



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 of Suffolk Councils  
*By email*

25 March 2026

Dear Leaders,

Thank you for your continued efforts to deliver new unitary councils in Suffolk. 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presents a once-in-a-generation chance to make sure our councils match the modern realities of our places, making sure outdated boundaries are not constraining growth, particularly in our towns and cities.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 last year, alongside the responses to the consultation, representations made and all other relevant information.

Following this assessment, I have decided to move forward with implementation of the three unitary authority proposal brought forward by West Suffolk Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, East Suffolk Council, Babergh District Council, and Ipswich Borough Council. This would create the following councils, referred to in the proposals as:

- Western Suffolk Council (current local government areas of West Suffolk, 21 parishes from Mid Suffolk, and Babergh (less 31 parishes)).
- Central and Eastern Suffolk Council (current local government areas of Mid Suffolk (less 29 parishes), and East Suffolk (less 25 parishes)).
- Ipswich and South Suffolk Council (current local government areas of Ipswich, 31 parishes from Babergh, 8 parishes from Mid Suffolk, and 25 parishes from East Suffolk).

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 both proposals met the criteria, the proposal for three unitary councils best met the criteria overall.

I found that the three unitary proposal better reflects the regional, cultural, social, and economic patterns across Suffolk, provides new councils that would reflect the different local identities and communities across Suffolk, and would more effectively support Ipswich's role as the key urban area across Suffolk. I also judged that it would provide the best balance within the planned Mayoral Strategic Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk.

In more detail, the three unitary councils will each be aligned to the county's distinct economic and community areas. I judged that this model will best support coherent planning for housing growth in line with the local needs of each area, particularly around Ipswich.

Reorganising Suffolk into three unitary councils will involve boundary changes, which I believe is justified on the grounds that three smaller unitaries would better reflect Suffolk's distinct areas and local identities. I judged that the proposal would allow specific local needs, on housing supply and other key public services, to be directly addressed to fit the distinct economic and demographic needs of individual towns, urban, rural and coastal areas. The

proposal will better facilitate locally responsive, place-based approaches to design public services tailored to each of these local communities' needs.

I understand the importance of preserving local identity, in this case for market towns and urban communities. I believe that the boundary design and governance arrangements of the three unitary proposal also present a way of balancing urban centres with surrounding rural areas while maintaining distinct identities. I took account of all consultation responses and I noted the strong, consistent local support from residents, named consultees and organisations for the three unitary proposals, in particular in relation to local democratic representation in new authorities. The three unitary proposal was supported by five out of six councils in the area.

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 Suffolk.

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 Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Given this, I have also considered the need to provide balanced representation in Norfolk and Suffolk's future Mayoral Strategic Authority. I believe that the future strategic 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. This was a relevant factor that I took into consideration in my decision to take forward three unitary councils in Suffolk, as well as in Norfolk.

### **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 Suffolk 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, Suffolk MPs and the Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "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