Smarter Simpler Better

One Suffolk

Business Case

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Foreword

Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council

Suffolk's local government structure is over 50 years old. In that time, our county and its people have grown in economic strength, confidence and ambition. They have outgrown the outdated and costly two-tier system introduced in the 1970s. It is this progress that has driven us to seek inclusion in the Government's 'Fast Track' programme for local government reorganisation.

Our commitment is not only to renew the processes and approach to local governance, but to redefine the social contract between local government and the people and businesses of Suffolk.

This is a unique opportunity that must not be missed or diluted by short-term political interests. Alongside our colleagues in district and borough councils and central government, we are tasked with laying the foundations for vital public services across Suffolk. We must not be distracted by the redrawing of boundaries for perceived political gain. Instead, we must seize this moment to future-proof Suffolk's local government, making it financially sustainable and resilient to the challenges ahead.

Above all, we must remember that this is not just about today's services. We are building the foundations for future generations: our children and all those who will call Suffolk home. That is why we stepped forward for the fast-track process and why we are grateful to have been accepted. To date, the most successful devolution has been driven by large cities. With Suffolk and Norfolk, there is an opportunity to introduce a different model and way of thinking – one that ensures the benefits of devolution drive growth in more rural locations.

I recognise that some reading this may never have visited Suffolk. They may not have experienced our county's natural beauty, the quiet but determined ambition of our towns and villages, or the warmth and generosity of its people. Suffolk is a proud county, with a long-standing role in both the regional and national story of Britain. From our agricultural heritage and world-class food production to our international ports and growing contribution to sustainable energy, Suffolk has always played its part. For these reasons, we believe Suffolk should lead the redesign of its own local government structure – shaping its future while learning from others who have gone before.

It is clear that the current system is not fit for purpose. Too much money is wasted through duplication. Too much time is spent navigating organisational boundaries that mean little to the people we serve. At a time when every pound must count, and when residents rightly expect services that are simple, accessible and joined-up, we cannot afford inefficiency. We must build a structure that is financially resilient and ready for the future.

Continued

That is why I believe Suffolk needs one unitary council – **One Suffolk**. A single council will bring clarity of leadership, accountability and vision. It will give Suffolk a stronger, unified voice on the national stage. Most importantly, the financial resilience of this model will allow us to focus resources where they are needed most: on frontline services, supporting our most vulnerable residents and investing in Suffolk's future growth and prosperity.

Breaking our county apart would do the opposite. It would introduce more bureaucracy, not less. It would cost tens of millions in set-up costs alone. Where **One Suffolk** will bring clarity and improved services, fragmentation will pit areas against each other, increase costs and create a postcode lottery in essential care services – putting our most vulnerable residents at risk.

I am proud of this business case. It sets out a clear vision for the future, built around eight key pillars:

- **Financial resilience**, freeing up resources for frontline services and keeping Council Tax as low as possible
- **A new £40 million capital investment fund for towns**, driving local economic growth
- **Communities empowered to lead**, by offering more powers and funding to town and parish councils
- **A simpler, better and proactive highways service** that acts quickly and delivers results
- **A unified, consistent and locally shaped planning**, created via a unified single planning framework that delivers greater consistency
- **A modern, tech-driven, innovative council**, with the financial capacity to invest in new technology and innovation
- **A resilient and growing local economy**, delivering growth with the benefits and opportunities spread Suffolk-wide
- **A strong voice for Suffolk and its future**, collaborating effectively with the new mayor to maximise the benefits of devolution

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These pillars are explained further throughout this document.

One Suffolk will establish a new relationship between council and residents – truly accessible to all and driven by a 'can-do' culture. It will create a model of local government best placed to deliver sustainable, county-wide economic growth.

Let me be clear: this is not simply a rebranding exercise. Local government reorganisation will mark the end of Suffolk County Council, as well as the district and borough councils. My role as Leader is to ensure that this transition is smooth for residents and that Suffolk gains the maximum benefit from it.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have so far written to us in support of **One Suffolk**. You can read their letters of support in the appendices.

Our communities deserve a council that cuts red tape, uses their money wisely and is ambitious on their behalf. Suffolk has so much to offer, and I am convinced that **One Suffolk** will set our county, its communities, residents and businesses firmly on the path to a more prosperous future.

Matthew Hicks

Councillor Matthew Hicks,
Leader of Suffolk County Council

Foreword

Nicola Beach,
Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council

In my 12 years working as a Chief Executive within local government, both at a district and county level, local government reorganisation represents by far the most challenging, and therefore exciting, programme of work I have ever been involved in.

Unitarisation will bring many benefits to Suffolk. Simplification of services for people, clear organisational cost savings and better interconnection of services stand out among them. These all lead to improved service delivery on the ground. We must be careful though. Such radical change is not without risks, especially where the disaggregation of vital people services like adult social care, or children's services, are involved.

I am especially aware that what we have committed ourselves to is the wholesale abolition of over 50 years' worth of established structural governance and agreed process. The ending of recognised and respected councils and the rebuilding of an entirely new local government landscape. One that will not only be fit for the challenges of today but must be flexible, responsive and financially sustainable enough to deal with the uncertain challenges of the future.

Local government reorganisation isn't just about creating a new framework – it's an unique opportunity to renew the role of officers within a brand-new authority. It's a chance to reshape the culture of public sector working: moving beyond the delivery of services to a more joined-up approach and investment in people and places, with consistent policies and practice across the county, such as car parking, leisure services and planning; building a workforce with the capacity and mindset to better support town and parish councils, be more accessible to the public and actively foster early help and prevention services.

For me, as a Chief Executive, it isn't enough to simply change the framework from two-tier to unitary and expect perfection; we must change and improve the culture of the officers that ultimately bring any council to life.

No council is perfect, and all existing councils in Suffolk have their own challenges and shortcomings.
I recognise where we need to do better, learning from the feedback we receive and the ideas and innovations that we see in other unitary councils. While local government reorganisation won't solve every problem, it offers a valuable opportunity to address processes that we know cause unnecessary and underlying difficulties.

Continued

I believe the **One Suffolk** approach not only delivers essential service reforms but goes further than other proposals by achieving the efficiency savings needed to tackle the growing demand and complexity within people's services, such as Adult Social Care and SEND. Rather than fragmenting finely balanced care services into smaller, less sustainable authorities, the **One Suffolk** model builds on the established economies of scale that underpin commissioned services and maintain vital countywide safeguarding frameworks. By creating something new, we can streamline the process and make every pound work harder – and **One Suffolk** offers the most financially sound way to do just that.

Of course, change of this scale can feel daunting. That's why we've made listening a key priority from day one. Our Residents' Survey drew over 8,000 responses. I've had the privilege of speaking directly with town and parish councillors, businesses, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations and other key partners, as well as meeting residents at our 'Local Matters – We Are Listening' events. These conversations have been invaluable and it's clear that face-to-face engagement remains one of the most powerful tools we have.

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> **The future of Suffolk is ours to shape, and whilst I believe One Suffolk is the best proposal to achieve the best results, it remains vital that whatever form is chosen, we all play our part in making it a success.**

I also want to recognise the incredible professionalism of not only my own staff in the county council, but also those in the wider Suffolk system, including district and borough councils.

Despite being at the centre of these changes, officers have continued to serve our communities with dedication and integrity. Their commitment to public service has been unwavering and I'm deeply grateful for everything they've done, and continue to do, to help us reach the right outcome for Suffolk.

This document sets out our vision for a single unitary council – one that delivers both local and county-wide services in a way that's smarter, simpler and better for Suffolk. But it's also about culture; listening more closely, embracing a 'can-do' attitude and engaging with residents in a way that's streamlined and responsive.

It's a bold step, but one we believe is necessary. The future of Suffolk is ours to shape and whilst I believe **One Suffolk** is the best proposal to achieve the best results, it remains vital that whatever form is chosen, we all play our part in making it a success.

Nicola Beach,
Chief Executive of
Suffolk County Council

Executive summary

Executive summary

Suffolk is a proud and historic county, with a strong sense of identity. It is made up of a diverse and vibrant mix of larger towns, market towns, coastal communities and rural villages.

While Suffolk has many different characteristics, there is also a collective pride in a single, binding identity and sense of belonging. This is evident from Suffolk Day, the Suffolk Show, the University of Suffolk, Suffolk-wide local media and the Suffolk Trinity (comprising the Suffolk Punch horse, the Redpoll bull and the Suffolk Sheep). There is even a Suffolk way of saying things that lives on through the ages, epitomised in popular culture in the blockbuster film "The Dig".

The county is home to nationally and internationally significant economic anchors. Key sectors include clean energy, agri-food and drink, ports and logistics, digital technology, advanced manufacturing, the horseracing industry and tourism. Suffolk's farming industry is a cornerstone of the region's identity, economy and environmental stewardship. Suffolk is home to several long-established estates, such as the Euston Estate, which manage thousands of acres of farmland and woodland. Farming in Suffolk is deeply woven into the local economy and Suffolk is a major producer of cereals (wheat and barley), sugar beet, potatoes and livestock. Local food businesses benefit from proximity to farms, supporting supply chains and thousands of jobs directly and indirectly through food processing, logistics and agri-tech.

Suffolk's £21 billion economy has averaged 3.3% annual growth over the past decade, comparable to Cambridgeshire (£23.8 billion), Buckinghamshire (£18.1 billion) and Tyneside (£23.2 billion)[1]. Suffolk is one of only a few UK areas which has consistently been a net financial contributor to national wealth.

To fulfil more of Suffolk's economic potential, it is vital to have a single, countywide economic plan for jobs, growth, skills and infrastructure, together with a fully aligned and integrated model for local public service delivery. As a connected economy, without this, we risk not making the most of what Suffolk has to offer and denying the full benefits of sustainable growth to Suffolk's residents and businesses.

One Suffolk is Suffolk County Council's proposal for a single countywide unitary council. Through extensive analysis and engagement, it is clear that a single unitary council for Suffolk will deliver the best outcomes for Suffolk's residents; be the most effective partner for government, businesses and wider stakeholders; offer the most financially sustainable and resilient new unitary council; and most strongly meet the criteria set by the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution.

One Suffolk will celebrate the diversity of Suffolk's communities while advancing both the government's growth and clean energy missions and Suffolk's vision for powering, feeding and connecting the UK. Moreover, it will provide Suffolk with a unified, clear and compelling voice to advocate for investment, ensuring strategic action and optimal investment decisions for the entire county.

A single countywide unitary council will:

- boost key industries
- be a single partner for government on energy projects and security
- improve collaboration with the National Health Service (NHS) and police
- be people-focused
- strengthen preventative health efforts
- integrate more deeply in our communities, working alongside Suffolk's diverse Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector.

Suffolk County Council welcomes Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as an extraordinary opportunity to create new and better local government for the people, businesses and partners of Suffolk. The ambition for **One Suffolk** is for a 'modern council' that is a responsive, community-driven partner, rather than a distant bureaucracy. It will adopt the very best practice from across the existing county, district and borough councils in Suffolk and from elsewhere. A new modern unitary council for Suffolk, **One Suffolk** will be digitally connected, with user-friendly platforms that let residents report issues, access services and participate in decision-making from their phones or laptops. It is a council where those who want or need to engage have a clear route to doing so using a range of communication methods, from telephone and digital to face-to-face.

It is a modern council where meetings are streamed live, consultations are interactive and data is shared

1 ONS UK Small Area Gross Value Added Estimates, 2023

transparently to build trust.
The physical spaces (offices, libraries, town halls, community hubs) are welcoming and multifunctional. Working hand-in-hand with digital connectivity, the culture is people-focussed and rooted in local communities. Staff are approachable and diverse, trained not just in policy but in empathy and innovation. A modern council that listens, adapts and co-creates with its residents, making governance feel less like a formality and more like a shared journey.

One Suffolk will set a new standard for local government, driving significant improvements in service delivery, community wellbeing and economic growth. It will do this by creating a unified, data-driven and innovative council that prioritises preventative services, strategic commissioning and integrated service delivery. It seeks to drive sustainable growth, improve efficiency and provide better outcomes for Suffolk's residents. We have grasped the opportunity to be bold and design **One Suffolk** to these modern council standards and hardwire that into the DNA of the new countywide unitary council for Suffolk.

One Suffolk: smarter, simpler, better

Devolution, coupled with local government reorganisation, presents an opportunity to reshape Suffolk's future while delivering effective and joined-up services. Working with the new mayor, Suffolk, as a single unitary council, will remove competition between places and enable the identification of clear and coherent investment priorities to maximise the benefits of devolution.

A single unitary council will celebrate the diversity of place to attract investment, maximise connectivity between places, people and businesses, simplify services, remove duplication, maximise economies of scale, improve transparency and create a streamlined council with clearer accountability. Put simply, establishing **One Suffolk** offers a transformative opportunity to redesign local government to make it:

Smarter

One Suffolk offers significant cost savings and is driven by data and innovation.

Financially efficient: One Suffolk is the most financially efficient model for Suffolk. As explored below, after five years it would deliver £78.2 million of benefit in terms of savings compared to the current model of local government in Suffolk with an annual net benefit of £39.4 million from year six onwards. Cost efficiency must be key in the design of any new council model. This was demonstrated in the letters of support we have so far received (see appendix 12).

Smart data: One Suffolk will have access to larger data sets, which will help drive improvements to the services the new unitary council offers by making smarter use of its resources and workforce.

Digital twin technology: One Suffolk will create a digital twin of Suffolk, a virtual model that simulates the county's physical environment. This will be used for urban planning, highways maintenance and infrastructure development, allowing for better decision-making and resource allocation.

Advanced technology integration: One Suffolk will implement cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to work with its deep-rooted community connections. This will enable the new council to predict and address community needs more effectively across all services. For example, this could range from providing additional support to a vulnerable resident that enables them to live as independently and well as possible through to detecting highways deterioration.

Public-private partnerships: One Suffolk will foster innovation through strategic partnerships with private sector companies, universities and research institutions. This will involve collaborative projects in Suffolk's key growth sectors such as clean energy, digital health and smart agriculture.

A single planning authority: One Suffolk will enhance predictability and efficiency by streamlining decision-making, aligning strategies for the whole county across sectors and enabling real-time monitoring. Shared resources and unified platforms would further reduce overhead costs and support faster, more coordinated progress towards housing and development goals.

Simpler

One council, one strategy, one point of contact.

Simple access: By simplifying access and supporting collaboration, **One Suffolk** will ensure that residents, families and communities receive timely support, interventions and responses. Whilst this is especially true for critical services such as social care or services where safeguarding is involved, it equally applies to those place-based services that all Suffolk residents experience such as waste collection, street cleaning and highways.

Reducing confusion: Fragmenting Suffolk into multiple ‘front doors’, each with its own access routes and arrangements, would risk confusion and inconsistency for residents and stakeholders. Inevitably, this would result in delays and additional pressure on frontline services and, most worryingly, it risks safeguarding opportunities being missed.

Effective partner: One Suffolk will also be a more effective partner for the new mayor and for partners in government. Communication with one unitary council for the whole of Suffolk will be significantly simpler, as a single council provides a strategic view as well as local insight, helping the mayor and government to understand Suffolk’s potential and where investment should be directed to produce jobs, growth and greater productivity.

Better

One Suffolk will drive innovation in how the new council operates.

Launch comprehensive social equity programmes: Implementing comprehensive programmes aimed at reducing social inequality and improving the quality of life for all Suffolk residents is most effectively achieved through a single unitary council. **One Suffolk** ensures streamlined decision-making, unified policies and efficient allocation of resources. By focusing on prevention, for example through affordable housing, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, a single unitary council can effectively coordinate efforts across all sectors, ensuring that its businesses and, most importantly, communities fulfil their potential. A single unitary council ensures that all residents have equal access to services and opportunities, promoting fairness and cohesion across the county.

Deliver transformative economic growth: One Suffolk will work with the new mayor to develop and deliver transformative economic growth and spatial development strategies. A single unitary council can help the mayor and Strategic Authority to leverage Suffolk’s significant strengths in sectors such as agri-food, digital technology and tourism. By creating innovation hubs, providing incentives for startups and attracting international investment, a single unitary council ensures streamlined decision-making, unified policies and efficient allocation of resources. This coordinated effort will maximise Suffolk’s economic potential and drive sustainable growth across the region.

Create a highways service that is agile, solution-oriented and empowered: Acting decisively in the service of our communities and by fostering a culture of “yes, and how,” **One Suffolk** will aim to accelerate delivery, reduce red tape and create visible impact on the ground. As a new council, **One Suffolk**’s senior leadership team will nurture a culture committed to being outward-facing, accessible and deeply engaged with local businesses and residents where respectful dialogue and proactive visibility are the cornerstones of trust and innovation. This unified approach ensures that services are delivered more efficiently and consistently across the entire county.

Provide holistic health and wellbeing: Implementing a holistic approach to health and wellbeing that integrates physical, mental and social health services is best achieved through a single unitary council working with the NHS as a strategic partner. This would include helping to shift from sickness to prevention by expanding community health programmes, better access to mental health services and promoting healthy lifestyles. A single unitary council can effectively coordinate efforts across all sectors, ensuring that no community is left behind.

Making a real difference on the ground

One Suffolk will not only be smarter, simpler and better, it will also offer greater resilience, sustainability and be connected to and reflective of the communities it serves. This is a rare opportunity to bring together and harmonise those services that make a real difference to Suffolk's businesses, places and people – such as planning, parking, transport, environmental health, licensing and economic development and ensure they are delivered in a more strategic, efficient and integrated way. This will help to create safer, cleaner and more attractive environments for businesses to thrive and residents and visitors to enjoy.

There are many tangible benefits to **One Suffolk**, but these are some of the most significant:

Financial resilience, low Council Tax

Improved financial resilience which will enable the new unitary council to free up resources for frontline services and keep Council Tax as low as possible. This will maximise public value by reinvesting savings on administration into services, innovation and regeneration.

£40 million new deal for market towns

Drive local economic growth through a £40 million capital investment fund for towns. Conduct a review of car parking and town centre markets across the county, working in consultation with traders, businesses and representative organisations, to drive greater local economic growth. **One Suffolk** will focus on local economic priorities identified by local communities. The residents' survey was clear that access to towns, bars, restaurants, shopping and retail is important.

Communities empowered to lead

Empower communities by offering powers and funding to town and parish councils, where these councils express a desire for such support and demonstrate the capability to deliver. This will be achieved through a partnership approach, supported by the establishment of 16 new area committees – a new cornerstone of community empowerment and insight. Easy to access, locally based, staff that work in partnership is key. This will give a voice to communities with clearer accountability, stronger local leadership and more responsive service design.

A proactive highways service

A revitalised highways service that says "yes" more often – acting swiftly, communicating clearly and delivering results. A senior leadership team that is committed to being visible, respectful and accessible – engaging openly with businesses and communities to drive progress together. Together, **One Suffolk** will be responsive, outward-looking and grounded in partnership in its delivery.

Unified, consistent and locally shaped planning

Create a unified planning framework that delivers greater consistency, efficiency and strategic alignment across Suffolk by consolidating planning functions under a single council. This reform will be guided by evidence, shaped by local engagement and implemented with care to preserve community identity and local knowledge. The goal is to build a planning system, including local planning committees, that is not only faster and more consistent but also smarter, more responsive and better aligned with Suffolk's long-term ambitions.

A modern, tech-driven innovative council

Leverage technology and innovation to ensure the council is a forward-thinking organisation prepared for future challenges. This approach will optimise staff, enhance accessibility, enable strategic deployment and support informed decision-making regarding council finances and resources. This frees up our staff to spend more time working directly with people – how a council should work.

A resilient and growing local economy

Build a strong, flourishing and resilient local economy that serves all residents, businesses and communities. To achieve this, the critical role that planning, housing, transport, environmental health, licensing and economic development play in shaping the conditions for economic growth, social wellbeing and environmental sustainability needs to be fully recognised. **One Suffolk** will ensure these are delivered in a more strategic, efficient and integrated way that reduces barriers for businesses and entrepreneurs. A centralised economic development team will champion local enterprise, attract investment, promote tourism and engage proactively with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs).

A strong voice for Suffolk and its future

Collaborate effectively with the new mayor to leverage the unified structure of **One Suffolk** to speak with a cohesive and strategic voice. This partnership will focus on identifying clear investment priorities that maximise the benefits of devolution. By working closely with the mayor, **One Suffolk** will ensure that Suffolk's diverse communities and areas are celebrated and that investment is strategically directed to enhance connectivity between places, people and businesses.

This transformation is not simply about structural change, it is about unlocking the full potential of Suffolk so that businesses and residents can benefit. **One Suffolk** is committed to collaborating with residents, businesses and stakeholders to ensure that the county remains vibrant, sustainable and fit for the future.

Greater resilience and sustainability

Detailed and granular local data and expert analysis by Grant Thornton shows that **One Suffolk** will provide greater resilience and sustainability and the best opportunity to improve outcomes for Suffolk's people, places and communities. Joined-up services will be enabled through integrated data, modern platforms and strategic commissioning – removing duplication and delays and delivering responsive, personalised support. This significantly simplifies governance and reduces complexity as residents, businesses and wider stakeholders have a single clear point of contact and accountability for all local government services, wherever they live in Suffolk.

One Suffolk provides a strategic scale and capacity that gives resilience while enabling the new council to root delivery in local communities and therefore better target resource to local characteristics and needs.

One unitary council also offers significant cost savings and financial efficiencies.

A single unitary council in Suffolk delivers the highest net benefit over five years and the largest recurring annual benefit after this five-year period. The scale of the difference is stark:

- **After five years, a single unitary council will have delivered £78.2 million of benefit**, the only form of LGR that provides benefit. A two unitary option will have cost an additional £48.0 million but the

Table 01: Summary of financial analysis of the three possible options for unitary local government in Suffolk

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Total annual benefit	£39.7m	£21.1m	£14.3m
One-off transition costs	-£47.2m	-£47.8m	-£47.1m
Annual disaggregation cost		-£13.5m	-£27.0m
Five-year impact of disaggregation		-£67.6m	-£135.2m
Net benefit after five years	£78.2m	-£48.0m	-£145.3m
Recurring net benefit after five years	£39.4m	£7.3m	-£13.1m

Table 02: Comparison of net annual benefit (2025/26 – 2032/33)

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Annual net benefit	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
One unitary council	-£0.345m	-£3.777m	-£20.383m	£2.117m	£7.215m	£16.926m	£37.018m	£39.427m	**£78.198m**
Two unitary councils	-£0.397m	-£4.530m	-£20.179m	-£16.038m	-£12.249m	-£8.035m	£6.133m	£7.264m	**-£48.031m**
Three unitary councils	-£0.397m	-£4.937m	-£18.728m	-£34.333m	-£31.466m	-£28.567m	-£13.761m	-£13.134m	**-£145.323m**

three unitary option is the most expensive costing £145.3 million more than the existing two-tier system.

- On an ongoing basis, the analysis shows that **One Suffolk** will be **£39.4 million cheaper per year than the current local government system in Suffolk**. For the two unitary council model, it will be £7.3 million cheaper but for the three unitary option it will actually cost £13.1 million more to operate than the status quo.

One unitary council is more cost effective and less risky to establish as it eliminates the need to disaggregate social care services that support Suffolk's most vulnerable people and maintains strategic economies of scale. The importance of protecting from disruption vital safeguarding services is made clearly in the letters of support we have so far received (see appendix 12). **One Suffolk** best optimises services and processes in terms of the integration of activities currently split across five districts and borough councils.

Implementing a model of numerous councils within Suffolk would require investment in both set up and disaggregation of services. It should be noted that for the three unitary option, the disaggregation costs included in the analysis do not include the costs associated with disaggregating district services, which would also be required given that this option splits historic district boundaries.

Not only is the single unitary configuration the best financial option for Suffolk, it also delivers benefits quicker than the other two options. Table 02 shows that a single unitary configuration delivers an annual net benefit from year one post-vesting day whereas a two unitary configuration does not begin to deliver an annual net benefit until year four post-vesting day. A three unitary configuration does not deliver an annual net benefit as the ongoing costs from disaggregation are higher than any benefits realised.

Through this analysis, it is clear that one council for Suffolk provides the best foundation to manage financial risk and delivers greater financial resilience without leaving any area isolated – which would not be the case under a two or three unitary council model. Therefore, while local government reorganisation does not remove the financial challenge facing all of local government, a single unitary council could improve financial resilience which would in turn and over time enable the new unitary council to free up resources for frontline services and help to keep Council Tax as low as possible.

This in turn offers notably better value for money for Suffolk's residents and more sustainable, quality public services.

Connected to and reflective of people

Councils are all about people and what they can do to make lives better. **One Suffolk** will simplify the system: one council, one strategy, one point of contact. Residents will no longer need to navigate multiple organisations with different gateways to access the support they need. Whether it is reporting a missed bin collection, applying for housing or accessing social care, people across Suffolk will deal with one organisation regardless of where they live and not be passed between multiple councils.

A single unitary council for Suffolk offers numerous business benefits. For example, haulage companies will benefit from simplified logistics and transportation planning, housing developers will benefit from better coordination and a streamlining of the planning process and businesses in the agricultural sector will receive more cohesive and strategic support. This would extend to other sectors.

Overall, a single unitary council for Suffolk will simplify processes, reduce duplication and create a more efficient and supportive environment for businesses across various sectors. This unified approach ensures that Suffolk can maximise its economic potential and provide better outcomes for its residents and businesses alike.

Were two or three unitary councils to be created for Suffolk, this would have the opposite effect. It would fragment Suffolk and its critical services with the risk that it creates significant variation in resources, capacity and service delivery at a local level. This leads to inconsistent opportunities for residents depending on where they live, undermining fairness and cohesion – it would create a postcode lottery.

By uniting Suffolk under one unitary council, service delivery (especially for the most vulnerable) becomes streamlined, consistent and focused. Countywide services already deliver locally and better alignment with housing and other support services enables earlier intervention and crisis prevention. This approach improves resident outcomes, reduces long-term costs and facilitates integrated, preventative approaches.

One Suffolk also renews and resets the relationship between the council and communities, encouraging transparency, public engagement and shared responsibility. Residents will have greater influence over local decisions and communication will be clearer and more accessible.

Strategic leadership at a county level, informed by local data and voices, allows for targeted action and maximises resources. Area committees and a revitalised relationship with town and parish councils will anchor decision-making locally, with dedicated support from council officers and tailored approaches to local ambitions.

A single council also positions Suffolk as a strong advocate for growth and effective partner with the new mayor and Strategic Authority. This unified approach removes competition, coordinates infrastructure, housing and education and supports long-term investment in key industries. Splitting Suffolk into several smaller unitary councils would fragment services, dilute strategic focus and hinder sustainable growth and devolution.

One Suffolk: a blueprint for the future council

Local government reorganisation presents a rare and seismic opportunity to transform Suffolk's local governance to be smarter, simpler and better. Suffolk needs a unitary council that is forward-thinking, resilient and built to last. A council that acts not as a top-down authority, but as a facilitator and enabler – empowering individuals and communities to take charge of their own futures – and fully committed to modern service delivery that is accessible and responsive.

A new unitary council that is different by design

One Suffolk provides an opportunity to change local government in Suffolk, both culturally and operationally. To make this a reality we have created a suite of design principles to support a decision-making framework that can guide the new council during the transition process as it is set up and established. It is a framework that will enable the new council to establish a new dynamic culture, ensuring decisions are focused on future requirements and needs, co-created with stakeholders (including with staff and recognised unions) and enabling difficult decisions to be made on sound evidence in a timely way. It is a framework that will take us beyond transition and ensure the new unitary council is on the necessary accelerated trajectory to deliver genuine transformation in local government services.

An operating model to deliver our ambition for Suffolk

The creation of **One Suffolk** will provide a unique opportunity to introduce a modern and sustainable operating model, at the heart of a broader integrated system of public service delivery in Suffolk. At its core is a commitment to prevention and potential – a proactive, strengths-based approach that seeks to unlock the capabilities of people and places before problems arise.

