. Formal Inclusion in Governance

The three-council model allows for structured, consistent engagement mechanisms with Town and Parish Councils. This ensures they are not sidelined in strategic planning but are recognised as essential partners in shaping services and strengthening community resilience.

3. Empowering Neighbourhood Governance

Three councils can tailor support and devolve responsibilities in ways that reflect the unique character and capacity of local areas—something a single, centralised council would struggle to do effectively.

4. Supporting Localism in Action

Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, three councils enable localism in practice—supporting Parish and Town Councils to take on more roles, access resources, and deliver services that matter most to their communities, where the individual Town or Parish wishes to do so.

Three Councils for Suffolk – a proposal informed by Suffolk's VCSFE sector

The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCSFE) sector is the backbone of Suffolk's communities—delivering vital services, building resilience, and reaching those often furthest from opportunity. As local government reorganises, it is essential that this sector is not only protected but empowered to thrive.

Creating Three Councils for Suffolk offers the most effective way to meet the sector's identified needs:

1. Local Access, Deeper Relationships

Three councils mean closer, more responsive relationships between VCSFE organisations and local government. Each council will have the capacity to engage meaningfully with its local voluntary and community sector—ensuring early involvement in planning, co-production of services, and a genuine understanding of place-based needs.

2. Stronger Infrastructure, Fairer Funding

With three councils, there is greater opportunity to invest in and tailor VCSFE infrastructure support to the unique characteristics of each area. This model also allows for more flexible, accessible commissioning—particularly for smaller organisations—while maintaining shared standards and consistency across the county.

3. Strategic Coordination with Local Insight

While a single council risks centralising decision-making and diluting local voices, three councils can coordinate strategically while staying grounded in community realities. This ensures that the sector's role in prevention, early intervention, and social value is embedded in both local delivery and countywide strategy.

4. A Stronger Voice in System Change

As Suffolk navigates both local government and NHS transformation, three councils provide the governance clarity and capacity to support the sector through change. They offer multiple points of access, clearer pathways for influence, and a stronger collective voice in regional and national forums.

Three Councils for Suffolk will deliver the localism, partnership, and flexibility the VCSFE sector needs—not just to adapt, but to lead in shaping a fairer, more resilient Suffolk.

Three Councils for Suffolk takes account of local identity and cultural and historic importance

Suffolk is a proud, historic county. However, it is not merely a single place with a single story. It is a county of diverse identities, shaped by geography, history, culture, and the communities who call it home.

Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk must go beyond structural reform. It must actively preserve, reflect, and empower the rich cultural identities, civic pride, and historic legacies that define our communities. This proposal does just that. It recognises the unique character and contribution of each part of the county. It must build on our creative heritage and build on and collaborate with a thriving and diverse arts and culture sector, rooted in local places.

Suffolk's communities are not defined solely by boundaries or population size. They are shaped by economic purpose, cultural heritage, and a shared sense of place. This proposal embraces that diversity. Full detail of how we have taken account of local identity, and the cultural and historic importance of different places can be found in the Context section of this proposal.

By proposing a model that recognises the distinct identity and potential of the different areas, the Three Councils for Suffolk proposal is a bold, necessary step forward for the benefit of the whole county. It balances reform with recognition, transformation with tradition, and ambition with belonging.

This is more than a new way of delivering services. It is a commitment to building a stronger, fairer, and more locally responsive Suffolk, together.

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution

It has been confirmed that Norfolk and Suffolk will elect a Mayor in May 2026, and work is well underway by all councils in both counties to prepare for this and the set-up of the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA). The Suffolk District and Borough Councils are committed to supporting the development of the MCCA and its transition in due course to a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA).

Devolution Priorities across Norfolk and Suffolk

Our approach to Local Government Reorganisation will provide multiple constituent authorities to support the Mayoral Strategic Authority in delivering across Norfolk and Suffolk, ensuring there is a truly connected regional picture with strong anchor institutions that can be a significant economic influence rooted in the place they represent. Multiple unitary authorities would represent and champion place at a more local level than one single voice representing each county if a single unitary for each was pursued.

Norfolk and Suffolk devolution is focused on:

1. Economic Growth and Productivity: Boosting local economies and attracting investment and working in partnership with Norfolk and Suffolk Business Boards to develop comprehensive, joint strategies.
2. Logical Geographies and Economies: a connected set of local geographies with a strong economic identity enabling local delivery and an ability to come together on a proportionate basis to leverage these economic strengths for the benefit of the region.
3. Physical Assets and Infrastructure: Improving transportation networks and infrastructure to enhance connectivity and support growth.
4. Employment and Skills: Ensuring that residents can use the full potential of their skills in driving productivity and growth.
5. Coherent Planning and Housing: Developing a housing offer that maximises growth, allows logical place-based development and better supports people's health and wellbeing.
6. Action on Flood Risk: Creating a fully integrated approach to flood and coastal management and devolution of flood and coastal erosion risk management.
7. Finance: Greater local autonomy creating a system that is more locally self-sufficient.

There is a clear need to drive innovation across the public sector and bring a strong voice for our largest economic centres of Ipswich and Norwich, while also reflecting the role of our other major towns and their economies, our coastal and market towns and rural areas in supporting these seven strategic priorities.

The area covered by the new Norfolk and Suffolk Mayor totals 9,169km². This is the largest geographic area covered by a single Mayor in England. As set out in the Context section of this Case for Change, Suffolk's economy is diverse as are its communities. It is important that the Mayoral Strategic Authority is able to understand and represent the strategic needs of all of Suffolk's communities and economies. This is best achieved by having three constituent members of the Mayoral Strategic Authority for Suffolk and ideally three for Norfolk. This approach gives balance and ensures that the strategic needs of all the communities in Suffolk can be heard.

Established Mayoral areas have strong constituent members from multiple unitary or upper tier councils. The strength of areas such as Greater Manchester and West Midlands is that there are sufficient constituent members to bring a range and depth of voices and expertise into the MSA demonstrating that for MSAs to be successful they need to be the right size and scale.



We have identified other critical success factors for successful MSAs and considered how our proposal embeds these:

Why regional authorities have succeeded	How three unitaries in Suffolk will deliver it
Clearly defined and aligned objectives between participants and stakeholders	<p>Six unitary authorities across Suffolk and Norfolk provides even representation for each county within the MSA and will enable stronger debate, representation and decision making. This optimum number of local constituent authorities will prevent a dominant voice in aligning objectives and stakeholders as well as encouraging healthy and productive challenge.</p> <p>It will also ensure that strategic priorities at MSA level accurately reflect the needs of all parts of the MSA area and align priorities between the MSA and the unitary councils.</p>
Building on and developing successful working relationships	<p>We have extensive collaborative system working experience that has delivered joined up proposals for Local Government Reorganisation and which is currently delivering for our communities. Three unitary councils for Suffolk will build on this in collaboration with new unitary councils in Norfolk, and across wider public services to deliver reform that makes a difference to residents' lives.</p>
Undertaking preparatory work to lay the ground for new functions and powers in advance	<p>We have taken account of the need to support the MSA in our estimation of how many councillors each unitary council will need to have to be connected to its communities, successful in delivering its statutory responsibilities and the delivery arm for many of the MSA's decisions.</p> <p>When developing officer structures and cabinet portfolios we will need to consider the relationships and capacity required to support the Mayor and the MSA in understanding each area and delivering priorities. Three unitary councils in Suffolk means the senior officer capacity to support the Mayor and MSA to deliver projects in each unitary area without projects competing with each other for single resource pools.</p> <p>The approach of all current councils being involved in the development of the initial MCCA for Norfolk and Suffolk means that there is a wide and developing understanding of what is required in respect of the functions and powers of the new Combined Authority and should Three Councils for Suffolk be the new model for local government, this will continue.</p>
Taking a whole-system approach to investment and growth and being prepared to contribute to local programmes	<p>A strategic authority needs local partners to be able to inform its investment programmes and to align delivery priorities. Unitaries therefore need to be close to communities and able to provide rich input to strategic planning and programme delivery. Three Councils for Suffolk will deliver this.</p>
Place Alignment - typically based on functional economic areas, it is important to strike the balance between the scale of towns and cities and building on the full range of economic strengths and opportunities in the wider area	<p>Recent LGA research identifies place alignment within a Strategic Authority as a critical success factor stressing the importance of considering the council's place strengths and how that can inform working within and across the MSA; recognising the contributions each council can make to the MSA area; and exploring local and regional priorities for public service reform, including where there is value from the MSA's scale and convening role.</p>

Strategic Planning with Local Delivery

A Mayoral Strategic Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk will operate across multiple unitaries taking on functions that require a wider strategic regional perspective. These will include management of our growth plan and associated place funding, managing the integrated settlement and the investment fund, transport (including public transport – which is important in both the rural and urban areas of Suffolk) and local infrastructure, strategic and spatial planning including the strategic elements of housing, skills, public safety, environmental management, economic development and regeneration, health and wellbeing, and public service reform.

The role of the Mayoral Strategic Authority will allow our unitary authorities to focus on local service delivery, drawing on their deep understanding of local communities' needs and strengths. By working together on joint initiatives and neighbourhood-led schemes our unitary authorities can build upon connection to place and drive health and wellbeing benefits.

Strong Decision Making in the Strategic Authority

A three unitary model in Norfolk, balanced with a three unitary model in Suffolk under one Mayoral Strategic Authority combines the benefit of strategic regional leadership, local democratic responsiveness and operational resilience.

It provides balanced representation around the Strategic Authority table across diverse areas such as coastal, rural and urban economies, and political perspectives. In addition, this structure offers Norfolk and Suffolk the opportunity to harness complementary strengths of each area and address unique challenges with shared solutions, ultimately delivering balanced and inclusive growth across the whole region.

We currently have 14 councils across Norfolk and Suffolk, the proposal for three unitary councils in Suffolk and three in Norfolk reduces this to six, delivering a significant reduction which represents a constructive balance between scale and efficiency and democratic engagement which supports strong decision making.

Devolution will enable the Mayoral Strategic Authority to take responsibility for strategic transport and infrastructure planning and delivery, ensuring that travel and freight routes are developed around economic functionalities and not county administrative boundaries. For example, a rail investment strategy focused on linking Ipswich, Lowestoft, Bury St Edmunds, and Felixstowe would strengthen connections between key coastal ports, market towns, and workforce centres. This approach will support rural residents accessing jobs in urban hubs and facilitate the efficient movement of goods from major logistic sites such as Felixstowe, the Freeport, and the A14 corridor.

Bringing together the economies of Norfolk and Suffolk under one Mayoral Strategic Authority fosters a shared identity and purpose supporting civic pride, more stable governance and stronger leadership. This structure ensures all types of communities are represented and eliminates policy bias towards only urban, coastal, or rural priorities.

There are significant strategic benefits to our proposed approach:

Strategic Benefits of Multiple Unitaries	Opportunity
Representation of Place	<p>The Norfolk and Suffolk MSA will cover an area of approximately 3,500 square miles with a starting population of about 1,700,000 residents. The area is predominantly rural, interspersed with urban centres, such as Ipswich and Norwich, and defined by a rapidly changing coastline presenting significant environmental and infrastructural challenges. It is important the complexities Norfolk and Suffolk can be understood and represented by the Mayor and the MSA.</p> <p>Multiple constituent authorities will provide strong anchor institutions with deep local knowledge, that can represent and champion place at a more local level than one single voice representing each county if a single unitary for each was pursued.</p> <p>Multiple unitaries also mean that smaller businesses will have a better conduit for their views to be heard by the MSA by having a more locally available unitary to engage and build relationships with, that can then represent their views to the MSA.</p> <p>The proposed multiple unitaries will give a voice to a wider range of communities and interests, representing urban, rural and coastal needs, while preventing a dominance of any one single area.</p> <p>There is significant experience of delivering for communities through collaboration in both counties. This collaboration is built on bringing together different perspectives, constructive challenge, enhanced scrutiny and local stakeholder representation at the table. This provides a solid foundation for multiple unitaries to collaborate and support the Mayor and the MSA to deliver their strategic priorities.</p>
Capacity and Capability	<p>The Norfolk and Suffolk MSA will be a strategic commissioning authority. Through this model, the MSA itself will have limited resource and capacity to deliver programmes of work without the support of external organisations.</p> <p>Multiple unitaries presents the opportunity to ensure there is the capacity, skills and capability in the wider system to deliver the strategic priorities of the MSA responding neatly to this proposed commissioning model.</p> <p>The proposed three unitaries in Suffolk will bring a diverse skill set, local knowledge, capacity and relationships to effectively support the MSA and enable wider joint investment and coordination on issues such as transport, housing and skills across the MSA and constituent authority areas.</p>
Governance, enhanced local representation and democratic legitimacy	<p>The establishment of multiple unitary authorities ensures a broader and more balanced representation of diverse places and populations. With a multiple unitary approach being presented by both the Norfolk and Suffolk Districts there will be more “voices at the table” creating a distributed leadership and delivery model, increasing the overall capacity in the system to address and manage complex issues.</p> <p>Scrutiny functions would be better resourced and diversified which will improve transparency, safeguard against conformity bias, provide effective and safe challenge all whilst ensuring a fair, inclusive, and democratic approach to decisions alongside helping to prevent risks.</p> <p>Spreading decision making across multiple unitary councils encourages ownership of outcomes and each authority can hold others (and the Mayor) to account, further improving transparency.</p>

Scrutiny	<p>An MSA with multiple unitaries enhances the ability of the system to scrutinise policy and performance effectively. Rather than a single scrutiny panel operating at distance, multiple unitary authorities can contribute layered and diverse oversight; each bringing unique perspectives based on local experience. This strengthens transparency, embeds continuous challenge, and ensures decision making at the MSA level is subject to robust, evidence-based review. It also enables clearer escalation routes, peer accountability and improved public confidence in how power is exercised.</p> <p>This reduces the risk of unchecked power concentrated in the hands of the Mayor with minimal constituent members.</p>
Risk (including Financial)	<p>More constituent members involved in governance including decision making and oversight reduces risks and increases transparency.</p> <p>Shared scrutiny makes it harder for risky or one-sided decisions to pass unchecked and encourages different perspectives in risk assessment and mitigation planning.</p> <p>Furthermore, multiple unitaries will spread any financial risks that the constituent authorities may have to absorb if there is a lack of financial management within the MSA itself, reducing the risk of severe financial impact if that risk is spread across multiple unitary councils.</p>
Trust in Institutions	<p>A more balanced multiple unitary structure within an MSA fosters greater public confidence by ensuring decisions are made closer to the people they effect.</p> <p>When residents see their communities reflected in the make-up of regional governance, and experience services that understand and respond to local context, it builds trust in institutions. Visibility of local leadership, coupled with fairer representation across diverse places, reassures communities that no area is being left behind or overshadowed.</p> <p>Crucially, public confidence is not just a by-product of good governance, it is a prerequisite for long-term democratic legitimacy, civic engagement and policy compliance. A model that feels accessible, equitable, and responsive creates the conditions for shared ownership of regional priorities and stronger public backing for change.</p>

New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment

Three Councils for Suffolk delivers effective democratic representation

There are currently 308 councillors elected to the county, district and borough councils in Suffolk. We have carefully considered how many councillors each of the three unitary councils should have in order to achieve good democratic governance, as well as to develop and maintain a deep connection to communities and to properly reflect community identities.

Appendix 5 sets out proposed baseline governance arrangements for each unitary council, of around 60 councillors. In addition, a range of local factors has been identified for each proposed unitary area which means we believe the final number for each unitary will be in a range of 60 – 66 councillors:

Central and Eastern – local governance considerations

At 703 square miles, the Central and Eastern Council has the largest land area of the three proposed councils. More significantly, it has around 240 town and parish councils - ranging from very small rural villages to large urban centres. The size of the area, and the number of local councils, will lend themselves to new forms of neighbourhood engagement which can be explored at the time an interim warding scheme is developed in 2026. But, for the purposes of council size, these factors pose two immediate challenges:

- The number of parish and town councils that an individual rural councillor can support if single member wards continue to be preferred in this part of Suffolk.
- Ensuring the flexibility within councillor capacity to continue to operate the area planning committee system currently used successfully by East Suffolk Council.

In respect of (a), having up to 66 councillors would provide more flexibility within the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) acceptable tolerances for variations in electoral

equality between wards. Meaning that, at the time of the LGBCE's review after 2028, there will be the scope to minimise the number of single member rural wards with very large numbers of parishes to support.

In respect of (b), the minimum number in our proposed range i.e. 60 councillors assumes one planning committee, and non-Cabinet members sitting on two committees each. If there is a wish to create two area planning committees, reporting to a strategic planning committee, this will put significant pressure on a 60-councillor model given the likely time requirement on planning committee members.

