



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP

*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities &
Local Government*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Leaders in Norfolk
By email

25 March 2026

Dear Leaders,

Thank you for your continued efforts to deliver new unitary councils in Norfolk. This Government is undertaking the biggest reform of local government in a generation, ending the current two-tier system and replacing it with new single-tier unitary councils. This agenda is key to this government's vision of local councils that deliver good services for residents and are equipped to drive economic growth, while empowering their communities.

As a government, our number one ambition is growing the economy and putting more money in the pockets of working people. Driving economic growth means acknowledging that cities, towns, and villages don't all perform the same roles in the national economy – they specialise in what they're best at. Public service demand also isn't the same across the country. Some areas have high levels of homelessness and temporary accommodation, others have high need for adult social care due to an older population. Local leaders, both in councils and mayoralities, need to be able to focus on the specific needs of their area.

Reorganisation presents a once-in-a-generation chance to make sure our councils match the modern realities of our places, making sure outdated boundaries are not constraining growth, particularly in our towns and cities. In too many places, council boundaries are misaligned with the needs of their local communities and how those communities live their lives.

This is particularly important for key government priorities on housebuilding, like our target of building 1.5 million homes in England this Parliament. The housing needs of local communities are best met by councils who are closely connected to their communities and understand a place's local identity. This connection is crucial in ensuring that local government can boost economic growth and design public services that respond to local residents.

Reorganisation must also respect local identity, and the distinctive nature of the rural, urban and coastal communities across our country. We want to see councils that are connected to their local residents and communities; councils that mean something to the people they serve.

Decisions

I have considered your proposals carefully against the criteria set out in the invitation letter of 5 February 2025, alongside the responses to the consultation, representations made and all other relevant information.

Following this assessment, I have decided to implement the proposal for three unitary councils brought forward by Breckland Council, Broadland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council. This would create the following councils, referred to in the proposals as:

- West Norfolk Council (current local government areas of Breckland, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, and 9 parishes from South Norfolk).
- Greater Norwich Council (current local government areas of Norwich, 19 parishes from Broadland, and 16 parishes from South Norfolk).
- East Norfolk Council (current local government areas of Broadland (less 19 parishes), Great Yarmouth, North Norfolk, and South Norfolk (less 25 parishes)).

In implementing this proposal, I am exercising my power to modify the base proposal received from the existing councils named above, in order to make the boundary change requested.

I appreciate that this decision will be disappointing for some of you. I would like to thank you for your efforts to date to prioritise the best outcome for your residents, and to thank you in advance for maintaining that perspective and seeking to deliver the new unitary councils that will help to grow the local economy and provide better public services for your people. Your ongoing collaboration will be vital to ensure that the proposal is implemented with the interests of residents at its heart.

Turning to the reasons for my decision, in my judgement, although each of proposals met all of the criteria, the proposal for three unitary authorities best met the criteria overall. While the single and two-unitary proposals met the criteria, I found that the three unitary proposal would better reflect Norfolk's communities and local identities, drawing on a detailed understanding of local need. It establishes councils that are better aligned to Norfolk's distinct communities and will therefore be able to design and deliver public services that respond more effectively to local priorities across Norfolk's different urban, rural, and coastal areas. I also judged that it would provide more effective balance within the planned Mayoral Strategic Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk, which will support more effective governance at the strategic authority level.

In more detail, I believe that the three unitary model will allow public service delivery to fit Norfolk's distinct urban, rural, and coastal community identities and local economic clusters, enabling the new unitaries to best meet local needs, including on housing supply, and addressing local economic and social challenges. The proposal was supported by six out of eight councils in the area.

I also judged that the three unitary proposal best considers the role and needs of Norwich as a central economic hub for the area. I am confident that the Greater Norwich unitary, including the sensible boundary changes requested, will enable focused leadership across the urban area, provide additional developable land to meet the housing needs of the area, and support effective public service delivery across a sensible urban footprint, all in a way that reflects Norwich's place as Norfolk's economic and urban centre.

I considered the expected costs and benefits, including transition costs, and the ability of each new council to be financially resilient. On the evidence, I am satisfied that the three unitary proposal can be delivered on a sustainable financial basis. The 500,000 population figure has always been a guiding principle, not a fixed threshold. Whilst all three new councils are below the 500,000 level, I am satisfied that it is appropriate on the basis that it produces a more coherent and effective outcome for Norfolk.

Simplifying local government ensures a strong foundation for devolution. We are committed to working with partners across Norfolk and Suffolk, including new unitary authorities once established, to further support the planned Mayoral Strategic Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk.

Given this, in reaching my decision, I considered the need to provide effective and balanced representation in Norfolk and Suffolk's future Mayoral Strategic Authority. I believe that the future Authority would be best supported by having similar local council structures across Norfolk and Suffolk, as implementing significantly different structures across the devolution footprint could lead to substantial population disparities and require more complex arrangements for governance, membership and voting – which would undermine effective functioning within the strategic authority. This was a relevant factor that I took into consideration in my decision to take forward three unitary councils in Norfolk, as well as in Suffolk.

Next steps

In relation to next steps, as you are aware a Structural Changes Order, which will be subject to Parliamentary approval, is required to abolish existing councils, establish new structures and make transitional arrangements. I have carefully considered the information in the proposals as well as the further representations you have made on the content of this Order. My officials will shortly write to your Chief Executives setting out the next steps and timeline for implementation, including my initial decisions on transitional arrangements that will be included in the draft legislation and to request further input, including on warding arrangements. This will enable you to take forward the work needed to begin preparation for elections and implementation, in advance of Parliamentary approval of the Order. For clarity, the elections that will take place for new authorities in 2027 will replace any existing local elections planned.

I am pleased to be able to confirm how the £63m in transition funding announced in February will be allocated. We will provide at least £900,000 per each new unitary authority that is being implemented to help establish effective services and governance arrangements, ensuring funding is provided fairly, consistently, and as quickly as possible. This means that the Norfolk invitation area will receive £2.7m for three new unitary councils. This approach

reflects the differing levels of complexity involved across areas and allows for a small central reserve to be used later for targeted support if needed. Funding will be issued through established grant mechanisms and we will be in touch to confirm next steps.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with you to deliver the vital improvements that reorganisation can facilitate.

I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives, Norfolk MPs and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Steve Reed". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

RT HON STEVE REED OBE MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government