There is a need to balance scale with personalisation. For services that are transactional and routine, economies of scale will allow the new council to maximise efficiency through automation and digital platforms. This frees up capacity and resources to focus where they matter most. However, not all services can be standardised. For those facing complex challenges – such as in social care or housing – personalised support is essential. These services must be tailored to individual needs, delivered with empathy, expertise and a human

touch. This duality will ensure that **One Suffolk** delivers smart, inclusive services – efficient where possible, personal where necessary.

One Suffolk's scale also gives it the power to lead strategically – coordinating across systems, shaping place-based investment and driving Suffolk-wide transformation in areas like infrastructure, regeneration and commissioning. Yet the strength of Suffolk also lies in its diversity. Communities have distinct identities, needs and assets. That's why some services must be localised – adapted to reflect the unique context of each place, whether through town and parish councils, area committees, libraries or leisure services. This duality ensures that Suffolk is both a leader in place and a partner in communities – **strategic in ambition, local in delivery**.

These dualities are not just philosophical – they are operational. The model therefore recognises that different services carry different levels of risk and lend themselves to varying degrees of standardisation.

The successful delivery of this operating model is grounded in the enablers set out in the 'how the new council will do it' design principles – a practical framework that ensures the vision is not only aspirational but also has strong foundations. The operating model is then delivered through a balanced integration of people, processes and systems. Each component must be appropriately aligned to its functional purpose to ensure the effective delivery of strategic aspirations.

The **One Suffolk** operating model is purposefully anchored in this sense of place, recognising that meaningful public service must be shaped by and responsive to the distinct character and needs of each locality. Therefore, a key delivery mechanism for delivering at a local level is through the network of area committees, town and parish councils and the new cohort of councillors.

One Suffolk: making it a reality

To realise the benefits outlined in this proposal, a clear and effective programme of work will be essential to the successful launch of **One Suffolk**. We fully recognise the scale and complexity of this challenge – delivering a fundamental transformation while maintaining high-quality, uninterrupted services for residents across Suffolk.

The change programme will be comprehensively planned, collaborative and appropriately resourced. The approach will be informed by the experiences of other newly established unitary authorities, drawing on both best practice and lessons learned to shape a robust and resilient transition. It is learning that will be supplemented by best practice from the private sector.

To successfully transition to a single new unitary council, we must adopt a structured yet adaptive framework that lays a strong foundation for transformation. This is not just a technical exercise – it is an unmissable opportunity to reshape how local government serves its communities. Therefore, this framework will:

- balance strategic oversight to guide long-term vision and decision-making with local insight, voice and evidence
- ensure operational continuity to safeguard essential services
- align governance to ensure clarity and accountability
- embed stakeholder engagement to build trust and consensus
- engage with staff and recognised unions at every step.

By embedding these principles from the outset, Suffolk can create a resilient, responsive and future-ready authority capable of delivering better outcomes for residents, businesses, staff and partners.

Below we set out the framework for our implementation plan which comprises four key pillars: phases of change, council-wide workstreams, service level change and facilitators of effective change. This will create a roadmap to guide a successful implementation of one unitary council in Suffolk.

Figure 01: Overview of the implementation framework

Phases of change	Council-wide workstreams	Service level change	Managing risk and realising value
Prepare	Vision and culture	Preserve and optimise	Governance and decision making
Transition	Organisational structure	Integrate and scale	Dedicated programme management office
Stabilise and improve	Service delivery models	Join-up and align	Independent assurance
Transform	Processes	Tailor and enable	Risk management framework
	Digital, data and technology	Standardise and localise	External communications and stakeholder engagement
	People and HR		Legal and constitutional
	Finance and commercial		
	Property and assets		

Section One

Introduction and context

Introducing Suffolk

Suffolk is a proud and historic county, with a strong sense of identity and a population of more than 786,000 residents. It is made up of a diverse and vibrant mix of larger towns, market towns, coastal communities and rural villages, all driving their own economic contributions to the area. Suffolk has a total of 31,020 businesses[1] across key sectors such as energy, agri-food and drink (including agri-tech), ports and logistics, digital technology, advanced manufacturing, the horseracing industry and tourism. It is a connected economy that is distributed across the whole county.

This diversity is reflected in the Suffolk Economic Strategy that provides a clear vision for sustainable growth across the county. With 90% of residents also working in Suffolk (according to the 2021 Census[2]) the county geography offers a highly connected, dynamic, single functional economic area further enhanced by the University of Suffolk and further education providers driving education and skills opportunities.

Suffolk's economic base makes it a net contributor to the UK economy. With international strength, its £21 billion GVA (Gross Value Added) economy has averaged 3.3% annual growth over the past decade, and is comparable to Cambridgeshire (£23.8 billion), Buckinghamshire (£18.1 billion), and Tyneside (£23.2 billion)[3]. Suffolk is one of only a few UK areas which has consistently been a net financial contributor to national wealth.

Suffolk's economy is shaped by a mix of industries, with tourism playing a central role. The visitor economy is Suffolk's largest employment sector, employing 45,600 people[4]. Suffolk's coastal towns are popular, drawing national and international visitors for their natural beauty and cultural events like the Aldeburgh and Latitude festivals. Constable Country and the Dedham Vale are renowned for inspiring artists Constable and Gainsborough, enhancing its appeal to cultural tourists. The Waveney valley, southern Suffolk and all of Suffolk's coastal towns support a prosperous hospitality and retail sector, contributing significantly to the local economy. The Cathedral, Abbey Gardens and Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds and horseracing at Newmarket add to the breadth and depth of Suffolk's visitor offer.

Ipswich is an important and interconnected County town, serving as Suffolk's centre for business, technology and innovation. It hosts sectors such as finance, technology and creative industries. Ipswich has good transport links to London and has the largest grain exporting port in the country. The town has made recent efforts to renew and regenerate itself as an urban centre, including significant investment in the waterfront area. The New Wolsey and Ipswich Regent theatres support rich programmes of cultural events, including the Ipswich Arts Festival and Ipswich's parks play host to many cultural events. The town has immense pride - based on a rich history - in its professional football team, Ipswich Town FC.

On Suffolk's eastern coast, the Sizewell nuclear power cluster, including the now consented Sizewell C, is another major strategic economic and clean energy contributor to the UK. Sizewell is pivotal to the UK's energy landscape, providing low-carbon energy and contributing to national energy capacity and security. It will provide decades of clean, reliable energy for around six million homes.The development of Sizewell C will bring significant investment, job creation and skills development, solidifying Suffolk's position as a leader in low carbon, sustainable energy. It will also mean that Suffolk

1 ONS 2023 Mid-Year Estimates and ONS 2024 Business Counts
2 Census 2021, Travel to workflows. Note whilst informative, this data should be treated with caution; lockdown restrictions and the furlough scheme that was in place in March 2021 had a significant impact on travel to work data and so the commuting patterns depicted are not necessarily reflective of current commuting.
3 ONS UK Small Area Gross Value Added Estimates, 2023
4 Suffolk Economic Strategy and Growth Plan 2024

has the UK's foremost operational nuclear cluster, placing Suffolk in a prime position as a centre of excellence for operation and maintenance in the nuclear sector. This means that Sizewell offers significant opportunities for local businesses and communities, stretching beyond the coastal geography, consolidating Suffolk's major contribution to the UK's clean energy supply and the government's growth mission.

Further up the coast is Lowestoft, the UK's most easterly point, with a long history of servicing offshore energy projects. It has become a hub for renewable energy, particularly the continuing development of offshore wind farms (for example East Anglia ONE). It is also home to the nationally significant research centre Cefas[5] and the Lowestoft Eastern Energy Facility, which supports ScottishPower Renewables. As this industry develops, it is creating jobs and boosting the local economy while also attracting skilled workers in engineering and technology. This growth has been further enabled, along with regeneration opportunities for the town, by Suffolk County Council completing the construction of the Gull Wing bridge. An investment of £145.8 million from government and council funds, the bridge opened in September 2024.

This award-winning bridge has transformed the town for the benefit of its people and local businesses, opened up economic opportunities across Suffolk and is helping to attract external investment.

5 Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

Suffolk boasts a thriving equine sector, with Newmarket and the surrounding area at the heart of this economic activity. Newmarket is known as the global headquarters for the horse racing and breeding industry. This sector employs around one in three people in the town and contributes over £256 million[7] annually to the local economy[8] and to the £1.47 billion[9] UK-wide racing Industry. This success attracts leaders and innovators from the equine industry, significantly shaping the area's cultural identity and heritage.

Agriculture also plays a central role, with many rural villages supporting farmland dedicated to Suffolk's broad food and drink production and agri-business. For example, Aspall Cyder, Adnams, Greene King, Muntons, British Sugar and Baron Bigod cheese from Fen Farm Dairy – many of which are award winning.

Suffolk's large rural areas are home to flourishing agri-businesses supported by cutting-edge research in sustainable farming practices, such as the High Suffolk Farm Cluster. Over the past decade, Suffolk's agri-food sector has outpaced national job growth by 1.6% annually and is projected to grow to two and a half times its current size by 2050, reaching £4 billion[10]. This growth is enhanced through strong links to the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor (CNTC), placing Suffolk at the forefront of precision agriculture, food innovation and supply chain resilience. Suffolk's connections to research hubs like Cambridge and Norwich position it as a leader in national and international food markets. Key transport links and growth corridors such as the A14 have strengthened Suffolk's connected economy, with vital links from international gateways such as the Port of Felixstowe to the rest of the UK.

Additionally, there is a dynamic engineering and manufacturing sector that spans much of the county and with key clusters around Haverhill and Sudbury. Suffolk is home to several strategically significant airbases such as RAF Mildenhall and Lakenheath that support and host USAF operations and Wattisham flying station and RAF Honington, Suffolk's economy is increasingly involved with the UK defence and security sectors. This is exemplified by collaborations with the Space East and Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA), which underscores its strategic importance in national security and advanced technology initiatives[11].

Adastral Park is a nationally significant digital cluster at the "heart of the UK's digital ecosystem"[12]. Home to around 150 high-tech ICT companies and BT's innovation labs it plays a vital part in ensuring national security.

A nationally and internationally significant economic driver, Felixstowe is home to the UK's busiest container port and a component part of Freeport East (which spans a larger geography). It handles 36% of the nation's container trade[13]. However, improved connectivity to Suffolk's key road and rail corridors to link the port to the rest of the UK is vital to maximising its potential. Located on the A14 growth corridor and part of Freeport East, Gateway 14 (a business, innovation and logistics park located outside Stowmarket) provides a base for manufacturing, logistics and R&D businesses, boosting the local economy and attracting investment into the region.

Key future trends for Suffolk

It is essential that this significant period of public sector reform – implementing both devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) – reflects Suffolk's diverse characteristics. Changes to local government that fail to enable better outcomes for Suffolk's demographic and socio-economic identity will be a missed opportunity and will significantly limit the benefits to Suffolk's residents and businesses (please see Appendix 1 for more detail).

An ageing population

While it is positive that Suffolk residents are living longer, supporting people so that they can live healthily, independently and well as long as possible remains a challenge. As of mid-2024, nearly 25% of Suffolk's population was aged 65 or older with some parts of East Suffolk seeing over half the population above that age[14]. This trend is not only driven by people ageing but also by inward migration, as individuals increasingly choose Suffolk as a destination for retirement. By 2040, almost one third of Suffolk's residents will be over 65 and 1 in 18 will be over 85[15]. Therefore, prevention and enabling people to support their mental and physical wellbeing has to be front and centre in any decision about the shape of local government in Suffolk. An older population is likely to increase demand pressures on health and care services.

Growing social inequality

While Suffolk fares relatively well in national comparisons of deprivation, deeper analysis reveals levels in Suffolk have been rising over the past decade, driven mainly by low educational attainment, with pockets of deprivation and inequalities that affect specific groups within the population[16]. As a county with rural as well as urban and coastal communities, often deprivation is hidden in smaller communities, for example, it has 22 small areas in the 10% most multiple deprived areas in England. The life expectancy of the most deprived 10% has plateaued since 2010[17]. Recent adult social care (ASC) trend data also shows that not only are more people accessing services, but they are doing so at a younger age and are more likely to come from deprived areas[18]. Child poverty is also a rising concern[19]. Addressing these issues will clearly be a first order priority for the new council in terms of managing the demand for services it creates but more importantly in terms of improving the lives of Suffolk's residents.

Physical and digital isolation and access to services

Suffolk's geography poses unique challenges, particularly for residents in rural and coastal communities. Suffolk has 50 miles of coastline and 37% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are defined as rural or sparse rural (for context the national unitary average is 18%)[20]. This is particularly significant because, nationally, rural and coastal areas often face limited access to essential services such as healthcare, social care, education and public transport. As the elderly population increases, the demand for accessible services – especially home-based or community care – is likely to grow, and the risk of isolation increases. Meeting these needs in remote areas will be even more of a challenge, potentially requiring investment in infrastructure, digital connectivity and mobile service delivery at scale.

In an increasingly digital economy, digital connectivity can often be as significant as physical connectivity. This is also an area of challenges. The percentage of premises that have coverage from a gigabit capable broadband service is much lower than the national average (79%) across three of the districts – Mid Suffolk (55%), Babergh (70%) and West Suffolk (71%)[21].

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7 Newmarket's Horse Breeding and Racing Cluster 2022 Report featured in Suffolk News on 14th March 2023
8 Newmarket's Horse Breeding and Racing Cluster 2022 Report featured in Suffolk News on 14th March 2023
9 The future of horseracing - House of Commons Library Published Tuesday, 24 October 2023
10 Suffolk Economic Strategy and Growth Plan 2024
11 Suffolk economic strategy, 2024
12 See https://atadastral.co.uk/
13 Suffolk Economic Strategy and Growth Plan 2024
14 ONS 2024 mid-year population estimates
15 ONS 2022-based mid-year population projections
16 Suffolk in 20 years – healthy, wealthy and wise?, Public Health & Communities, Jan 2025
17 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) in England 2019, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
18 SCC ASC Insight and Intelligence Hub
19 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, English Indices of Deprivation 2019, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
20 Defra, 2021 census rural urban classification
21 Ofcom fixed broadband availability across the UK, Jan 2025

Education, skills and the resultant economic disparities

Suffolk faces persistent challenges around educational attainment and workforce skills. Residents are less likely than average to work in high-skilled, high-paid professions and more likely to be employed in lower-wage sectors like care, leisure and other service roles. Coastal areas, in particular, struggle to attract and retain highly qualified professionals[22]. This contributes to Suffolk's lower gross median full-time weekly pay (£692), which remains below the UK average (£732)[23].

As of 2024, 23.4% of Suffolk residents have no formal qualifications, compared to the national average of 18.2%[24], which directly impacts employability and earning potential. While recent A-level results show a slight improvement, with the proportion of students achieving grade A or above rising from 21.1% in 2024 to 21.3% in 2025, Suffolk ranks as the fifth lowest-performing upper-tier local authority area in this category. Similarly, although the proportion of residents with university-level qualifications is increasing, it still lags behind national figures and the rate of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) remains a concern, especially in more deprived areas.

Within Suffolk, a high proportion of schools operate as academies – 93% of secondary schools and 68% of primary schools. This presents challenges in addressing skills gaps, as the council has limited influence over curriculum and strategic direction in academy schools compared to maintained schools.

Together this matters because the relationship between skills, education and productivity growth is dynamic and mutually reinforcing. A more skilled and educated workforce is more productive, leading to a higher economic output, greater prosperity and better opportunities for Suffolk's people and economy. In turn, productivity growth creates opportunities for skills development and education by increasing demand for specialist knowledge and fostering innovation.

Providing the right number of homes, of the right type and in the right place

Suffolk faces a range of housing challenges that reflect both national pressures and local complexities. There has been an increase in housing targets with the number of households across the districts and borough in Suffolk projected to grow between 2023 and 2043. However, the composition of these households is expected to shift. There is a projected increase in adult-only households, particularly those consisting of a single person, while households with dependent children are projected to decline[25].

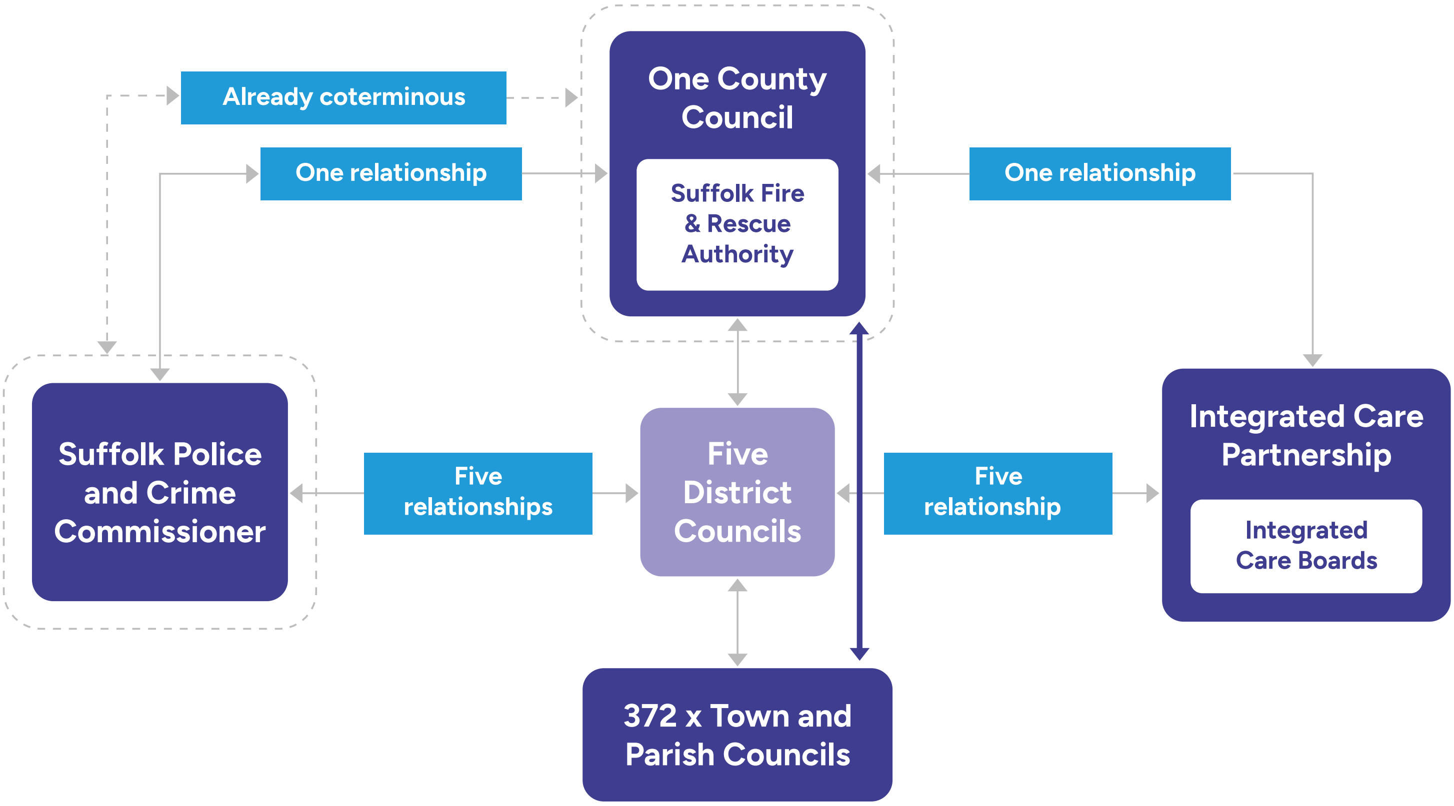
At the same time, housing stock remains relatively low in both East and West Suffolk when compared to their growing populations, adding further pressure to the availability of affordable housing[26]. Whilst on aggregate Suffolk has been able to deliver against national housing targets over recent years, housing delivery in Suffolk has been inconsistent (for example some districts have overdelivered and some like Ipswich Borough Council, have underdelivered).

The result is that housing affordability is a concern across Suffolk, with rising property prices and rental costs making it increasingly difficult for residents – especially younger people and low-income households – to access suitable housing. This problem is only exacerbated by growth in second home ownership.

22 Suffolk in 20 years – healthy, wealthy and wise?, January 2025, Public Health & Communities
23 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - resident analysis, 2024
24 DfE education and training statistics, 2024
25 ONS Housing projections for England 2018-based
26 MHCLG Live tables on dwelling stock

The current model of local government in Suffolk and public services landscape

Figure 02: Overview of the current public services landscape in Suffolk



The existing form of local government in Suffolk has been in existence for over 50 years. Whilst Suffolk's public sector system has a collaborative and constructive history of working on shared areas of priority, dividing services between the county and five district/borough councils inevitably leads to confusion, duplication and less efficient ways of working. This includes duplicating back-office functions and processes, such as IT and HR. There is consensus amongst Suffolk's councils that unitary government offers a more sustainable and effective form of local government.

Suffolk currently has 308 elected councillors, excluding town and parish councillors, representing over 200 wards and divisions of varying geographic sizes. 26 of these councillors are 'twin hatters' representing similar communities within both county council divisions and district/borough wards. Councillors collectively serve on over 70 council committees and sub-committees, many of which perform similar functions across different parts of the county.

The area covered by Suffolk County Council is already coterminous with that of the Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), the Suffolk Constabulary and the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service.

As part of NHS England's 2025 reforms, the Suffolk and North East Essex ICB and the Norfolk and Waveney ICB will merge to form a single Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board by April 2026. This merger is intended to simplify system leadership and improve coordination across health and care services.

The case for public sector reform

The government has set a clear expectation that two-tier local authority structures are shortly to be a thing of the past. This two-tier structure divides responsibilities between the county and district/borough levels, often leading to overlapping functions and fragmented service delivery. Whilst this is a proposal for the most efficient and effective form of unitary government – a single Suffolk unitary council – it is not limited to simply reforming existing two-tier local government. Rather, this proposal reflects the unique opportunity to design a new system of sustainable local government. One that hardwires community empowerment and evidence-led decision making into a new Suffolk-wide unitary council that is more accessible and focused on prevention, to help Suffolk – both its people and places – to reach their full potential.

Suffolk County Council is responsible for strategic services such as education, social care, highways, public health, and fire and rescue. The district and borough councils manage services, including housing, planning applications, waste collection, leisure services and local environmental health.

While this model was designed to balance strategic oversight with local responsiveness, it has increasingly been seen as inefficient and confusing for residents and businesses. The division of responsibilities can result in duplicated efforts, inconsistent service standards, delays in decision-making and decisions shaped more by a desire to maintain organisational independence than by a focus on collaborative efficiency or value for money. Residents often struggle to understand which council is responsible for which service, leading to frustration and disengagement. Local government reorganisation in Suffolk presents a vital opportunity to tackle the inefficiencies, duplication and confusion inherent in the current two-tier system. More than just structural reform, it offers a platform to radically transform the way local public services are delivered and how communities engage with local government.

For Suffolk, much like the rest of the country, local government is navigating an increasingly complex landscape, with significant challenges threatening their ability to deliver essential services. Financial pressures remain critical, with councils forced to scale back services, raise taxes and deplete reserves to balance budgets. These pressures are compounded by demographic shifts and social inequalities, such as an ageing population, greater cultural diversity and rising inequality, which drive the need for more tailored and inclusive services.

Local government reorganisation will lay the groundwork for a more strategic, unified and accessible approach to governance across the county. It will enable Suffolk to better position itself for future opportunities, including devolution and regional investment while also providing a strong voice for the area on a regional, national and international stage.

The opportunity presented by devolution

Suffolk has long held ambitions for devolution and for too long, the East of England has not been able to access the benefits of devolution. However, with simple, effective and locally connected governance through a single Suffolk unitary council within a regional Mayoral Strategic Authority there are significant opportunities to drive growth. This approach will contribute to the government's critical growth mission and deliver better jobs, infrastructure, housing and opportunities for local people.

With decisions made closer to communities, there will be greater opportunities to deliver growth that is sympathetic to local identity and needs, for example, ensuring that Suffolk's outstanding natural and historic heritage is protected and enhanced as part of any decisions made by the mayor around growth. Together, Suffolk and Norfolk have much potential to help deliver the government's new Modern Industrial Strategy. As part of a Mayoral Combined County Authority with Norfolk (referred to in the English Devolution White Paper as a Mayoral Strategic Authority) (MSA), this economic potential is enhanced through shared growth sectors such as digital and technology, clean energy, ports and logistics, ICT and thriving visitor economies.

As the new MSA's constituent members Suffolk and Norfolk county councils have been working closely together and with government on establishing the area's new MSA, as well as developing their LGR business case proposals for their respective county areas.

In particular, Suffolk has a unique national contribution to make to clean energy, with 10% of the UK's Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, including the recently confirmed construction of Sizewell C nuclear power plant. This means that Suffolk County Council is already focused on championing, supporting and convening local communities that are most affected by larger infrastructure schemes.

Being part of an MSA offers unprecedented opportunities. This includes decision making and funding that is locally informed and tailored to local need, rather than through national methodologies or formulas. However, as a sub-regional authority, the MSA also needs strong and sustainable, local government to be effective in informing decisions and supporting delivery that makes a positive difference to communities.

The English Devolution White Paper is clear that "geographies should ensure the effective delivery of key functions including Spatial Development Strategies, Local Growth Plans, Local Transport Plans, Skills Plans and Get Britain Working Plans". This approach was consolidated in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, which reiterates the significance of these plans in guiding MSAs to maximise and enhance economic and social opportunities within their area.

A single Suffolk-wide unitary council best fits these ambitions for delivery. A single unitary council for Suffolk will provide a consistent voice and ensure that local strengths and needs are conveyed clearly and objectively, eliminating any competition or political differences that would arise between multiple unitary councils. In turn, this will enable better structural planning to unlock developments that meet local needs and drive growth. For example, facilitating housing with the right infrastructure both physical (e.g.

schools) and virtual (e.g. broadband) enabling delivery of sites that will help communities to thrive. Or work with national agencies (e.g. National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA)) and funding sources (e.g. National Housing Bank) to secure investment in new infrastructure and housing schemes.

Devolution enables coordinated action in a defined place. To do this, the directly elected mayor and the MSA needs strong and accountable local government that delivers and is easy for local communities, businesses and wider partners to understand and engage with.

Whilst enabling growth is a vital mission for the MSA, there is a clear role for the mayor in wider public service reform. As indicated by the devolution framework and consolidated in the recently published 10-year health plan. These documents clearly set out a national policy direction for the mayor to embed more digital, community based, preventative and integrated approaches to health, care and wellbeing. A single unitary council for Suffolk will make this significantly easier.