There are other local factors in this authority's area which are likely to put pressure on councillor capacity and the requirement to provide councillor nominations to internal and external bodies. These include but are not limited to:

- Engaging with Port and Harbour Authorities.
- Engaging with the Broads National Park Authority.
- The long-term process for building the new Sizewell C Nuclear Reactor, one of the largest and most challenging construction projects in the UK.
- The fact that the entirety of the new council area will contain council-owned housing stock.

Ipswich and Southern – local governance considerations

Being the most urban of the three proposed unitaries will generate different caseloads for the new councillors – national evidence and local experience indicates this is of a higher volume in urban populations than rural ones.

Higher levels of deprivation also tend to lead to both an increase in demand and a requirement for more time intensive communication e.g. personal visits rather than email. 14% of Ipswich Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) fall within the most deprived decile.²⁴

Councillors whose wards have a high concentration of council housing stock tend to spend a significant amount of time on housing matters and Ipswich and Southern Suffolk will inherit a significant Council housing stock.

Councillors in some current wards/divisions also face particular challenges in dealing with casework owing to the relatively high proportion of residents who cannot speak English well or at all; this adds considerably to the time taken to deal with casework.

Liaison with the proposed Ipswich Town Council, which will be by far the largest Town Council in Suffolk as well as liaison with existing towns and parishes.

All of the above factors, along with having flexibility to reduce the likelihood of rural wards with large numbers of parish councils to support, point to the potential value of extra councillor capacity.

In addition, there are other local factors in this authority's area which are likely to put pressure on councillor capacity and the requirement to provide councillor nominations to internal and external bodies. These include but are not limited to:

- Engaging with the Port Authorities.
- Supporting long-standing joint arrangements between Colchester and Ipswich's museums.
- The fact that the entirety of the new council area will contain council-owned housing stock.

Western Suffolk – local governance considerations

Western Suffolk is also a large geographical area, at 598 square miles - with around 170 town and parish councils, including several of the largest town councils in Suffolk.

It will inherit some council housing stock, but a large part of its area (the current West Suffolk Council area) does not have an Housing Revenue Account (HRA) at present.

Although multi-member rural wards are not uncommon at district level presently, the new council may benefit from the same flexibility in council size when it comes to providing new forms of neighbourhood governance, manageable rural ward sizes and keeping the current distinctive ward boundaries between urban and rural communities.

This need for flexibility will be uniquely heightened by large variances between electorate and population size created by the large number of US military personnel and their families living in certain parts of Western Suffolk. This creates the potential for larger than average ward sizes (population, number of parishes, geographical area) in the north-west of the new unitary area due to the requirement to maintain electoral equality when the LGBCE carry out their review between 2028 and 2030.

The new council may also want the scope to consider an area planning system.

In addition, there are other local factors in this authority's area which are likely to put pressure on councillor capacity and the requirement to provide councillor nominations to internal and external bodies. These include but are not limited to:

- Since a large part of its area is in the Greater Cambridgeshire Sub-Region, engaging with that area's Mayor, as well as the new MSA for Norfolk and Suffolk.
- Working with the Horse Racing Industry, as a continuation of the current multi-sector arrangements and agreements.
- Supporting a very large UK and US military community and infrastructure. Two US airbases are located at Mildenhall and Lakenheath, and there is a further RAF base at Honington. There are 11,000 US personnel and families living on base and in the areas around the military bases.

Taking the proposed governance model and these local factors into consideration, our current estimate – pending work on warding arrangements later in the Local Government Reorganisation process – is that each council may require between 60 and 66 councillors. This would mean one councillor for every c.4000 residents based on 2021 census data and a maximum of 198 councillors. This is an overall reduction of at least 110 councillors, saving associated allowances etc but retaining a significant level of democratic representation to ensure strong connections to communities.

	Population 2021 (Census 2021 Parish)	60 councillors	66 councillors
Western Suffolk	254,700	4,245	3,859
Ipswich and Southern	252,552	4,209	3,827
Central and Eastern	253,416	4,224	3,840
Total	760,668		

By 2025 it is anticipated that Suffolk's population will have grown to around 1 million residents and at this point the average number of residents served by 66 councillors in each council would be 5,050.

Our implementation plan, set out in 108 includes the need to finalise an interim warding scheme.

Three Councils for Suffolk delivers engaged and empowered communities

Effective neighbourhood governance means moving decision-making as close to residents as appropriate, with the basic principle that decisions are made by people who understand local needs.

Our principles

- Working with what exists.
- Inclusive participation by default.
- Widening audiences and partnerships.
- Reflecting the topic.
- Recognition and value to deepen democracy and civic participation.
- Transparency and honesty and trust.

Neighbourhood-based approaches offer a powerful opportunity to reshape how public services are delivered, placing communities at the heart of decision-making and enabling residents to be active participants rather than passive recipients.

The proposed three councils for Suffolk model is designed to support this vision. It would establish three unitary councils, each with a strong local focus and the autonomy to shape services around the specific needs of their communities. This model allows for decisions to be made at the most appropriate level, whether locally, across the three councils, or at a wider Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral level, ensuring flexibility and responsiveness to the scale and impact of each issue.

At the core of this governance model is a commitment to listening to and acting on the voices of local people. Whether decisions are made at a neighbourhood, town, district, or county-wide level, the structure is designed to be close enough to communities to reflect their needs and aspirations.

The three unitary councils will work constructively with town and parish councils, recognising their independence while ensuring that neighbourhood-level engagement is not solely reliant on them. This approach enables a broader, more inclusive model of community involvement, one that empowers residents to co-design and, where appropriate, co-deliver services and initiatives that matter most to them.

Sometimes, the most effective role for local government is to enable and support, stepping back to allow empowered communities to lead. This model builds on strong foundations already in place across Suffolk, such as the Community Help Hubs in East Suffolk, where staff work collaboratively with vulnerable residents, or the partnerships with health services that engage people with lived experience to shape local provision.

Over time, this approach will also support greater alignment between local government and other key partners, including health, police, and voluntary sector organisations. This presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape local services, deploying proven tools more widely and co-creating new ones with communities.

Throughout the proposed model, the principle of being local and responsive is embedded. It respects the unique geography, demographics, and preferences of each area, and champions a person-centred approach to empowering residents, where they live, on the issues that matter most to them.

We also recognise that meaningful engagement extends beyond residents alone. Strong, trusted relationships with key partners, including the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sectors, local businesses, and statutory agencies, are essential to delivering joined-up, impactful services that meet the full spectrum of community needs.

Appendix 6 provides more detail on how we will bring these principles to life through the new authorities, and measure success.



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND ROADMAP



We understand that building the right local government for Suffolk brings huge opportunity but that it does include risks and challenges. We have developed a detailed implementation plan which we are putting into practice and have a proposed programme structure to enable Suffolk to make the best use of the time available before vesting day.

We have summarised key features of the plan below and welcome the opportunity to discuss with Ministers and civil servants and to share our experience and approach with other local authority areas.

We have experience of Local Government Reorganisation

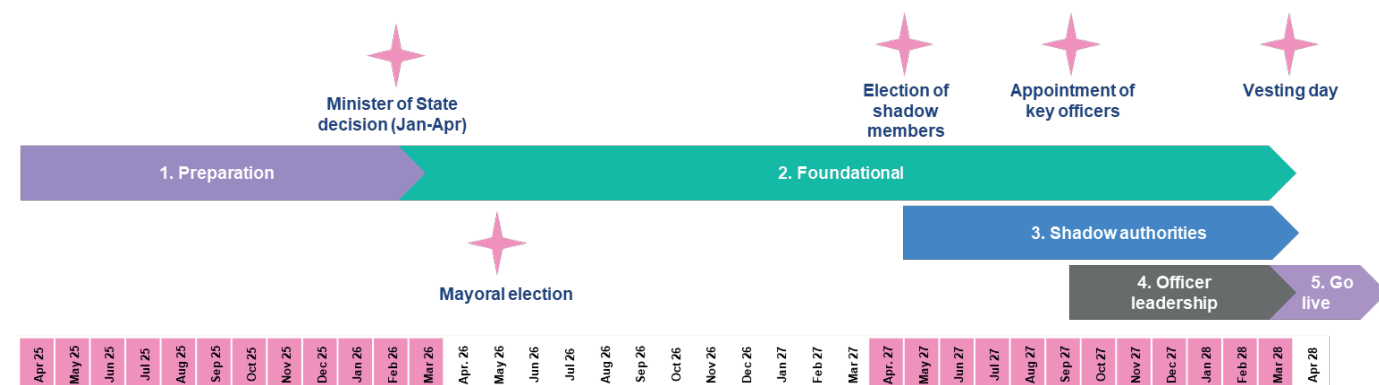
We understand the complexity of Local Government Reorganisation and have done it before. In 2019 we integrated Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury and Suffolk Coastal and Waveney districts to create West Suffolk and East Suffolk. This included addressing some of the key challenges also found in unitarisation, including technology infrastructure, shadow authorities and supporting staff and residents through the change. We will use that experience to accelerate this Local Government Reorganisation and to minimise disruption for staff, residents and businesses. We know that delivering LGR requires collaboration and have a strong history of doing so across local government in Suffolk.

Our principles for implementation

We have established principles to guide our approach to implementation. These are based on our experience and having consulted with officers and people who previously delivered Local Government Reorganisation, including in Suffolk to understand the practicalities of disaggregation.

1. Continuity and quality of public services throughout transition;
2. Resident-focused design and communication;
3. Transparency and accountability in decision-making;
4. Value for money and long-term financial sustainability;
5. Collaboration across all councils and partners;
6. Staff wellbeing and inclusive organisational culture; and
7. Proactive risk mitigation, especially for complex service disaggregation.

The phases of Local Government Reorganisation



The implementation of Local Government Reorganisation has four clear phases. Each phase enables different activities, has different priorities and requires different governance structures. The phasing helps to structure a plan, improve communication with staff and partners and accelerate delivery.

1. **Preparation:** Before a decision on the shape of the new unitaries.
2. **Foundational:** When a decision on the shape of the new unitaries has been made, until vesting day but before the election of shadow members or appointment of officer leadership.
3. **Shadow authorities:** With members elected but only with programme or unofficial groupings of officers for capacity.
4. **Officers leadership:** When Tier 1-3 officers have been appointed and can prepare the new councils
5. **Go-live:** After vesting day when new councils are operational.

Phase	Summary priorities
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up the programme (governance, workstreams and finance). Recruit Strategic Partner(s). Set up the plan, timeline and critical path. Set up a data hub - Gather and maintain consistent programme data. Define and agree scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils. Follow guidance such as that issued by the Minister in July 2025 regarding transition arrangements.
Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressing what is in appropriate scope of the programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems, and contracts. Service alignment and transformation including reconfiguring existing area based working arrangements to match boundaries of new councils. Options appraisals. Preparing for key decisions. Elections. Compliance with Structural Changes Order and legal checks and assurance.
Shadow authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and leadership roles. Member inductions and service briefings. Key decision timetable. TUPE transfer arrangements.
Officer leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tier 2 and Tier 3 Leadership Recruitment. Service Planning. Development of council plan, Budget MTFP. Key policies and strategies (Strategic priorities and corporate plans, Unitary strategic risk register, Constitution). Operating model and staffing allocations. Preparing for Day 1.
Go-live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stability and seamless experience. Improvement and post-LGR transformation.

There are also fundamentals that will remain in place throughout the reorganisation process:

- Staff support and communication.
- Communication with partners and residents.
- Access to the right skills and capacity.
- Clarity on Day 1 requirements and target state.

- Management of programme creep and over-optimism.
- Change management.
- Collaboration and ownership.

Our governance

We will operate an LGR Programme Board across Suffolk which will report to a Suffolk Leaders Group and Joint Committees. This Board will include the Chief Executives and Programme Director and will oversee the programme and address strategic issues and risks.

We will establish a Day 1 Board to focus on managing delivery of the programme plan. This will include tracking progress against milestones and completion of Day 1 requirements.

Underneath the overarching LGR programme we will set up unitary delivery groups to focus on issues specific to each new council including elections, council plan, member induction, policies, and culture.

These groups will increase in importance when working to Shadow Authorities and when interim heads of paid service are appointed but by starting early we are setting the unitaries up for success.

Our workstreams

We know the importance of operating a single programme across Suffolk to drive consistency, efficiency and to address challenges where possible.



We are setting up Unitary Delivery Groups to focus on preparations for the new councils. These are collaborative by definition and will be agile to take advantage of opportunities that may arise but relate to one of the new unitaries individually. These governance structures will develop to support the Shadow Authorities and establish the new authorities when permanent officers are appointed.

Key risks and mitigations

We understand the risks that LGR presents and are already working to mitigate them through our programme structure and approach:

- Disaggregation complexity – creating the right structures for Suffolk entails disaggregating County and District Council services and changing boundaries. We are mitigating this through close work with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, insight from other LGR programmes that have disaggregated services and beginning planning for Day 1 early.
- Insufficient ICT capacity – ICT is a key service, workstream and enabler of all services and elements of the programme and is a risk to the safe and legal function of the new councils. We have an established ICT managers meetings across Suffolk and are sharing data on our systems, licences and infrastructure to prepare for LGR and reduce the capacity required.
- Poor Collaboration – LGR requires collaboration across councils, tiers of local government and across political parties. We are mitigating this through building on existing collaborative arrangements, developing ‘no regrets activities’ that we can deliver across Suffolk as a single programme and discussing protocols for how we will approach LGR. We know the value of ‘good endings and safe beginnings’ and will set up the programme efficiently to maintain focus on service delivery in sovereign councils while setting up the unitaries for success.

Our ambition for Day 1

Our vision for LGR is ambitious and exciting and we are already working to deliver it but we know that the focus for vesting day needs to be about seamless continuity of services. Our residents should only see positive change on 1 April 2028 and experience no disruption to the way they receive or access services.

Setting the unitaries up to be safe, legal and effective will be the priority for the programme but we are planning a transformative element to the programme which will identify opportunities prior to Day 1 and deliver key agreed improvements in the sovereign councils ahead of vesting day.

We have started

From our experience of reorganisation we know the value of starting early. We have a head start as we already work closely together and have a number of shared services, roles and contracts aligned with the new unitary structures. To build upon this we have been working collaboratively as Districts and Boroughs to:

- Map our ICT infrastructure and enterprise architecture.
- Set up unitary delivery groups to identify and take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities such as shared roles or where contracts or licences are expiring.
- Map our contracts to inform integration opportunities.
- Bring our service leads together to compare policies and processes and to identify opportunities.
- Clean up and standardise data across Suffolk.
- Establish a Programme Management Office.
- Identify skills and capacity requirements to deliver the programme.
- Consider further shared roles and skills sharing across councils.
- Develop a datahubwork collaboratively on data to drive forward the LGR process.
- Agree how sovereign councils in Suffolk will operate prior to vesting day.
- Establish an LGR programme Board and tools to power the programme.

Post LGR transformation

This implementation will be the first step on the journey to local government fit for the future in Suffolk. We expect each unitary to continue on their transformation journey to realise the benefits of LGR for residents and businesses. These will each look differently to reflect the distinct identities of the areas and people they serve but we expect post-LGR transformation to encompass:

- Developing alignment with new target operating models.
- Contract integration and optimisation.
- Further service integration.
- Further systems improvement and integration.

POPULATION DATA AND PROJECTIONS

The projected population figures were calculated using:

- ONS Census population estimates (2021) at parish level <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/parishdataenglandandwalescensus2021>
- Projected housing completion numbers:
 - New housing completions 2021-24 (actual figures – provided by each authority).
 - Projected new dwelling completions in published 5 Year Housing Land Supply documents (2024-29).
 - Projected new dwelling completions using MHCLG standard methodology (2030-2045).
- Number of households (ONS Census 2021) [Number of Households - Office for National Statistics](#).

Current population calculations for Suffolk (2021)

The current population data were taken from the 2021 Census at parish level and shows the population of Suffolk to be 760,668.

Current District	2021 population (2021 Census)
Ipswich	139,642
East Suffolk	246,061
West Suffolk	179,934
Babergh	92,343
Mid Suffolk	102,688
Total Population	760,668

Table 1: Population of each authority based upon 2021 Census data (parish).

Current population projections for each of the new unitary authorities (2021)

The following table shows the population make up of each of the new unitary authorities from the existing local authorities.

Western Suffolk	Ipswich and Southern Suffolk	Central and Eastern Suffolk
West Suffolk: 179,934	Ipswich: 139,642	East Suffolk: 180,768
Mid Suffolk: 20,149	Mid Suffolk: 9,891	Mid Suffolk: 72,648
Babergh: 54,617	Babergh: 37,726	
	East Suffolk: 65,293	
CURRENT POPULATION 254,700 (2021)	CURRENT POPULATION 252,552 (2021)	CURRENT POPULATION 253,416 (2021)

Table 2: Population of each of the unitary authorities in 2021.