This proposal for local government reorganisation

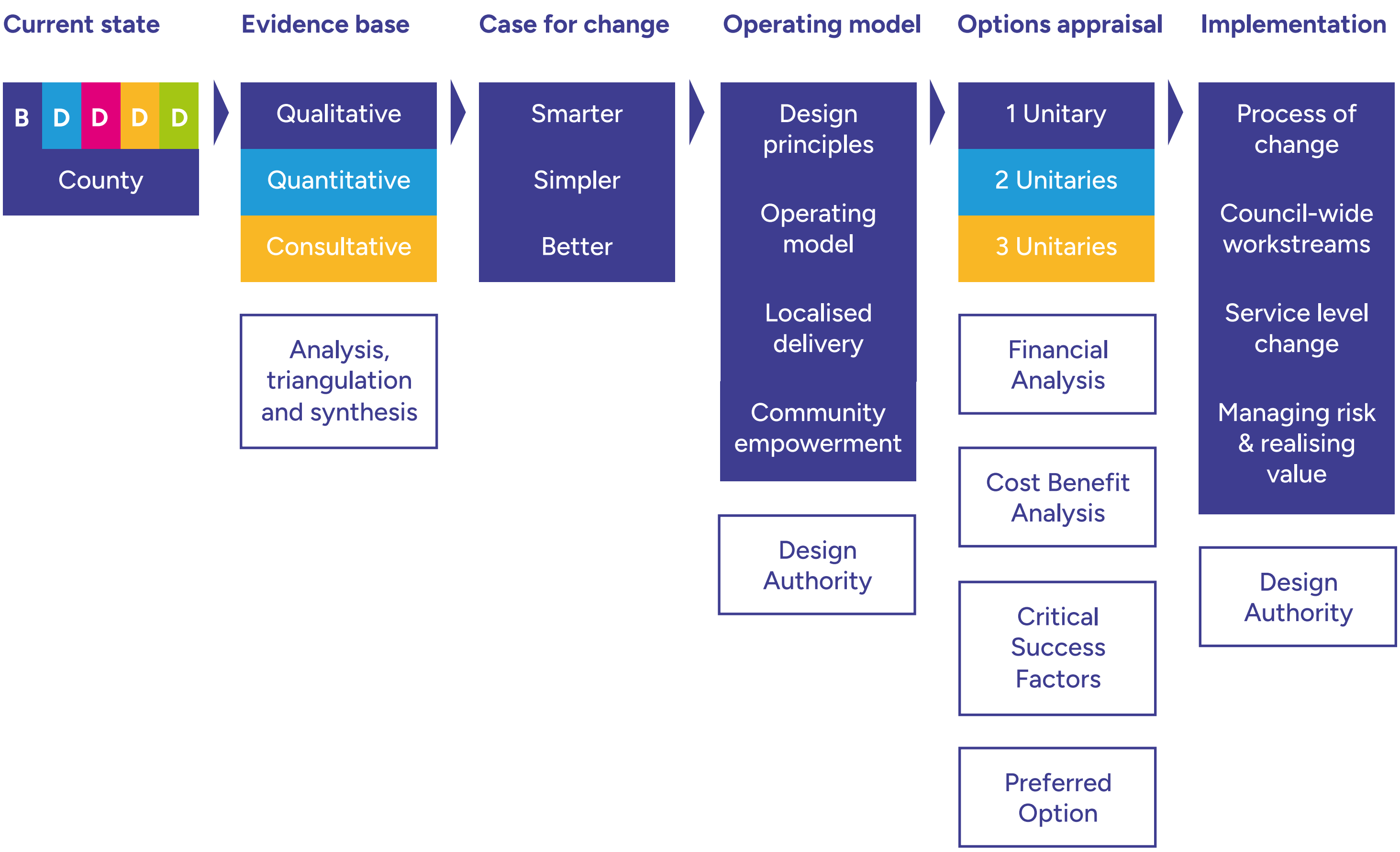
Below we provide an overview for how we have approached the development of this proposal for local government reorganisation. It is an approach that is reflected in the structure of this document.

Having outlined the current position in Suffolk in this section (section 1), the next section sets out our methodology (section 2). In this section we provide an overview of the qualitative and quantitative analysis we have undertaken alongside a summary of the key messages we have heard through extensive consultation and engagement. It is through synthesis of this information that we have identified the core components of our case for one unitary council in Suffolk (section 3) and established the future blueprint for one unitary council in Suffolk (section 4) where we set out ambitions for what the new unitary council will do and how it will do it.

With these parameters in place, we then step back to appraise the different configuration options to robustly test – qualitatively and quantitatively – if a single unitary council really is the best option with regard to local government reorganisation for Suffolk (section 5).

The penultimate section then considers what is required to successfully implement the change (section 6). Our case then concludes with a summary of how our proposal meets the different criteria set by government for local government reorganisation (section 7).

Figure 03: Overview of the approach to developing this local government reorganisation proposal



Section Two

Methodology and approach

Methodology and approach

To ensure a robust, transparent and evidence-led appraisal of local government reorganisation options for Suffolk and the development of a clear case for change, we have adopted a structured methodology that integrates a range of external and internal qualitative and quantitative evidence. It is an approach that aligns with the government's six core criteria that will be used to assess proposals and reflects the county council's four pillars of promoting health and wellbeing, strengthening the local economy, protecting and enhancing the environment, and delivering value for money for Suffolk's communities[1].

Quantitative analysis

Our quantitative analysis has revolved around three core sets of data.

First, our socio-economic profiling – which drove our initial assessment of a long-list of potential configurations – involved modelling over 25 national statistics and external data points, covering: demographics, deprivation, labour market conditions, economic performance and housing.

This analysis provided a detailed comparative snapshot of each proposed unitary configuration and enabled benchmarking against existing unitary councils across England.

In addition to this high-level comparison, we conducted a second in-depth analysis of Suffolk's specific socio-economic challenges to assess how different configurations might support the delivery of simpler, fairer and more accountable services, as well as financially sustainable and integrated public service delivery. This included analysis and assessment of a much broader set of national statistics, local data and financial returns (such as the Revenue Outturn forms provided to MHCLG).

The third and final area of quantitative analysis was the financial modelling that has informed our assessment of the costs and benefits of the different options. Given the detail involved in this analysis we have provided a separate appendix which sets out the detail behind our methodology and the different assumptions that have been used. This includes details of our approach to the phasing of different costs and benefits.

The baseline financial and staffing (FTE) data for this analysis was developed in consultation with Suffolk's districts and borough to ensure that the different cases, in the relevant analysis, began from a consistent starting position.

In headline terms our financial analysis covers the following six areas:

- **Financial baseline assessment:** review of financial resilience, unit costs, spending patterns and debt levels using Revenue Account data and council-published financials (e.g. Annual Accounts)
- **Transition costs:** modelling of transition, including costs (e.g. redundancy, IT, establishing the new council, shadow authority operating costs)

1 Suffolk County Council master-corp-strategy-report-2022-26

- **Disaggregation costs:** modelling the costs of splitting services currently operated by the county council
- **Savings from reorganisation:** identification of the savings that result from the changes to senior management requirements and democratic services
- **Savings from transformation:** identification of potential cashable savings from consolidating management, back-office functions, service delivery and governance structures
- **Council Tax harmonisation:** modelling of a range of different scenarios reflecting both different harmonisation levels and the speed at which harmonisation is achieved
- **Financial resilience modelling:** assessment of the potential imbalances created by multiple unitary councils in Suffolk

Qualitative analysis

To supplement and support the quantitative analysis we have also undertaken a comprehensive programme of qualitative engagement to ensure that local perspectives and priorities are embedded in our proposals. This included:

- **Resident engagement:** surveys, focus groups and drop-in events were held across Suffolk to gather views on service priorities, governance and local identity
- **Joint county, district and borough workshops:** workshops enabled staff to educate all parties on their services and provided an opportunity to discuss how services are run today
- **Senior officer survey and discussion:** internal meetings enabled key officers and teams to contribute to shaping the proposals, particularly around risks of disaggregation and potential benefits of further integration
- **Member engagement:** internal meetings and working groups were used to discuss and shape the proposals and considerations around issues such as Council Tax harmonisation, community empowerment, economic growth and the risks of disaggregation
- **Partner and stakeholder engagement:** regular engagement with public sector partners, the VCFSE sector, town and parish councils and business groups ensured that the proposals reflected a broad spectrum of local insight. This included dedicated sessions for every town and parish council in Suffolk

Throughout the process we have sought to use inclusive communication and tailored materials, both in-person and online, to ensure they were accessible and facilitated participation and engagement. This included those who are digitally excluded and underrepresented groups. This engagement was not only instrumental in shaping the development of this proposal but has laid the groundwork for future community-level governance and accountability and ongoing engagement throughout the LGR process. Further detail on our engagement approach is set out below with many of the findings provided throughout this proposal along with full details in Appendix 3.

A proposal shaped by extensive engagement

To ensure our proposal reflects the needs and aspirations of local communities, a comprehensive engagement programme was undertaken under the **One Suffolk** banner. This was the biggest and most comprehensive communications and engagement programme the county council has ever delivered in Suffolk. This included two comprehensive surveys for residents, face-to-face and virtual engagement sessions with residents, businesses, community groups, town and parish councils and public sector stakeholders – as well as making widely available and accessible digital, social media and hard copy information. This proposal is, therefore, created in partnership with a broad range of Suffolk stakeholders and considers issues of local identity, cultural and historic importance and wider matters that will impact on the **One Suffolk** proposal. This section summarises that work, the key findings drawn from it and how this learning has directly influenced our proposal.

A more detailed analysis of the findings from our two surveys is included in the appendices to this business case. The findings have not been combined due to the different survey methodologies used to collect the responses. They are however presented sequentially so that comparisons can be made.

Suffolk residents

Understanding the needs and views of as many residents as possible has been at the centre of the **One Suffolk** proposal for one new unitary council. To achieve this, we have created multiple opportunities for a wide range of people to engage with the idea of local government reorganisation, and our **One Suffolk** proposal, and have found significant public interest in the subject.

We have delivered 12 face-to-face resident engagement sessions in town centres across the county, where local people could speak to councillors and officers directly about the **One Suffolk** proposal, ask questions, give their views, take away information and complete our residents' survey.

Across these events, clear themes emerged:

- Strong recognition of the benefits that a single unitary council could bring, including making services simpler, cheaper and more efficient, with many residents welcoming the potential savings
- People value the opportunity for services to be delivered close to their communities, with joined-up working seen as a way to improve delivery and give more influence to local voices
- Many residents were engaged and well-informed on the proposals
- Recognition of Suffolk's geographical diversity and the importance of protecting local identity if, for example, towns like Felixstowe and Hadleigh become suburbs of Ipswich in a three-unitary split

To ensure we reached a demographically representative sample of Suffolk residents, we commissioned Ipsos to conduct an independent telephone survey – which launched on 7 July 2025. This survey gathered responses from 1,000 people proportionately representing social demographics across the county.

Key findings from the representative Ipsos survey include:

- Residents in Suffolk are most likely (31%) to say that they value access to the natural environment of the countryside when thinking about their local area, followed by access to urban green spaces (18%) and local community or voluntary activities (17%)
- Most Suffolk residents are likely to say they feel a sense of belonging to the county (69%), and their town or village (65%). They have less of a sense of belonging to their local district or borough (42%)
- People in Suffolk are most likely to say they would contact their district/borough council (20%), county council (18%) or MP (16%) if they wanted to raise a local issue. However, a similar proportion said they don't know who they would contact (18%)
- Three in five (62%) residents in Suffolk said they have not contacted any of their local MPs, councils or councillors in the past 12 months
- Around a third of people in Suffolk say that a lack of time (32%) and other priorities (30%) prevent them from getting involved in local decision-making. A quarter (26%) say that they do not get involved because it would not make a difference
- There is no council service area that stands out as most important to residents in Suffolk. However, of those selected, they are most likely to say that Education/SEND (18%) and partnerships with local NHS services (16%) are most important
- Over half (56%) of residents in Suffolk said they had at least heard of the proposals related to local government reorganisation. Just over two fifths (43%) have not heard about it at all. 72% of people aged 55 and over were at least aware of local government reorganisation, followed by 46% of 35-54 year olds and 37% of 18-34 year olds

- Residents are split in terms of whether they are in favour or against the proposal to create a unitary model of local government in Suffolk. A third (32%) are in favour, 29% are against and a further third (34%) are neither for nor against. People aged 18-34 were most in favour (34%) followed by people aged 55-75 (33%) and then people aged 35-54 (29%)

- Just under half (45%) of residents in Suffolk are not confident that the proposed changes would make it simpler for residents to understand and access services. A quarter (25%) think that the proposed change would help to make it simpler

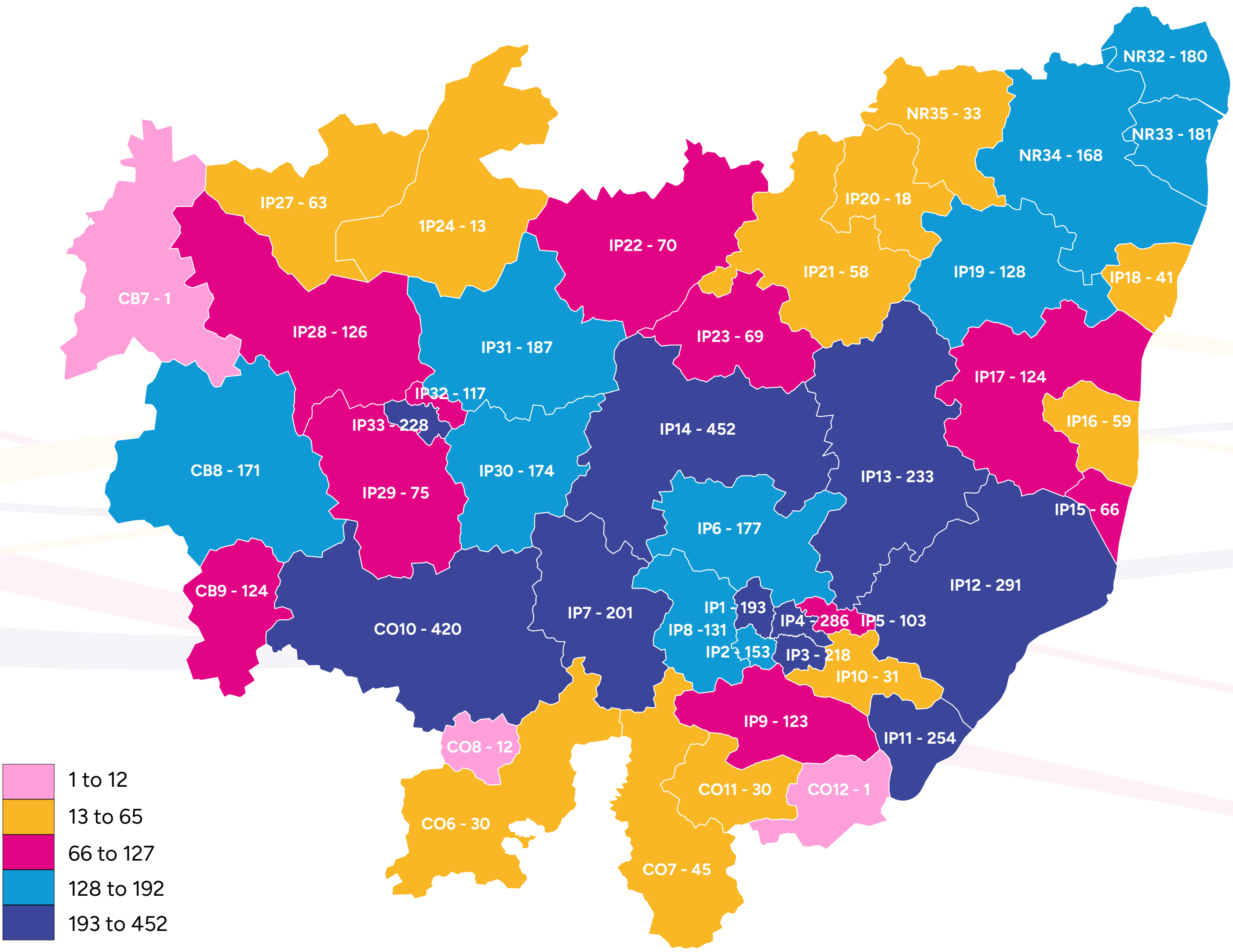
- Around one in five (22%) are confident that a unitary model in Suffolk would improve value for money of council services. Just under half (45%) do not have confidence that a unitary model would improve value for money

- Three in ten residents in Suffolk think that being listened to (30%) and meeting local needs (29%) should be the priority areas for improvement as part of local government reorganisation

In addition to the Ipsos survey, we launched an open residents' survey on 10 June, which ran for 10 weeks until 18 August 2025. The survey received 8,189 responses from across Suffolk - the largest survey response rate Suffolk County Council has received in the past decade.

Where respondents supplied postcode information, we were able to map where those responses came from. The map demonstrates that responses were received from across Suffolk, with no areas failing to engage.

Figure 04: LGR survey responses by postcode area



Action was taken to ensure everyone in Suffolk had the opportunity to respond. This included sending a leaflet to all households across the county, sponsored social media activity (including additional promotion to reach under-represented areas), distribution of physical copies of the survey across Suffolk's 45 community libraries, promoting the survey at our in-person resident engagement sessions, sharing information with town and parish councils, business groups, voluntary and community groups and through staff engagement.

The majority (67%) of respondents heard about the survey via the posted leaflet, followed by local news (8%) and Facebook (7%). 189 paper copies of the survey were returned.

Key findings from our residents' survey include:

- Half (50%) of those who responded said they were in favour of the proposal to create a unitary model of local government in Suffolk, with just over a third (37%) being against it
- Four fifths (79%) of people feel a sense of belonging to their village or town whilst slightly fewer (73%) feel a sense of belonging to Suffolk as a county, and nearly two thirds (63%) feel a sense of belonging to East Anglia. Just under half (49%) feel the same sense of belonging to their district or borough
- Just over two thirds (70%) felt they understood the proposal to create a unitary model of local government for Suffolk, whilst just 7% did not understand it
- Eight in ten (83%) residents highlighted access to the natural environment of the countryside as the main reason they value their local area, followed by access to the natural environment of the coast (77%) and access to the main towns of Suffolk (63%)
- Two fifths (39%) of people stated that if they had an issue about their local area, they would raise it with their town or parish council. A similar proportion of people (38%) said the same about their district or borough councillor
- However, over two fifths (43%) stated that they haven't contacted any of the highlighted individuals or organisations, including their town or parish council/councillors, district or borough council/councillors, county council/councillors and their local MP, within the past 12 months
- Nearly half (47%) of residents would like to be involved when it comes to public consultations, whilst slightly fewer (45%) would like to know more about their councillors and how to contact them
- Not feeling their views will make a difference (34%), having other priorities (34%) and a lack of time (31%) were cited as the main obstacles preventing individuals from getting involved in local decision-making
- Transport and infrastructure (65%) was identified as the most important council services for residents, followed by waste and recycling (55%) and housing and planning (50%)
- A third (32%) of residents feel confident that these changes will make it simpler for residents to understand and access services, while nearly half (46%) don't feel confident and 20% are neither confident nor unconfident
- Nearly half (47%) don't feel confident in the fact that a unitary model will improve the value for money of council services, with a third (32%) feeling confident and 20% being neither confident nor unconfident
- A third (33%) of people highlighted that meeting local needs should be the priority for improvement as part of LGR in Suffolk, closely followed by value for money (30%)

Respondents also left 4,510 general comments in the survey. A summary of the most common themes is below:

Saving money through efficiency and removing duplication

- Widespread frustration with the current two-tier system, with suggestions that moving to a unitary model would streamline decision-making and reduce administrative overheads
- Overlapping responsibilities between district and county councils result in inefficiencies, confusion and wasted resources. A single authority is viewed as a means to consolidate services and provide greater clarity for residents
- Merging councils could reduce operational costs, enabling more funding to be directed towards frontline services such as SEND, highways and waste collection

Waste of time/money

- The costs involved in setting up a new authority will cancel out any savings and savings will take too long to achieve
- A new system will cost much more to run
- Too much money has been spent on councils promoting their preferred options

Support - seems sensible/ practical/best option/get on with it!

- One unitary authority would standardise services throughout the county
- A single council would reduce the number of councillors and also cut red tape
- One unitary authority would lead to less confusion about who provides which service

It is important to note that there was a significant jump in the number of people making comments supportive of the **One Suffolk** proposal as soon as the districts and borough councils published their proposed council boundary map on 7 August 2025. It is unclear what would have been the impact had they released their map earlier in the business case development process.

Negative comment based on experience of existing councils (county, district and borough)

- Concern that poor service received in the past would be magnified in a unitary authority model
- Council workers are not currently delivering a good service as too many are working from home
- Difficult to contact councils now so it will only get worse.

Don't agree with proposals/ happy with current system

- The current system works fine as it is – no need to change it
- Currently, local councillors are easily accessible. A larger council or councils could mean they are difficult to speak to
- Local services are easy to access without the need to travel

Concerns about the size of a single authority

- Larger towns will be favoured and the needs of smaller ones overlooked
- Those providing services will have less local knowledge and will be too distant from the areas they are serving
- One council will be so big that decision-making will be slower and based on a 'one size fits all' mentality

Need to maintain and improve existing services

- Respondents are concerned that reorganisation could lead to a decline in service quality, particularly in areas such as road maintenance, waste collection, public transport and social care
- Respondents are seeking clear evidence that any savings will be reinvested into frontline services, amid concerns that the motivation behind the changes is purely cost-driven
- There were calls for improved communication, more joined-up working across services and increased investment in frontline staff

Additional questions surrounding the proposal

- Survey responses indicated varying levels of understanding among residents regarding local government reorganisation, devolution and the **One Suffolk** proposal
- Many respondents expressed confusion or uncertainty about the structure, purpose and implications of the proposed reorganisation - highlighting the need for clear communication and ongoing engagement
- Questions were raised about transparency, accountability and the decision-making process - with respondents uncertain about how leadership would operate and how local voices would be represented under the new model

Need to serve all residents equally

- Respondents emphasised the need for any new local government structure to serve all residents equitably, with particular attention to rural and coastal communities
- They also highlighted the importance of a fair distribution of resources across the county, particularly for high-cost services such as adult social care
- These views reflect a strong desire for inclusive governance that acknowledges Suffolk's geographic and demographic diversity

Ensuring the process is democratic

- Residents expressed significant frustration over the cancellation of local elections in May 2025, following Suffolk's inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme
- Respondents expressed a desire for a public vote on the proposed changes and reported feeling excluded from the decision-making process
- There were calls for transparency and accountability from the new authority with questions around who will lead it and how the leaders will be selected

Further analysis of specific location-based responses saw the common themes identified in the free text response (above) reflected across Suffolk, except for Felixstowe. The most common theme highlighted from this area is support for the **One Suffolk** proposal, with particular concerns surrounding Felixstowe being merged into a new area including Ipswich.

This sentiment was particularly noticeable following the announcement of the districts and borough councils proposed boundaries for three unitary authorities. This is referenced in the note above.

The full survey results, including details of the methodologies used, are included in the appendices. Although our two surveys have different data collection methodologies, there are key similarities between the findings:

- Overwhelmingly, residents identify with being from Suffolk and their local town or village
- Most residents have at least some understanding of the proposals to create a unitary council model in Suffolk
- Largely, residents are split on whether they support the general idea of council unitarisation
- Residents only have modest confidence that unitarisation would simplify access to services or improve value for money
- A significant portion of residents have not made direct contact with local elected representatives in the past 12 months
- Residents show a consistent pattern of disengagement due to lack of time, other priorities and feeling like it would not make a difference
- Residents consider meeting local needs to be a priority for improvement

Suffolk parish and town councils

All town and parish councils and parish meetings in Suffolk (over 420 in total) were offered an in-person or virtual briefing, with 46 events already delivered and others happening later in September 2025.

These events involved a presentation from senior councillors or officers followed by an interactive question and answer session. The sessions so far have been well attended and well received – with 465 people taking part. We also presented to town and parish council clerks at three virtual sessions organised by the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC).

Key themes identified throughout the sessions include:

- Desire for local councillors who understand and have knowledge of community-specific issues, particularly in rural areas
- Requests for more influence and transparency in planning decisions and for local representatives to be involved more meaningfully in making those decisions
- Calls for named contacts, direct lines and face-to-face engagement to help improve customer service and response times
- Worries about loss of local identity and community voice, with scepticism about whether savings will be reinvested locally
- Mixed views on taking on more responsibilities - with smaller councils feeling under-resourced and overburdened with requests for funding, training and support if responsibilities increase. Some larger councils were keen to explore opportunities to take on more responsibilities - with associated funding
- Requests for local control over funding and a simplified grant process
- Interest in multi-member wards, area committees and local hubs with suggestions for community liaison roles and dedicated support teams
- Resistance to purely digital engagement with emphasis on telephone access, printed materials and physical presence

Follow up sessions are being arranged with several town councils that showed a particular interest in further discussing opportunities to take responsibility for community assets and services. These conversations are proving positive and are ongoing at the point of submitting this business case.

Suffolk businesses and business groups

Businesses form an important part of the fabric and diversity of Suffolk and, as such, their views and opinions on LGR are essential. Eight events were held with over 130 business owners/ representatives from across Suffolk to discuss the **One Suffolk** proposal and get their input. These sessions took place virtually and in-person, offering business attendees the opportunity to shape our proposals.

Furthermore, special briefings were held with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) from across the county. These organisations play a key role and should be considered as key stakeholders.

Key findings from these business engagement sessions include:

- Frustrations around the lack of accountability in the current local government system
- A need for greater access and communication in the new system
- Desire for a 'dedicated front door' for businesses when contacting the new authority
- A call for cost savings to be reinvested in Suffolk
- A sense of optimism surrounding unitarisation and a need for improvements to the current system

Suffolk voluntary, community, faith and social enterprises (VCFSE)

We held three sessions with Suffolk's VCFSE organisations, organised through Community Action Suffolk and Suffolk's two Integrated Care System VCFSE Assemblies. 34 organisations took part in the sessions.

Key findings from these engagement sessions include:

- Participants are seeking assurances that vulnerable people and families will continue to receive the help they need during this period of change and that any savings will be reinvested into local frontline services
- Voluntary sector organisations want to have a voice and be part of the up coming changes and there will need to be opportunities for co-production
- Participants seeking reassurance that existing relationships will be maintained and local connections will not be lost during transition to new arrangements
- VCFSE are a diverse group of different organisations supporting and addressing different challenges and needs with different scales and geographies covered. Any new unitary model needs to be flexible to work well with these diverse groups
- A coherent, preventative, targeted and early help model is important.
- Residents need help to only tell their story once. The council, VCFSE and other partners need to join up better across services to avoid 'hand offs.'
- Worries about consistent and fair practice being applied across Suffolk if there is a disaggregation of key services such as safeguarding, children and young people's and adult social care - and impact of change (as above)

We also attended two community events organised by a local partnership organisation and a residents' association.

Key findings from these engagement sessions include:

- Ensuring local representation and community voice is not lost through transitions to a new model
- A desire for local councillors to have knowledge of community-specific issues
- A need for local decisions to be made locally - through the introduction of area committees and not centralised decisions made in Ipswich

Suffolk children and young people

Young people today will be affected by these changes tomorrow. It is important that they have an opportunity to have their say - especially as the government plans to give 16 and 17 year-olds the right to vote in all UK elections. Our engagement therefore included young Suffolk residents through TikTok, Instagram and YouTube and Suffolk members of the UK Youth Parliament. We have also engaged with education leaders.

9,107 young people engaged with our social media campaign by clicking on links in the posts. 300 16-34-year-olds took part in our residents' survey.

Key findings from these engagement sessions, and survey responses, include:

- 16-34 years most value access to the natural environment of the countryside (77%), pubs, bars, restaurants and cafes (72%) and access to the natural environment of the coast (68%)
- They have the strongest sense of belonging to their village or town (72%), followed by Suffolk (70%), East Anglia (58%) and then their district or borough (44%)
- Younger people are most interested in being involved in knowing more about their councillors and how to contact them (52%), taking part in consultations (49%) and taking part in focus groups or resident panels (48%)
- Transport and infrastructure (57%) is the most important council service area to 16-34 year olds. Adult social care is the least important (16%)
- 54% of younger people are in favour of a unitary model of local government. This is higher than the county average (50%)
- Over two fifths (44%) are confident that the changes would make it simpler for residents to understand and access services. This is higher than the county average (32%). 32% are unconfident, which is lower than the county average (46%)
- Over two fifths (44%) are confident that the changes would lead to financial savings and reduced duplication. This is higher than the county average (32%). 36% are unconfident, which is lower than the county average (47%)
- 16-34 years believe that meeting local needs (35%) and providing value for money (33%) should be considered priorities for improvement

We also spoke with approximately 40 school leaders at one of our school leaders' breakfast meetings, alongside discussions held on an individual basis with school leaders and NHS colleagues.