Future population projections for Suffolk in 2045

For the purposes of the Suffolk Local Government Reorganisation Case for Change, future population figures have taken the 2021 Census data as the starting point. Whilst more recent data are available, it is considered that the 2021 Census data provide the most accurate baseline for calculating future population for the following reasons:

- The 2021 Census data go down to the parish level. This information will be vital when calculating the future population projections for the new unitary authorities.
- The 2021 Census data are more robust and reliable than more recent ONS projections, primarily due to response rates.
- The 2021 Census provides average household population size data at the local authority level, which can then be applied to housing completions to project future potential population.

The following methodology has then been applied to project the population of each existing local authority, and of Suffolk, to the year 2045.

1. Baseline Population
 - 2021 Census data at the parish level.
2. For the years 2021 to 2024:
 - Housing completions data have been used. These data are considered to be accurate as each local authority must monitor completions and report these through the annual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR).
3. For the years 2024 to 2029:
 - Each authority produces a Five-Year Housing land Supply statement, which sets out the permissions that have been granted and any Local Plan / Neighbourhood Plan allocations that are expected to be built within the next five years. In calculating build out rates, local authorities do make some assumptions, such as size, complexity and type of permission, but these are typically informed by developers and landowners. These are therefore considered to be reliable.
4. For the years 2029 to 2045:
 - The assumption made is that the Government's standard methodology for each local authority area will be delivered in full.
5. Population increase calculation:
 - A household multiplier has then been applied to the number of net new dwellings. This figure is calculated by dividing the population of the authority (table 1) by the number of households within the authority (ONS 2021).

Utilising this methodology, the population of Suffolk is projected to increase by 240,728 from 2021 to 2045 to **1,001,396**. This is set out in Table 3.

Council	Babergh	East Suffolk	Ipswich	Mid Suffolk	West Suffolk	Total
2021 Population (2021 Census)	92,343	246,061	139,642	102,688	179,934	760,668
Dwellings completed 2021-2024	1,986	2,489	574	3,122	2,479	10,650
Number of new dwellings to be built over next 5 years (from 5 Year land Supply document) 2024-2029	2,496	5,916	2,107	3,210	4,884	18,613
Annual total under standard methodology (published March 2025)	769	1,667	719	733	1,194	
Number of new dwellings to be built under standard methodology (2029-2045 (15 years)) (published March 2025)	11,535	25,005	10,785	10,995	17,910	76,230
Total number of dwellings to be built by 2045	16,017	33,410	13,466	17,327	25,273	105,493
Household sizes (from census 2021)	2.3	2.22	2.35	2.32	2.29	
Population increases from 2021 to 2045	36,839	74,170	31,645	40,199	57,875	240,728
Population Figure in 2045	129,182	320,231	171,287	142,887	237,809	1,001,396

Table 3: Projected population of Suffolk in 2045 using the Case for Change methodology.

Estimating the population projections of the three Unitary Authorities for the Case for Change

Taking the data in Table 2 this is then converted to a percentage calculation.

% split per new unitary authority proposed from each existing local authority			
Existing local authority	Western Suffolk	Ipswich and Southern Suffolk	Central and Eastern Suffolk
Babergh	59.15	40.85	0
East Suffolk	0	26.54	73.46
Ipswich	0	100	0
Mid Suffolk	19.62	9.63	70.75
West Suffolk	100	0	0

Table 4: Percentage of each existing local authority into the three new proposed unitary authorities.

Applying these percentage splits to the projections in Table 3 results in the following population projections for each of the unitary authorities in 2045.

Western Suffolk	Ipswich and Southern Suffolk	Central and Eastern Suffolk
POPULATION PROJECTION 342,255 (2045)	POPULATION PROJECTION 322,807 (2045)	POPULATION PROJECTION 336,334 (2045)

Table 5: Projected population of the proposed new unitary authorities in 2045.

APPENDIX

2

INITIAL OPTIONS EVALUATION

Commentary for scoring in a single unitary

Evaluation criteria	1 unitary	Qualitative analysis
Establishing a single tier of local government	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Delivery of streamlined governance and countywide co-ordination of key servicesSimplifies accountability and enables consistent policy implementation
Efficiency, capacity, and withstanding shocks	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Delivers the highest annual savings (£36m) and lowest implementation cost (£33m), with no disaggregation costs. Fastest payback period at 2 yearsCombines expertise and staffing into a single, flexible workforce
High quality and sustainable public services	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Consistent countywide service standards, but lacks local tailoring or responsiveness to diverse communitiesCentralised management supports long term planning and resilience, but local insight is diluted
Working together to understand and meet local needs	L	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Centralised structure overlooks local differences and prioritiesWeaker local partnerships due to broader, less targeted engagementLess responsive to emerging local issues or community voices
Support devolution arrangements	L	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lacks the local flexibility needed to tailor devolved powers to distinct regional prioritiesDilutes local accountability
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	L	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Residents deal with one council but this is further from where they liveFewer councillors per area meaning reduced visibility and representation at neighbourhood levelHarder to maintain close relationships with town/parish councils, voluntary groups and local networks

Commentary for scoring in a 2 unitary model

Evaluation criteria	2 unitaries	Qualitative analysis
Establishing a single tier of local government	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More manageable geography and population in each unitary to support effective governance and service delivery Clearer local leadership within each area strengthening accountability and strategic decision making
Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some duplication, limiting full potential of economies of scale Annual savings of £35m with £20m disaggregation and £36m implementation costs
High quality and sustainable public services	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthens the ability to maintain established relationships with communities Brings decision making closer to communities which allows for more locally tailored service delivery
Working together to understand and meet local needs	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less granularity in understanding diverse local communities Bigger unitaries making it harder to tailor services to very specific neighbourhood needs
Support devolution arrangements	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covers broader, less cohesive areas, making it harder to align with natural economic geographies and place-based priorities
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larger geographic areas per unitary making it harder to build close relationships with local communities Fewer councillors per locality reducing visibility and responsiveness at neighbourhood level

Commentary for scoring in a 3 unitary model

Evaluation criteria	3 unitaries	Qualitative analysis
Establishing a single tier of local government	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects Suffolk's diverse economic and demographic profiles Aligns with local identities and functional geographies
Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right balance between efficiency and scale, and local delivery and responsiveness Balanced model with £34m annual savings, £20m disaggregation and £39m implementation costs. Payback period of 4.5 years
High quality and sustainable public services	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables place-based service design, stronger local partnerships, and integrated delivery Supports innovation and responsiveness
Working together to understand and meet local needs	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritises community identity and local accountability Supports tailored interventions and better outcomes
Support devolution arrangements	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures local democracy is maintained and local relationships retained Six unitary authorities across Norfolk and Suffolk drives better accountability and stronger decision making for the Mayor and strategic authority
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains strong local relationships, supports neighbourhood-level delivery, and ensures equal focus across communities

CRITERION 2 - TECHNICAL FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

3.0 Introduction

This section provides the comprehensive technical evidence base that underpins the financial analysis presented in earlier sections of the Case for Change. It consolidates all supporting data, calculations, and assumptions used in constructing the financial model for the preferred Local Government Reorganisation option, ensuring that the analysis is both transparent and auditable. The content here has been developed in close collaboration with finance teams from each existing council, reflecting shared understanding of local data and a jointly agreed methodology.

The purpose of this section is to serve as the detailed reference layer that supports the narrative and conclusions reached in the main body of this document. It contains the full set of model inputs, mappings, and outputs, ranging from the derivation of the new revenue budgets to the disaggregation of reserves and capital positions, the workings behind estimated savings and implementation costs, and the 7-year financial forecasts under different scenarios. Each appendix clearly documents its source data, allocation approach, assumptions, and any material judgement applied in the modelling process. This ensures a clear audit trail from base data through to headline findings.

To support clarity and usability, the section is structured into three technical appendices, each aligned with a core element of the financial analysis:

- **Appendix A – Methodology and Assumption Log:** Captures the overarching modelling approach, data sources, macro assumptions, and the engagement steps taken to validate inputs with local finance leads.
- **Appendix B – Savings Assumptions:** Sets out the savings estimates in full, including baseline costs, percentage reductions, and rationale by category, as well as the modelling behind base, midpoint, and stretch scenarios.
- **Appendix C – Implementation Cost Breakdown:** Breaks down one-off transition and disaggregation costs by year and type, with cost drivers and any contingency assumptions clearly noted.

Each appendix is structured for ease of navigation and aligned to the relevant sections of the main report. Where appropriate, appendices are supplemented with footnotes, citations, and version tracking to ensure reproducibility and clarity for external reviewers, auditors, and government stakeholders.

This section acts as the technical foundation upon which the financial case is built. It allows readers, particularly finance professionals, Section 151 Officers, and programme sponsors, to interrogate the detail behind each modelling decision and to have confidence in the robustness, transparency, and evidential basis of the conclusions drawn.

Appendix A – Methodology and Assumption Log:

The phased model has been prepared in three sections – assumptions, calculations and outputs. The outputs include the calculation of payback period, individual year impact of LGR and a cumulative impact of LGR. These outputs help in assessing the viability of the LGR options being assessed.

The model is based on the following three key assumptions:

- Savings costs
- One-off implementation costs
- Investment in Disaggregation of County services

The phased model projects the above across thirteen years, including three pre-implementation years (Base Year, Year -1 and Shadow Year) and ten post-implementation years.

The model is, however, based on 2024/25 prices and does not include any adjustment for future inflation for both costs as well as savings.

The inputs as well as outputs have been prepared and validated internally with Section 151 officers. These reflect the best estimates as of the writing of this case.

Appendix B – Savings Assumptions:

The overall savings assumptions have been prepared using a mix of top down and bottom-up savings approaches, as outlined below.

Top-down approach:

The overall savings assumptions for the current LGR have been calculated based on the outlined savings of unitary authorities as outlined within previous Case for Change documentation. These included fourteen previous cases for change across England ranging from cases submitted between 2009 and 2023. The data included Base Case and Stretch case savings.

For each individual previous case, an average savings per population base was calculated for both the Base case and Stretch case savings. These were subsequently indexed up from the relevant transition year (per the previous case for change) to April 2025 prices. A simple arithmetic average of indexed savings per population base informed the overall average indexed saving per population, which was used to calculate the total 'top-down' savings.

The top-down savings were split into underlying savings categories (as reflected in table below) using a percentage allocation mix based on internal discussions.

Saving Name	Description	Rationale and Assumptions	% of Total Savings
Optimising Leadership	Reviewing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication and enhance operational efficiency, by merging similar responsibilities into fewer and more impactful positions.	Assumes a single senior leadership team replaces multiple councils' executives (Chief Execs, Directors, S151s, Monitoring Officers). Savings phased: 10% in Shadow year, 40% in Year 1 (quick restructuring), 50% in Year 2. Assumes no significant delays from legal/TUPE or governance negotiations.	6%

Right Sizing the Organisation	Determining the right size of the organisation, proportionate to the services that are being delivered, offset by the costs of new technology and upskilling individuals. Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation.	Assumes 10–20% of workforce (primarily back-office/admin roles) reduced through consolidation, automation and voluntary redundancy. Phased: 10% in Shadow Year, 20% Year 1 (early release), 40% Year 2, 30% Year 3. Realisation depends on culture change, system integration and union engagement.	22%
Consolidating Corporate Services	Consolidating back-office functions, such as Human Resources (HR), Finance and Information Technology (IT) to streamline operations, enhance efficiencies and unlock savings.	Merger of finance, HR, payroll, legal and comms into centralised functions. Savings phased: 20% in Year 1, 40% in Year 2, 30% in Year 3. Requires effective digital systems, unified policies and process harmonisation.	20%
Service Contract Consolidation	Understanding current and joint service arrangements between Councils, and what savings (or costs) may be incurred on consolidation. Determining the optimum sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced. This will need to consider both financial and operational efficiency and will consider existing arrangements with third parties.	Assumes merging of contracts (waste, highways, care) and renegotiation over time. Realised more slowly: 10% in Shadow Year, 35% in Year 1, 35% in Year 2, 20% in Year 3. Dependent on contract cycles, procurement capacity and provider cooperation.	9%
Procurement and 3rd Party Spend	Centralising procurement to determine resultant costs/savings through relative purchasing power and renegotiating terms with suppliers. Where appropriate, consolidating similar contracts for service delivery, presents an opportunity to renegotiate terms and achieve economies of scale with suppliers.	Centralised procurement, common suppliers, leveraging purchasing scale. Moderate phasing: 10% in Shadow Year, 35% in Year 1 (quick wins), 35% Year 2, 20% in Year 3. Assumes enabling technology is in place and aligned specifications across services.	9%
Proportionate Democratic Services	Reviewing the costs of democratic services (elections, committee support, etc.) to be proportionate to the new authority. Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (e.g. committees, elections).	Assumes reduction in number of councillors and associated committee and democratic support costs. High immediate impact: 80% savings in Year 1 (after elections), 20% in Year 2. Assumes new governance model implemented immediately post-reorganisation.	8%

Improved Digital and IT Systems	Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes, can lead to significant time and cost savings. Unified platforms and systems rationalisation reduce licensing, support, and admin overheads.	Streamlining systems and licenses, introducing self-service platforms, rationalising IT estate. Gradual delivery: 15% Year 1 (quick wins), 35% Year 2, 50% Year 3. Dependent on investment in digital infrastructure and culture shift to online services.	2%
Asset and Property Optimisation	Reviewing property portfolio to ensure alignment with the council's overall objectives and community needs.	Release of surplus office space, lease terminations, or revenue from letting/disposals. Moderate delivery: 40% Year 1, 40% Year 2, 20% Year 3. Contingent on lease terms, capital receipt strategy and local market conditions.	6%
Customer Engagement	Enhancing customer contact facilities, determining the needs of citizens in the new authority and developing a proportionate customer contact centre, where appropriate including self-service through digital channels, to improve customer engagement, satisfaction and drive operational efficiencies and cost savings.	Channel shift to digital, contact centre consolidation, and automation of transactions. Phased savings: 20% Year 1, 40% Year 2, 40% Year 3. Assumes digital access for residents, workforce reskilling, and strong comms.	6%
Consolidating Fleets and Optimising Routes	Exploring consolidation of fleets and any route efficiencies, to reduce costs and minimise environmental impact. Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs.	Integration of transport assets across services (e.g. waste, social care, facilities). Phased rollout: 30% Year 1, 40% Year 2, 30% Year 3. Benefits depend on fleet management tools, depot locations and service redesign.	3%
Further Service Transformation	Redesigning and streamlining services post-implementation to unlock deeper long-term savings. Savings achieved through the consolidation of services, leveraging the workforce pillars and identifying leading practice across the new proposed Unitary, in order to achieve the most efficient service delivery that achieves best value for the services. These savings will be dependent on service design and informed by proposed new ways of working.	Post-LGR redesign of core statutory services (e.g. ASC, CSC, Public Health), applying best practice. Phased impact: 30% Year 1, 40% Year 2, 30% Year 3 and beyond. Requires strategic leadership, policy alignment, and front-line innovation investment.	9%

Savings by category as calculated from the top-down approach was subsequently compared with the savings calculated using the bottom-up approach.

Bottom-up approach:

To estimate the potential savings using the bottom-up approach, an overall spend against each of the savings' categories (as per above table) was identified and a corresponding high-level saving against spend (in percentage terms) was made against each of the categories.

The total savings were then aligned across the bottom-up and top-down approaches to ensure a realistic savings assumption by category. Where spend data by savings category was not available (e.g. Service Contract Consolidation, Asset and Property Optimisation, Consolidating Fleets and Optimising Routes, Further Service Transformation) the top-down savings assumptions were retained.

The quantum of savings calculated based on the above process is assumed to be relevant to the one unitary option. A high-level assumption has been made to reflect 5% erosion of savings under a two unitary option. Similarly, the three unitary option assumes that realised savings will be 7.5% lower as compared to the one unitary option.

The savings were then allocated to individual unitaries based on the unitaries share of total population.

No savings from LGR have been assumed to be realised in Base Year (2025/26) and Year 1 (2026/27). However, they start to ramp up in Shadow Year (2027/28) and build up by Year 3. The savings have then been phased as per the below table:

	Shadow Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Optimising Leadership	10%	40%	50%	
Right Sizing the Organisation	10%	20%	40%	30%
Consolidating Corporate Services		20%	40%	40%
Service Contract Consolidation	10%	35%	35%	20%
Procurement and 3rd Party Spend	10%	35%	35%	20%
Proportionate Democratic Services		80%	20%	
Improved Digital and IT Systems		15%	35%	50%
Asset and Property Optimisation		40%	40%	20%
Customer Engagement		20%	40%	40%
Consolidating Fleets and Optimising Routes		30%	40%	30%
Further Service Transformation		30%	40%	30%

Appendix C – One Off Implementation Cost Breakdown:

The overall implementation cost assumptions have been prepared using a top-down approach only, based on the implementation costs as outlined within previous Case for Change documentation. These included the same previous cases for change used to inform the top-down Savings assumptions, to ensure consistency. The data included Base Case and Stretch case implementation costs.