Key themes from those discussions included concerns around how Suffolk can keep a safeguarding focus if the county was split up, as partners have a bigger footprint than this. Multi academy trusts, for example, work over multiple local authority areas already and the NHS partners have just moved to a larger two county footprint (Suffolk and Norfolk).

Council staff

Five dedicated staff webinars have been delivered by Suffolk County Council's chief executive and executive directors – giving staff the opportunity to learn more about LGR, the **One Suffolk** proposal and to ask questions directly of senior leaders. 1,248 attendees have engaged with these sessions so far, and further sessions have been arranged for September 2025. There has also been regular internal council communications and information sharing.

Key findings from these engagement sessions include:

- Some confusion over the likely role of the new mayor of Suffolk and Norfolk
- A strong interest in whether Suffolk County Council will hold elections in 2026
- Questions over when the government is likely to make the decision on which proposal will be consulted on
- Concern over potential job losses because of the LGR process

Suffolk's political stakeholders and key influencers

Throughout the process of preparing this business case, there has been regular engagement with political stakeholders, including Suffolk MPs, and meetings with civil servants from MHCLG. We briefed MPs on our proposals both before and after the drafting of this business case.

We heard, we responded

It's clear that we have engaged with a lot of relevant people on our **One Suffolk** proposal, but what does this all mean when it comes to the final business case? That is the key question. There are many ways in which we have incorporated stakeholder suggestions into our final proposals. The table below summarises some of the key themes we've heard through our engagement activity and explains what we propose in direct response.

Table 03: Summary of key themes from engagement activity and our response

We heard	We responded
Local identity and representation • Strong emphasis on preserving Suffolk's local identity, especially in rural and coastal areas • Concerns about larger towns dominating decision-making • Desire for local councillors with community-specific knowledge • Calls for area committees and local hubs to ensure decisions are made locally.	• A council with 140 local councillors, accountable for all local government functions in Suffolk (except town and parish functions) and each representing approximately 4,227 residents which is comparable with other unitary authorities. This will enable them to focus on their community leadership and representative roles • Empowering local communities by giving additional powers and funding to town and parish councils as desired • These town and parish councils will be provided extra support through the creation of 16 new area committees, as successfully implemented in Wiltshire • Creating a council that designs and delivers services that reflect the unique characteristics of Suffolk's towns, villages, coastal and rural areas and embeds Suffolk's identity, values and local understanding into every decision and service.

Simplification and efficiency of services • Widespread support for streamlining services, reducing duplication and avoiding the risks of disaggregation. • Recognition that a single unitary authority could improve clarity and reduce administrative overhead. • Mixed confidence in whether the unitarisation would simplify access to services or improve value for money.	• **One Suffolk** is the simplest and most financially efficient model, saving £78.2 million over five years and reducing duplication of services and staff across Suffolk. • **One Suffolk** would see no service disaggregation of critical public services like social care and highways. This would minimise disruption to service users as the existing councils transition into the new model.
Engagement, transparency, and democratic process • Strong desire for ongoing engagement, clear communication and public involvement in decision-making. • Calls for named contacts, face-to-face engagement and accessible information.	• Named contacts and more face-to-face contact for town and parish councils, especially in areas like highways where relationships and trust need to be built and maintained. • Empowering local communities by giving additional powers and funding to town and parish councils as desired. • These town and parish councils will be provided extra support through the creation of 16 new area committees, as successfully implemented in Wiltshire.
Meeting local needs and equity • Desire to meet local needs across all demographics. • Concerns about fair distribution of resources, especially for high-cost services like adult social care. • Emphasis on inclusive governance that reflects Suffolk's geographic and demographic diversity.	• Empowering local communities by giving additional powers and funding to town and parish councils based on desire to take on additional responsibility. • These town and parish councils will be provided extra support through the creation of 16 new area committees, as successfully implemented in Wiltshire. • Dividing Suffolk into three new authorities creates a potential uneven distribution of services at a local level and county-wide resulting in inconsistencies for residents. • Creation of an authority that embeds Suffolk's identity, values and local understanding into every decision and service.

Service quality and frontline investment • Concerns that reorganisation could lead to a decline in service quality. • Calls for reinvestment of savings into frontline services across Suffolk such as SEND, highways, and waste collection. • Requests for joined-up working across services and better support for frontline staff.	• A single organisation provides a greater level of accountability as the new unitary council will embed a mechanism to better connect with and empower people in the decisions made through streamlining decision-making and reducing bureaucratic delays. • Providing a £25m capital investment fund for market towns, allowing them to focus on local priorities which have been determined in close partnership with **One Suffolk.** • Keeping Suffolk as one avoids the risks involved when fragmenting the county, creating significant variation in resources, capacity and service delivery at a local level, resulting in inconsistent opportunities for residents depending on where they live, undermining fairness and cohesion. • A single clear point of contact and accountability for all local government services making it easier and simpler for residents and businesses alike, further reducing costs across the public sector.
Public awareness and understanding • Residents expressed a need for clearer explanations, accessible formats, and inclusive engagement methods (e.g., printed materials, telephone access).	• One unitary council for Suffolk means that residents, businesses and stakeholders have a single clear point of contact and accountability for all local government services.

Section Three

The case for one unitary council in Suffolk

Suffolk's rich diversity – of place, geography and economy – is one of its greatest strengths. This diversity, however, demands a unified and strategic approach to economic development, public service delivery and local governance. To unlock Suffolk's full potential, we must build on the existing Suffolk-wide operational platform – one that already delivers critical services – and transition to a single, integrated new unitary council: One Suffolk.

This foundation is unique to our proposal. It avoids the costly and risky disaggregation of services and provides a stable base from which to evolve. Without alignment, there is a risk of fragmentation, inefficiency and missed opportunities for sustainable growth.

Devolution, coupled with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), presents an opportunity to reshape Suffolk's future. Working with the mayor, Suffolk as a single unitary council will remove competition between places and enable the identification of clear and coherent investment priorities to maximise the benefits of devolution.
A single unitary council will enable the new unitary council to celebrate the diversity of place to attract investment, maximise connectivity between places, people and businesses and exploit economies of scale. It will ensure that economic growth in different parts of Suffolk can benefit people and businesses across the whole of Suffolk.

Greater resilience and sustainability

A single unitary council will provide greater resilience and sustainability for local government. In part this will be through the new council – **One Suffolk**, that will be smarter, simpler and data driven. One unitary council maximises the opportunity of bringing services together (and their associated data) to change the way services are delivered. One unitary council releases significant potential through reducing duplication and administrative overheads as well as fostering innovation and best practice, working to deliver services focused on prevention and protecting the most vulnerable in Suffolk.

One unitary council also offers significant cost savings and financial efficiency as it is cheaper to establish – with two or three authorities requiring investment in both set up and disaggregation of services – **One Suffolk** delivers far greater benefits in terms of savings over the current system of local government. This ensures better value for money for Suffolk's residents.

Connected to and reflective of people

Councils are all about people and what they can do to make lives better. A single unitary council for Suffolk will be simpler and less confusing for all residents. A single unitary council makes it easier to change the culture of local government across Suffolk. Therefore, the new council will feel less like a distant bureaucracy and more like a community-driven partner. It will be digitally connected, with user-friendly platforms while still enabling face-to-face contact across multiple physical "front doors" across Suffolk. Digitisation will complement rather than replace engagement with officers.

Accountability will also be clearer with a single organisation and an appropriate level of democratic representation. As part of this the new unitary council will embed a mechanism to better connect with and empower people in the decisions made through streamlining decision making and reducing bureaucratic delays centrally alongside the creation of area committees and revitalising and investing in Suffolk's town and parish councils. Together this will provide the most straightforward and accountable democratic leadership of place. Importantly it will also be consistent across Suffolk. Residents will not look at their neighbours and see different service levels or different opportunities to engage in decision making.

By avoiding any disruption to the delivery of sensitive and complex services such as children's and adult social care we are deliberately prioritising the needs of and protecting the most vulnerable in Suffolk. By better aligning these services with others, like housing, this will enable the new unitary council to create a strong safety net to protect and assist those in Suffolk who most need support and often have the quietest voice. One unitary council for Suffolk will also provide the opportunity to identify risk early, intervene quicker and prevent crises from escalating. With the delivery of these early intervention schemes not only improving the resident experience but reducing long-term costs to the system.

A champion for Suffolk

A single unitary council will provide the most transformative and robust platform for growth and the best means of effective working with the mayor. It will give Suffolk a single, clear and coherent voice in making the case for investment. It will ensure we act strategically and make the best investment decisions for Suffolk as a whole. One council will not only remove unhelpful local competition for funding and investment, but it will enable more effective and integrated strategic planning for growth, housing and education. By uniting responsibilities currently split between county, districts and borough councils we will have a joined-up approach which avoids duplication. This will ensure that new housing developments are properly coordinated, with the delivery of schools, transport and community infrastructure, creating well-designed neighbourhoods where people want to live and work.

One Suffolk enables the new unitary council to be a true local partner in the delivery of the current government's missions. A single unitary council can help drive growth in nationally significant industries, accelerate the delivery of clean energy, enhance joint working with the police, deliver a unified approach to early years education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and maximise the opportunities around embedding a focus on prevention to maximise health and wellbeing.

We believe there are six key components to our strategic case for **One Suffolk**. These have been developed through a robust process – grounded in data and evidence, shaped by resident surveys and informed by extensive engagement with partners across Suffolk. Together, they form a compelling and locally rooted case for transformation. These six strategic cases will be explored in the remainder of this section and are built around a shared ambition to:

- Make local government smarter, simpler and better for the residents and businesses of Suffolk
- Establish a platform for investment and growth
- Empower local communities
- Create stronger, safer and more integrated public services
- Deliver the best possible value for money for our residents
- Be the most effective local partner for government

Summary of the case for change

	Arguments for One Suffolk	Arguments against splitting Suffolk into two or three unitary authorities
Make local government smarter, simpler and better for the residents and businesses of Suffolk	• **Smarter, data-driven leadership: One Suffolk** provides a critical mass in terms of data that will enable it to be used to shape and inform delivery which in turn will improve strategic commissioning, prevent delays and facilitate the delivery of more responsive, personalised support. • **Simplified governance and enhanced partnerships:** Businesses, the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector and other partners such as the NHS and the police have a single clear point of contact and accountability for all local government services, making it easier and simpler to work together and reducing costs across the public sector. • **Joined-up, resilient services: One Suffolk** would simplify local government: one system, one council, one strategy, one point of contact. This will ensure integrated delivery across housing, health and social care, strengthens workforce recruitment and improve outcomes through consistent standards, faster response times, and a unified approach rooted in local communities. A Suffolk-wide delivery model enables better strategic decisions and removes the risk of postcode lotteries.	• **Fragmented leadership:** Two or three councils create competition and conflicting priorities, weakening strategic decision-making and slowing progress – it creates a mayor that has to arbitrate between places rather than champion them. • **Limited impact:** Artificial boundaries restrict investment reach, dilute economic benefits and reduce collaboration across Suffolk's diverse sectors. • **Weakened influence:** Disaggregation complicates planning, undermines Suffolk's national role in infrastructure delivery and reduces effectiveness in regional partnerships.

	Arguments for One Suffolk	Arguments against splitting Suffolk into two or three unitary authorities
Establish a platform for investment and growth	• **Delivery of a unified economic strategy:** **One Suffolk** enables the delivery of a county-wide economic strategy already agreed upon by Suffolk's public and private sector leaders. It provides a coherent structure to implement this strategy effectively across sectors like clean energy, agri-food and logistics. • **Stronger investment case:** A single authority offers a unified voice and strategic oversight, making it easier to work with the mayor, attract and coordinate investment, particularly for large-scale infrastructure projects and nationally significant initiatives like Sizewell C and Freeport East. • **Efficient planning and service integration:** Consolidating planning services under one authority builds resilience, reduces duplication and ensures faster, more strategic decision-making. It also aligns housing, transport and skills planning, supporting place-based growth and productivity. • **Best supports and facilitates councillors' and local government's convening role:** Through the combination of being locally rooted with strategic Suffolk-wide leadership, **One Suffolk** would be able to convene and influence key stakeholders to galvanise the delivery of key growth priorities.	• **Fragmented leadership:** Two or three councils create competition and conflicting priorities, weakening strategic decision-making and slowing progress – it creates a mayor that has to arbitrate between places rather than champion them. • **Limited impact:** Artificial boundaries restrict investment reach, dilute economic benefits and reduce collaboration across Suffolk's diverse sectors. • **Weakened influence:** Disaggregation complicates planning, undermines Suffolk's national role in infrastructure delivery and reduces effectiveness in regional partnerships.

	Arguments for One Suffolk	Arguments against splitting Suffolk into two or three unitary authorities
Empower local communities	• **Better identification of local priorities:** A single unitary council makes it easier to collate and then action priorities. Through consistent engagement it will be possible to collate common priorities and issues which in turn will drive associated actions plans and delivery. This will be key in ensuring **One Suffolk's** strategic ambition and scale is informed by and translates into what is important to local communities. • **Empowered localism:** **One Suffolk** enables better empowerment of neighbourhoods and town and parish councils within a coordinated Suffolk-wide framework, supporting tailored action and stronger local democracy. • **Stronger local voice:** **One Suffolk** enables strategic leadership informed by local voices, using local data, area committees and town & parish councils to ensure decisions reflect community needs and priorities. • **Stronger local relationships with key partners:** By establishing area committees **One Suffolk** creates an opportunity for local partners – particularly businesses and the VCFSE sector – to engage with the mechanics of local decision making.	• **Postcode lottery in local opportunity:** Fragmenting Suffolk into two or three authorities risks creating significant variation in resources, capacity and service delivery at a local level. This leads to inconsistent opportunities for residents depending on where they live, undermining fairness and cohesion. • **Barriers to strategic collaboration:** A greater level of localism across separate authorities makes it harder for Suffolk-wide partners – such as the police, NHS and Integrated Care Board and the mayor – to engage constructively. These partners would experience an increased level of pressure and demand supporting two or three unitaries. This weakens joint working and reduces the effectiveness of initiatives that require a unified approach.

	Arguments for One Suffolk	Arguments against splitting Suffolk into two or three unitary authorities
Create stronger, safer and more integrated public services	• **Migration to the most competent platform:** Avoids disrupting the delivery of sensitive and complex services such as children's and adult social care, which risk poorer outcomes if divided among smaller authorities. • **Joined-up services:** **One Suffolk** unites health, care, housing and safety into a single system. This makes it easier and simpler to work with and engage statutory partners like the NHS and the police which will in turn drive better outcomes for residents. • **Dual power of scale and personalised support:** **One Suffolk** combines the strategic scale and economics of efficiency with the ability to deliver tailored support for individual people and places.	• **Safeguarding risks:** Splitting children's and adult social care services disrupts established safeguarding arrangements and professional oversight, increasing the likelihood of performance decline during and after transition. • **Market instability:** Fragmentation encourages competition among authorities over scarce care providers and workforce, destabilising local care markets, raising care provision costs and potentially impacting quality and availability of support. • **Loss of specialised expertise:** Smaller authorities may struggle to recruit and retain experienced directors and key professionals due to fragmented responsibilities and smaller scale, impacting service quality.
Deliver the best possible value for money for our residents	• **Efficient structures:** **One Suffolk** removes duplication across councils, streamlining governance and back-office functions to free up resources for frontline services. • **Smarter spending:** A single unitary council enables strategic financial planning, better contract management and stronger purchasing power – delivering better outcomes for less. • **Financial resilience:** **One Suffolk** provides greater financial sustainability and flexibility to fund essential services and respond effectively to future challenges and crises.	• **Duplication of leadership and management:** Two or three authorities require separate senior leadership teams and service delivery management, increasing recurring overhead costs. PwC's modelling shows that splitting county services into more than one unitary leads to duplicated staffing and democratic structures, inflating costs and reducing savings potential. • **Reduced economies of scale:** Fragmentation undermines purchasing power and reduces third-party spend efficiencies that single county models capitalise on, resulting in increased costs for service delivery and diminishing financial benefits

	Arguments for One Suffolk	Arguments against splitting Suffolk into two or three unitary authorities
Be the most effective local partner for government	• **One voice for Suffolk:** A single Suffolk authority provides a unified voice to engage with government and the mayor, simplifying communication and strengthening influence. • **One partner for government:** **One Suffolk** enables strategic alignment with national priorities – such as clean energy, education reform and public safety – through coordinated leadership and delivery. • **Enabling devolution:** **One Suffolk** provides a platform to enable devolution and work as a partner with Norfolk.	• **Fragmented representation:** Two or three councils create competing voices, making it harder for Suffolk to speak clearly and consistently to government and the mayor. • **Reduced strategic impact:** Disaggregation weakens Suffolk's ability to lead on national priorities like clean energy, education reform and public safety due to lack of scale and coherence. • **Lower resilience:** Smaller authorities may lack the financial and operational capacity to respond to national missions or crises, reducing Suffolk's effectiveness as a trusted partner.
Supports and enables devolution	• **Easiest to understand:** **One Suffolk** would be recognised as the local government body for Suffolk, making it the primary point of contact for partners such as central government, the new mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk, and other local stakeholders • **Strategic place leadership:** Representative of and connected to all Suffolk's communities, **One Suffolk** will improve the Mayoral Strategic Authority's strategic and place leadership. • **Most efficient use of the MSA's resources:** **One Suffolk's** single Suffolk-wide leadership will be informed by understanding local needs and characteristics across the whole county and therefore, be able to better target the MSA's funding, delivery and influence to the benefit of Suffolk. • **Support the mayor to advocate for Suffolk:** As representative and place leader for the whole of the County, **One Suffolk** is best able to advocate and champion for the whole county and support the mayor in campaigning for the best deal for the communities of the Suffolk and Norfolk MSA.	• **Complicates the governance:** Instead of a single unified voice and strategic leadership of a single council, two or three unitary authorities would mean the MSA governance is populated with council leaders from different administrations representing partial geographies within Suffolk and bringing different – and likely competing or conflicting – strategic and political objectives. • **Increases competition for MSA resource and support:** More Leaders and Administrations will be seeking investment and support from the mayor and MSA. • **Dilutes convening power of local government:** Partners and local communities of interest that transcend council boundaries within the County will need to work across two or three councils, with different priorities and possibly politics, making it harder to work in partnership.

Making local government smarter, simpler and better

Establishing a single Suffolk unitary authority offers a transformative opportunity to redesign local government – making it smarter, simpler and better. This approach will remove duplication, improve transparency and create a streamlined council with clearer accountability and joined-up services. Through digital innovation, data-driven planning and modern infrastructure, Suffolk can deliver faster, more responsive services tailored to community needs. A simplified governance model will make services easier to access, while enabling financial efficiency and strategic focus.

This section explores how bold and sensible reform can create a council that's not only operationally smarter, but deeply committed to building stronger, more resilient communities across Suffolk. The ambition for **One Suffolk** is for a 'modern council' that is a responsive, community-driven partner, rather than a distant bureaucracy. It will adopt the very best practice from across the existing county, district and borough councils in Suffolk and unitary councils elsewhere. This modern council would be digitally connected, with user-friendly platforms that let residents report issues, access services and participate in decision-making from their phones or laptops. It is however also a council where those that want or need to engage in person have a clear route to doing so using a range of communication methods, from telephone to face-to-face across a range of locations.

It is a modern council where meetings are streamed live, consultations are interactive, and data is shared transparently to build trust. **One Suffolk** will be geographically spread across Suffolk with services and access points delivered through a wide-ranging estate. These physical spaces (offices, town halls, community hubs, libraries) are welcoming and multifunctional. Working hand-in-hand with digital connectivity, the culture is people-focussed and rooted in local communities. Staff are approachable and diverse, trained not just in policy but in empathy and innovation. A modern council that listens, adapts and co-creates with its residents, making governance feel less like a formality and more like a shared journey.

Smarter local government

Smarter local government means more than just digital and technology – it's about intelligent leadership, collaborative service design and forward-thinking strategy. Suffolk deserves a council that is not only modern, but personal, purposeful and adaptable.

Data & digitally enabled

Suffolk's current two-tier system holds a wealth of valuable data and insight across various councils and agencies. However, the fragmented structure makes it difficult to fully harness its potential – significant effort is required to negotiate access, align priorities and navigate multiple governance frameworks to bring information together. These coordination barriers limit agility and delay opportunity for early intervention.

A single Suffolk unitary council would safeguard and enhance Suffolk's existing data and insight strengths by removing bottlenecks created by data governance and fragmented systems across multiple organisations.
For example, if a young person was in the care of one council but one of their parents was housed by another council this would require an element of data sharing which would not exist with a single council. This challenge already exists across county boundaries and splitting Suffolk would exacerbate this. One unitary council therefore enables seamless integration of local knowledge with strategic planning. This consolidated model supports current-state visibility, smarter policy, targeted resource allocation and proactive service design. It also embeds a collaborative, evidence-led culture into the **One Suffolk** operating model.

In today's digital age, fragmented service delivery across Suffolk's councils not only confuses residents but also hampers efficiency and innovation. Residents expect seamless, intuitive interactions like those offered by commercial services, but across its multiple authorities Suffolk's digital offer is inconsistent and outdated. This includes issues such as failing payment systems, digital discrimination (whereby accessibility is limited) and a need to upgrade IT infrastructure more generally. Crucially, residents need channel choice – whether digital, phone or face-to-face – to suit their individual needs and preferences. A single Suffolk unitary council would enable a unified, digital platform that simplifies access, improves consistency and reduces duplication – freeing up capacity for more complex, personalised support and accelerating the Fit for the Future transformation that is already being driven forward in relation to existing county council services.

Strategic leadership

Suffolk faces a complex set of challenges – from demographic change and rising demand for services to economic inequality and climate resilience. Meeting these challenges requires more than service delivery – it demands strategic, system-wide leadership.

A single Suffolk unitary authority would provide a clear and consistent point of leadership for Suffolk. It would enable a shared ambition and vision that all partners – across the NHS, police, fire and rescue, education, business and the VCFSE and delivering joined-up solutions that reflect the real needs of Suffolk's people and places.

Crucially, a single Suffolk unitary model strengthens Suffolk's ability to act as a system leader, not just coordinating services, but shaping the conditions for long-term change. It enables the council to take a more strategic role in areas such as economic development, climate action, health and wellbeing, and skills. With a single voice and unified governance, Suffolk can speak with greater authority at regional and national levels, attract investment and influence policy in ways that fragmented structures cannot.

For central government, a single unitary authority offers a clear point of contact and accountability, simplifying engagement and enabling more effective partnership working. **One Suffolk** provides a strong local partner to work alongside the mayor and other regional leaders in alignment with national priorities and the delivery of the government's five missions.
This streamlined model enhances the ability to coordinate funding, policy implementation and reform at pace.

Smart commissioning and market shaping

The scale of a single Suffolk unitary council unlocks the potential for further smarter, more strategic and integrated procurement and commissioning. For example, a one council approach which is co-terminus with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) footprint presents opportunities for integrated commissioning across health and care services. Suffolk County Council has already consolidated commissioning activity for adult and children's social care leveraging its buying power, driving better value for money and achieving economies of scale that are simply not possible under a fragmented model. **One Suffolk** is an opportunity to preserve and scale this buying power by maintaining the platform already in place for social care and scaling this commissioning approach across other services such as housing and temporary accommodation. In all of these areas, fragmented commissioning leads to inconsistent service standards, inflated costs and limited ability to influence market behaviour (with more detailed information provided in the 'Creating stronger, safer and more integrated public services' section). A unified approach allows Suffolk to shape the market more effectively, coordinate provision and ensure that contracts deliver both quality and sustainability.

Strategic commissioning also enables the council to embed social value, environmental responsibility and innovation into its procurement processes. It supports better contract management and a stronger focus on outcomes while also making things clearer and more consistent for businesses and VCFSE organisations across Suffolk – through a single, unified approach. Ultimately, smarter commissioning is about using public money wisely – not just to buy services, but to drive change, support local providers and deliver better results for Suffolk's residents.

Simpler local government

Suffolk's current two-tier system is complex, confusing and inefficient – for residents, businesses and partners alike. Navigating which council is responsible for which service can be frustrating and time-consuming, especially when issues span multiple domains. This complexity also creates duplication in governance, back-office functions and service delivery, diverting valuable resources away from frontline impact.

Easier to navigate for residents

A single Suffolk unitary council would simplify the system: one council, one strategy, one point of contact. Residents would no longer need to understand the intricacies of local government structures to access the support they need or consider where in Suffolk they are if they needed to access a council service. Whether it is reporting a missed bin, applying for housing, or accessing social care, people would deal with one organisation – regardless of where they live or what the issue is – rather than being passed between councils.

People don't live in administrative boundaries – they live in communities. Two or three unitaries would retain much of the current fragmentation, introduce new inconsistencies, make it harder to deliver joined-up support and disrupt continuity of care and support. For example – under the three council proposal – Stowmarket which is in a parliamentary constituency with Bury St Edmunds and on the major A14 trunk road between there and Ipswich, would find itself in an administrative boundary with Woodbridge and Lowestoft, areas with which it has far less in common.

The division of responsibilities between county and district councils can also create gaps in service delivery – particularly for residents with complex or overlapping needs. People can fall between the cracks when services don't align or when handovers between organisations are unclear or inconsistent. A single Suffolk unitary authority removes these boundaries, enabling joined-up support that follows the individual, not the organisational chart. This is especially important for vulnerable residents, who often rely on multiple services working together seamlessly.

Easier to navigate for partners

For partners, simplification means clarity and consistency. Organisations such as the NHS, police, housing providers, VCFSE sector groups and local businesses currently have to engage with multiple councils across Suffolk – something that would remain the case with two or three new unitary councils – each with different priorities, processes and points of contact. A single Suffolk unitary council provides a clear partner interface, making it easier to collaborate, plan and invest in long-term solutions. It also strengthens Suffolk's voice in regional and national forums, enabling more effective advocacy and influence.

Unlock operational benefits

Internally, simplification unlocks significant operational benefits. A unitary model allows for streamlined governance, clearer accountability and faster decision-making. It reduces duplication in corporate services – such as finance, HR, IT and procurement – freeing up capacity and resources that can be redirected to frontline delivery. Shared systems and standardised processes improve efficiency, reduce administrative burden and create a more agile organisation that can respond quickly to changing needs.

Crucially, simplification does not mean centralisation. Suffolk already leads the way in devolving services, with Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and locally embedded delivery models. A single council strengthens this by streamlining governance and enhancing support across communities – enabling place-based teams to focus on what matters locally, backed by consistent county-wide infrastructure and resources.

In short, a unitary model removes unnecessary complexity from the system, making it easier to get help, easier to work together and easier to get things done. It's about creating a local government that works with people, not around them.

Better local government

A single Suffolk unitary authority is not just smarter and simpler – it's fundamentally better for residents, communities and the public sector as a whole. It enables a change in the quality, consistency and impact of local services.

Joined-up working

The complex, interrelated challenges facing Suffolk – such as growing inequality, ageing population, the need to drive sustainable economic growth and the imperative to improve skills and wages – cannot be effectively tackled in isolation. Currently, the fragmented landscape of local government and public service agencies across Suffolk is hindering progress, establishing two or three new unitary councils would reinforce the inertia. Disconnected structures and siloed working practices limit the ability to understand the full picture, align priorities and deliver the kind of transformational change that residents deserve.

A single Suffolk unitary council offers a powerful solution. By consolidating services, a single Suffolk unitary council creates the capacity for more integrated, strategic decision-making and delivery. It breaks down internal silos within local government and in particular it makes it easier and more cost-effective to work with partners across the public, private and VCFSE sector enabling a more joined-up approach to policy, planning and service provision.

One of the most significant advantages of one unitary council for Suffolk is the opportunity to align housing, social care and public health under one roof. These services are inextricably linked, particularly when supporting older residents or those with complex needs. A unified delivery model allows for more responsive, person-centred support, better use of resources and improved outcomes for individuals and communities alike. The case studies from page 74 provide further detail of this opportunity.

Resilient & talented workforce

Local government across the UK is under increasing pressure to recruit and retain a skilled workforce, amid an ageing demographic and growing service demands. In Suffolk, the current two-tier model intensifies this challenge – six separate councils competing for talent (not only with each other, but also in the wider market), duplicating recruitment efforts and stretching resources across fragmented organisations. This competition not only weakens workforce strategies but also undermines the county's ability to offer attractive career opportunities. It is a competition that would only increase with two or three unitary councils, particularly in those hard to recruit senior roles (e.g. directors of children's services) or specialist teams (e.g. biodiversity).

Moving to a single Suffolk unitary authority unlocks the potential to create a unified, future-focused public employer. It allows for a consolidated approach to building a stronger, more resilient employment proposition. **One Suffolk** can present a compelling offer: a modern organisation with a clear sense of purpose, flexible career pathways and meaningful opportunities to innovate and serve.

A single unitary council creates stronger career pathways and helps attract and retain high-quality talent across a range of services, particularly in specialist roles. For example, a unified planning team enables the development of a broader and more resilient skill base – covering specialist areas such as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) (including energy projects), minerals and waste, water management, flooding, coastal erosion, transport and highways.

These skills are often in short supply nationally and are essential for delivering complex, long-term projects. Similarly in data and analytics, a larger **One Suffolk** unitary can support a team of specialist analysts, each with distinct areas of expertise, rather than relying on more generalist roles. This creates better opportunities for learning, collaboration and support – making the organisation more attractive to skilled professionals and better equipped to deliver high-quality services. Under a fragmented structure, such expertise would be spread thinly across smaller teams, risking sustainability and limiting opportunities for professional growth.

By reducing internal competition and aligning strategies, the single Suffolk unitary council becomes a destination employer – known for valuing people, investing in potential and responding to change with agility. This is not just about solving today's workforce crisis, it's about cultivating a workforce for tomorrow – diverse, engaged and proud to shape Suffolk's future.

Better outcomes for residents

Ultimately, **One Suffolk** is about delivering better outcomes for the people who live and work in the county. A single Suffolk unitary council enables more consistent service standards, greater resilience, faster response times and a more proactive approach to meeting residents' needs – regardless of where they live.

Importantly, **One Suffolk** brings together the best practice from across the region into one place – amplifying what's already working well and applying it more widely.
This avoids duplication, accelerates learning and ensures that successful approaches don't remain isolated within individual councils.

The model also strikes a vital balance between scale and local delivery. While the unitary council benefits from strategic oversight and economies of scale, it remains rooted in Suffolk's diverse communities. Local teams, local knowledge and local relationships continue to shape services – ensuring they are responsive, inclusive and tailored to the unique needs of each place.

Why a fragmented unitary model fails Suffolk

A fragmented unitary model – where Suffolk is split into two or three unitary authorities – risks entrenching inefficiency, duplication and inconsistency across the county. Rather than streamlining governance, this approach multiplies overheads, administrative boundaries and policymaking processes, undermining the very benefits that unitary government aims to deliver.

Suffolk's economic, social and environmental challenges are deeply interconnected and require coordinated solutions. Fragmentation makes strategic planning more complex and reduces the ability to take a Suffolk-wide view on transport, housing, health, education and climate resilience. It can create postcode lotteries for services, limit economies of scale and dilute collective bargaining power – whether in procurement or securing investment from central government.

If Suffolk were to be divided into two or three unitary authorities, there would still be scope for collaboration on strategic priorities through pan-Suffolk partnerships, such as for social care. However, this approach risks reintroducing elements of a two-tier system, with duplication of governance and the need to negotiate cross-boundary arrangements. Divergent political leadership, varied local priorities and inconsistent funding models could further complicate joint working – making it harder to deliver consistent services and long-term planning across the region. It also inhibits the benefits of devolution with the risk of the mayor being dragged into distracting conversations regarding funding distribution as each unitary argues for its 'fair share' as opposed to strategic investment. Moreover, while such cooperation may be achievable in the short term, it is difficult to guarantee sustained partnership working over the long term as political landscapes and institutional priorities evolve.

Two or three unitary councils also complicate service delivery for residents and partners. Citizens navigating separate systems may face confusion, delays and unequal access to support. Public sector partners such as the NHS, police and VCFSE sector organisations operating across Suffolk would be forced to engage with two or three councils, straining collaboration and wasting resources.

In contrast, a single Suffolk unitary council promises clarity, consistency, strategic coherence and agility. It would enable stronger leadership, simplified structures and better use of data and resources to respond to demand. Most importantly, it ensures Suffolk speaks with one voice – allowing it to advocate powerfully for its people, region and future.

Smarter.

One unitary council for Suffolk enables the new unitary council to maximise the use of data and insight to best inform and shape services. A larger council will have a critical mass of data which will significantly enhance the insight it can generate, for example it will have more data points to inform predictive models making them more robust and accurate.

More data and richer insight raise the bar in terms of the delivery of services. This includes using insight and coordination to enhance prevention, for example combining housing and social care data to predict when a family might be at risk of homelessness, or faster response times by having all the key information to hand on a single platform.

Simpler.

One unitary council for Suffolk means that residents, businesses and stakeholders have a single clear point of contact and accountability for all local government services.

This is particularly important in reducing the burden on stakeholders and partners like the mayor, police, fire, NHS and community and VCFSE sector. One Suffolk will mean that they work with a single partner and a clear unified strategy makes it easier for these vital partners to collaborate, plan and invest in long-term solutions. Given the number of partners in Suffolk, one unitary council will therefore be operationally easier to engage with and strategically better in terms of the alignment of the services it provides.

Better.

One Suffolk strikes an important balance between scale and local delivery. The scale enables strategic oversight and creates economies of scale, with a defining principle of the new single unitary and the culture it wants to create being the desire to be rooted in Suffolk's diverse communities: local teams, local knowledge and local relationships continue to shape services.

This will be fundamentally better for residents, communities and the public sector as a whole. It enables a change in the quality, consistency and impact of local services.

Establishing a platform for investment and growth

Combining devolution with LGR provides a seminal opportunity for growth in Suffolk. However, if we are to fully realise the potential of this change it places a premium on creating a single platform that can underpin our economic aspirations and our recently agreed Suffolk-wide single, unified economic plan for jobs, growth, skills and infrastructure. Without this alignment we risk not fulfilling our economic potential and denying the full benefits of sustainable growth to Suffolk's residents and businesses.

One council for Suffolk enables the new unitary council to deliver a sustainable and long-term growth platform for Suffolk, one that can deliver place-based growth, drive productivity and ensure that the opportunities created by growth are spread across Suffolk.

The remainder of this section sets out how and why we can do this.

Delivering growth – the foundations of the platform

In December 2024 Suffolk's Business Board published its economic strategy. This strategy identified three types of growth for Suffolk:

- **High growth –** sector strengths which are driving the economy and contributing to UK PLC. Most notably:
  - **Clean energy** – home to nationally significant offshore wind farms and a globally competitive renewables supply chain and support industry; Suffolk is playing a crucial role in the UK's energy transition. This coupled with Sizewell C means that Suffolk has the capacity to power over half of England's homes. This makes Suffolk a national leader in this sector providing major opportunities for local economic growth and aligns directly with one of the government missions to accelerate the transition to clean energy and strengthen energy security.
  - **Agri-food and drink –** Suffolk is a critical hub for production and processing food and drink and over the last decade has outpaced national job growth. It is home to major UK and international companies such as Adnams, Greene King and Copella. It is a sector that is also evolving and innovating with new agri-tech and sustainable practices which promise to increase production and processing in a more sustainable manner while also inspiring a workforce for the future.
  - **Ports and logistics –** home to the UK's largest container port at Felixstowe and nationally significant ports for clean energy and agri-food sectors in Lowestoft and Ipswich, Suffolk is a linchpin in global logistics and trade. This provides significant employment and economic opportunities locally and aligns with the government mission to kickstart economic growth and strengthen national infrastructure.

- **Emerging growth –** sectors with strong potential for expansion, building on relations with surrounding places and economies. This includes financial services and insurance, life sciences and biotech and ICT, digital and creative.

- **Value growth –** opportunities within our large employment sectors where productivity of businesses and the quality of jobs can be improved. This includes advanced manufacturing and engineering, construction, health and social care and the visitor economy.

This is a strategy for Suffolk. It is a strategy that is universally supported and endorsed by both the Business Board and Suffolk's wider public sector leaders (including leaders and chief executives from Suffolk's local authorities, NHS and police). It is a strategy that will shape **One Suffolk's** future ambitions by providing a strong platform for: place-based growth, productivity and opportunity.

Building from this platform, **One Suffolk** will anchor growth to sectoral strengths and opportunities. It is an approach that enables the new unitary council to celebrate the diversity of places across Suffolk as a whole. **One Suffolk** will drive growth by maximising connectivity between places, people and businesses. A single unitary council will give Suffolk a single, clear and coherent voice to make the case for investment. This unified voice will be essential to attracting and securing investment, boosting and renewing infrastructure and connectivity, driving enterprise and innovation, talent development and creating pride in place.

"Powering, feeding and connecting the UK" was the strapline of the economic strategy both underlining the core economic strengths of Suffolk as well as the interconnectedness of the economy and Suffolk's nationally and internationally connected economic anchors. For example, Felixstowe, along with the strategically significant ports of Lowestoft and Ipswich are supported by logistics hubs. These hubs are also vital in enhancing Freeport East's growth and reach to growth gateways such as Gateway 14 on the A14 at Stowmarket.

Delivering growth – the opportunities created by this platform

A platform for place-based growth for Suffolk

The economic opportunities for place-based growth are clear.

Ipswich traditionally serves as Suffolk's centre for business, technology and innovation and is the location of choice for many of our finance, technology and creative industries. Haverhill and Sudbury on the other hand are home to many of our engineering and manufacturing businesses, with Mildenhall playing an important role in the defence sector.

Clean energy has a deep and expanding footprint across the east of Suffolk from the Sizewell nuclear power cluster to the cluster for offshore wind around Lowestoft – this is a cluster of activity that will draw investment, job creation and skills development into Suffolk. There is a genuine opportunity to solidify Suffolk as one of the UK's leaders in low carbon, sustainable energy.

CASE STUDY

County farms

Suffolk County Council's management of its County Farms Estate demonstrates the power of unified governance in delivering long-term public value. As the third-largest landowner in the county, the council owns 4,987 hectares of farmland, supporting 128 tenants. This scale of public sector land ownership provides a unique platform not only for sustainable agriculture but also for shaping environmental policy, driving economic growth and enabling regeneration.

A single unitary council structure ensures that this strategic asset is managed coherently and consistently. In 2019 a councillor-led review of County Farms exemplified the benefits of unified oversight, enabling the council to develop a long-term vision that integrates commercial viability, environmental stewardship and community wellbeing. These principles are far more difficult to implement uniformly if the estate were fragmented across two or three authorities.

Crucially, the County Farms Estate gives the council a powerful lever to influence environmental outcomes – such as biodiversity, carbon sequestration and land use planning – at scale. This influence would be significantly weakened if land ownership were divided among two or three separate unitary councils, each with potentially differing priorities, policies and resource levels. Fragmentation could also undermine the estate's potential to support wider regeneration and growth initiatives, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where coordinated land use is essential.

By retaining the estate under one unitary council, Suffolk can continue to align land management with broader strategic goals – such as housing, health, education and climate action – while maintaining a strong, unified voice in regional and national policy discussions.

This approach maximises the estate's value as a public asset and ensures it remains a catalyst for inclusive, sustainable development across the county.

Felixstowe is home to the UK's largest container port and a component part of Freeport East (which spans a larger geography) As part of the Freeport investment, Gateway 14 (a business, innovation and logistics park located outside Stowmarket) provides a base for manufacturing, logistics and R&D businesses, boosting the local economy and attracting investment into the region.

While these sectors have a geographical locus many of Suffolk's economic strengths cover vast swathes of the geographic area. For example, farming, agri-food and drink have their homes in key towns like Bury St Edmunds but also spread extensively across Suffolk's large rural areas with many rural villages combining food production alongside cutting-edge research. This makes Suffolk's land some of the most economically productive in the country. There are countless businesses spread across Suffolk's rural areas, and a growth ambition focused solely on larger towns risks overlooking and undervaluing the full scale of our economic growth potential.

A similar example is tourism and visitor economy, a truly Suffolk-wide, interconnected sector. This sector encompasses a breadth and depth of different offers, from popular coastal towns, to the vast array of different cultural assets and events to unique visitor attractions such as horseracing at Newmarket. This offer draws national and international visitors to Suffolk and is reflected in the fact that it is Suffolk's largest employment sector by employees[1]. It is the scale and prominence of this sector that makes Suffolk's Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) such an important stakeholder in driving the growth of Suffolk.

1 Suffolk Economic Strategy and Growth Plan 2024

The rich diversity of Suffolk as a place, geography and economy is a huge strength. This unique diversity, however, places a premium on underpinning our economic aspirations through delivering on the single, unified economic plan for jobs, growth, skills and infrastructure, together with a fully aligned and integrated model for local public service delivery. Without this alignment we risk not fulfilling our economic potential and denying the full benefits of sustainable growth to Suffolk's residents and businesses.

Connectivity is a critical part of this and vital in maximising Suffolk's global and national economic potential. For example, along key roads (A11, A12, A14, A1307) and by rail, where improvements to the Ely and Haughley junctions remain key in unlocking freight and passenger capacity. To enhance the emerging growth sectors clustered across Suffolk such as ICT, creative industries, life sciences and finance and insurance, digital connectivity is also vital.

Therefore, to maximise the economic potential for Suffolk, **One Suffolk** will:

- **Support local growth across Suffolk's market towns and rural communities through a £40m capital investment fund –** through our new locality model (see next section) and the establishment of an Investment Fund we will provide local places with some of the resources they need to support and drive growth locally. This will include a holistic review of car parking and local markets to ensure that their contribution to economic development and growth is maximised.

- **Work closely with our Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) –** as part of supporting local growth across Suffolk it will be essential for the new council to work closely with BIDs and DMOs to better understand their rich insight from working in specific localities and to ensure that the new council is not only listening to their priorities but working closely with them (and the mayor) to join up activities and to ensure that action is taken.

- **Place a premium on connectivity between places to ensure that growth is both enabled and spread across Suffolk –** the scale of opportunities within our high growth sectors is huge. Effective connectivity will enable the benefits of this growth to spread beyond the specific local environs of individual projects, investments and clusters. This will include – but not be limited to – **One Suffolk** supporting and championing mobile and digital connectivity and working closely with the mayor (see below) to prioritise investment in the A11 and A14 corridors and other key routes across Suffolk (for example the Mayor's Key route network) and their links with local roads. This will also include a detailed review of car parking to create a consistent model that is aligned with our growth ambitions.

- **Enhance the economic potential of Ipswich –** through a revitalised and enhanced Ipswich Vision Board and a town council for Ipswich we will provide investment in leadership and a core consultative role in planning and economic development to ensure that key issues are prioritised. As part of this **One Suffolk** will fully support the Portman Road redevelopment and invest in enhanced connectivity for Ipswich Waterfront. **One Suffolk** will also ensure that the civic and ceremonial arrangements including the historic mayoralty and civic status of Ipswich are not only protected but enhanced – including supporting a bid for City Status for Ipswich. Our ambition is to make sure the benefits of Ipswich flow out to the rest of Suffolk.

- **Utilise the economic opportunity created by the Industrial Strategy Zone to drive growth across Suffolk – One Suffolk** will work with government to ensure that its Industrial Strategy Zone Action Plan is delivered in Suffolk.

- **Ensure housing and infrastructure is aligned with and supports growth –** working closely with the mayor (see below) a single unitary council will look strategically across Suffolk to understand how growth can best be supported by new housing development and key infrastructure from roads and transport connectivity to school and medical provision. A single geography with a single planning function that is fully aligned with other public services provides a unique opportunity to address historic difficulties around the allocation of housing.
One Suffolk will be the best means of having a single conversation around housing – where, what size, what type – and a better chance of meeting increased housing targets while minimising the detriment on rural villages.

Given HM Treasury's desire to introduce place-based business cases **–** as signalled through the launch of the Green Book – and bring together projects such as housing, transport and skills into a single strategic investment proposal (an approach that aligns with OECD recommendations[2]), it would appear counter-intuitive for Suffolk to shift away from this investment coherence and through two or three councils create complications and conflicts. A single council for Suffolk would provide the necessary leadership and coordination to enable the development of truly effective place-based business cases, making it easier to secure much needed investment.

For the new strategic authority, One Suffolk creates the most coherent platform from which to work with Norfolk and the new mayor to make devolution a success in this sub-region.

Together there are particular opportunities for shared growth in relation to:

- **Clean energy initiatives,** which are a high growth priority for both, particularly in relation to offshore wind alongside hydrogen. There are also opportunities to maximise the supply chain benefits from larger projects such as Sizewell C.

- **Agri-food and drink;** this sector sits at the historical bedrock of both local economies, and the Strategic Authority provides an opportunity to raise both the profile and investment into this sector and to ensure that economies of scale and supply chain opportunities are realised.

- **Financial services,** and the opportunity to ensure that the emerging clusters within Ipswich and Norwich are complementary, supporting both the wider economy within the Strategic Authority as well as opening up opportunities nationally and internationally.

- **Creative digital sector,** like financial services, there is an opportunity to ensure that collaboration and complementarity are the heart of the growth ambition so that together the sector is able to maximise opportunities for investment – for example Suffolk's focus on media and gaming and Norfolk's on film.

This sector complementarity underlines the need for growth in this sub-region to be driven by sectoral strengths and maximising the opportunities that exist. Two or three authorities in Suffolk will undermine this ambition by limiting the scale and introducing artificial boundaries. One unitary authority for Suffolk provides the simplest and most coherent structure for engagement with the mayor. It creates a single voice for growth.

To date the most successful devolution has been driven in or by large cities. With Suffolk and Norfolk there is an opportunity to introduce a different model and way of thinking. One that ensures that the benefits of devolution drive growth in more rural locations. For example, building on the fact that rurality is a key consideration in our Equality Impact Assessment we could work with the mayor and government to consider how this can be best captured and reflected in all investment cases.

2 Place-Based Policies for the Future | OECD

For national ambitions

Suffolk is currently the location of a large number of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) that include the development of:

- A 3.2 GW twin nuclear reactor power station on the Suffolk Coast at Sizewell (Sizewell C) (Consented, under construction)
- Circuit network reinforcement to the National Grid between Bramford and Twinstead (Consented, under construction)
- New National Grid transmission link between Norwich and Tilbury (in Examination)
- A High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) connection between Suffolk and Kent (Sea Link) (in Examination)
- A Multi-Purpose Interconnector between the UK and the Netherlands (LionLink) (pre-application)
- East Anglia One North offshore wind farm (Consented, under construction)
- East Anglia Two offshore wind farm (Consented, under construction)
- East Anglia Three offshore wind farm (Consented, under construction)
- East Anglia One offshore wind farm (Consented and operational)
- Five Estuaries offshore wind farm (decision stage)
- North Falls offshore wind farm (decision stage)
- Sunnica Energy solar farm (Consented)
- Helios Energy Park solar farm (pre application)
- Eco Power Suffolk solar farm (pre application)
- A North Suffolk reservoir proposed by E & S Water in WMRP24
- An advanced water recycling scheme proposed by E & S Water in WMRP24

CASE STUDY

Planning to enable growth

A single unitary council for Suffolk can create a planning authority equipped to support and enable growth. A single larger planning team creates capacity and expertise, and ensures that the team has the full set of skills required to process planning applications within Suffolk – for example, minerals and waste specialists both of which are subject to national skills shortages, or experts in water management, flooding and coastal erosion, transport and highways. The majority of these specialists currently sit within the County Council and would need to be split across two or three authorities in small, potentially unsustainable teams. Many of these specialisms are particularly important for the delivery of larger scale and long-term projects, especially the full array of NSIPs within Suffolk.

Second, a larger unitary authority will be more able to provide resources and support input into the mayor's Spatial Development Strategy and engage effectively with national agencies such as Homes England, the Environment Agency and Natural England – where relationships can be built with a single authority.

Third, a larger unitary authority will also be better resourced to support communities and share learning across them, particularly in relation to NSIPs where the strain on parish councils is an important local issue.

Finally, a single authority will increase the speed in determining schemes through better linkages to regulators and consultees, reducing the number of authorities that need to be consulted and the consistent and effective use of pre-application and Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs).

Across the current Suffolk Authorities around 5,100 planning applications are determined each year – this is similar in scale to places like Cornwall. Bringing several planning services together provides an opportunity to benefit from economies of scale and build in a level of resilience to the service that may not have been possible for smaller, predecessor organisations[3].

This is almost unprecedented.

However, there is a significant risk that the creation of two or three authorities in Suffolk could massively destabilise the delivery of these projects. For example, the creation of two or three planning authorities would remove the strategic oversight and create delays. It would also dilute the learning to date and fragment the officer expertise. In addition, artificial boundaries would hinder the extent to which growth opportunities can be spread across the geography or conversely there could be limited consideration on the negative impacts on a neighbouring unitary authority. The County Council has already established the nationally recognised NSIP Centre of Excellence – **One Suffolk** would allow this to be further scaled to ensure large infrastructure projects contribute appropriately to the communities they impact and schemes impact on the environment and economy is maximised.

3 LGA/PAS Planning Peer Review Lessons for organisational changes in planning services, April 2024

The nature of these projects means that they are also critical to the delivery of the government's industrial strategy particularly in relation to tackling high industrial electricity costs and in supporting the UK to become a clean energy manufacturing and innovation superpower. Two or three unitary authorities would remove the scale of opportunity that exists within Suffolk and put these projects in different jurisdictions. Rather than simplifying the planning process it would complicate it.

A platform for productivity

The evidence is clear, encouraging long term investment in economic capital such as skills, infrastructure and innovation is central to driving improvement in productivity which in turn lifts living standards. This is central to our economic ambitions in Suffolk. The opportunities for the new unitary council in relation to clean energy, agri-food and drink, and ports and logistics have the potential to create a platform and pipeline of long-term investment in Suffolk.

It is a potential that has to be grasped if it is to ensure that investment supports skills, infrastructure and innovation. However, creating two or three unitary councils risks diluting this potential. It will focus decisions on what is best for individual localities and not Suffolk as a whole. It will drive short-term decisions rather than strategic ones. As noted in the recent Industrial Strategy, there is a need for government to intervene where markets are insufficiently coordinated, and for Suffolk there is a risk that this lack of coordination could be self-inflicted through the creation of two or three organisations with differing priorities and objectives.

A single council for Suffolk – working closely with the mayor – is our best chance of creating a dynamic economy that encourages innovation, attracts and directs investment to where it can have the greatest impact and ultimately ensures that resources flow to their most productive use.

A platform for opportunity

In creating a platform for growth, it is essential that it drives local change, that growth creates opportunities for people in Suffolk and that it helps address two fundamental challenges at the heart of Suffolk: the growing social inequality and the economic disparities in relation to education, skills and employment.

One Suffolk provides the best opportunity to ensure that the economic potential that exists translates into change and benefits for all residents. As noted in the previous section, the nature of Suffolk's socio-economic make-up would mean that social inequality could be reinforced by two or three authorities.

While further education, skills and employment will be the responsibility of the mayor and Strategic Authority, it will be essential that the Local Skills Improvement Plan speaks for Suffolk as a whole. A single council will provide a more holistic view of the skills landscape, enabling the new unitary council to play a more effective convening role across the education sector and between businesses and skills providers, both of which will ensure it is a far simpler conversation for the mayor. Conversely, two or three authorities and locally vested interests will create unnecessary competition, resulting in funding being spread thinly and not targeted to those areas that need it most.

To realise the greatest benefits from Suffolk's economic potential in terms of improving the skills of our residents there also needs to be deep connectivity between businesses and talent and in particular identifying the future skills needs early. **One Suffolk** offers the best opportunity to create the clearest and most effective pathways between education, training and employment. To be truly effective these pathways need to spread across the whole of Suffolk, they cannot be limited by artificial boundaries, something that is particularly true for our high growth sectors. **One Suffolk** will have the connectivity and reach to coordinate and join up the various education and skills providers situated across Suffolk and its borders to best harness the skills and teaching expertise that meet the needs of local people and best match them to opportunities for jobs that fulfil their potential. This will help businesses to work with the best possible skills provider and not just the closest geographically.

Delivering growth – the scale of the benefit

The Suffolk Economic Strategy set an ambition to add £14 billion to the economy by 2045 and to do this by outpacing the national average growth rate. This is a bold but realistic target. It is one that a single Suffolk unitary council has the best chance of achieving.

By working with the mayor and the Strategic Authority on transport and local infrastructure, skills and employment support, housing and strategic planning, economic development and regeneration, environment and climate change we have the collective policy levers to maximise productivity and deliver a range of opportunities for Suffolk's businesses and residents.

One Suffolk's single leadership voice will not only be clearer for the mayor, but it will be informed by understanding local needs and characteristics across the whole of Suffolk and therefore, be able to better target the Strategic Authority's funding, delivery and influence to the benefit of Suffolk.

Limiting growth – the challenge of multiple unitary authorities

By contrast, two or three unitary authorities will significantly hinder growth across Suffolk as they will introduce competition between places which will hinder strategic decision making and create unnecessary delays, particularly in relation to planning.

Two or three authorities will also see growth within an artificial boundary, one that is not recognised by businesses, and as such will argue for investment within a limited geographical area. This will significantly limit the impact of any investment secured as it will result in it being spread thinly rather than used strategically to deliver the greatest impact and tackle the biggest issues of need.

Maximising the opportunities presented by devolution

As has been noted a single, strategically focused council for Suffolk will be easier for the new directly elected mayor to engage with, which will help to ensure that the mayor's decisions are better informed by local identity, voice and needs and ultimately can help deliver the best outcomes for the sub-region of Suffolk and Norfolk. As noted above, this will be critical to growth; however there is a much wider role of the mayor in public service reform as indicated by the devolution framework.

This includes delivering on the national policy direction to embed with more digital, community based, preventative and integrated approaches to health, care and wellbeing. A single Suffolk-wide unitary council will provide a scale of data and insight in understanding population health and local insight on where best to target collaborative interventions with the Strategic Authority and other key partners such as the new ICB. Not only will this enhance the mayor's ability to fulfil their duties in the devolution framework (enshrined in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill), but it will unlock opportunities to tackle systemic issues to enable communities to live healthier for longer.

Where devolution and a focus on population health outcomes are most advanced, the Strategic Authority could have a stronger role in enabling its population to live independently and well for longer. For example, emulating the prevention demonstrators in Greater Manchester. These are a partnership between the NHS, single or upper tier authorities and strategic authorities to trial new innovative approaches to prevention – supported by mayoral 'total place' powers, and advances in genomics and data. A single Suffolk-wide unitary council will be best placed to work with Norfolk to contribute to such an arrangement.

This could include enhancing devolutionary freedoms to bring together existing entities, including integrated care boards (ICBs), providers, mayors and industry, to experiment, test and generate evidence on implementing innovation.

Feeling confident and safe is also vital for local communities and the new powers enshrined in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill for Mayors and Strategic Authorities to take on the police and crime commissioner and fire and rescue authority powers. Both of these services are locally connected, and with strategic oversight, a single unitary council for Suffolk would best support the execution of these new powers to ensure that communities are safe, confident and proud of their neighbourhoods.

As with growth, working with the mayor and government on these policy issues, a single unitary council for Suffolk will remove unnecessary (and often bureaucratic) competition between multiple authorities and identify clear and coherent priorities to maximise the benefits of devolution for all places across Suffolk.

Smarter.