These were calculated as One-off implementation costs and investment in disaggregation of County services.

One-off implementation costs:

For each individual previous case, an average one-off implementation cost per population base was calculated for both the Base case and Stretch case. These were subsequently indexed up from the relevant transition year (per the previous case for change) to April 2025 prices. A simple arithmetic average of indexed one-off implementation cost per population base informed the overall average indexed one-off implementation per population.

These were subsequently adjusted for:

- £3.0 million increase for the three unitary option across base, mid and stretch to reflect that each new authority requires its own setup processes, including establishing governance structures, IT systems, and administrative frameworks, leading to higher cumulative transition costs.
- £3.0 million decrease for the one unitary option across base, mid and stretch to reflect the smaller impact of costs described above.

The final figure was then apportioned across the cost categories underpinning the one-off implementation costs (see below table).

Category	Description	Rationale and Assumptions	% of Total Costs
Workforce - Exit	Compensation paid to employees as a result of restructuring/redundancies, including redundancy payments, pension strain, TUPE, salary harmonisation, and other contract termination fees.	Redundancy and termination costs reflect staff length of service. Assumes staged implementation: 10% in Shadow Year, 20% in Year 1, 30% in Year 2, 40% in Year 3. No exit costs incurred in Year 1 to reflect timing of implementation.	46%
Workforce - Development	Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.	Cost allowed for retraining through redeployment of workforce. Assumes 40% of total implementation cost incurred in Shadow year 1, 40% in Year 1 and 20% in year 2.	5%
Transition - Team	Implementation programme team including: Legal, Contract Negotiation, Project and Programme Management, and specialist support.	A significant transition team required for each unitary authority. Includes legal, HR, project support, public consultation. Some benchmarks include change management and creation of new councils. Assumes 20% of total implementation cost incurred in Base Year, 35% in Year -1, 35% in Shadow Year, 10% in Year 1.	13%
Transition - Culture and Communications	Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. This should inform the public, stakeholders, and employees of proposed changes and address concerns.	Cost allowed for other culture and comms change. Includes all rebranding, change, and engagement. Assumes 20% of total implementation cost incurred in Base Year, 35% in Year -1, 35% in Shadow Year, 10% in Year 1.	4%

Transition - Processes	Work required to harmonise processes and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures.	Cost allowed for efforts to harmonise processes and procedures as part of the transition Assumes 20% of total implementation cost incurred in Base Year, 35% in Year -1, 35% in Shadow Year, 10% in Year 1.	8%
Consolidation - Systems	Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration, commonality of cyber security, and training for new systems.	Costs reflect previous examples of system implementation Some benchmarks do not include allowance for ERP and data migration, cleansing and interface development Assumes 10% of total implementation cost incurred in Base Year, 10% in Year -1, 60% in Shadow Year, 20% in Year 1.	7%
Consolidation - Estates and Facilities	Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.	Some benchmarks do not include capital receipts, which can be used to fund, for example transformation or regeneration. Capital receipts not offset here. Assumes 15% of total implementation cost incurred in Shadow Year, 35% in Year 1, and 50% in Year 2.	8%
Contingency	Additional 10% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates.	Standard across Cases to build out contingency. Assumes 6% of total implementation cost incurred in Base Year, 10% in Year -1, 18% in Shadow Year, 10% in Year 1, 31% in Year 2 and 36% in Year 3.	10%
Total			100%

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from Base Year and build up by Year 3. These have then been phased as per the below table:

	Base Year	Year -1	Shadow Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Workforce - Exit			10%	20%	30%	40%
Workforce - Development			40%	40%	20%	
Transition - Team	20%	35%	35%	10%		
Transition - Culture and Communications	20%	35%	35%	10%		
Transition - Processes	20%	35%	35%	10%		
Consolidation - Systems	10%	10%	60%	20%		
Consolidation - Estates and Facilities			15%	35%	50%	
Contingency	6%	10%	18%	10%	31%	26%

Investment in disaggregation of County Services

The investment in disaggregation of primary county services have been assumed due to additional leadership and service capacity in providing Adult Social Care Services, Children Social Care Services, Housing Services, Place Services and Corporate and Support Services across three unitaries to support local needs and service delivery rather than one council. These have been quantified based on a percentage of spend against each service (summarised in table below). As part of validation, it was assumed that no additional cost impact is likely to occur on Housing Services, which have therefore not been assumed.

The high-level percentages assumed and rationale for the disaggregation investment across the services are outlined in the below table.

Cost Category	Rationale and Assumptions	Calculation method
Adult Social Care	Management - Assumes additional leadership in DASS and AD, head of legal role. ICT and Systems - Requires data segregation, integrations, separate instances and eventually separate case management systems. Performance and Strategy - Additional statutory reporting and strategic development.	+2.75% of budget
Children's Services	Management – Assumes additional leadership in DCS and other new roles required e.g. Derby. Additional Head of Virtual School. ICT and Systems - Requires data segregation, integrations, separate instances and eventually separate case management systems. Performance and Strategy - Additional statutory reporting and strategic development.	+1.3% of budget
Place Service	Management - Assumes shared service for Emergency Planning but additional management roles to support functions. Could hold resilience and Emergency Planning County wide. Procurement / Third Party – review contracts required - Third party spend, potential to share. ICT costs – minor increase in systems costs through multiple contracts.	+1.4% of budget
Corporate and Support Services to the Council Duplication	Management - Small increase in management roles Staff - Increase in Finance, HR, legal and policy, ICT/digital and performance roles, informed by WandF post-LGR disaggregation pressure. Procurement / Third Party - No additional caseload or complexity as a result of disaggregation.	+3.75% of budget

This investment is assumed to be validated for the 'Mid' case. For 'Base' case, these have been assumed to be lower by 10% while for 'Stretch' case, these are assumed to be 10% higher. No disaggregation investment or costs have been assumed in the one unitary option, while for three unitary option these have been assumed to be 66.7% higher than the two unitary option. These costs have been allocated to the individual unitaries based on the share of population within the new unitaries.

The investment is assumed to be reflected 100% from Year 1 of the implementation, without any ramp-up.

SUFFOLK LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Background

The government wants to simplify how councils work. This means the current county, district, and borough councils will be replaced. Instead, all services will be run by new unitary councils.

Currently in Suffolk:

- Suffolk County Council is responsible for delivering services such as special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), roads, public transport, social care, libraries, and recycling centres across the county.
- Five district and borough councils (Babergh, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, and West Suffolk) are responsible in their areas for delivering services like bin collections, street cleaning, parking, leisure services, local planning, council housing, and helping homeless people.

A unitary council is a single council that provides all these services for a specific area.

Suffolk's councils are now looking at how to reorganise to better meet the needs of residents, businesses, and communities, as part of the government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) initiative.

To support this, Suffolk's District and Borough Councils launched a survey inviting residents, business owners, employees, councillors and other stakeholders to give their view on local government reorganisation in Suffolk.

The survey – hosted by Mid Suffolk District Council on behalf of Suffolk's District and Borough Councils – launched on 15 May 2025 and ran until 25 July 2025.

Survey overview, promotion and response

Survey overview

The survey sought views on:

- The attributes that are considered most important in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate, with respondents asked to rank nine attributes in order of importance.
- How local government could work better for them and their community, with respondents invited to provide an open-text response.

It also collected information on the age of the respondent, which district or borough they lived in, and whether they were responding primarily as a resident or in another capacity.

The online survey was hosted on [Mid Suffolk District Council's resident engagement platform](#). Responses were mainly collected digitally, with an option to download a paper copy of the questionnaire which could be returned by email or post.

A copy of the survey questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

Survey promotion

The survey was promoted by Suffolk's District and Borough Councils across a range of channels, including via:

- Media releases issued to local news outlets.
- Council websites and newsletters.
- Posters, postcards and leaflets placed in public spaces and shared digitally and physically with partners, including town and parish councils.
- Social media campaigns across multiple platforms.
- Direct communications with key stakeholders.
- Internal council staff communications.

Interpreting and presenting the results

As an open-access survey, the survey aims to seek views from everyone but does not necessarily deliver a representative sample of the population. It is recognised that the survey topic and the approach taken means that the final sample profile may be skewed towards certain groups (such as those with an interest in/understanding of local government).

Responses to the attribute ranking exercise are presented in three ways:

- The proportion ranking each attribute as the most important (i.e. in first position).
- The proportion ranking each attribute as one of the top three most important.
- The average (mean) rank score for each attribute, where the lower the rank score the more important an attribute is seen to be.

Data tables are included in Appendix B, showing the results of the attribute ranking exercise by district/ borough of residence, age and the basis on which respondents answered the survey.

For the open-text question, comments were thematically coded to enable responses to be quantified. Data tables are included within the main report to show the number and percentage of comments by theme.

A full list of the open-text comments is included as an annex to this report, arranged by theme.

Survey response

Between 15 May and 25 July 2025, a total of 2,208 responses were received, with 2,182 online completions and 26 paper copies returned.

Tables 1 to 3 provide a breakdown of respondents by their district/borough of residence age, and the basis on which they responded to the survey (whether as a resident or in another capacity).

NOTE: * denotes a percentage less than 0.5% but greater than 0%.

Table 1: Respondent profile – district/borough

Which Suffolk district do you live in?	Count	%
Babergh District	403	18%
East Suffolk District	655	30%
Ipswich Borough	348	16%
Mid Suffolk District	389	18%
West Suffolk District	350	16%
I live in Suffolk but don't know which district	11	*
I live outside of Suffolk	34	2%
Not answered (question skipped)	15	1%
TOTAL	2,208	

Table 2: Respondent profile - age

Which age bracket are you in?	Count	%
Under 18	2	*
18-34	177	8%
35-49	427	19%
50-64	796	36%
65-79	661	30%
80+	99	4%
Prefer not to say	36	2%
Not answered (question skipped)	10	*
TOTAL	2,208	

Table 3: Respondent profile – respondent type

How are you responding to this survey?	Count	%
As a resident	1,841	83%
As someone who works in public services (for example working for a council, in the NHS, police, fire or ambulance services)	181	8%
As a parish or town councillor	43	2%
As a district, borough or county councillor	37	2%
As someone working in the area	29	1%
As a business owner	27	1%
As someone involved in a local voluntary organisation or community group	17	1%
Other	16	1%
Not answered (question skipped)	17	1%
TOTAL	2,208	

Background

A total of 2,208 respondents completed the survey between 15 May and 25 July 2025.

Most important attributes in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate

The survey asked respondents “What is most important to you in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate?” with respondents asked to rank nine attributes in order of importance (where position 1 is ‘most important’).

The four attributes considered most important by respondents were:

Being local: ‘Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36% ranked this as their most important attribute • 57% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 3.8
Money: ‘Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19% ranked this as their most important attribute • 51% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 4.0
Quality: ‘Improving the overall quality of public services’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12% ranked this as their most important attribute • 41% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 4.4
Accountability: ‘Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9% ranked this as their most important attribute • 36% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 4.7

A lower attribute score reflects higher importance

How local government could work better for Suffolk’s residents and communities

The survey asked respondents “Is there anything else you’d like to say about how local government could work better for you and your community?” with respondents able to provide a written response to the question if they wished.

A total of 1,230 respondents (56%) answered this question, with comments thematically coded to enable responses to be quantified. The responses included:

- Views towards local government reorganisation
- Comments related to how local councils should work
- Mentions of specific issues / priorities for improvement
- Other comments, which included:
 - Other comments related to local government and democracy
 - Other comments not classified elsewhere

Key findings are discussed below:

Note that percentages are based on the number of respondents who answered the question (i.e. 1,230), not the total number who completed the survey. It should be noted that some responses were coded into more than one category where multiple issues or themes were mentioned by a respondent.

Views towards Local Government Reorganisation

Almost half of those who provided a response to the question (46% / 562 respondents) put forward views related to Local Government Reorganisation.

- Eight per cent (95 respondents) commented on the principles of local government reorganisation and devolution, with 5% (57 respondents) stating they were unsupportive of reorganisation / unitary authorities being created or commenting that the current district council(s) should be kept.
- Twenty-six per cent (314 respondents) provided views on the number of unitary authorities for Suffolk, with:
 - 7% (80 respondents) supportive of having a single unitary (or unsupportive of multiple unitaries).
 - 19% (234 respondents) supportive of having multiple unitaries (or unsupportive of a single unitary). This included 88 respondents (7%) who specifically stated there should be three unitaries and 23 (2%) who mentioned there should be a Greater Ipswich unitary authority (without stating a preferred overall number).
- A further 6% (72 respondents) provided general comments that local government should be kept local or not centralised (55 respondents) or made comments about smaller councils being better / larger councils being worse (17 respondents).
- Nine per cent (111 respondents) provided a range of other comments related to the process of establishing future unitary authorities. This included 4% (55 respondents, from Babergh, East Suffolk and Mid Suffolk) who were unsupportive of becoming part of Ipswich in any future council structure.

Comments related to how local councils should work

More than a third of those who provided a response to the question (38% / 473 respondents) put forward comments which related to how local councils should work. The most commonly mentioned themes were:

- Specific suggestions that proposed ways of making savings / reducing costs (5% / 58 respondents), alongside general mentions about delivering value for money / greater efficiency / not wasting money (4% / 45 respondents).
- Better / more engagement and consultation with residents and communities / opportunities to influence decisions / contribute to decision-making (4% / 55 respondents)
- Providing greater transparency and accountability (4% / 53 respondents).
- Listening to residents / communities and acting on their concerns (4% / 52 respondents)
- More / better joint and joined-up working (including mentions of less duplication) (4% / 45 respondents)
- A need to recognise / understand / respond to local need (3% / 43 respondents)
- Maintaining or improving face-to-face / telephone / non-digital contact and communications (3% / 40 respondents)

Other themes - each mentioned by 2% of respondents - included the importance of councillors being local, better communication, knowing who to contact / who does what, focusing on doing the basics well and keeping services local.

Mentions of specific issues / priorities for improvement

Fourteen per cent of those who provided a response to the question (173 respondents) highlighted specific issues or priorities for improvement. The most commonly mentioned issues were improving public transport (21 respondents) and repairing roads / potholes (20 respondents).

A similar number (21 respondents) made general comments about particular locations being overlooked / ignored.

Other responses

A number of other responses were received, which included:

- Other comments related to local government and democracy (89 respondents / 7%), including 20 respondents (2%) who considered there was a need for an increased role / greater responsibilities for town and parish councils.
- Other comments not classified elsewhere, including 45 respondents (4%) who commented on the survey / engagement exercise.

Full Results

What is most important to residents and stakeholders in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate?

The survey asked respondents “What is most important to you in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate?” with respondents asked to rank nine attributes in order of importance (where position 1 is ‘most important’).

The order in which the nine attributes were presented to respondents was randomised in the online survey.