In order to improve Suffolk's productivity (see Appendix one) long-term strategic investment in economic capital such as skills, infrastructure and innovation is required. The opportunities the new unitary council has in relation to clean energy, agri-food and drink, and ports and logistics have the potential to create a platform and pipeline of long-term investment in Suffolk.

A single unitary council is best placed to make the smart, coordinated and strategic decisions – working closely with the mayor – that can encourage innovation and direct investment to where it can have the greatest impact and ultimately ensures that resources flow to their most productive use.

Simpler.

A single unitary authority will give Suffolk a single, clear and coherent voice to make the case for investment. This makes it significantly easier to work with the mayor as well as a range of national stakeholders. This will be important in terms of coordinating our economic and growth ambitions with Norfolk as it will be in driving nationally significant priorities and projects, particularly in relation to supporting the UK to become a Clean Energy manufacturing and innovation superpower.

Better.

Suffolk is currently the location of a large number of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. The nature of these projects means that they are also critical to the delivery of the government's industrial strategy. There is a significant risk that the creation of two or three authorities in Suffolk could massively destabilise the delivery of these projects.

Conversely, a single unitary council for Suffolk can create a planning authority that is equipped to support and enable growth through: establishing the capacity and expertise to drive forward a broad range of projects; providing resources and support input into the mayor's Spatial Development Strategy and engage effectively with national agencies such as Homes England, the Environment Agency and Natural England; and increasing the speed in determining schemes through better linkages to regulators and consultees ensuring that growth opportunities are complemented and enabled with the appropriate infrastructure and housing to maximise the benefits to local residents.

Empowering local communities

LGR presents a once in 50 years opportunity to reset and reinvigorate the relationship between councils and their communities: helping residents to engage in decision-making about their place and community; fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership around local spaces, services and outcomes; facilitating engagement with a broad range of services that extend beyond those just delivered by the council; and enhancing communication and with that transparency and trust so people understand better the objectives of the council and why and how different decisions are made.

As noted earlier, **One Suffolk**, a single Suffolk-wide unitary council, will create local government that is simpler, easier to understand and easier to access for partners (including the MSA and VCFSE) and, most importantly, local communities. In driving forward this change it is critical that we retain democratic accountability and hard-wire community engagement and empowerment into the DNA of the new unitary council. In doing so, **One Suffolk** will deliver on the policy direction set in the English Devolution White Paper and affirmed in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

One Suffolk's scale enables the new council to be an informed and strategic leader of the entire place – be that the Strategic Authority (Suffolk and Norfolk) and wider sub-region, the historic county (Suffolk) and the very local (towns, villages, streets, individuals). With all three spatial layers reflecting the fact that it is these geographies where residents feel the greatest sense of belonging[4].

This place-leadership will be rooted in and informed by the voice of local people coupled with local data, evidence and insight, which in turn, will enable better targeted action, use of assets and resource across Suffolk to really make a difference on the ground to how people feel and what they see in their neighbourhoods.

Critically, this combination of strategic scale informed by local voices and evidence is key to embedding more preventative and early help approaches that help communities to maximise their potential and live more independently and well for longer.

Establishing a Suffolk-wide model for area committees

In delivering area committees **One Suffolk** is not starting from scratch (which would be the case were two or three new unitary authorities created). Rather, we are building on and joining up existing good practice. Integrated local delivery is already embedded in all of Suffolk's communities. There are also Suffolk-wide datasets based on local data that help pinpoint the different needs in local places and therefore, inform how best to target resources and assets. Currently, these factors combine to inform existing integrated community delivery through the Suffolk-wide network of 16 Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs).

Our ambition for **One Suffolk** will evolve the INT local delivery arrangement through the creation of Suffolk-wide area committees where councillors will convene with local residents and stakeholders, such as local VCFSE organisations and businesses – and the most local form of local government – town and parish councils, to truly strengthen **One Suffolk's** community empowerment offer. This will create genuine local delivery and decision making; it will root local government in local communities; and it will ensure that

4 79% felt a sense of belonging to their village or town, 72% to Suffolk and 63% to East Anglia – by contrast on 48% felt a sense of belonging to their district or borough

community voices are heard in strategic decisions.

One of the key advantages of using these pre-existing geographies is the rich, local data that already exists. For example, the vulnerable persons dataset, initially developed during the COVID 19 pandemic. Suffolk Office for Data Analytics (SODA) and partners put the necessary, lawful information governance in place to enable this project. SODA collated over 40 datasets from partners and added flags for each vulnerability (clinical, social, financial) to individuals based on information within the datasets. Individuals and households were matched using a combination of name, DOB and address and unique person / household IDs were created. All data was combined into one dataset, which was then anonymised for analysis.

Therefore, from the outset **One Suffolk** will be able to build on the principles within government's Plan for Neighbourhoods[5] of community empowerment and collaboration, longer-term approach and holistic outcomes. The area committees proposal ensures that local engagement and data supports the identification of local priorities which in turn drive associated actions plans and delivery. This will be key in ensuring **One Suffolk's** strategic ambition and scale is informed by and translates into what is important to local communities. In designing our approach, we will also learn from and reflect existing and mature good practice for community empowerment such as that delivered within the county unitary authority of Wiltshire and more locally the community partnerships established in East Suffolk. Together, the clarity around priorities and local connectedness will enable more effective delivery and ensure that we make a positive difference to the way that

communities experience and feel about their local area.

To be successful, **One Suffolk's** area committees do need to be adequately resourced and purposeful. Therefore, they will be empowered to determine their local priorities and action plan. A single Suffolk-wide unitary council will commit to support them in this and will seek to draw together common threads in order to complement **One Suffolk's** strategic priorities and focus on integration, empowerment, innovation and prevention.

To make the area committees a reality **One Suffolk** will:

- **Provide access to funding,** this new funding will include community grants, for example, to local facilities and VCFSE groups as well as individual place budgets allocated to each of **One Suffolk's** ward councillors. This financial autonomy reinforces the important leadership role the area committees will play, as well as enabling swift, place-based action and enhancing the convening and influencing capacity of the area committees as a whole. Together this funding will be used to address local issues, support community initiatives and respond to emerging opportunities.

- **Work through councillors' place leadership;** we will provide simpler, more accessible democracy with **One Suffolk's** councillors a conduit to all local government functions across Suffolk. In this context the area committees are able to foster their own identities and evolve over time to best fit local circumstances, as well as being a channel to feed insight and issues back to the **One Suffolk** unitary council. This direct engagement will help energise and enhance local democracy and accountability. It will provide a richer, deeper and more accessible and engaged democracy than the current two-tier system of local government.

- **Create an operational structure where each area committee works with a dedicated council officer(s),** who will provide support, coordinate and connect activity in the area and ensure access to local data and intelligence. This support will facilitate the two-way flow of information and help to create an evidence base that enables informed, targeted decision-making that reflects the specific needs and priorities of each area both locally and in terms of **One Suffolk** as a whole. Most importantly, they will help the committee to ensure that

5 See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus-and-tools/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus#eligible-local-authorities

its activity and investments have impact, and their achievements can be reviewed and evaluated.

- **Establish a model that is both standardised and adaptable.** While the structure and core functions of the partnerships will be consistent across Suffolk, each partnership will have the flexibility to operate in a way that reflects its unique context. This balance ensures efficient service delivery while remaining deeply rooted in local realities. Therefore, whilst the partnerships will have formal structure (recorded decisions, tracking of funding where relevant) they will also enable more local agencies and activities where relevant. Therefore, enabling the strategic, simpler, more efficient **One Suffolk** unitary council to encourage local activity and deliver against the ambitions of the Plan for Neighbourhoods
- **Use data and insight from local voices** to ensure that decisions are evidence-led, reflect local circumstances and connect to **One Suffolk's** ambitions for the county. It will also provide clear information for partners to

CASE STUDY

Lowestoft Healthy Hearts

Lowestoft Healthy Hearts is a two-year collaborative project led by Suffolk County Council's public health team. The project launched in 2024, bringing together the local community and partners (the VCFSE sector, NHS, district council and Health Innovation East) to tackle high blood pressure (hypertension), a leading cause of heart attacks and strokes. Input from 219 residents via "Community Voices," shaped the project interventions, delivered using a 3-pillar approach as outlined below:

- **Prevent –** a public awareness campaign encouraging people to "know their numbers", education about healthy behaviours, a dedicated Feel-Good Suffolk advisor to support residents with quitting smoking, healthy eating and exercise and the creation of "Heart Health Hubs".
- **Detect –** an innovative digital health check station located in Lowestoft Library offering free blood pressure checks in the community.
- **Protect –** supported by an innovative digital tool, Lowestoft GP practices proactively contacted patients identified to have high blood pressure and optimised their medication.

The project has so far delivered over 900 free blood pressure checks, reaching many who had not been checked in over a year. Approximately 12% were recorded as having high blood pressure. Over 865 local people have been referred to Feel Good Suffolk for weight management courses, stop-smoking services and exercise groups. Moreover, local GP surgeries have identified over 2,500 patients with uncontrolled blood pressure and over 1,700 of these patients now have their blood pressure under control. The Lowestoft Healthy Hearts project will continue through 2025, with an independent evaluation underway to capture lessons and long-term impacts. Its early successes are already influencing how we design health services and demonstrates the Council's commitment to improving health and reducing inequalities.

collaborate and better target their resources to meet local need and prevent more complex demand on public services.

Revitalised relationships with Suffolk's town and parish council network

Alongside the creation of area committees, we also commit to strengthening and extending our extensive town and parish council network.

Suffolk is currently home to a network of 372 town and parish councils[6], alongside 56[7] parish meetings in smaller communities. These local bodies form a vital part of Suffolk's democratic fabric, giving residents a voice, shaping local priorities and driving grassroots action. Run by dedicated volunteers, they are the foundation of community accountability, ensuring that local views are not only heard but acted upon by principal authorities. However, too often, town and parish councils have been treated like members of the public, given the same reporting tools and generic responses, rather than being recognised and respected for the vital work they do. That must change.

Looking ahead, Suffolk's future governance model will build on the foundation of town and parish councils, while also recognising their diversity. Some have well-established capabilities, while others are still developing their potential. **One Suffolk** will work in genuine partnership with all of them through the 16 area committees, offering support where needed and empowering those ready to take on more responsibility. It will be important to foster a culture of genuine partnership built on mutual respect, open communication and practical collaboration. Whether through digital tools like parish portals, through **One Suffolk's** councillors, or as part of an area committee, our goal is clear: to ensure every community not only has a voice but the means and confidence to act on it.

Following widespread engagement and feedback from Suffolk's town and parish councils, it is clear that there are varied levels of ambition and appetite for additional responsibilities.

Reflecting this, **One Suffolk** will work in partnership with these groups to establish a tailored approach that reflects local desires and can flex to local circumstances. This will not be distant, paternalistic and imposed, nor will it be ad hoc and infrequent. Rather, it will be grounded on a bespoke offer for powers and support that builds on good practice and lessons learnt from elsewhere and reflects the distinct ambitions of Suffolk's many and varied communities. This will include:

- **A partnership charter:** A formal agreement between the **One Suffolk** and the town or parish council, affirming their importance and committing to give due consideration to their views when making local decisions
- **Bespoke training:** Courses for councillors and clerks covering topics such as AI, data security, and safeguarding
- **Technical support:** Assistance with website development and design, helping to standardise how information is shared with the public, providing engagement opportunities with officers (for example basing planning officers in libraries to facilitate easier discussions)
- **Financial oversight:** Guidance on identifying and applying for grants and funding opportunities
- **Direct access:** A dedicated phone line and email address for clerks and councillors to reach the support team for advice and guidance
- **Officer attendance:** The ability to formally request council officers to attend meetings as desired
- **Shared services access:** Use of approved **One Suffolk** commercial providers – giving town and parish councils access to favourable rates on printing, catering, IT procurement and more

Through listening to our existing parish and town councils we have heard strong concerns about:

- the potential loss of local representation and knowledge due to fewer councillors;
- fears that rural voices could be overshadowed by urban priorities;
- challenges with communication and in particular frustrations over poor contact with county and district councils and a desire for more direct, face-to-face engagement;
- criticism of the planning system as bureaucratic and unresponsive, with parish councils feeling their input is often ignored; and
- a sense that many parish councils, especially smaller ones, feel under-resourced and a worry that LGR will increase their responsibilities without adequate support.
- Alongside these concerns we have also heard worries around how savings would be used, the fairness of Council Tax harmonisation, scepticism around potential benefits and worries around the centralisation of services and the loss of local access.

6 https://www.salc.org.uk/about-us
7 https://www.salc.org.uk/about-us

Each of these issues have influenced and shaped our approach not just to empowerment but to the case for **One Suffolk** and the future model we will create for local government in Suffolk. They are at the heart of our new model for places (see above), our approach to democratic representation (see below) and our approach to service delivery particularly how town and parish councils will input into and be involved in the planning process (see next sub-section on Creating stronger, safer and more integrated public services).

For many, alongside the concerns, we also heard excitement about and a desire for greater influence and structured involvement in shaping the new system. In response to input from the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) – who represent 97% of Suffolk's town and parish councils – we have developed a list of services and assets that could be devolved to those town and parish councils that are interested and have the capability, capacity and resources to deliver. This list is not definitive. It is based on existing good practice in other county unitary authorities such as Somerset and provides a model for further testing and developing between the new unitary council and its town and parish councils. It should be noted that this will be a voluntary arrangement, and **One Suffolk** will carry out thorough due diligence and ensure that there are adequate tests of competency and appropriate safeguards in place before transferring any assets or responsibilities. We will enable town and parish councils to adapt to best fit to local circumstances. It is also something we see developing and evolving over time, particularly as the proposed area committees are established and embedded.

Revitalised relationships with Suffolk's town and parish councils network

Assets	Services
• Cemeteries and church yards • Memorials • Crematoria • Community centres • Public toilets • Local parks • Open spaces • Sports grounds • Swimming pools • Leisure and arts centres • Play areas • Roadside verges and other small open spaces	• Minor highways functions and public rights of way (e.g. speed limits, gritting) • Development control functions, • Soft estate (e.g. grass cutting and weeds) • Fly-tipping clearance • Street cleaning • Community transport • Community safety • Neighbourhood watch • Footpath lighting • Community grants • Isolation/volunteering/befriending initiatives • Partnering in local tourism initiatives • Partnering in local climate change initiatives • Street naming • Licensing (e.g. event notices, street trading)

Ipswich – A strong county town thriving within an ambitious new unitary council

One of England's oldest towns, Ipswich has a rich culture and heritage. With a population of 139,378[8] it is Suffolk's largest population centre and also one of its most diverse. Known as East Anglia's waterfront town, the town boasts a modern waterfront marina surrounded by high-rise apartments alongside the Suffolk University Campus. Home of nationally recognised yacht builders Spirit Yachts, the marina is the food and drink centre of the town, hosting many waterfront bars, cafés and restaurants.

Ipswich boasts a rich culture and heritage offer including the UK's most significant collection of Constable and Gainsborough paintings and drawings outside of London. It also has a vibrant arts scene with DanceEast regularly hosting some of the UK's best dance companies and the New Wolsey, Regent Theatres and the Corn Exchange as venues for drama, comedians, singers and drawing in national touring shows. Ipswich's cultural heartbeat also includes Ipswich Town Football Club, a source of deep local pride and the newly designated Anglican Minster at St Mary Le Tower reflecting is sporting and spiritual heritage.

Ipswich hosts sectors such as finance, technology and creative industries as well as being the UK's leading grain export port. The Port of Ipswich plays a vital role in the national economy, handling over 1 million tonnes of cargo annually as well as grain, includes fertiliser, cement and aggregates. Many residents also work beyond the town, particularly at the Port of Felixstowe, BT's Adastral Park and more recently supporting the construction of the new Sizewell C development. Well connected with good links to London particularly by rail and the A14 growth corridor, it is an economic anchor within Suffolk's £21 billion economy[9].

Despite its size and significance, Ipswich remains unparished – a stark contrast to the rest of Suffolk, where towns and villages benefit from local town or parish councils. This democratic gap widened further with the 2024 removal of borough council area committees, which had previously facilitated dialogue between councillors, residents, businesses and community groups. These were replaced by a new Community Engagement Strategy.

However, **One Suffolk's** community empowerment model would invest in more effective, representative, accessible and engaging ways for communities to influence decisions over local priorities and help make a difference to their areas. These will be flexible, informed by local data and insight and benefit from the scale of resource that only a Suffolk-wide unitary council offers. This includes two area committees, involving local councillors, residents and stakeholders. Flexible in membership, these could include local businesses and VCFSE organisations, as well as other anchor institutions such as the Football Club, University and theatres.

Whilst an economic anchor, evidence also shows that 12 of the 22 areas in the 10% most deprived areas of England are in Ipswich[10]. Therefore, the area committees will enable all communities to identify priorities and actions that will make a difference locally as well as being connected to and influencing **One Suffolk**, the countywide unitary council to be an advocate and champion for the town. This will be reflected in **One Suffolk's** own decision making and action as well as the Suffolk and Norfolk Strategic Authority, through the council's constituent membership.

In addition to introducing the area committees, under **One Suffolk**, a town council for Ipswich would be proposed. This will provide opportunities to explore taking responsibility for assets that are of particular local significance. As well as providing local representation and voice enjoyed by the rest of Suffolk, a town council would also ensure retention of Ipswich's historic identity and civic heritage, which includes a royal charter granted in 1200. Therefore, an important element of this new town council will relate to the civic duties of the mayor (a role that has existed since 1836). **One Suffolk** will ensure that all the civic duties are transitioned appropriately and that the distinct civic character is retained. This will see the mayor of Ipswich, continuing to serve as a civic ambassador, representing the town at official events, promoting its identity and heritage, and fostering community pride. It will also help form a suitable platform to work with the new unitary council in preparing a bid for city status.

8 Suffolk Observatory: Population - LTLA | Ipswich | Report Builder for ArcGIS (source: ONS population estimates 2024

9 Suffolk Economic Strategy 2024
10 NOMIS June 2023; Public Health Suffolk analysis

Democratic model

Finally, we will ensure that the new unitary council has a clear democratic structure that makes it easy for residents to identify who is accountable for service performance and confidence in the council's ability to deliver. This will include robust scrutiny arrangements. As a new unitary council, **One Suffolk** offers the opportunity to simplify and improve accessibility of local democracy. For instance – and at its simplest – holding committee meetings in various geographic locations across Suffolk.

In line with guidance from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), the new council needs to ensure an appropriate number of elected members to provide effective strategic leadership, democratic accountability and strong community representation.

Suffolk currently has 303 elected councillors, excluding town and parish councillors (based on the recent boundary review of the County Council that implements 70 county councillors), representing over 200 wards and divisions of varying geographic sizes. These councillors collectively serve on more than 70 council committees and sub-committees, many of which perform similar functions across different parts of the county. The creation of **One Suffolk** presents an opportunity to reduce duplication and establish clear lines of accountability. As well as a simpler, more accountable governance structure, **One Suffolk** would have communities embedded in its ways of working through the area committee model described earlier. As part of the governance model for one unitary council it is proposed that it would comprise up to 140 councillors. This size would:

- Mean that the democratic governance of **One Suffolk** reflects Boundary Commission advice on capacity for caseload, representation and decision making.
- Create a single cohort of councillors, accountable for all local government functions across Suffolk, supporting strategic leadership and efficient use of democratic resources.
- Ensure effective governance by consolidating the number of councillors and committees, streamlining decision-making.
- Mitigate any democratic deficit from streamlining the number of councillors across the county.
- Enable councillors to focus on their community leadership and representative roles, supporting the development of area committees.
- Offer sufficient capacity for councillors to balance the demands of participating in formal governance (committee meetings) including those of the MSA as relevant, respond to casework representing local constituents and contribute to accountability, scrutiny and partnerships.
- Strengthen collaboration with town and parish councils, local partners and residents to enhance community leadership and enable further devolution where appropriate.
- Deliver savings through reducing the number of councillors, thereby lowering overall spend on members' allowances and contributing to a more cost-effective governance model.
- Provide all councillors with an opportunity to represent and connect with their communities as well as influence, scrutinise and decide on key services making a positive difference in a way that is sustainable and considers councillors' capacity.
- Ensure sufficient democratic input and capacity for the transition (e.g. establishment of the shadow authority) and early foundation phases associated with new unitary local government.

Wards will continue to reflect the distinct geographic and community characteristics of Suffolk from its rural, coastal, market town and urban communities and the local assets within them (e.g. schools, libraries, leisure centres). Some areas are geographically larger or more densely populated than others, and these differences must be considered to ensure strong local representation and manageable workloads for councillors taking things like travel into consideration. Tailoring services to the unique needs of each ward will improve service efficiency and support broader public sector reform. We expect each councillor would represent approximately 4,227 residents, supporting a balanced and manageable workload. This is comparable with other county unitary councils such as Buckinghamshire (4,568) when it was established as a unitary council and Somerset (4,653). This would ensure that local voices are heard and reflected in decision-making at both strategic and community levels, including through the area committees within **One Suffolk's** geography. To ensure simplicity and accessibility we propose that these are decided on the principle of one council.

The council will adopt clear democratic structures that make it easy for residents to identify who is accountable for service performance. Transparency will be key to building trust in local democracy and confidence in the council's ability to deliver. As a new county unitary, it will be important that **One Suffolk** has a clear and appropriate committee structure, given the range of services it will be responsible for, including planning, regulatory (e.g., licensing), social care and housing. Robust scrutiny arrangements will be in place to hold decision-makers to account and ensure services are focused on the right outcomes for residents, while maximising value for money. It will also ensure that Suffolk is well represented in the Suffolk and Norfolk MSA and that the mayor and MSA are well connected to its Suffolk communities.

As a modern new unitary council, **One Suffolk** offers the opportunity to simplify and improve accessibility of local democracy. Moreover, it enables the creation of integrated decision-making structures that maximise the opportunities for more coherent scrutiny and delivery of the Council's services. For example, bringing together decisions on housing and young people or licensing and community safety. It also combines strategic democratic oversight and decision-making with local knowledge and representation.

One Suffolk's community empowerment approach at a glance

Approach	Its unique functions	How it will work
Area committees	• Dedicated funding • Dedicated officer support • Enhances councillors convening powers • Connects the council's strategy and local impact/need and voice • Purposeful with resource to make positive difference in communities	• Councillor led • Local data packs for evidence-based actions • Flexible membership to reflect local communities (may include town and parish councils, community-based staff e.g., from NHS, community policing, neighbourhood boards) • Locally determined action within council's strategic priorities • Ability to offer grant funding for local activity
Town & parish councils	• Elected councillors • Ability to raise a precept on Council Tax • Most local level of local government • Able to take on direct delivery of some services	• Devolved delivery of some services where appropriate • Democratic with connection to the new single unitary council's councillors. • Simpler, faster access to the single unitary council for Suffolk. • Local representation
Renewed democratic decision making	• Streamlined committee structures • One set of councillors connected to the single countywide unitary authority for all local government functions • A Council that is simpler to understand and access • Easier to hold to account (one council, one front door)	• An appropriate number of councillors that encourage democracy but reduce duplication and waste • A constituent member of the Mayoral Strategic Authority, connecting Suffolk's communities to the strategic devolved authority • Locality budgets for councillors to directly support community action.

Smarter.

One Suffolk's model for empowerment seeks to implement and maximise the value of cutting-edge technologies such as AI and Machine Learning to blend data and insight gathered from local voices. This will ensure that decisions, both Suffolk-wide and locally, are evidence-led, reflect local circumstances and are aligned with the strategic priorities of the council.

Importantly this evidence can be used in the new unitary council's engagement with the mayor and other partners including the NHS, police, fire and the VCFSE sector to enable the new unitary council to collaborate and better target the combined resources across Suffolk to meet local needs and prevent more complex demand on public services.

Simpler.

By evolving existing local delivery arrangements into Suffolk-wide area committees we will make it easier and simpler to support community empowerment from day 1 – rooting local government in local communities and ensuring that community voices are heard in strategic decisions.

Through evolving pre-existing arrangements, it makes it easier for partners and stakeholders to engage and maximises the benefit of the rich, local data that already exists.

Our area committees align with our town and parish council boundaries ensuring alignment and coordination and removing any confusion with overlapping boundaries and jurisdictions.

Better.

One Suffolk will deliver change in community engagement and empowerment in two core ways:

- Enhancing relationships and making engagement with the council better. Responding directly to concerns that have been raised through our extensive engagement we will create a new operational structure with officers dedicated to each area to provide support, coordinate and connect activity in the area and ensure access to local data and intelligence.
- Providing funding that can be used to address local issues, support community initiatives and respond to emerging opportunities.

Creating stronger, safer and more integrated public services

The creation of a unitary council in Suffolk provides a unique opportunity to change local government by addressing the duplication, bureaucracy, inefficiency and ultimately confusion created by a two-tier structure. But this is not merely about redrawing boundaries – it is a chance to deliver better public services through more coherent, capable and resilient delivery platforms. Central to this ambition is the concept of 'migrating to the most competent platform' – to really maximise the opportunities created by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and importantly minimise, and in some cases remove, the risks of this change, a single unitary council for Suffolk is the optimal solution.

By bringing local government services together in a single council we can enhance and strengthen the delivery of a range of critical services including social care, SEND, housing, public health and leisure, trading standards, the natural and historic environment, flooding and coastal erosion plus waste. While, importantly, avoiding the substantial risk of complex and costly disaggregation of county-wide services such as social care, SEND and highways. By avoiding the unnecessary splitting of services, **One Suffolk** is better able to protect and support those in our society and across rural, urban and coastal communities who most need support and often have the quietest voice.

Today, services across Suffolk are delivered by multiple authorities with differing levels of resource, capability, maturity and resilience. In some areas, excellence already exists and can be scaled. In others, fragmentation has led to duplication, confusion for residents and avoidable costs. LGR gives Suffolk the opportunity to make deliberate choices about where each service should sit in the future system and how it can be improved through integration, redesign or local empowerment, ultimately leading to improved outcomes and experiences for Suffolk's residents.
Our change typologies provide a framework for understanding the different journeys services will need to be taken in order to deliver stronger, safer and more integrated services:

Figure 05: Change typologies

Change Type	Description
Strengthen & optimise	Where a service already operates with high capability, strategic reach and system leadership, the task is to retain core strengths and optimise and improve delivery.
Integrate & scale	Where multiple fragmented service models exist, integration is needed to remove duplication, resolve inefficiencies and improve user experience.
Join-Up & Align	Where services are closely linked in terms of outcomes but structurally or culturally disconnected, they must be realigned for joined-up delivery.
Tailor & Enable	Where services are place-based and thrive through local responsiveness and identity, change should empower local leadership within a shared framework.
Standardise & Localise	Create a consistent framework or platform (e.g. digital or process) while retaining local responsiveness and access points.

The remainder of this section looks at both the opportunities for integration and the risks of disaggregation for a number of services and in doing so shows how **One Suffolk** will create stronger, safer and more integrated public services.

Strengthen & optimise

Suffolk County Council already delivers a range of critical services – including social care, public health, education, highways and trading standards – on a Suffolk-wide basis, with established infrastructure, strategic leadership and proven capability. Under the **One Suffolk** model, these services will be strengthened and optimised to ensure safe, stable and uninterrupted delivery to residents.

Because these services are already delivered at scale and operate from a competent and mature platform, they do not require disaggregation or integration as part of the reorganisation. This continuity will enable the new unitary to maintain momentum on existing continuous improvement journeys, both in the lead-up to and following vesting day.

The following sections illustrate this typology through key service examples in adults, children's services, highways and community resilience – highlighting how continuity supports both stability as well as optimisation and innovation.