Most important attributes

The four attributes considered most important by respondents were:

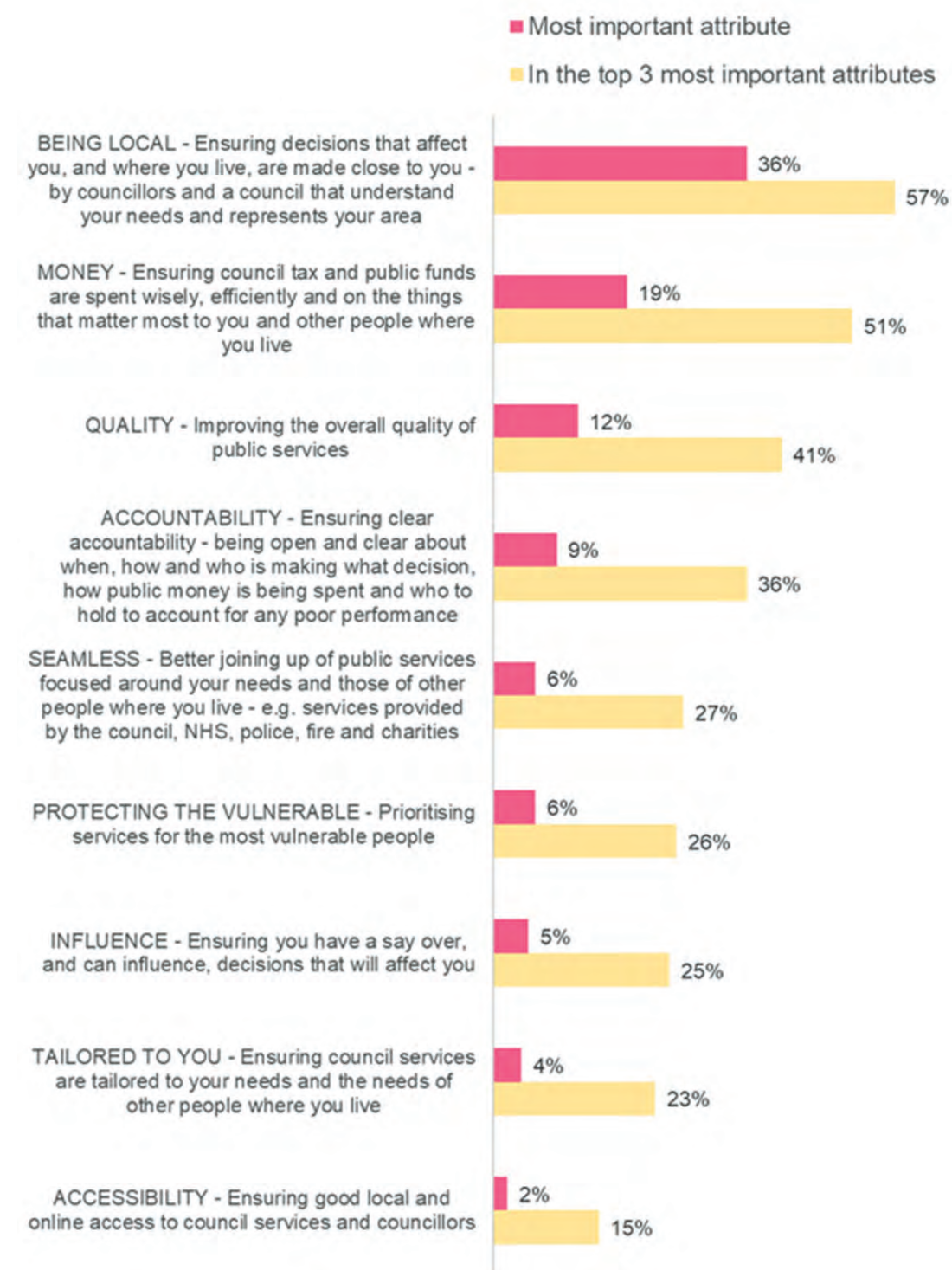
Being local: ‘Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36% ranked this as their most important attribute • 57% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 3.8
Money: ‘Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19% ranked this as their most important attribute • 51% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 4.0
Quality: ‘Improving the overall quality of public services’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12% ranked this as their most important attribute • 41% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 4.4
Accountability: ‘Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9% ranked this as their most important attribute • 36% ranked this as one of their top three most important attributes • Average rank = 4.7

A lower rank number equates to higher importance.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents who rated each of the nine attributes as their most important and within their top three most important attributes.

Table 4 shows the average (mean) rank for each attribute.

Figure 1: What is most important in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate - percentage of respondents ranking each attribute as most important to them / within their top three most important attributes



Base size: 2,187 respondents (21 of 2,208 respondents skipped this question)

Table 4: What is most important in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate – average (mean) rank per attribute

The table shows the percentage of respondents who ranked each attribute in each position - so for example, 36% ranked 'being local' in first place (most important), 11% ranked it in second place, 10% in third place, and so on. The final column shows the average (mean) rank position for each attribute.

Attribute	1 - most	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 - least	Average (mean) rank (1-9)
BEING LOCAL Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	36	11	10	7	6	6	7	6	11	3.8
MONEY Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	19	16	15	12	10	8	7	7	5	4.0
QUALITY Improving the overall quality of public services	12	14	14	15	13	10	10	7	4	4.4
ACCOUNTABILITY Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	9	14	12	12	12	13	10	9	7	4.7
SEAMLESS Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	6	10	11	12	13	11	11	13	13	5.3
INFLUENCE Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5	9	11	10	13	15	13	12	11	5.4
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	6	10	9	11	13	12	13	12	14	5.4
TAILORED TO YOU Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	4	9	10	10	10	11	13	17	15	5.8
ACCESSIBILITY Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	2	6	7	10	12	14	15	17	18	6.2

Base size: 2,187 respondents (21 of 2,208 respondents skipped this question)

Variations were seen in the survey data based on district/borough of residence, age and the basis on which people responded to the survey. These are discussed below, with reference to the proportion who ranked each attribute within the top three most important.

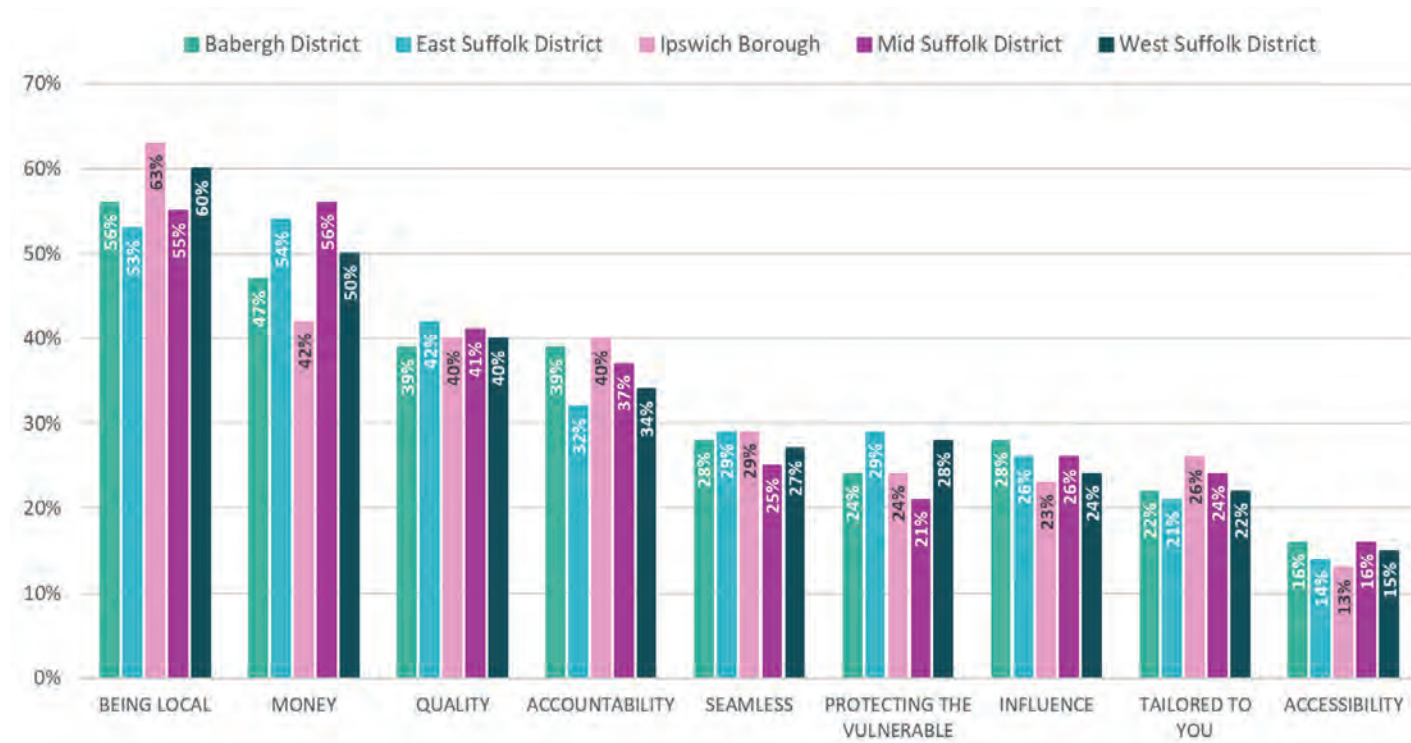
Responses by district/borough

Based on which district/borough respondents lived in:

- Respondents from Babergh were:
 - Slightly more likely to rank accountability (39% compared with 36% overall) and influence (28% compared with 25%) within their top three most important attributes.
 - Slightly less likely to rank money (47% compared with 51% overall) within their top three.
- Respondents from East Suffolk were:
 - Slightly more likely to rank money (54% compared with 51% overall) and protecting the vulnerable (29% compared with 26% overall) within their top three most important attributes.
 - Slightly less likely to rank being local (53% compared with 57% overall) and accountability (32% compared with 36% overall) within their top three.
- Respondents from Ipswich were:
 - More likely to rank being local (63% compared with 57% overall) and slightly more likely to put accountability (40% compared with 36% overall) and services being tailored (26% compared with 23%) within their top three.
 - Less likely to rank money within their top three (42% compared with 51% overall).
- Residents from Mid Suffolk were:
 - More likely to rank money within their top three (56% compared with 51% overall).
 - Less likely to rank protecting the vulnerable within their top three (21% compared with 26% overall).
- Results for respondents West Suffolk were generally in line with the overall average, although they were slightly more likely to rank being local within their top three most important attributes (60% compared with 57% overall).

Figure 2 shows the full range of responses by district/borough.

Figure 2: What is most important in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate – proportion of respondents ranking each attribute within the top 3 most important (by district/borough of residence)



Base sizes: Babergh (395 respondents); East Suffolk (653 respondents); Ipswich (345 respondents); Mid Suffolk (383 respondents); West Suffolk (349 respondents)

Responses by age

By age:

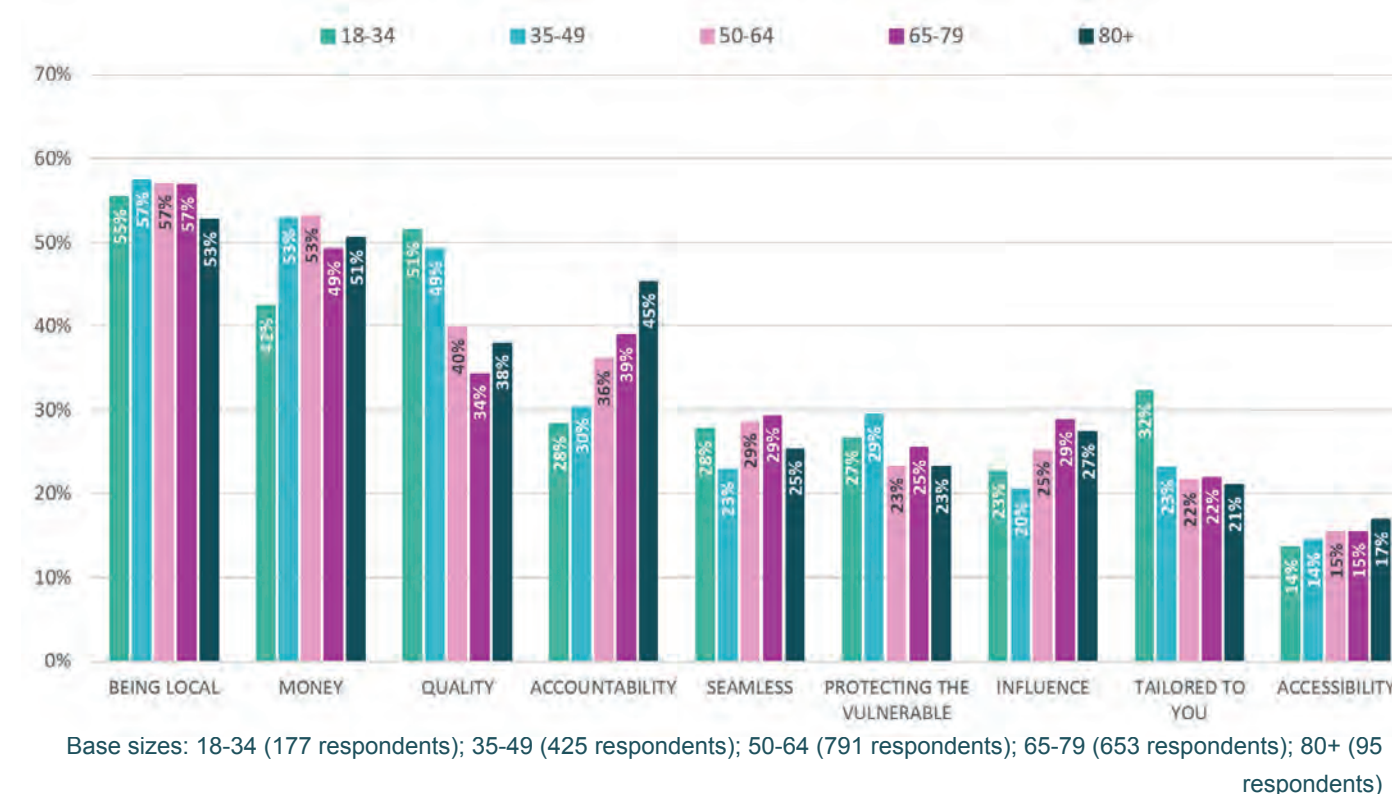
- Quality was seen as more important by younger respondents: 51% of 18-34- and 49% of 35-49-year-olds ranked quality within their top three most important attributes, compared with 40% of 50-64-year-olds, 34% of 65-79-year-olds and 38% of those aged 80+.
- In contrast, accountability was seen as more important by older respondents: 28% of 18-34-year-olds and 30% of 35-49-year-olds ranked accountability within their top three most important attributes, rising to 36% of 50-64-year-olds, 39% of 65-79-year-olds and 45% of those aged 80+.

Other notable differences included:

- Influence appeared slightly more important to those aged 65+: 29% of those aged 65-79 and 27% of those aged 80+ ranked influence within their top three most important attributes compared with 23% of 18-34-year-olds and 20% of 35-49-year-olds.
- 18-34-year-olds were less likely to consider money as important but more likely to consider services being tailored as important: 42% of this age group ranked money within their top three most important attributes (compared with 51% overall) and 32% ranked services being tailored in their top three (compared with 23% overall).

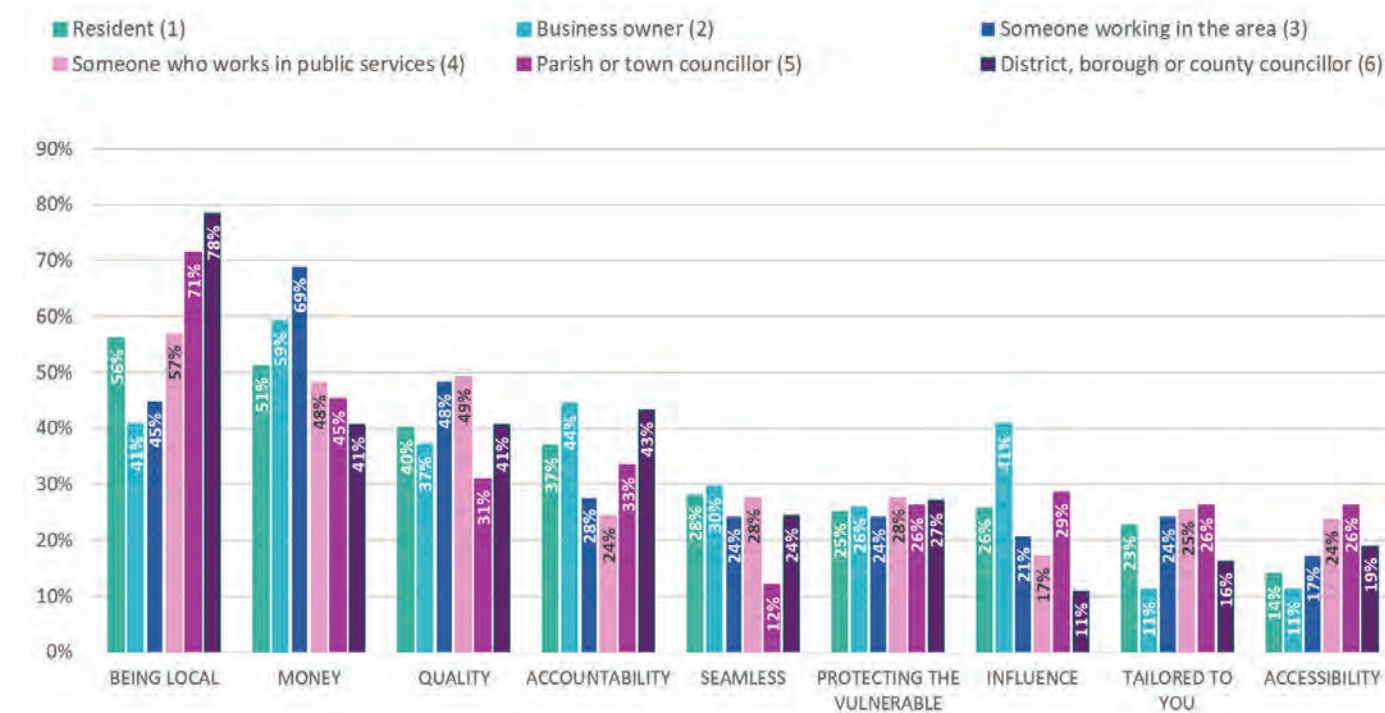
Figure 4 shows the full range of responses by respondent type.

Figure 3: What is most important in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate – proportion of respondents ranking each attribute within the top 3 most important (by age)



Base sizes: 18-34 (177 respondents); 35-49 (425 respondents); 50-64 (791 respondents); 65-79 (653 respondents); 80+ (95 respondents)

Figure 4: What is most important in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate – proportion of respondents ranking each attribute within the top 3 most important (by respondent type) The numbers (1-6) in brackets denote the order in which the data is presented within the bar chart



Works in public services (181 respondents); Parish/town councillor (42 respondents); District, borough or county councillor (37 respondents). Results shown for respondent types where there are 25 or more respondents.

How local government could work better for Suffolk's residents and communities

The survey asked respondents "Is there anything else you'd like to say about how local government could work better for you and your community?"

Respondents were able to provide a written response to the question if they wished.

Analysis

A total of 1,230 respondents (56%) provided a response to this question. Of the remainder, 972 respondents left the comment box blank and six respondents provided responses that were off-topic and were therefore excluded.

Comments were thematically coded to enable responses to be quantified, with the findings presented under the following broad headings:

Views towards local government reorganisation, which included:

- Comments related to the principles of local government reorganisation and devolution
- Views towards the number of unitary authorities for Suffolk
- Other comments related to keeping local government local / smaller councils (not specifically discussing the number of unitaries)
- Other views on the process of establishing future unitaries
- Comments related to how local councils should work
- Mentions of specific issues / priorities for improvement

Other comments, which included:

- Other comments related to local government and democracy
- Other comments not classified elsewhere (including comments on the survey / engagement exercise)

The tables which follow show the number and percentage of comments per theme, with percentages based on the number of respondents who answered the question (i.e. 1,230) as opposed to the total number who completed the survey (2,208).

It should be noted that some comments were coded into more than one category where multiple issues or themes were mentioned by a respondent. Where relevant, 'Net' codes have been created within the tables to summarise two or more related codes.

A full list of the open-text comments is included as an annex to this report, arranged by theme.

Views towards Local Government Reorganisation

Almost half of those who provided a response to the question (46% / 562 respondents) put forward views related to local government reorganisation. The most common themes are summarised below with Table 5 showing the full range of responses:

- Eight per cent (95 respondents) commented on the principles of local government reorganisation and devolution, with 5% (57 respondents) stating they were unsupportive of reorganisation / unitary authorities being created or commenting that the current district council(s) should be kept.
- Twenty-six per cent (314 respondents) provided views on the number of unitary authorities for Suffolk, with:
 - 7% (80 respondents) supportive of having a single unitary (or unsupportive of multiple unitaries).
 - 19% (234 respondents) supportive of having multiple unitaries (or unsupportive of a single unitary). This included 88 respondents (7%) who specifically stated there should be three unitaries and 23 (2%) who mentioned there should be a Greater Ipswich unitary authority (without stating a preferred overall number).

- A further 6% (72 respondents) provided general comments that local government should be kept local or not centralised (55 respondents) or made comments about smaller councils being better / larger councils being worse (17 respondents).
- Nine per cent (111 respondents) provided a range of other comments related to the process of establishing future unitary authorities. This included 4% (55 respondents, from Babergh, East Suffolk and Mid Suffolk) who were unsupportive of becoming part of Ipswich in any future council structure.

Table 5: Views towards local government reorganisation

Is there anything else you'd like to say about how local government could work better for you and your community?

	Count	%
Comments related to the principles of local government reorganisation and devolution	95	8%
Supportive of the principle of combining district/borough and county councils / simplifying local government structures	20	2%
NET: Unsupportive of reorganisation / keep current district council/councils	57	5%
Unsupportive of reorganisation / unitary authorities being created	42	3%
Other comments about keeping current district council/councils	15	1%
Unsupportive of a mayoral office being created	20	2%
Other comment about mayors / mayoral office	2	*
Views towards the number of unitary authorities for Suffolk	314	26%
Supportive of a single unitary / unsupportive of multiple unitaries	80	7%
NET: Supportive of multiple unitaries / unsupportive of a single unitary	234	19%
Supportive of multiple unitaries / unsupportive of a single unitary (not specifically mentioning an exact preferred number)	108	9%
Supportive of 2 unitaries (specific mention)	15	1%
Supportive of 3 unitaries (specific mention)	88	7%
Other comments mentioning that there should be a Greater Ipswich unitary authority (without stating a preferred overall number)	23	2%
Other comments related to keeping local government local / smaller councils (not specifically discussing the number of unitaries)	72	6%
Keep local government local / not centralised / general comments about remaining local	55	4%
Other comments about smaller councils being better / larger councils being worse	17	1%

	Count	%
Other views towards the process of establishing future unitary authorities	111	9%
Unsupportive of becoming part of Ipswich in any future council structure	55	4%
Concern about the costs of reorganisation / lack of savings	15	1%
Concern about the reduction in councillors / need for more councillors / ensure we have enough councillors	14	1%
General comment that fewer councils / unitary authorities would be better	8	1%
Formation of unitaries should reflect the geography e.g. in terms of how areas work / function	8	1%
More detail is needed about the proposals	7	1%
Concern that cost of social care / SEND / debt will impact budgets for other services	5	*

Comments related to how local councils should work

More than a third of those who provided a response to the question (38% / 473 respondents) put forward comments which related to how local councils should work. The most commonly mentioned themes were:

- Specific suggestions that proposed ways of making savings / reducing costs (5% / 58 respondents), alongside general mentions about delivering value for money / greater efficiency / not wasting money (4% / 45 respondents).
- Better / more engagement and consultation with residents and communities / opportunities to influence decisions / contribute to decision-making (4% / 55 respondents)
- Providing greater transparency and accountability (4% / 53 respondents).
- Listening to residents / communities and acting on their concerns (4% / 52 respondents)
- More / better joint and joined-up working (including mentions of less duplication) (4% / 45 respondents)
- A need to recognise / understand / respond to local need (3% / 43 respondents)
- Maintaining or improving face-to-face / telephone / non-digital contact and communications (3% / 40 respondents)

Other themes - each mentioned by 2% of respondents - included the importance of councillors being local, better communication, knowing who to contact / who does what, focusing on doing the basics well and keeping services local.

Table 6 shows the full range of responses.

	Count	%
Comments related to how local councils should work	473	38%
NET: Comments related to specific ways of making savings / reducing costs	58	5%
Reduce / stop spending on particular initiatives / groups	13	1%
Reduce number of staff / wages	11	1%
Reduce / review the number / wages of management staff	10	1%
Invest in digital technology / AI to bring down costs and improve customer service experience	7	1%
Not outsourcing / contracting out work	7	1%
Other comment related to specific ways of making savings / reducing costs	14	1%
Better / more engagement and consultation with residents and communities / opportunities to influence decisions / contribute to decision-making	55	4%
Greater transparency and accountability	53	4%
Listening to residents / communities and acting on their concerns	52	4%
More / better joint and joined-up working (including mentions of less duplication)	45	4%
Focusing on delivering value for money / greater efficiency / not wasting money (general mentions)	45	4%
Need to recognise / understand / respond to local need	43	3%
Maintaining or improving face-to-face / telephone / non-digital contact and communications	40	3%
Importance of councillors being local / decisions being made by representatives who understand their area	26	2%
Better communication	24	2%
Knowing who to contact / who does what (including having a single point of contact)	21	2%
Focus on doing the basics well / spending money on essential or statutory services	20	2%
Keeping services local / services need to be local	19	2%
Better access to councillors	17	1%
Improved quality and/or access to services	14	1%

	Count	%
Being more involved / visible locally	13	1%
Improved customer services	9	1%
More staff / ensuring sufficient number of staff	9	1%
Reduce council tax	6	*
Having local staff / staff with knowledge of the local area	6	*
Having a longer-term strategy / focus	5	*
Enabling communities to help themselves (including availability of more/ continuous funding)	4	*
Other comments about how councils should work	30	2%

Mentions of specific issues / priorities for improvement

Fourteen per cent of those who provided a response to the question (173 respondents) highlighted specific issues or priorities for improvement. The most commonly mentioned issues were improving public transport (21 respondents) and repairing roads / potholes (20 respondents).

A similar number (21 respondents) made general comments about particular locations being overlooked / ignored.

Table 7 shows the full range of responses.

	Count	%
Mentions of specific issues / priorities for improvement	173	14%
Improve public transport	21	2%
Repair roads / potholes	20	2%
Improve town centres	15	1%
Improve infrastructure to meet growing population	14	1%
Stop housing overdevelopment	13	1%
Protecting nature and wildlife / the environment	12	1%
Cleaner streets and public areas	11	1%
Support for particular groups	10	1%
Stop energy infrastructure overdevelopment (e.g, solar farms, pylons)	9	1%
Community safety / crime	9	1%
Housing (availability and affordability), including social housing provision and homelessness support	9	1%
Traffic / lorries / speeding	9	1%
Parking (including mentions of free parking / making parking free)	8	1%
Road network improvements (not repairs / potholes)	8	1%
Economy / jobs / businesses	7	1%
Things for children and young people to do	5	*
Tackling or responding to climate change	5	*
Access to healthcare	5	*
Improved SEND provision	4	*
Mental health support	4	*
Refuse collection	3	*
Social care (including mentions of taking social care in-house)	3	*
Cycling and sustainable travel	3	*
Pavement accessibility for wheelchair users	2	*
Other comments about specific locations being overlooked / ignored	21	2%
Other specific issues / priorities for improvement / action	17	1%

Other responses

A number of other responses were received, which included:

- Other comments related to local government and democracy (89 respondents / 7%), including 20 respondents (2%) who considered there was a need for an increased role / greater responsibilities for town and parish councils.
- Other comments not classified elsewhere, including 45 respondents (4%) who commented on the survey / engagement exercise.

These are shown in Table 8 below.

	Count	
Other comments related to local government and democracy	89	7%
Need for an increased role / involvement of town and parish councils / greater responsibilities for town and parish councils	20	2%
Be less political / councillors should focus on issues / not party politics	13	1%
Ensure greater powers / representation for Suffolk against national government	9	1%
Should not have removed the right to vote in local elections this year	8	1%
Greater funding required for local councils	7	1%
Introduce proportional representation / not 'first past the post' elections	6	*
Increase local responsibility for issues currently dealt with nationally / regionally	5	*
Abolish town and parish councils	4	*
Need for encouraging greater diversity amongst councillors (including younger councillors) / making it an attractive option	4	*
Abolish the Police and Crime Commissioner	4	*
Hold a vote / election on the issue	4	*
Other comments about town and parish councils	7	1%
Comments on the survey	45	4%
Negative comments about the survey / engagement exercise	34	3%
Comments that all attributes asked about within the survey are equally important	12	1%

APPENDIX 4-A – Survey Questionnaire

Have Your Say on the Future of Local Government in Suffolk

The national government wants to simplify how councils work. This means the current county, district, and borough councils will be replaced. Instead, all services will be run by new 'unitary councils'.

Right now in Suffolk, local government services are split up:

- Suffolk County Council is responsible for delivering services such as Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), roads, public transport, social care, libraries, and recycling centres across the county.
- Five district and borough councils (Babergh, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, and West Suffolk), are responsible in their areas for delivering services like bin collections, street cleaning, parking, leisure services, local planning, council housing, and helping homeless people.

A unitary council is a single council that provides all these services for a specific area.

Suffolk's councils are now looking at how to reorganise to better meet the needs of residents, businesses, and communities, as part of the government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) initiative.

We want to know what you think. Please take a few minutes to share your views.

About you

1. Which Suffolk district do you live in, that is the council which you or your household pays your Council Tax to?

- Babergh District
- East Suffolk District
- Ipswich Borough
- Mid Suffolk District
- West Suffolk District
- I live in Suffolk but don't know which district
- I live outside of Suffolk (please specify)

2. What is your postcode, minus the last two digits? For example, IP1 1 or IP33 3.

This helps us ensure we hear from residents across Suffolk

WRITE-IN

3. How are you responding to this survey?

If you fit more than one category, please choose the one that is most important for this survey

- As a resident
- As a business owner
- As someone working in the area
- As someone who works in public services (for example working for a council, in the NHS, police, fire or ambulance services)
- As someone involved in a local voluntary organisation or community group
- As a parish or town councillor
- As a district, borough or county councillor
- Other (please specify)

4. Which age bracket are you in?

- Under 18
- 18-34
- 35-49
- 50-64
- 65-79
- 80+
- Prefer not to say

Views about the future of local government

5. What is most important to you in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate?

Please rank in order of importance where 1 is the most important

NOTE: The order in which the attributes are presented to respondents is randomised in the online survey

- **Accountability** - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision; how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance
- **Being local** - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area
- **Influence** - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you
- **Money** - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live
- **Accessibility** - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors
- **Tailored to you** - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live
- **Quality** - Improving the overall quality of public services
- **Protecting the vulnerable** – Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people
- **Seamless** - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities

Your voice matters

6. Is there anything else you'd like to say about how local government could work better for you and your community?

WRITE-IN

APPENDIX 4-B: Data tables (Most important attributes question)

NOTE: * denotes a percentage less than 0.5% but greater than 0%.

Headline results – most important attributes

What is most important to you in thinking about how any future council(s) in Suffolk should operate?	Number / percentage ranking each attribute as...			
	...most important		...in the top 3 most important	
Respondents were asked to rank attributes rank in order of importance				
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	781	36%	1,241	57%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	413	19%	1,109	51%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	269	12%	886	41%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	207	9%	783	36%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	141	6%	600	27%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	135	6%	559	26%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	109	5%	555	25%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	86	4%	499	23%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	46	2%	329	15%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187			

The table shows the percentage of respondents who ranked each attribute in each position - so for example, 36% ranked 'being local' in first place (most important), 11% ranked it in second place, 10% in third place, and so on.

The final column shows the average (mean) rank position for each attribute.

Attribute	1 - most	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 - least	Average (mean) rank (1-9)
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	36%	11%	10%	7%	6%	6%	7%	6%	11%	3.8
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	19%	16%	15%	12%	10%	8%	7%	7%	5%	4.0
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	12%	14%	14%	15%	13%	10%	10%	7%	4%	4.4
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	9%	14%	12%	12%	12%	13%	10%	9%	7%	4.7
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	6%	10%	11%	12%	13%	11%	11%	13%	13%	5.3
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5%	9%	11%	10%	13%	15%	13%	12%	11%	5.4
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	6%	10%	9%	11%	13%	12%	13%	12%	14%	5.4
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	4%	9%	10%	10%	10%	11%	13%	17%	15%	5.8
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	2%	6%	7%	10%	12%	14%	15%	17%	18%	6.2

Base size: 2,187 respondents (21 of 2,208 respondents skipped this question)

Headline results – most important attributes by district/borough (based on where respondents live)

% ranking each attribute as MOST IMPORTANT	TOTAL	Babergh District	East Suffolk District	Ipswich Borough	Mid Suffolk District	West Suffolk District
Results by district/borough (based on where respondents live)						
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	36%	38%	34%	40%	33%	36%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	19%	14%	23%	15%	19%	19%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	12%	13%	10%	14%	13%	13%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	9%	10%	10%	11%	9%	7%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	6%	6%	6%	7%	6%	6%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	6%	4%	7%	5%	7%	7%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5%	8%	4%	4%	6%	3%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	5%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	395	653	345	383	349

% ranking each attribute IN THE TOP 3 MOST IMPORTANT

Results by district/borough (based on where respondents live)	TOTAL	Babergh District	East Suffolk District	Ipswich Borough	Mid Suffolk District	West Suffolk District
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	57%	56%	53%	63%	55%	60%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	51%	47%	54%	42%	56%	50%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	41%	39%	42%	40%	41%	40%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	36%	39%	32%	40%	37%	34%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	27%	28%	29%	29%	25%	27%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	26%	24%	29%	24%	21%	28%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	25%	28%	26%	23%	26%	24%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	23%	22%	21%	26%	24%	22%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	15%	16%	14%	13%	16%	15%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	395	653	345	383	349

AVERAGE RANK (between 1-9 where 1 is 'most important')

Results by district/borough (based on where respondents live)	TOTAL	Babergh District	East Suffolk District	Ipswich Borough	Mid Suffolk District	West Suffolk District
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.4	3.7	3.6
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	4.0	4.1	3.8	4.4	3.7	4.1
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.3
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	4.7	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.7	4.9
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.5	5.4
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5.4	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.5	5.5
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	5.4	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.3
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.5	5.8	5.9
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	6.2	6.1	6.4	6.2	6.0	6.0
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	395	653	345	383	349

Headline results – most important attributes by age

NOTE: Results are not shown for sub-groups containing fewer than 25 respondents.