Adult social care

Adult Social Care (ASC) in Suffolk is already delivered at scale through a mature, Suffolk-wide system with strong leadership, integrated infrastructure and a clear improvement trajectory. Suffolk was part of the pilot CQC local authority assurance regime and found to be "good". Its matrix model of locality-based working through our Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INT) combines the resilience of a large system with the responsiveness of local delivery. Under a single Suffolk unitary, this system can be preserved and optimised – ensuring continuity, stability and the ability to innovate without disruption – ultimately ensuring that residents are better protected and cared for. Fragmenting services across two or three councils would introduce unnecessary complexity, reduce efficiency and resilience and risk undermining the quality and consistency of care as well as the improvement work already underway. Adult Social Care should not be viewed in isolation from our NHS partners, who operate in three place-based community alliances: West Suffolk, Ipswich and East, and Waveney and Great Yarmouth. The three-council model does not align to this NHS place footprint. This would introduce inefficiency into the health system in Suffolk and destabilise the INT development at a time when national policy promotes acceleration of neighbourhood health delivery.

CASE STUDY

Customer first

The current Customer First model exemplifies the benefits of a unified approach. Handling over 10,000 contacts each month, it provides a 24/7 front door to ASC and children and young people services, resolving nearly half of all enquiries at first contact. This reduces pressure on specialist teams and ensures residents are connected to the right support quickly and reliably. Disaggregating this service would confuse access points, duplicate systems and compromise statutory compliance. A single unitary preserves seamless access and ensures equitable support for all residents, regardless of location throughout Suffolk.

The Suffolk-wide commissioning model demonstrates the value of scale. Strategic oversight of large and niche contracts enables efficient market shaping and cost-effective service delivery. Splitting this function would reduce expertise and purchasing power, create inconsistent pricing and increase administrative burdens for providers. In a limited care market, two or three councils competing for the same providers[11] would drive up costs and distort availability – particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas. The Department of Health and Social Care highlights market shaping as essential to sustaining a vibrant and resilient care sector[12] - a single Suffolk unitary maintains the coherence and strategic influence necessary to sustain a stable and responsive care market.

It is unrealistic to assume that smaller authorities can engage more easily with local providers offering lower rates than national organisations. In practice, new capacity cannot be created overnight and relying on overstretched[13] and under-resourced[14] [15] local markets – such as the current shortage of appropriate residential care for younger working-age adults and those with complex needs, particularly outside Ipswich and East Suffolk – is not a sustainable solution.

Moreover, the Suffolk Care Association operates Suffolk-wide. A three-unitary model would require either the creation of separate associations to represent providers – introducing inconsistency, particularly for those operating across boundaries – or maintaining a single association, which could lead to competition and conflicting priorities between authorities. This fragmentation risks

11 Evidence shows that loss of expertise can mean smaller LAs find it harder to carry out their commissioning roles, 'Adult Social Care Local Authority Commissioning Behaviours' 2017, University of York & The King's Fund
12 Adult social care market shaping guidance 2024, DHSC
13 Suffolk County Council's Care Market Strategy 2025–2030 acknowledges rising demand, increasing complexity of and financial pressures as key challenges to market sustainability
14 Skills for care 2023/24, staff vacancy rates
15 Skills for care 2023/24, skill level of market

undermining the coherence and effectiveness of provider representation and service delivery.

Smaller authorities are more likely to struggle to maintain very specialist or high-cost services[16], leading to increased mismatches between local demand and available supply and cross-boundary placements. Services such as Home First (reablement), Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Safeguarding & Quality Assurance rely on centralised expertise and infrastructure. Splitting these functions would dilute capability, complicate statutory responsibilities and increase risk. A single authority ensures consistency, safety and resilience – avoiding a postcode lottery in service access, supporting better outcomes and more efficient care coordination.

One Suffolk would build on a foundation of established relationships, such as the collaborative work between Suffolk and Norfolk on strategic authority ambitions, and the strong partnerships already in place with NHS colleagues, education, the voluntary sector and the police among others. This continuity provides a stable platform for integrated service delivery and strategic alignment across sectors.

Integration with NHS partners is a critical strength of Suffolk's ASC system. Locality teams are embedded within INTs and hospital discharge hubs, supported by joint commissioning and shared governance. Fragmentation would disrupt these relationships, reduce data sharing and weaken alignment with the NHS Integrated Care Board. A single council preserves joined-up, whole-system care – essential for managing rising demand and delivering transformation.

A unified structure also strengthens collaboration across agencies such as police, education and housing. It supports consistent delivery of shared priorities like safeguarding adults, prevention, early intervention and community wellbeing. Suffolk has a Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which joins up the approach to considering safeguarding referrals from across the county. Doing this once and at scale ensures that partners are able to commit resources to consider enquiries and ensure appropriate action is taken to mitigate the risks to vulnerable adults. The Suffolk MASH ensures consistent customer experience regarding safeguarding regardless of where the resident lives in the county. Opportunities for innovation in a single unitary authority include closer

CASE STUDY

An opportunity to further integrate Social Care and Public Health with Housing in Suffolk

In Suffolk, the opportunity to align housing, social care and public health under a single unitary authority presents a transformative model for delivering more responsive, person-centred support, better use of resources and improved outcomes for individuals and communities alike. These services are deeply interconnected, particularly when supporting older residents and individuals with complex needs, where housing stability, health outcomes and care provision are mutually reinforcing.

One Suffolk can:

- coordinate services more effectively, reducing duplication and enabling faster, more responsive interventions
- design housing solutions that are tailored to care needs, such as supported living schemes, extra care housing and adaptations for accessibility
- integrate public health initiatives with care planning, promoting preventative approaches that reduce long-term demand on services.
- improve resource allocation, ensuring these are directed where they have the greatest impact
- enhance outcomes for individuals and communities, through joined-up assessments, shared data and collaborative working across sectors

For example, a resident with early-stage dementia living in unsuitable housing may currently face delays in accessing support due to fragmented service pathways. Under a single unitary model, housing officers, social workers and public health teams can work together from the outset, enabling timely relocation to a safer environment, proactive health monitoring and tailored care planning – all within a single governance framework.

This approach not only improves individual wellbeing but also contributes to system-wide sustainability, reducing hospital admissions, care home placements and emergency interventions.

16 As part of wider analysis the District Council Network (DCN) acknowledges that scale provides benefits when it comes to capital-intensive or highly specialised services; 'The Power of Prevention and Place', DCN & IMPOWER 2025

integration between the wider determinants of health including housing, leisure services, public health and local communities as well as a more joined-up approach to planning and infrastructure. A single Suffolk council provides clear, accountable leadership across the system – improving the ability to manage population health and wellbeing. Being able to embed digital care functionality through the Cassius platform into homes, in a consistent way will continue to deliver better outcomes for less.

Structural fragmentation creates barriers for statutory partners such as the police and ICBs, who may lack the capacity to engage with multiple smaller authorities. This raises risks around safeguarding, continuity of shared casework and strategic commissioning. For residents, it can lead to confusion, inconsistent pathways and delays in support, particularly for those undergoing service transitions or statutory assessments. Fragmenting the approach to safeguarding would create uncertainty and potentially worse outcomes for residents. For example, where NHS provider organisations are not coterminous with a local authority footprint the effectiveness of partnership working will be less effective with potentially different referral routes and operational pathways. Where people move across unitary authority boundaries, there could be a requirement to transfer safeguarding activity or lead responsibility to a new safeguarding team. Creating more boundaries where they do not exist, increases the risk of residents falling in between authority service delivery. A single unitary council ensures clarity, consistency and accountability.

A unified model supports workforce sustainability by avoiding duplication of specialist and leadership roles, which would stretch an already limited pool of professionals and increase reliance on costly interim and agency staff. Financially, it enables flexible budget management, coordinated responses to care inflation and efficient use of resources. Legacy funding arrangements are often difficult to unpick and attempts to redistribute resources can generate unintended disparities across local areas. Two or three authorities would increase costs through duplication and have limited ability to offset overspends across localities. Divergent budget strategies between different councils with differing demands – as would likely occur in Suffolk – could further destabilise the care market and reduce service quality. Over time, smaller authorities, with limited ability to raise local revenue relative to demand, may lack the fiscal flexibility to absorb shocks, invest in innovation, or maintain specialist and preventative services. This weakens long-term resilience and risks a shift toward more reactive, cost-intensive models. A single council, therefore, offers long-term financial sustainability, protects frontline services and supports a more resilient and future-ready care system.

Looking ahead, demographic data clearly shows that rising demand and mounting service pressures will be among the most significant challenges facing Suffolk. The future transformation of Adult Social Care will increasingly rely on innovations in data and technology – enabling services to better anticipate need, personalise support and promote independence. Fragmenting the system across two or three authorities would split data, introduce inconsistent governance and risk delaying or even blocking progress. Suffolk has a reputation of good transformation and is already making positive progress in this space – now is not the time to disrupt that momentum. A single **One Suffolk** unitary council provides the stable foundation needed to accelerate sustainable, system-wide transformation in adult social care, unlocking wider public sector reform and delivering better outcomes for local people. For a more detailed and granular analysis of the risks we have identified in relation to splitting social care into two or three councils please see Appendix four and five.

CASE STUDY

Cassius

Suffolk County Council launched its multi-award winning county-wide digital assistive technology service Cassius back in 2021, with the likes of remote sensors, communication devices and falls aids receiving high levels of satisfaction from residents and delivering significant savings for the local authority.

With over 12,000 digital care support items ordered to date, the authority has saved £29.4 million since rolling out the technology, via reduced planned growth in its social care budget. In addition, Cassius has resulted in a reduction of 180,000 care hours per year, 1.5 million hospital days saved and 463 people living at home with the technology rather than in residential care.

This has been done by installing technology such as room sensors to track activity, smart speakers for reminders, video phones to enable calls with care workers (instead of them visiting homes) and wearables to help people go out and access support if they require it. With 19.6% of those receiving adult social care in Suffolk now supported with a Cassius device, the council says it has enabled people to live more independent yet connected lives.

Children and young people services

Children and Young People (CYP) services are already delivered at scale through a Suffolk-wide system with shared infrastructure and significant recent investment in transformation. Like adult social care, CYP services are supported by a matrix model of locality-based working – combining community-focused delivery with the strategic resilience, consistent standards and clear accountability required to protect and improve outcomes for children and young people. It enables Suffolk to build on its strengths, maintain momentum and continue tackling areas for improvement without the disruption of competing priorities, cost, or complexity of structural change.

One of Suffolk's key advantages – only possible to retain under a single unitary – is its ability to operate strategically at scale. This ensures children and families can access the right services wherever they live. It underpins a system designed to de-escalate need early – improving outcomes and reducing long-term costs. In contrast, fragmentation would duplicate effort, increase financial pressure and undermine early help and preventative work. At a time when national policy is focused on integration and early intervention, Suffolk's model is more than administratively efficient – it is a strategic asset. It aligns with the Department for Education's vision for resilient, joined-up services and strong multi-agency leadership.

CASE STUDY

One authority, one vision: Suffolk's model for effective school infrastructure and place planning

A single council structure brings clear strategic advantages for Suffolk's education system. A single unitary authority enables Suffolk to deliver school infrastructure and place planning that is strategic, equitable and efficient. With unified oversight, the county can manage admissions, school transport, school places and infrastructure holistically – reflecting how families choose schools based on individual needs, not administrative boundaries.

The model supports consistent, seamless engagement with Multi-Academy Trusts, Single Academy Trusts and maintained schools, and provides a single point of coordination for Department for Education engagement – especially important as legislative changes require academy trusts to work more closely with local authorities. Suffolk has already undertaken significant co-production and strategic planning, including a recent JSNA and a Suffolk-wide Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) sufficiency review to support capital investment and meet emerging needs. Continuing this work under one council ensures progress is not lost or delayed.

The additional benefits of a single unitary authority – building on Suffolk's existing strategic planning – are clear in infrastructure investment. Under the current two-tier system, education teams must bid for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds held by district councils. A single unitary authority would streamline this process, enabling faster and more targeted investment in school buildings and growth areas, whilst retaining the same effectiveness of strategic planning at scale.
SEND provision currently benefits from the scale and consistency offered by a single system. These services are complex and costly to duplicate. A unitary authority ensures consistent access and avoids fragmentation, especially for vulnerable children who need timely support.

Beyond education-specific services, a single authority reduces duplication of roles and responsibilities, aligns services more effectively and facilitates better data sharing across education, health and social care. This alignment strengthens decision-making, supports early intervention and ensures children and families receive joined-up, responsive support. In contrast, splitting Suffolk into multiple authorities would introduce administrative complexity, increase costs and risk deepening inequities – particularly for disadvantaged families less able to navigate a fragmented system. A single authority provides clarity, consistency and fairness across the board.

Suffolk's current model works well across a number of areas and services. A single unitary authority would make it even stronger – delivering better outcomes for children, families and communities.

Managing home-to-school transport within **One Suffolk** also offers significant advantages. Due to the geographically diverse nature of Suffolk, many children rely on home-to-school transport, including taxis, to travel. Fragmenting responsibilities across two or three unitary authorities would increase the likelihood of transport routes crossing administrative boundaries, complicating coordination and driving up costs. In contrast, a Suffolk-wide approach allows for the creation of a single, cohesive market, substantially reducing the number of pupils affected by boundary issues. This enables genuine competition among providers – rather than competition between two or three separate unitary councils – resulting in better value for money and improved service quality. A unified system also supports more efficient route planning, economies of scale and strategic commissioning, ultimately delivering a more equitable, cost-effective and responsive transport service for families and the council alike.

The “One Front Door” approach already demonstrates the strength of a unified 24/7 access point for children and young people services. As outlined in the Customer First case study (see section on adult social care) it ensures consistent triage, streamlines referrals to reduce pressure on specialist teams and ensures young people and families are connected to the right support quickly. Where required it also enables consistent multi-agency safeguarding responses from the moment a concern is raised. Fragmenting this approach into two or more separate front doors – each with its own access routes and processes – would duplicate systems, create confusion for both service users and partners, and risk delays, missed safeguarding and non-compliance with statutory duties. It would also place additional strain on already stretched frontline services. For partners, such as the Police and NHS, multiple front doors create a new challenge - evidence from elsewhere in the country has highlighted this with partner agencies refusing to be present at the different front doors due to limited resources. A single unitary council preserves seamless access and ensures equitable support for all residents, regardless of location throughout Suffolk.

Corporate parenting is one of the most demanding and resource-intensive responsibilities within CYP services. It requires strong governance, specialist oversight and a coherent, Suffolk-wide approach to care planning and commissioning. Splitting corporate parenting across two or three councils would fragment decision-making, dilute accountability and create inconsistent experiences for looked-after children. As with commissioning in adult social care, scale matters. Fragmentation would erode Suffolk’s strategic leverage and purchasing power – critical when complex placements can exceed £1 million per year. Additionally, operating across two or three unitary authorities would not only increase costs through duplication but also reduce the ability to pool risk. This means the financial impact of high-cost placements would be felt more sharply in smaller areas, undermining resilience. A single council retains the capability to commission effectively and consistently protects the most vulnerable.

Fragmenting CYP services would introduce substantial risk – particularly in safeguarding, early help, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and mental health pathways. Dispersing governance and delivery across two or three councils would weaken triage systems, delay interventions and reduce the quality and consistency of support for vulnerable children and families. High-risk areas such as child protection, SEND and mental health require specialist and consistent responses. Fragmentation would lead to diluted accountability, disrupted care planning and a postcode lottery in service quality and access. It could also lead to the loss or dilution of specialist teams delivering crisis or complex support – placing additional strain on an already stretched workforce. This is especially concerning in the context of rising demand and complexity at Suffolk’s front door. **One Suffolk** provides the strategic and stable framework needed to ensure seamless safeguarding, clear thresholds and equitable access across the county. It preserves the integrity of specialist pathways and avoids destabilising critical services at a time when resilience is essential.

Suffolk's 'Every Child Suffolk' vision spans social care, education, health, wellbeing and safeguarding. It is grounded in strong partnerships and a single council with clear accountability and direct influence over delivery. Children and young people do not experience services through administrative boundaries – a simplified structure helps ensure their needs are met without artificial division.

Meeting the diverse needs of Suffolk's children and young people requires an imaginative, joined-up approach across the public sector. This includes strong links with housing, early years settings, schools, further education, health, leisure and employers. A single council can coordinate these services to support education, socialisation and employment – ensuring young people thrive in all aspects of life and avoid the current postcode lottery.

CASE STUDY

Families First in Suffolk: a unified approach to national reform

Children and families do not experience their lives in silos. They move across schools, services and communities – and need care systems that are coherent, predictable and well-coordinated.

Suffolk is already taking action to embed national reforms in children's services through the Families First model, which deepens integration of family partnership working. This relies on a single assessment framework, consistent case management and multi-agency collaboration. The foundations to embed these approaches are well underway through an integrated front door, family help model and family hubs programme.

Suffolk has committed to co-designing its model with staff, partners and the families it serves. With £205 million allocated locally – including a £2.2 million uplift in 2025/26 – the county is investing in reforms that reflect local needs and empower communities. This inclusive approach ensures that transformation is not imposed from the top down but built collaboratively with those who know the challenges and strengths of Suffolk best.

Fragmentation would jeopardise this progress by undermining consistency, disrupting established partner relationships (including Police and the NHS) and forcing transformation to be repeated under separate new governance structures.

At a pivotal moment in national reform, the Suffolk-wide model is more than administrative convenience – it is a strategic asset. One Suffolk aligns with the Department for Education's vision for integrated, resilient services and strong multi-agency leadership. Fragmentation has the potential to introduce competing priorities and uneven service quality, undermining national reform at a local level. A single unitary authority offers Suffolk the best chance to deliver the Families First vision: keeping children safe and helping families thrive.

Connectivity and accessibility across this network are especially critical to improving outcomes and social mobility. Ultimately families benefit from a more responsive and tailored system that brings together housing, jobs and care – supporting holistic and equitable outcomes throughout Suffolk. A single unitary council also enables a coherent, Suffolk-wide approach to growing local skills and opportunities. It allows economic development, education and workforce strategies to align, supporting young people – particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds – to raise their aspirations and access meaningful training and employment opportunities.

A larger unified council also enables the continued development of a 'single view of the child' – bringing together multi-agency data to provide a timely and complete picture of each child's circumstances. This is especially vital for vulnerable children and learners, where timely, informed decisions can prevent harm and improve outcomes. Integrating data across social care, education, health and police, supporting early intervention and enabling more accurate and faster responses to safeguarding concerns and better outcomes overall. This level of coordination becomes significantly harder – and often unworkable – when partners must engage with two or three councils, duplicate relationships and navigate different access protocols to vital information.

Suffolk's children and young people services are committed to improving the care experience and expanding accommodation options for care leavers through strategic planning, reducing homelessness and increasing access to stable housing. However, delivery is currently constrained by the division of responsibilities between councils for care and housing/homelessness services and further complicated by the presence of multiple separate housing authorities across the county.

A single unitary - **One Suffolk** would remove these barriers, enabling a consistent and joined-up approach to housing for care leavers. It would introduce a Suffolk-wide policy and standardised allocation framework for vulnerable young people, replacing fragmented housing registers with one unified system. This would simplify access, prioritise care leavers across Suffolk, and strengthen strategic oversight of applications and sufficiency planning. A unified authority would also support better data integration and monitoring, enabling more targeted support and effective homelessness prevention. It would streamline decision-making around underused or vacant assets, reducing instability and expanding options for supported and independent living to aid transitions into adulthood. Care leavers often face challenges in health, education and housing, and are disproportionately affected by homelessness and mental health issues. **One Suffolk**'s consistent, Suffolk-wide approach offers the best opportunity to improve outcomes and life chances for looked-after young people across Suffolk.

Structural fragmentation would also create significant barriers for key statutory partners – particularly Police, the NHS and the VCFSE sector – who may not have the capacity to engage effectively with two or three new councils. In some areas, limited resources have already led to reduced or withdrawn participation in multi-agency forums, directly affecting the quality and timeliness of practice. The consequences include increased safeguarding risk, disrupted casework and weakened strategic commissioning. These effects would be felt most by the most vulnerable and would undermine the integrated, preventative approach that Suffolk is working hard to embed.

Delivering high-quality SEND services remains one of the most complex and sensitive areas of public service, particularly in a rural and diverse area like Suffolk. The system is under significant pressure, with rising demand, increasing complexity of need and ongoing funding challenges. In the past families and professionals in Suffolk have raised concerns about the consistency and accessibility of SEND support. It is important to be honest about these challenges while remaining ambitious about the opportunity to improve. A unified approach under **One Suffolk** provides a platform to further strengthen strategic oversight, streamline processes and deliver more consistent support for SEND children and families. As with other services, this includes closer integration with key partners such as the NHS, more joined-up planning and delivery, consistent access and standards, and the Suffolk-wide strategic oversight to enable proactive rather than reactive responses to emerging needs. Families would benefit from simpler, clearer pathways and fewer handoffs between services, while economies of scale would support more efficient use of resources and reinvestment where it is needed most.

This vision is already being delivered through Suffolk's recent co-produced SEND Strategy[17] which sets out a bold Suffolk-wide approach to working with schools and settings to expand inclusive and specialist provision. The new unitary has an opportunity to build on this offer further by aligning SEND services with wider district-led provision - such as leisure facilities - to create an even more inclusive, joined-up offer that fully reflects the needs of all children and families across Suffolk.

17 Suffolk's SEND Strategy 2024-2029, Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk North-East Essex Integrated Care Board, NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, SENDIASS, Suffolk's SEND Young Person's Network and Suffolk Parent Carer Forum.

Suffolk's CYP services are on a clear improvement journey, with sustained focus on social care, SEND and school improvement. This momentum must be preserved. A Suffolk-wide structure ensures continuity of leadership, strategic investment and service delivery – protecting the investment and progress already made. It also allows Suffolk to move forward with a focus on integrated services and early intervention, which are more cost-effective than high-tariff reactive services. This work will be driven by the new Children and Young People's Transformation Strategy (2026–2031) which is being piloted this year, supported by a refreshed governance model and the establishment of a CYP Transformation Board. The success of this strategy – beginning before reorganisation and continuing beyond it – depends on integrated leadership, shared intelligence and aligned priorities across Suffolk. These are best achieved under a single, unified council. Any disaggregation would impact this progress, adversely affecting outcomes for our children.

We are mindful that one counterargument could be to establish a single, Suffolk-wide Children's Trust. However, we agree with government that this is not a viable solution. Depending on governance arrangements, trust directors would owe their primary duty to the trust (including financial responsibilities), which may lead to decisions that conflict with broader council aspirations. Once removed from the council's corporate agenda, a trust has fewer incentives to drive efficiency or align with wider place-based strategies. Given the scale of CYP budgets, councils will understandably want to retain flexibility and control yet a multi-authority trust would require full agreement on practice models and priorities and need to be accountable to several councils and scrutiny bodies.

CASE STUDY

Transformation

A multi-agency Strengthening Services for Children and Families in Suffolk Board has been established to strengthen the services provided by a range of partners for children and families in Suffolk. The Board meets every two months, chaired by Suffolk's chief executive and includes colleagues from Suffolk County Council, the NHS, Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership, Department for Education, Essex County Council (as a sector led improvement partner), Suffolk Constabulary and elected cabinet members.

CASE STUDY

Innovation

In response to feedback from children and young people saying they want to be able to go out in the community and feel safe and supported, the service created 'Anyone is welcome' map who shows welcoming places across Suffolk and also developed a 'top tips' list to support local businesses and venues become more welcoming to those young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Young people can access the map and see where other young people have felt safe in their community and can also rate their own places and support other young people.

This would demand a leadership team large and flexible enough to serve each – introducing inefficiencies, increasing costs and draining capacity. Rather than improving outcomes and reducing costs – the core ambitions behind local government reorganisation – a Trust in this context would likely do the opposite: introduce confusion, raise costs and weaken the integrated, whole-system approach Suffolk is committed to strengthening. It is an inadequate response to a challenge that can be fully avoided through a single authority.

For a more detailed and granular analysis of the risks we have identified in relation to splitting social care into two or three councils please see Appendix four and five.

Highways and streets

Suffolk's highways and streets are vital, connecting people, places and essential services and play a significant contribution to Suffolk's economy. Managing over 4,200 miles of roads, 6,200 miles of pavements, 3,500 miles of Public Right of Way network and nearly 2,000 structures, Suffolk Highways is a complex operation requiring strategic coordination, technical expertise and consistent standards. Only a single unitary authority can provide the scale, resilience and coherence needed to manage and deliver a modern highway network in line with Department for Transport (DfT) expectations.

Years of local authority financial pressures have necessitated a focus on keeping the network safe, leading to a loss or degradation of many services that residents value most highly – resulting in a poor customer experience and low levels of satisfaction.

As a new Suffolk-wide unitary council, **One Suffolk** council must redress this. A single unitary council can capitalise on the realisation of financial and scale benefits. Exemplifying the modern council principles described at the beginning of this case, **One Suffolk** will embed a new culture of openness, responsiveness and accessibility to improve the customer experience and provide increased focus on the needs of residents and the quality of places.

One Suffolk will remove the complexity and frustrations of residents, parishes and businesses by creating a significantly improved front door and create a 'tell us once' culture which will enhance the customer experience by removing confusion and duplication. The physical environment is fundamental to how people feel about their local area. We know from our residents' survey that access to the natural environment and countryside is one of the things people value most about their local area. **One Suffolk** brings the benefit of scale enabling more choice of where to invest and resource services. This could be protecting public rights of way, maintaining a footpath or ensuring adequate car parking for people to visit one of the many sites of natural beauty across Suffolk.

One Suffolk will merge the highways service with wider street services. Coupled with locality-focused officers and working through new empowered community arrangements such as area committees, there is an unprecedented opportunity to join up these services and provide a better environment that people are proud of. Engagement with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) will be a key part of this approach, ensuring that local businesses have a voice in shaping the public realm and that investment aligns with the needs of both residents and the local economy. Re-investing LGR efficiencies in the provision of services to communities will enhance the places in which people live, investing in drainage, signing, lining, soft estate management and low value/high importance schemes for the community. The things that matter.

A single unitary council also ensures Suffolk's highways, public rights of way, streets and flood and coastal risks are managed holistically – with aligned investment, shared data and a unified voice in regional infrastructure planning. It is the only model that guarantees resilience, efficiency, and a safe, well-maintained network for all communities across Suffolk. A part of this, **One Suffolk** will progress a lane rental scheme to better manage roadworks on our busiest routes, reducing disruption, improving journey times, and reinvesting surplus income into network improvements and innovation.

By merging and streamlining depot and back-office infrastructure, the new council will be smarter and redirect resources into frontline services. The creation of locality teams who can work on behalf of Suffolk's communities to provide improvements, focused on facilitation and delivery, will enhance the core highways infrastructure management and street scene teams and adopt a pride in place culture.

Investment in Suffolk's market towns will enhance their contributions. The creation of a town council for Ipswich will also provide support for the communities that live in the County Town. A unified push for city status for Ipswich will act as a catalyst for investment and identification of strategic priorities for investment by

the new Strategic Authority will support the improvement of the transport network. The new council will need to match this ambition and ensure senior leadership is able to rise to the challenge.

By grasping the opportunity that LGR and a single unitary provide, the new council can offer a change in the culture and provision of highways and street services to residents and communities while continuing to build on the track record of strategically managing the wider network. The scale and opportunity of a unified strategic direction and ambition will allow the **One Suffolk** to leverage investment and procurement weight to bring significant innovation. For example:

1. **Advanced technology integration:** The new council will implement cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to predict and address community needs more effectively. For example, AI will be used to analyse data from various sources to identify trends and predict issues before they become critical, such as predicting areas that might face higher rates of deterioration on the highways.

2. **Digital twin technology:** The new council will create a digital twin of Suffolk, a virtual model that simulates the county's physical environment. This will be used for urban planning, highways maintenance and infrastructure development, allowing for better decision-making and resource allocation.

3. **Public-private partnerships:** The new council will foster innovation through strategic partnerships with private sector companies, universities and research institutions particularly through the use of big data.