% ranking each attribute as <u>MOST IMPORTANT</u>	TOTAL	18-34	35-49	50-64	65-79	80+
Results by age						
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	36%	33%	35%	35%	38%	33%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	19%	15%	20%	20%	18%	18%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	12%	22%	16%	11%	9%	11%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	9%	6%	7%	9%	11%	13%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	6%	6%	4%	7%	8%	4%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	6%	6%	8%	6%	5%	3%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5%	5%	4%	5%	6%	6%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	4%	6%	4%	4%	3%	7%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	5%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	177	425	791	653	95

% ranking each attribute <u>IN THE TOP 3 MOST IMPORTANT</u>	TOTAL	18-34	35-49	50-64	65-79	80+
Results by age						
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	57%	55%	57%	57%	57%	53%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	51%	42%	53%	53%	49%	51%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	41%	51%	49%	40%	34%	38%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	36%	28%	30%	36%	39%	45%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	27%	28%	23%	29%	29%	25%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	26%	27%	29%	23%	25%	23%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	25%	23%	20%	25%	29%	27%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	23%	32%	23%	22%	22%	21%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	15%	14%	14%	15%	15%	17%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	177	425	791	653	95

Headline results – most important attributes by respondent type

NOTE: Results are not shown for sub-groups containing fewer than 25 respondents

AVERAGE RANK (between 1-9 where 1 is 'most important')	TOTAL	18-34	35-49	50-64	65-79	80+
Results by age						
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.8	4.0
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	4.0	4.6	3.9	3.8	4.0	4.0
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	4.4	3.8	4.0	4.4	4.6	4.7
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	4.7	5.2	5.0	4.7	4.6	4.2
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.4	5.2	5.3
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5.4	5.7	5.7	5.4	5.3	5.2
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	5.4	5.3	5.3	5.5	5.4	5.7
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	5.8	5.3	5.7	5.8	5.9	5.9
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	6.2	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.1	5.8
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	177	425	791	653	95

% ranking each attribute IN THE TOP 3 MOST IMPORTANT	TOTAL	Resident	Business owner	Someone working in the area	Someone who works in public services	Parish or town councillor	District, borough or county councillor
Results by age							
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	36%	35%	22%	28%	39%	43%	54%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	19%	20%	33%	10%	14%	10%	5%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	12%	12%	15%	24%	18%	17%	14%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	9%	9%	15%	14%	6%	14%	14%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	6%	7%	0%	3%	6%	0%	8%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	6%	6%	11%	14%	9%	0%	0%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5%	5%	4%	3%	3%	7%	0%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	4%	4%	0%	3%	4%	10%	3%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	2%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	3%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	1,823	27	29	181	42	37

**% ranking each attribute
IN THE TOP 3 MOST
IMPORTANT**

Results by respondent type

	TOTAL	Resident	Business owner	Someone working in the area	Someone who works in public services	Parish or town councillor	District, borough or county councillor
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	57%	56%	41%	45%	57%	71%	78%
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	51%	51%	59%	69%	48%	45%	41%
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	41%	40%	37%	48%	49%	31%	41%
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	36%	37%	44%	28%	24%	33%	43%
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	27%	28%	30%	24%	28%	12%	24%
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	26%	25%	26%	24%	28%	26%	27%
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	25%	26%	41%	21%	17%	29%	11%
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	23%	23%	11%	24%	25%	26%	16%
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	15%	14%	11%	17%	24%	26%	19%
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	1,823	27	29	181	42	37

**AVERAGE RANK (between 1-9
where 1 is 'most important')**

Results by respondent type

	TOTAL	Resident	Business owner	Someone working in the area	Someone who works in public services	Parish or town councillor	District, borough or county councillor
BEING LOCAL - Ensuring decisions that affect you, and where you live, are made close to you - by councillors and a council that understand your needs and represents your area	3.8	3.8	4.8	4.4	3.6	3.0	2.6
MONEY - Ensuring council tax and public funds are spent wisely, efficiently and on the things that matter most to you and other people where you live	4.0	3.9	3.0	3.4	4.1	4.2	5.2
QUALITY - Improving the overall quality of public services	4.4	4.4	4.3	3.7	4.0	5.0	4.0
ACCOUNTABILITY - Ensuring clear accountability - being open and clear about when, how and who is making what decision, how public money is being spent and who to hold to account for any poor performance	4.7	4.7	4.6	5.1	5.4	4.5	4.1
SEAMLESS - Better joining up of public services focused around your needs and those of other people where you live - e.g. services provided by the council, NHS, police, fire and charities	5.3	5.3	5.0	5.5	5.4	6.3	5.9
INFLUENCE - Ensuring you have a say over, and can influence, decisions that will affect you	5.4	5.4	4.4	6.1	6.0	5.2	6.4
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE - Prioritising services for the most vulnerable people	5.4	5.5	5.8	5.0	5.2	5.6	5.3
TAILORED TO YOU - Ensuring council services are tailored to your needs and the needs of other people where you live	5.8	5.8	7.3	5.8	5.4	5.9	5.9
ACCESSIBILITY - Ensuring good local and online access to council services and councillors	6.2	6.2	5.9	6.0	5.8	5.4	5.7
Base size (number of respondents)	2,187	1,823	27	29	181	42	37

GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR NEW UNITARY COUNCILS

Shared Governance Considerations

The LGBCE regards council size to be a function of the three broad aspects to a councillor's role. These are categorised as:

1. Strategic Leadership
2. Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships) and
3. Community Leadership.

Taking each in turn:

Strategic Leadership

Each of the three new councils will operate under the 'Strong Leader and Executive' model in line with the provisions of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill currently progressing through Parliament.

Council

Full Council will be each Council's highest decision-making authority.

It will deal with matters such as:

- Written and verbal questions raised by individual Councillors.
- Approving the council's policy framework.
- Agreeing the council's Budget and setting the Council Tax.
- Making decisions referred to it which are outside the budget or policy framework.
- Adopting and changing the Constitution.
- Electing the Leader of the Council, Chair and Vice-Chair.
- Making appointments to outside bodies.

Council meetings will also be a forum where councillors can exercise their representative function and one which can underpin policy formulation and performance review. The new councils will also put in place means for public engagement at council meetings.

The Leader and Cabinet

The Leader will be elected for a four-year term of office. The Leader will then appoint a Deputy Leader, and up to 8 other Cabinet Members, a total of 10 positions.

The majority of 'Executive side' decisions will be made at meetings of the Cabinet, with Officer delegation below key decision thresholds.

Strategic policies will be developed by Cabinet Members with officer support and guidance. In some cases these policies may then be tested with Overview and Scrutiny, before being adopted by Cabinet.

Cabinet Members will work with their counterparts in other Norfolk and Suffolk councils on system wide issues and will need sufficient time to do this.

Devolution

The Leader will have a role within the Mayoral Combined County Authority and the Leader/Cabinet members will also work with others on the Suffolk Business Board and emerging health governance.

Cabinet Member Portfolios

Whilst it is possible that Council Leaders may choose to have a Cabinet of fewer than 10 Councillors it is prudent to allow 10 places to provide the same flexibility as provided for in law.

The work of all Cabinet members comprises:

- Providing direction
- Setting strategic priorities
- Taking key/relevant decisions;
- Engaging with other councillors;
- Providing a communications/engagement role

The number of hours spent by Cabinet Members on their responsibilities varies depending on the portfolio and the range of decisions required.

It is likely that at least half of the Portfolios will need to be full time roles – especially those relating to large statutory functions such as Adults' and Children's services. Some Portfolios will carry additional responsibilities such as:

- Chairing the Community Safety Partnership
- Being a member of the Schools Forum
- Involvement in inspections e.g. Children's Services / Adult Social Care

Cabinet Delegations

Decision making below key decision thresholds is typically delegated to Officers.

Officers making more significant decisions will regularly consult their Portfolio Holder, the Leader, and where relevant other Portfolio Holders/ward members prior to making such decisions. The new councils may also make provision for some decision-making directly by Portfolio Holders in their new constitutions.

Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships)

Scrutiny

Decision makers will be held to account through regular reporting to Scrutiny Committees. Scrutiny Committees will also have their own programme of areas for scrutinising and may also question decisions taken in their communities by others. They may also monitor the Council's performance in service delivery. Scrutiny Committees will therefore have an advisory role in policy development, as well as post-implementation reviews and ongoing performance management.

Scrutiny Committees would also allow Councillors to develop sufficient specialist knowledge to deliver effective scrutiny.

Evidence from unitary authorities with similar populations shows that the number of places on Scrutiny Committees varies widely from 23 in Southampton to 55 in Plymouth.

The new councils are likely to want to test different models of scrutiny, suited to their own local needs and preferences. However, it would generally be expected that there would be some form of strategic and corporate scrutiny (acting through a lead committee) and then a number of specialist committees providing particular areas of focus. For instance for education and children's services.

As a baseline, were current Scrutiny arrangements from the County and District/Borough Councils mapped onto each new authority (taking an average of the District/Borough arrangements) there would be at least 39 places on scrutiny committees required. Allowing for around this level of capacity in council size would give the new authorities flexibility in the model they develop.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CFGs) recommend that, for practicality, Scrutiny Committees have between 7-10 members. A membership of 9 Councillors per committee would give good representation of electors and would lead to 36 places on four scrutiny committees (before substitutes). Committees would meet several times per year (e.g. 5), with use of Task and Finish Groups where very detailed work needed to be done by Councillors.

It is noted that joint arrangements for Health Scrutiny may need to be put in place to align with NHS Boundaries.

Audit and Governance

The Committee would deal with the Council's risk management and audit arrangements including consideration of the Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement prior to Full Council approval and the Council's annual audit letter.

In accordance with the latest CIPFA guidance, two independent, non-voting members should be appointed to provide further independent challenge

Subject to any standards reforms arising from the recent consultation, there is more than one option in terms of Governance/Standards; it may be a joint purpose committee alongside Audit or could be a stand-alone Committee. It would, alongside the Monitoring Officer, manage the Standards regime for Councillors and Sub-Committee meetings could be established to consider breaches of the Code of Conduct if required.

These Committees would meet approximately four times per year and consist of 6 Councillors or more. Training would be provided on at least an annual basis, with additional learning for the Chair.

Planning

This section looks at the baseline demand for the planning function across all three councils

Government is currently consulting on capping the size of Planning Committees at 11 Councillors, and so this number of Councillors is suggested as a minimum to ensure that there is the best possible geographic and political diversity on the committee.

0.7 substitutes per member generally produces sufficient substitutes without too much dilution of knowledge and so 8 Councillors would be appointed as substitutes.

Government is also consulting on setting a threshold at which decisions are delegated to Officers and based on this it is anticipated that a minimum of one Planning and Development Committee meeting thirteen times a year would be needed to meet demand (see section B).

It is anticipated that meetings of the Planning and Development Committee would typically last 2-3 hours, and in addition to these there would be a minimum of 4 site visits per year and 2 or 3 training sessions (some of the councils may also choose to hold more site visits). Together with the large volume of material which Councillors need to read in advance of Committees this makes being a member a significant commitment.

It is often considered good practice that Councillors do not sit on both the Cabinet and Planning Committee and the new council may choose to prohibit this under its new constitution. This is therefore factored into these generic calculations.

Licensing

The maximum size of a Licensing Committee is set by law at 15 Councillors. It is proposed that the Committee size be set at 15 Councillors as if it were smaller this would risk the Council's ability to appoint sufficient Councillors for Sub-Committee hearings, particularly where these are required at short notice. This larger committee size would also ensure that there is the best possible geographic and political diversity on the committee.

It is anticipated that the Licensing Committee would meet 4 times per year to be consulted on licencing policy and also determine some types of licence.

Sub-Committees will be arranged on an ad-hoc basis and consist of 3 members and a substitute, drawn from the main Licensing Committee. Members are required to complete training and observe hearings prior to sitting on a Sub-Committee. It is anticipated that an average of 20-25 Sub-Committees could be required per year.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Health and Wellbeing Boards are a statutory committee of the local authority, and provide a forum for political, clinical, professional and community leaders from across the health and care system come together to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population and reduce health inequalities.

It is anticipated that 5 Councillors would be appointed to the Health and Wellbeing Board and that the Board would meet 5 times per year.

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

It is a statutory requirement for every Local Education Authority (LEA) to appoint a SACRE to advise on religious education and to support curriculum reviews.

It is anticipated that 4 Councillors would be appointed to the SACRE and that the body would meet 3 times per year.

Corporate Parenting Board

A corporate parenting board provides a forum by which to: monitor the wellbeing of children looked after by the council; look strategically at the way children in care and care leavers are experiencing services; provide a forum to discuss issues; and a positive link with children in care councils and other forums.

It is anticipated that 6 Councillors would be appointed to the Corporate Parenting Board and that the Board would meet 4 times per year.

Governance of Shared Services

As is the case now, there is scope for some services to be shared with other Councils, and others may be hosted by one authority for others. For instance, the current very successful revenues partnerships (one of which is shared with parts of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk).

Where a shared arrangement is in place, Joint Committees (of Cabinet) will need to be established to provide governance for these arrangements.

Additional committees / Panels

Each Council will need Committees / Panels to appoint senior officers as well as to deal with disciplinary matters relating to senior officers (in line with the relevant JNC advice). The governance of pension funds will also require councillor input.

Where the council may be shareholders in more than one LATCO, a shareholder representative/group will be required involving the Leader and/or Cabinet members.

Consideration should be given to other working groups such as environment, Local Plan, treasury management, etc.

These are likely to be ad hoc rather than standing committees / panels but it is important that they are included within relevant constitutions. Each committee / panel should have no fewer than five members.

Additional arrangements for children's services

Councils may wish to discharge some Children's Services functions through Committees. Suffolk County Council has an Education Transport Appeals Committee.

Outside Bodies

The Council is likely to make appointments across a wide range of Outside Bodies, meaning that Councillors will be involved in a large number of organisations across the area, representing the interests of these within the Council and the Council's interests at the Outside Body. The time commitment varies by each outside body, and the nature of the appointments vary (some being simply observers and others being trustees) but there will be a significant commitment from Councillors involved in this partnership working. It is anticipated that each Councillor would be appointed to one or two Outside Bodies and that these would each take approximately 1 hour per month of their time.

Community Leadership

A large part of the role of every councillor is representing their own ward, including dealing with casework from constituents. The LGA's 2022 councillor census showed an average unitary councillor spent 7.6 hours a week engaging with constituents and 4.8 hours working with community groups. Council size is therefore important to ensure this workload is shared in a manageable way, and the widest range of people is able to consider standing for election.

Furthermore, as an area's population grows, so will casework. Whereas the number of councillors will not increase until the next electoral review, possibly well over 10 years' away. So future capacity in a rapidly growing area should also be considered.

Each of the new councils will need to reflect on this aspect carefully in reaching a final view on council size, including the support given to councillors in their ward roles.

In terms of direct impact on creating capacity in governance models for community representation, the following would need to be taken into account on top of casework from individual constituents:

Neighbourhood/Area Governance

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill will introduce a requirement on English local authorities to establish neighbourhood governance mechanisms. Regulations around these arrangements are awaited but it is likely that this will represent a significant time commitment for Councillors. Anecdotal evidence from Ipswich's previous Area Committee model and other area governance models suggests an average demand on Councillors time of around 3 hours per month.

Parish & Town Council/Community Group liaison

Neighbourhood governance may create new models for engagement but ward members will still need to interact directly with parish and town councils and/or residents' or community associations/forums. This direct engagement is a key characteristic of local government in most parts of Suffolk today.

While new models of engagement might be required in rural wards (some parts of the country have adopted ward member engagement with clusters of parishes) there will always be a need for direct interaction and this is still likely to equate to several hours a month for each councillor, usually in the evening.

In addition, we know from the input of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils to the LGR process that the town and parish council sector is keen to see a new enhanced role for itself, working with the new unitary councils. They have asked for a range of collaboration initiatives, including:

- A Suffolk Charter: A binding agreement outlining mutual responsibilities, expectations, and procedures—regularly reviewed to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- Parish Liaison Officers: Dedicated roles within the new authority structure, supported by senior community development officers (as seen in North Yorkshire)
- Community Networks: Two-way communication channels enabling clustering of councils to:
 - Monitor service quality.
 - Consult residents and escalate issues.
 - Support local partnerships.
 - Develop community-led projects and funding bids.

- Focus Groups: Representative samples of parishes and towns to co-design improvements in areas such as communication, highways, and emergency planning.
- Regular Engagement: Scheduled meetings between Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC), lead councils, and parish meetings to maintain dialogue and alignment.

This new approach is likely to increase the current levels of engagement and add to the requirement on council size.

Baseline council size

The governance model above suggests that there is a need to allow for up to 10 Councillors to form each Council's Cabinet. Given the demanding role of Cabinet members, it is assumed that these Councillors will generally not be members of other committees.

There are then around 80 'main' committee places to fill, excluding employment committees and an Education Transport Appeals Committee plus joint arrangements which would be allocated to members of Cabinet, and specific local requirements. Even if it was assumed that each Councillor not on Cabinet will sit on two 'main' Committees, this will require a further 40 Councillors.

Finally, an allowance needs to be made for effectively managing the governance requirements outlined above, which will be in addition to populating Cabinet and the 'main' committees. As a baseline, this allowance is suggested to be 10 Councillors in each council. This extra capacity will allow some flexibility and specialism in committee memberships, and the fairer allocation of other councillor roles, such as sitting on boards. For instance, recognising the particular burden placed on regulatory committee members compared to other committees.

In summary, our proposal to test in later stages of the review is that **60 Councillors** is the minimum requirement for council size in each of the three new councils, before taking into account specific local factors and emerging national views on how regulatory and other functions are organised. A council of this minimum size is also best placed to be able to organise its business in a way that attracts the widest range of people to stand for public office.

APPENDIX

6

NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE AND EMPOWERMENT MODEL – THREE UNITARY COUNCIL APPROACH

Principles of neighbourhood working in Suffolk

New councils will adopt key principles (as set out in the main Case for Change) in the design of the appropriate neighbourhood governance structures and embed an early help and prevention model to reduce demand on statutory services. Councils will achieve this by listening to all of their residents, ensuring those from marginal groups or deprived communities are heard, and build on the assets and infrastructure in that community that meet local need. This will build on pre reorganisation relationships with residents and local groups to be able to embed this in a swift and meaningful way.

Working with what exists

The new councils will need to consider what can be usefully and successfully transferred from existing pre-LGR neighbourhood models. For example, where an area has a strong, active and inclusive existing structure which can serve the function of engagement with new councils well, then it is likely that this will be adopted as the foundation of the model for a new council.

Inclusive participation by default

No matter what the model of empowerment, ways to engage residents will reflect accessibility and inclusivity. This will mean mixing in-person and online to maximise participation, where using digital means ensuring they are accessible, working with residents with specific access needs to best understand how to design options. New councils will ensure that all voices are heard, proactively seeking those who don't or can't come to the council, to ensure all communities are represented in all forms of dialogue and co-design, as well as decision making. One way of doing this is working through elected members, local frontline staff or community champions who are working with these residents, ensuring that contacts with residents in their homes and communities are optimised and 'Making Every Contact Count'.

Widening audiences and partnerships

In designing ways to involve residents meaningfully on key topics, the new authorities will ensure they understand the different audiences and appropriate routes to engage them. New councils will want local people identifying local problems and identifying the local solutions that will work in their own community.

This may include working through local VCFSE organisations, working with local anchor organisations or businesses, or youth organisations to ensure all voices are heard, and that those with the most investment (i.e. the most to lose or to gain) are actively encouraged to participate. It remains important however not to see organisations as a proxy for residents, and councils will need to engage directly with their residents.

Reflecting the topic

Flexibility will be key to achieving the right outcome. There will be challenges which disproportionately impact a particular geography or community, where their views should be given more weight, and this would be reflected in the mechanism used to empower those residents to engage. The way new councils engage a local community on the development of a local park will be vastly different from the way it seeks to collaborate with residents on climate change, and that nuance must be reflected in the approach. This may mean the councils working collaboratively on topics which have an impact wider than their own boundaries, as current councils do, or across the MCCA where the impact is regional.

Recognition and value to deepen democracy and civic participation

Any resident power will be genuine, open and transparent, with residents given the information they need to make fully considered and meaningful contributions. New councils will ensure neighbourhood governance is as local as possible, but also understand that decision making will be at the most local level appropriate for the decision or service change that is being proposed. A variety of appropriate tools can allow for this such as Citizen Juries, participatory budgeting or devolved decisions to a community forum or network, which can be used depending on the situation and local interest.

Transparency, honesty and trust

New councils will need to ensure that all relevant data is shared with communities, both to support the informing of decision-making but also showing the impact of those decisions in the longer term. Sharing evidence and data leads to better decisions and enables wider public scrutiny, which builds trust and encourages participation.

Methods and mechanisms

There is already a plethora of successful ways local authorities in Suffolk are engaging their local population. The new unitary councils would seek to build on what works, learn from and adapt those that have not fully met resident expectations, as well as introducing new, appropriate models, designed with local communities wherever possible.

It is not sufficient to establish a restrictive model and expect residents to come to the local authority, councils need to work with communities, their place and their interests to best engage them and use empowerment to build trust to enable true neighbourhood governance. It is clear from our collective experiences and those of other councils, that a local council that is close to its communities is best placed to understand their diversity of needs. Such councils have the relationships, trust and mechanisms to do this well.

Place-based Community Partnerships

The opportunity for open and ongoing conversation at a Place-level will become even more important. Working in a way which enables residents to engage on topics which impact their local area with a real focus on data and insight informed priorities. These mechanisms will reflect the place they serve, being designed to be representative and unrestrictive. The size and design of these will reflect the local area, and the existing structures within it, for example building on the Community Partnerships that already exist and seeking to join up with key health structures, our Policing colleagues, VCFSE organisations and business leaders.

New councils will focus on embedding data- and local intelligence-led approaches to engagement and tailor their support accordingly. By combining datasets from community partnerships, housing, council tax, and more qualitative information from our engagement and community partners, councils can take a place-based approach to neighbourhood engagement—ensuring that efforts are inclusive, targeted, and evidence-based. This allows for co-design with residents, tracking of the impact of interventions, and prioritisation of resources to where they are most needed. The three unitary model will allow these partnerships to operate at a level local enough to ensure their effectiveness and relevance, but also in proper proportion to the scale of the new council itself.

Local example: When Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils became East Suffolk Council in 2019, the main concern expressed by residents was loss of democratic mandate and that the Council would become more remote from its residents. To address this the new Council established eight Community Partnerships, each with a budget of £25,000 per annum and a focus on using data and local insight to agree priorities – the things that are most important to local people. An overarching Community Partnership Board brings the Chairs of these eight Community Partnerships together with key partners including the County and District Councils, police, both ICBs that currently cover East Suffolk, local colleges and businesses, and key VCFSE representatives. The Board has a further budget of £300,000 per annum to enable projects that cover at least two Community Partnership areas. Over the last six years the Partnerships and Board have allocated more than £3 million to projects to tackle the things that matter to residents – with an emphasis on collective problem solving and maximising collective impact.

Thematic forums and assemblies

Experience shows us that communities are much more incentivised to collaborate on decisions related to topics they are impacted by over more generic approaches. For key decisions which impact the wider area, specific workshops, forums and assemblies can be convened to engage residents more deeply on the topic. The approach will follow the topic and the audience. New councils will continue to work through groups such as Disability Forums and SEN networks to inform policy and services and lead real change, for example to the design of new community buildings, allocation processes for new beach huts or housing, and maximising access to information and accessible signposting.

Local example: Ipswich Social Mobility Alliance, where organisations invested in youth-led social action and long-term social mobility come together to deliver hackathons which engage young people in reimaging the town. Their voices feed into the development of new ways of working, and seek to shape our regeneration around young rather than bring young people into adult dominated spaces. A shared communications approach and working with schools and youth organisations allows young people to lead and has led to Ipswich being the focus for workshops for the National Youth Strategy.

Local example: The East Suffolk Youth Council was formed in 2023 and includes more than 30 youth councillors from schools across East Suffolk (including home schooled young people and SEN students). The Youth Council has presented three motions to Full Council, focussing on youth activities, mental health and wellbeing, use of CIL for projects benefiting young people and flooding, all of which have been welcomed by East Suffolk Councillors of all parties. The Youth Council is leading our Youth Takeover Day offer this year and they are running a workshop at our annual Community Partnership Forum.

Digital tools

Residents have busy lives, and expecting them to fit in-person meetings into busy schedules can be challenging. There will always be a need to augment digital approaches for those excluded, but digital solutions can offer a 24/7 way for residents to engage in their own time. Using available tools such as surveys, votes, ideation forums and online workshops, presented through coherent engagement platforms new authorities will ensure that decisions are transparently displayed, and residents have opportunity to comment and shape services, projects and decisions.

Our approach to digital engagement will not only be about convenience but also about insight. Modern technology will enable the gathering of real-time feedback, map sentiment geographically, and identify emerging priorities. These tools support inclusive participation through mobile-friendly design, anonymous input options, and accessibility features. By integrating engagement platforms with internal systems, new councils will ensure that resident voices directly inform service design and delivery. It is important to emphasise that digital tools will complement - not replace - local democratic representation. Platforms will be designed to reflect local agendas and ensure elected members can engage meaningfully with constituents, especially in areas where geography or population density presents challenges.

Local example: Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have piloted the Go Vocal platform to facilitate resident input on local priorities.

Early campaigns have shown promising engagement, inspiring neighbouring districts to explore similar models. The platform's flexibility and transparency have made it a cornerstone of our digital engagement strategy.

Capturing community conversations

It is important that new councils take an approach which is ongoing and doesn't make residents wait for a window to engage on a topic when it means something to them in the moment. New councils will seek to embed active community listening into organisational culture and across service provision, so that when residents raise ideas or concerns, there are ways to capture that and use it to influence the priority of decision making. Local neighbourhood services mean local frontline officers who understand their community (both assets and needs), they will be empowered to capture the local feedback and intelligence to inform services and decision making from the earlier point in the design process.

Local example: Suffolk has three Sport England Place programme areas across its districts and boroughs, and the use of Community Connectors has been built into the models from the start, to ensure that the voice of residents informs action from the earliest stage. These roles are employed from the local community and are employed to work with residents to understand their experiences of local activities, the built environment and barriers to being more active in a way data sets cannot provide. The system, which is heavily led by its district and borough leads, have committed to using this localised intelligence to inform changes in practice, allocation of Place income in a participatory budgeting methodology, and the development of community-led governance of the programme more broadly.

Devolved place-based and topic-based budgets

Devolving budgets has a place in good neighbourhood governance, but has to be appropriate and proportionate with clear outcomes to be used correctly. Depending on the issue, residents can have a role in allocating funding and should be enabled to understand why funding is being allocated. This may be through participatory budgeting or transferring community assets.

Local example: An East Suffolk Community Partnerships piloted a 'Community Soup' programme where micro community groups have the opportunity to pitch for funding for new project ideas from their peers at a social evening including, as the name suggests, soup (or other shared food) based on the Detroit Soup model. This was built on at larger scale through the recent Community Call to Action focussing on Social Isolation and Loneliness, where six VCFSE organisations (from 28 applications) were invited to pitch their ideas in a Dragon's Den style to the Community Partnership Board. Four projects received £25,000 each, with the process already in train to be used again due to its success.

Working with Civil Society stakeholders

New councils will recognise that direct engagement with residents is one element of impactful decision-making, with another being the relationship and trust councils maintain with key organisational stakeholders, including Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sectors, the local businesses vital to growth and prosperity, and other statutory bodies.

Meaningful partnerships with VCFSE stakeholders

As part of embedding of community power, new councils will respect the unique place of the VCFSE sector as part of that model, and also as a peer in terms of service design and delivery. As such councils will:

- Maintain forums specific to the VCFSE sector priorities to continue with trusted relationship development
- Respect VCFSEs as experts in their relevant fields, especially related to key topics such as SEN provision and social care, engaging them in meaningful service design collaborations
- Work through those organisations where they hold trusted relationships with key communities, valuing their place in supporting residents to navigate currently complex structures such as health and social care and working alongside the new authorities to create better pathways
- Ensure procurement and grant funding activities are accessible to a broad range of VCFSEs and do not preclude them from delivery opportunities e.g. Community Call to Actions
- Share data and evidence which supports them to best target their own resources and develop business cases for services

Local example: All districts and boroughs work alongside our ICS in what we call our Connect Space - a network of statutory, VCFSE and health organisations coming together as peers to develop ideas, scrutinise services and review evaluations of good practice and lived experience. A more local unitary design means that there would be locally based officers able to align to these partnerships with local knowledge and understanding, broadening them into other areas outside health. These link to the delivery of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and therefore can influence a health service which is more reflective of the specific place it operates in, rather than providing a generic service, and ensure connections to prevention levers outside health within local government.

Ensuring a role for businesses to support economic and community growth

Suffolk's local businesses serve a unique role in community decision-making, both as conduits to those residents who work in their companies, but also in their unique experiences related to growth, transport and infrastructure. They are vital to tackling economic inequality and promoting growth.

Businesses need specific mechanisms to support them to engage in decision making which may not be the same structures as those for residents or VCFSEs. Therefore, new councils will:

- Maintain place-based forums to engage businesses on key issues which impact them such as skills, tourism and infrastructure projects
- Ensure that they work closely on key strategic developments such as Local Plans, ensuring that developers and businesses with an interest in locating to and investing in Suffolk are engaged in the decision making which will support them.
- Work closely on the skills agenda to ensure that education and skills development reflect the available local jobs market, benefiting residents and businesses.

Local example: The Rural England Prosperity Fund, designed to work alongside the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, enabled some of our District Councils to bolster the rural economy and strengthen rural communities by providing capital funding for projects that boost productivity, create jobs, and enhance community facilities. Projects generated from these funds include working with local businesses and education providers that created targeted recruitment support, a Skills Academy, Employability Programmes and development of green and adult skills programmes.

They also include support for essential community hubs, including villages halls and community centres through grant programmes aimed at encouraging local committees to consider the future of their building and consider additional, multi-functional uses.

Local example: Mid Suffolk District Council has negotiated with developers on large scale industrial developments for the creation of community benefit funds to mitigate potential impact to the surrounding community, working with communities and parish councils to identify their concerns and community aspirations.

Through this model, Port One development will directly benefit the local community with gains such as solar panels on community buildings, the rebuild of Little Blakenham village hall,

a Biodiversity Enhancement Fund and the creation of a ‘nature reserve’ at Gipping Meadow through working with the businesses to invest in the locality.

Working in partnerships with statutory colleagues

Complex local issues are rarely the domain of one single statutory body, and new councils, would ensure that relevant forums to collaborate on these topics were retained and expanded.

The Suffolk model for community safety is already delivered by three Community Safety Partnerships at a local level for delivery, supported by a Suffolk wide Community Safety Board which helps share best practice, collaborate on training and disseminate central funds to the local bodies for delivery against their local priorities.

Likewise, our current health collaboration and decision-making is on a three Alliance model footprint. Again, it is specific local priorities which are identified, with intelligence from communities, which reflect the diversity of the areas we represent. This group collectively agrees to the allocation of local budgets, establishes local grant panels for shared decision making and helps partners align their work to make the biggest impact for the community.

Going forward our unitary approach would:

- Maintain forums networks and boards for statutory bodies on key topics such as safety and health
- Ensure these boards are supported with localised evidence from the neighbourhood activities to reflect the areas they serve
- Collaborate at a Suffolk or Suffolk/Norfolk level as appropriate to share best practice and regional priorities

Local example: Suffolk has three Clear, Hold, Build programmes in different stages of operation. In all cases, the constabulary identified the current district or borough council as the most impactful partner to share the responsibility of the programme delivery with. These projects, in Felixstowe, Newmarket and Ipswich, have been founded on the principles of community involvement and ownership, the ability to understand a small area better through engagement than data alone, and collaborative working at all stages. These have not only resulted in large numbers of arrests and prevention of crime, but the exploration of new ways of sharing intelligence, a better trusted relationship with local VCFSE groups and more trust from local residents in the benefits of working alongside agencies to take ownership of their local streets.

Measuring success?

It will be important in committing to increased community decision-making to evaluate the impact of neighbourhood engagement and decision making.

When working with communities, embedding a process of continuous learning, feedback and iteration is important as councils will need to adapt as the communities and places change, and new priorities emerge.

Each place will have different measures of success as they will have unique circumstances and priorities but generally, success measures will cover:

- How many people have had a chance to influence decision making and how representative these participants are of the local place
- The breadth and diversity of opportunities to influence change
- How many services, projects and strategies have been meaningfully influenced by communities
- How do residents feel about their level of agency in local decision making, and their trust in the unitary councils to empower them
- The changes in the effectiveness of services influenced by community decision making

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