There are notable concerns about the prospect of fragmenting this service across two or three unitary councils as this would compromise resilience, increase costs, introduce duplication and reduce buying power. It would dilute the ability to respond swiftly to emergencies, severe weather and climate change impacts. Services like winter gritting, flood and emergency response require unified oversight and rapid mobilisation, something only a single unitary council can guarantee.

In today's competitive employment market, splitting the service would risk populating the resource requirements of multiple unitary authorities spending more money on staff compared to tangible outcomes. Fragmenting highways services would weaken the resilience and availability of out-of-hours operations, which are vital for maintaining access to the highway network in all conditions. These services support emergency response, ensure safe travel during severe weather and enable daily movement across the county. A single unitary council provides the coordinated staffing, depot coverage and strategic oversight needed to deliver these services reliably and efficiently.

A single unitary council also ensures Suffolk's highways, public rights of way and streets are managed holistically – with aligned investment, shared data and a unified voice in regional infrastructure planning. It is the only model that guarantees resilience, efficiency and a safe, well-maintained network for all communities across Suffolk.

Additionally, the interface and management of interactions between the trunk road network (National Highways) and the local road network (local authorities) become more convoluted and problematic if National Highways has to coordinate with multiple authorities.

Most importantly, the distraction, cost and risk of disaggregating highways services removes the ability to change the culture and investment prospects to deliver the ambitious change that is proposed.

Community resilience and safety

Feeling safe is essential to Suffolk residents' confidence and pride in their communities. While Suffolk remains one of the safest counties in England, both actual safety and the perception of safety continue to be top priorities. Although between December 2023 and 2024 knife crime in Suffolk fell by 20%, there are growing concerns that some of Suffolk's communities face challenges in relation to knife crime, following knife-related fatalities in Ipswich and Haverhill. This issue and others like them, from county lines activity to anti-social behaviour, require strategic coordination and locally responsive action. **One Suffolk** will provide this leadership and drive the coordination that is necessary to address complex challenges such as anti-social behaviour, youth violence and criminal exploitation.

As a single unitary council, **One Suffolk** will offer key stakeholders - including the police, criminal justice partners and the VCFSE sector – a strategic yet locally rooted partner. This unified model will enhance community safety and crime prevention, ensuring consistent, efficient and effective delivery across the county.

Suffolk County Council currently leads on statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024. This includes coordinating the Safer Stronger Communities Board, overseeing domestic abuse accommodation and support, and leading on radicalisation prevention, serious violence and criminal exploitation. Fragmenting these responsibilities across two or three councils would risk inconsistency and inefficiency and create an additional burden on the police as they will be required to maintain and manage multiple different relationships.
A single council ensures coherent, Suffolk-wide responses to complex challenges like anti-social behaviour, safeguarding and youth violence.

It also enables smarter use of resources. It allows for strategic commissioning and rationalisation of assets – from CCTV networks (West Suffolk alone operates 800 cameras) and detached youth work to community outreach and financial inclusion services. It avoids duplication and ensures that investment is targeted where it is needed most, based on shared intelligence and Suffolk-wide data. This is particularly important for supporting vulnerable groups and those affected by domestic abuse or exploitation.

For example, the Collaborative Communities Board already led by Suffolk County Council takes a systemwide approach to prevention and resilience, working across sectors to tackle poverty, food insecurity and social isolation. A single council would strengthen this collaboration, reduce bureaucracy and provide a unified platform for working with the NHS, police, fire services, VCFSE sector and town and parish councils. It would empower local communities while enabling strategic decisions that benefit the whole of Suffolk. By having a single, accountable body that can act decisively, plan strategically and deliver consistently – across urban, rural and coastal communities alike – the new unitary council will be in full alignment with national policy and the desire to empower leaders, simplify structures and deliver better outcomes.

CASE STUDY

Operation Spotlight

Operation Spotlight, coordinated by Suffolk Constabulary, achieved a 45% reduction in ASB across Suffolk by testing innovative policing approaches and strengthening community partnerships. Crucially, this initiative was delivered through a multi-agency model, with active involvement from district, borough and county councils, alongside youth justice, health and social care services. These partners worked together through the County ASB Steering Group, ensuring joined-up delivery and feeding into the Suffolk Safer Stronger Communities Board. Operation Spotlight shows how shared intelligence and coordinated action can deliver real impact.

One Suffolk embeds this joined-up approach, making it the norm rather than the exception.

Natural Environment, Climate, Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management

Suffolk stands at a pivotal moment in its response to climate change and environmental stewardship. The creation of a single unitary council offers a transformative opportunity to protect the county's people and landscapes through a more coherent, strategic and resilient approach. At present, environmental responsibilities are scattered across multiple councils, each operating with its own policies, priorities and small specialist teams. This fragmentation limits Suffolk's ability to plan effectively for the future and respond decisively to immediate threats.

A unified council would bring together the county's leading expertise in natural environment, climate, and flood and water management, combining it with the local delivery strengths of district councils such as East Suffolk. This integration would enable a consistent, Suffolk-wide approach to nature recovery, biodiversity net gain and sustainable land management. It would also allow for the scaling-up of successful local initiatives – such as pollinator planting and low-mow verge schemes – ensuring that environmental benefits are felt across both urban and rural communities. Crucially, a single council would be better positioned to align with national strategies like the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and proposed Environmental Delivery Plans, unlocking greater funding and influence in the process.

Equally important is Suffolk's ability to respond to environmental crises, particularly flooding and coastal erosion, which are becoming more frequent and severe. Effective flood and water management demands a high level of technical expertise, rapid coordination and strategic investment – requirements that fragmented teams across multiple councils struggle to meet. A single unitary council would consolidate these specialist skills, increasing resilience and fostering innovation. It would streamline statutory processes, improve the consenting of works to ordinary watercourses, and strengthen Suffolk's capacity to develop and deliver funding packages for flood defence and coastal protection.

This unified structure would also enhance Suffolk's ability to engage with the Mayoral strategic authority, central government and neighbouring counties like Norfolk on cross-boundary initiatives. Projects such as "Reclaim the Rain," a DEFRA-funded partnership with Norfolk County Council, demonstrate the potential of collaborative, holistic water management. With one council, Suffolk could scale up such efforts, ensuring that every community – from coastal towns to inland villages – benefits from robust flood protection and climate adaptation strategies.

Ultimately, a single unitary council would give Suffolk one voice and one vision. It would enable the county to lead with confidence, delivering a cleaner, greener and more resilient future for all who live and work here.

CASE STUDY

Response to Storm Babet

In October 2023, Storm Babet caused the worst flooding in Suffolk in over 70 years, with over 900 homes and businesses reporting internal damage. The response involved multiple agencies, with Suffolk County Council acting as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), responsible for coordinating investigations and long-term risk reduction. District and borough councils led the initial support to residents, while the County Council managed data collection and grant distribution. The fragmented structure created challenges in coordination, requiring significant staff time and a £1 million investment from reserves to expand LLFA capacity for flood investigations. Due to the multi-agency nature of the response, highway drainage maintenance and road cleaning were inconsistently applied across areas, complicating recovery efforts. Despite some partnership working, the multi-agency response highlighted the strain on resources and the need for improved collaboration. The experience underscored the importance of strategic coordination in emergency response and long-term resilience planning across Suffolk's local authorities.

One Suffolk would deliver a more streamlined and strategic response to environmental emergencies by unifying multi-agency coordination under a single authority. This approach removes confusion and duplication – for example the need for national agencies to engage with three different councils – enabling faster, more effective action. Critically, it provides a single point of contact for both the public - helping communities feel safer and more supported - and for partner agencies, ensuring clearer communication and more efficient collaboration during times of crisis.

The Storm Babet case study shows that the existing systems and operating models are no longer appropriate and need transformation on the scale of a single unitary to act effectively.

The current drainage infrastructure was designed for a climate, and weather patterns, that have changed dramatically. Manual inspections and reactive interventions often occur too late to prevent damage. Siloed responsibilities between highways authorities, landowners and regulators have led to fragmented responses and missed opportunities. The result: flooded roads, stranded vehicles and strained public trust.

This proposal sets out a bold shift – led by **One Suffolk** – from reactive maintenance to predictive, intelligent drainage management. The new unitary council will transform its network into a living, learning system – one that anticipates risk, adapts in real time and protects roads before damage occurs.

Strategic response: building a smarter system

One Suffolk will deploy a suite of smart technologies across its highway drainage network. Internet of Things sensors will monitor water levels, flow rates and detect blockages in real time. These sensors will feed into predictive analytics platforms, allowing the organisation to forecast flooding risks using weather data, terrain models and historical patterns. Machine learning will identify high-risk zones and optimise maintenance schedules, ensuring resources are allocated where they matter most. Infrastructure upgrades will include permeable pavements and green drainage features – bioswales, rain gardens and smart water storage – to reduce surface runoff and enhance natural absorption.

This is not theoretical. Cities like Rotterdam, Singapore and London have already proven the model. Singapore's Smart Nation drainage system reduced urban flood incidents by 45% in five years. Highways England's pilot programmes and California's AI-driven maintenance planning offer further evidence that predictive systems work – and scale.

Collaboration: a force multiplier

Technology alone is not enough. Success depends on strategic collaboration across agencies and sectors. **One Suffolk** will have the scale and influence to establish a coordinated framework involving highways authorities, local communities, landowners, environmental regulators and emergency services.

By sharing data and aligning objectives, these stakeholders will create a network of intelligence and action. A blocked culvert upstream becomes a coordinated response downstream – before it becomes a crisis. Landowners will be engaged to support upstream water retention and runoff reduction. Regulators will ensure compliance and support funding mechanisms. Emergency services will integrate predictive alerts into their response planning.

This multi-agency approach is not just efficient, it is transformative. It reduces duplication, accelerates decision-making and builds public confidence in infrastructure resilience.

Expected outcomes and value

By adopting this predictive and collaborative strategy, **One Suffolk** anticipates:

- a 30% reduction in emergency maintenance costs
- up to 50% faster response times during flood events
- fewer road closures and disruptions
- enhanced safety for road users
- stronger public trust in infrastructure management

This is not just a drainage upgrade. It is **One Suffolk**'s commitment to foresight, resilience and public safety and **One Suffolk** will have the tools, the partners and the vision to lead.

Integrate & scale

In Suffolk, some services are currently delivered through fragmented models or split across two tiers of local government, often resulting in duplication, inefficiencies and inconsistent resident experiences. Under **One Suffolk**, these services will be integrated into unified county-wide models that maximise efficiency, improve outcomes and enhance accessibility. This transformation will enable services to leverage benefits of scale through shared infrastructure and resources to deliver more consistent and impactful support to residents.

The following sections illustrate this typology through key service examples in planning, housing, waste management and regulatory services – highlighting the benefits of integration and breaking down of organisational boundaries.

Planning

Providing the right homes in the right places is fundamental - not just for local businesses and economic growth, but for the wellbeing of residents. Housing is a cornerstone of safe, thriving communities, and must be supported by essential infrastructure: schools, roads, broadband, utilities and flood protection. When done well, it shapes how people feel about their neighbourhoods, fosters pride in place and ensures communities can grow sustainably and securely.

Data highlights that the number of households and demand for dwellings across Suffolk are forecast to increase by 16% from 2018 to 2043 – more than double the rate of population growth - as changes in demographic structure change household composition[18]. As well as the type of housing, these changes in households will change communities. As highlighted in the underpinning analysis, by 2043, Suffolk's population is forecast to age, with 1 in 5 people over 75 and 1 in 3 aged over 65[19]. However, Suffolk is currently delivering 64% fewer homes than needed 35[20]. The fragmented planning structure prevents coordinated delivery of housing and infrastructure, particularly in key growth corridors such as the A14 and A12. The current planning system is failing Suffolk's residents – is not building enough homes for people who need them, homes are being built in the wrong places and numerous schemes are approved on appeal, with huge cost and delay for local businesses who want to build high quality new homes. For example, based on current local need (assuming March 2025 affordability ratios), Suffolk needs 5,063 new homes with average completions between 2021/22 and 2024/25 only totalling 3,090. This makes it more critical than ever to adopt a strong, strategic approach to housing – one that supports vibrant, resilient communities and secures a thriving future for Suffolk.

The current two-tier planning system in Suffolk faces significant structural and operational challenges that hinder effective service delivery. Variations in district and borough council policies, coupled with inconsistent application across the County and misalignment with county council services, create fragmentation and inefficiency. Many smaller planning teams operate with limited resources and struggle to attract and retain skilled professionals, further compounding delivery issues. As a result, housing outcomes are suboptimal, and there is dissatisfaction among local communities and stakeholders – whether developers, local business or public sector partners. As an example of variation and suboptimal outcomes across Suffolk, in 2024/25 the proportion of major planning decisions within 13 weeks varies between 100% A clear example of variation and suboptimal outcomes across Suffolk is seen in the proportion of major planning decisions made within 13 weeks in 2024/25, which ranges from 83% to 100% across the five districts and borough – compared to a national average of 90%. One of the most pressing issues is the fragmented capacity and skills creating competition between councils within the County. Specialist expertise in areas such as minerals, waste, flooding, building control, coastal erosion and transport is thinly spread, with some roles duplicated and others entirely absent. These challenges are compounded by national skills shortages and difficulties in recruitment and retention, particularly in smaller authorities. Ipswich Borough Council, operating independently, adds another layer of duplication and complexity, especially in strategic planning and infrastructure coordination.

Furthermore, inconsistencies in planning policy and decision-making further undermine the system. Each council maintains its own Local Plan, policies and monitoring frameworks, resulting in confusion for developers and communities alike. Parish councils frequently report that their input into planning decisions is overlooked, with little transparency or feedback. This disjointed approach hampers the ability to deliver coherent, long-term development strategies across the county.

With new powers and duties over housing, infrastructure and economic growth – including the new Spatial Development Strategy set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill – the new mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk will be a new and powerful stakeholder in Suffolk's planning system. A single countywide unitary authority offers a transformative opportunity to deliver a

18 ONS: Household projections for England, Suffolk housing summary
19 ONS: Household projections for England, Suffolk housing summary
20 ONS population estimates (2022 released 2023) and projections - local authorities - 2018-based, Census maps

more strategic, responsive and integrated planning service for all stakeholders. With its people focussed culture and priority of prevention, **One Suffolk** will work with developers and communities to provide adaptable and appropriate housing that helps people live as independently and well for as long as possible. By leveraging its Suffolk-wide strategic scale and deep local insight, **One Suffolk** is uniquely positioned to shape sustainable future communities – something that smaller, competing unitary councils within Suffolk would struggle to achieve.

A single unitary council will enable centralised coordination of Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions, strategic partnerships with national agencies and better use of public sector land to support affordable housing. For CIL this is particularly important as currently there is a mixed picture across Suffolk, as East Suffolk, Babergh and Mid Suffolk are all CIL authorities but West Suffolk and Ipswich are not. **One Suffolk** will change this – working with the mayor to align mayoral CIL – to create a Suffolk-wide CIL authority to ensure that there is appropriate investment in placemaking. The area committees and revitalised town and parish council relationships proposed by **One Suffolk** will be critical in providing local insight into the process and to help improve delivery.

Smarter, simpler and better

One Suffolk will be accessible and accountable to local communities and government. In February 2025, the UK Government announced a major overhaul of the planning system to simplify and accelerate the preparation of Local Plans. Councils are now expected to produce plans within 2.5 years rather than the previous average of seven years with mandatory housing targets and regular progress assessments. These reforms are backed by funding to recruit new planners by 2026 and maximise digital tools to improve transparency and land availability mapping. **One Suffolk** would learn from existing countywide unitary councils that have already begun implementing planning service improvements and Suffolk. From our learning **One Suffolk** is proposing a transformative opportunity to reimagine the county's approach to spatial planning. Under the current two-tier system, local plans are developed and managed by individual district councils, resulting in a fragmented planning landscape. This fragmentation has led to inconsistencies in policy application, duplication of effort and inefficiencies in infrastructure coordination. A single unitary model provides the foundation for a more coherent, strategic and responsive planning framework – one that is better equipped to meet Suffolk's long-term growth ambitions and align with the broader objectives of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Experience from other unitary authorities across England demonstrates the value of consolidating planning functions under a single strategic framework. Councils such as Dorset, Cornwall and Buckinghamshire have adopted unified Local Plans that cover their entire administrative areas. These plans are supported by mechanisms for local engagement, such as area-based forums and committees, which ensure that community voices continue to shape development priorities. The outcomes in these areas have included improved policy consistency, enhanced infrastructure delivery and more effective alignment with regional economic strategies.

In Suffolk, the proposed planning framework would consist of a single Suffolk-wide Local Plan, setting out strategic policies for housing, transport, employment, climate resilience and infrastructure. This plan would be complemented by a series of area-based planning statements, tailored to reflect the characteristics and priorities of Suffolk's diverse communities. These statements would be informed by local data, stakeholder engagement and member oversight, ensuring that the strategic plan remains grounded in local realities.

Existing Neighbourhood Plans would be retained and integrated into the new framework, preserving the work already undertaken by communities and providing continuity in local policy. Where gaps exist, **One Suffolk** would support the development of new Neighbourhood Plans, offering technical guidance and financial assistance to ensure equitable access to planning tools.

Governance of the new planning system would be structured to balance strategic oversight with local accountability. A Strategic Planning Board, chaired by a cabinet member, would oversee the development and implementation of the Local Plan. This would be supported by dedicated teams to align planning with transport, education and health services, often working in partnership with Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Area committees or panels would be established to facilitate local input, review area-based statements and engage directly with residents and stakeholders. A centralised planning team would deliver technical expertise and policy development, with officers assigned to specific geographic areas to maintain local knowledge and responsiveness. A digital planning platform would underpin the system, providing transparent access to planning documents, data and consultation processes.

This approach aligns closely with the strategic priorities of a Mayoral Strategic Authority. The MSA model emphasises integrated spatial planning, infrastructure coordination and inclusive economic growth across county boundaries. A unified Local Plan for Suffolk would provide a clear and consistent policy framework that supports the delivery of MSA-wide strategies, including housing targets,

transport corridors, employment zones and environmental resilience. The area-based planning statements would ensure that local distinctiveness is preserved, while enabling Suffolk to contribute meaningfully to regional objectives.

Moreover, the proposed governance structure supports the principles of democratic accountability and subsidiarity that underpin the MSA model. By embedding local engagement within a strategic framework, Suffolk can ensure that planning decisions are both locally informed and regionally aligned. This dual focus enhances the county's ability to secure investment, deliver infrastructure, and respond to the evolving needs of its communities.

The transition to a single unitary council provides Suffolk with a unique opportunity to lead in planning innovation. By adopting a single Local Plan supported by area-based planning statements and robust governance, the county can deliver a planning system that is efficient, strategic, and responsive – fully aligned with the ambitions of a MSA Authority and capable of driving sustainable development across the region. Under the Planning and Infrastructure Bill councillors will also have less of a role in planning decisions. The Bill introduces a national scheme of delegation – leading to officers making more decisions. Government is proposing a scheme of delegation which categorises planning applications into two tiers:

- **tier A:** would include types of applications which must be delegated to officers in all cases
- **tier B:** would include types of applications which must be delegated to officers, unless the chief planner and chair of committee agree it should go to committee based on a gateway test

In addition, the Bill contains a power for the Secretary of State to set out requirements on the size and composition of planning committees. A maximum of 11 members for planning committees is being proposed by government in the proposed regulations, along with a requirement for mandatory training for all planning committee members.

Statutory requirements will need to be reflected in **One Suffolk**'s governance and formal decision-making structures. Therefore, it is proposed that the new single unitary council has four or five local planning committees, that reflect the geographies of the 16 proposed area committees and therefore, also those of town and parish councils. The enhanced community empowerment structures proposed would both support these planning committees but also be able to inform the increased delegated decisions that are proposed under the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

Feedback from town and parish councils highlights a pressing need for reform. Many fear that rural voices may be overshadowed by urban priorities, particularly with Ipswich as a central hub. Planning is widely seen as bureaucratic and disconnected from local realities, with evidence-based objections often overlooked. There is a clear demand for more responsive, area-based planning, meaningful local input, and structured engagement through the area committees.

One Suffolk would respond to these concerns by creating a unified planning authority capable of managing complex applications and supporting long-term growth. This would bring consistency to planning policy and monitoring, reduce confusion, and improve developer confidence. Crucially, it would embed local voices into the process by working in partnership with town and parish councils, residents, and local agencies.

Through the area committees, local concerns could be more swiftly heard and directed to the appropriate planning committee or delegated decision-maker. Structured engagement, reliable service delivery, and better integration of planning with transport, education, and health infrastructure would help unlock development opportunities that benefit communities. By improving both digital and face-to-face access, the new authority would ensure that all communities – urban and rural – are supported, engaged, and empowered.

Housing

Housing is a cornerstone of local authority service delivery, with responsibilities spanning temporary accommodation, social housing and housing development. Under **One Suffolk**, these three critical areas will be brought together alongside other key services including planning, highways, social care and public health. By aligning housing with these interconnected functions, **One Suffolk** will foster a more holistic approach to place-making, ensuring that housing strategies are informed by and contribute to wider community needs and infrastructure priorities.

Homelessness presents an escalating challenge across Suffolk, reflected in an increasing reliance on temporary accommodation. Between March 2024 and March 2025, the rate of households in temporary accommodation rose from 1.2 to 1.5 per 1,000 residents. Whilst this upward trend is evident across all districts and boroughs, the level of demand varies substantially - peaking at 2.2 in Babergh and remaining consistently lower in West Suffolk, between 0.9 and 1.1. The type of accommodation used also differs; for example, in March 2025, Ipswich relied on bed and breakfast hotels for 36% of its temporary accommodation placements - a notoriously high-cost option - with a median stay of 132 days, by far the longest of any of the districts using this type of provision at this time. Meanwhile, Babergh recorded the highest rate of households placed out of area, and all districts and boroughs saw an increase in out-of-area placements compared to March 2024[21]. These trends highlight the continued pressure on local housing services and the challenges of meeting statutory homelessness duties within a fragmented system increasingly reliant on costly reactive responses rather than proactive prevention.

Spending patterns also reflect this variation. Homelessness spend per head of population is inconsistent across Suffolk with Ipswich being almost double the next highest spender[22].

Differences in pressures and prevention outcomes are further highlighted when examining rough sleeping rates per 100,000 residents. Ipswich has consistently recorded the highest rates over the past two years, whereas Mid Suffolk and Babergh have seen the lowest. During this time Ipswich appears to be the only council experiencing a downward trend in rough sleeping. Furthermore, in both 2022/23 and 2023/24, the percentage of households where the prevention duty ended (those at risk of homelessness) with accommodation secured for six months or more was consistently below 50% in West Suffolk and East Suffolk, while Babergh and Mid Suffolk recorded the highest success rates. Similarly, for households where the relief duty ended (those already homeless), East Suffolk, West Suffolk and Babergh had the lowest rates of securing longer-term accommodation, whereas Mid Suffolk achieved the strongest outcomes, ranging between 41% and 48%[23]. These disparities highlight the uneven capacity across Suffolk to respond consistently and effectively to homelessness, reinforcing the case for a more coordinated, Suffolk-wide approach.

Under Suffolk's current two-tier system, housing and homelessness responsibilities are split across multiple district and borough councils. For residents, this often results in a postcode lottery where access to support depends more on geography than need. For councils and partners, fragmented responsibilities make coordination difficult and create risks of inconsistent service offers, duplication of data collection, casework and commissioning, ultimately limiting their ability to efficiently respond to increasingly complex demands.

A unified **One Suffolk** model would create opportunities to commission more strategically, reduce reliance on reactive placements and secure better value for money – especially in areas like temporary accommodation – where reactive spot-purchasing is both expensive and unsustainable. A single council rather than two or three could engage with providers at scale, shape the housing market more effectively and avoid the contradictions of one council department enforcing against poor housing standards while another is procuring from the same provider.

One Suffolk would also allow for better data integration. A single Suffolk-wide organisation would enable better linking of housing and homelessness information with adult social care, children's services, health and community safety, creating a fuller view of vulnerability and demand. This would support forecasting, smarter resource allocation and the development of a "single customer view," so residents are not forced to repeat their story multiple times. Intelligence-led prevention could reduce crises before they escalate, improve the experience of those at risk of homelessness and lower costs in the long run.

21 Tables on homelessness, MHCLG
21 Available data in MHCLG Local Revenue Outturn 2023/24
23 Tables on homelessness, MHCLG

CASE STUDY

Unlocking housing intelligence in Suffolk – the power of a single customer view

Imagine a young adult in Suffolk with a history of care involvement, mental health challenges and housing instability. Over the course of 18 months, they are placed in temporary accommodation three times – each time by a different district council. Due to siloed systems, none of the councils have access to a full picture of the individual's history, support needs, or previous placements. As a result, interventions are reactive, duplicated and poorly coordinated, leading to increased distress for the individual and higher costs to the system. A single Suffolk unitary authority would be much better placed to develop a coordinated response including a stable housing pathway tailored to the individual's needs, such as mental health and employment support - reducing disruption for the individual, delivering better outcomes and value for money.

By enabling integrated data systems and a single point of accountability, a unitary model would transform Suffolk's ability to deliver proactive, person-centred housing services. It would reduce fragmentation, improve outcomes and make better use of public resources, ensuring that no one falls through the cracks due to postcode or organisational boundaries.

A single Suffolk-wide housing authority would offer a simpler point of engagement for partners such as the NHS, police, the VCFSE sector and housing providers. This would enable more joined-up planning and faster responses for those with overlapping needs, such as people who are street homeless and facing mental health challenges. It would also strengthen Suffolk's collective voice in national forums, improve consistency in policy and commissioning, and drive-up housing standards by aligning commissioning, regulation and enforcement under one governance framework.

Social housing is a critical service provided to local residents. The scale of housing need varies significantly, with waiting lists ranging from 47 to 17 households per 1,000 across Suffolk. Currently, of the five Suffolk district and borough councils four do deliver some social housing in house through a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Across the district and borough councils, Ipswich, Babergh, East Suffolk and Mid Suffolk all have retained social housing stock, although the scale of this stock differs and there is not universal coverage. There are also a significant number of Registered Providers who are active across Suffolk and with ambitions to further their development programmes to assist Councils in the delivery of their housing and homelessness duties. Therefore, there is an important requirement for any new council to work effectively with Registered Providers. The bringing together of social housing delivery into a single unitary council in Suffolk would provide both operational and strategic benefits.

Operationally, consolidating social housing management across Suffolk into a single unitary council offers significant financial efficiencies. By pooling resources, the new authority can unlock economies of scale in procurement, maintenance and service delivery. This consolidation reduces duplication in administrative functions and enables smarter, more strategic investment in housing stock – such as bulk purchasing for repairs, ensuring building safety requirements are met or coordinated retrofit programmes. A unified social housing structure also allows for more flexible financial planning, better leveraging of borrowing capacity and streamlined access to government funding. One unitary council also creates more efficiency in working with the range of Registered Providers that operate across Suffolk. At its simplest this is about one relationship for these organisations but more significantly it includes both the creation of a single tenancy agreement making it easier for residents and changing the culture of housing management to one that is more focused on providing support to vulnerable residents than simply enforcing policies.

Strategically, **One Suffolk** would significantly enhance capacity to plan and deliver more complex forms of accommodation – such as care leavers, extra care housing or supported living – critical in light of Suffolk's aging population and rising demand for social care (also see Adult Social Care and Children's and Young People sections). By aligning planning, commissioning and development functions within one organisation, Suffolk can adopt a more joined-up, cross-sector approach. This reduces inefficiencies caused by siloed procurement and fragmented funding and enables longer-term, strategic planning that is more responsive to shifts in demand.

The scale of housing waiting lists and projected population growth underscore the critical importance of accelerating house building in Suffolk.

Housing need in Suffolk presents a complex and pressing challenge that warrants strategic attention.

Publicly available data from Government's Live Tables on Rents, Lettings and Tenancies (Table 600) confirms that housing waiting lists are substantial across the county.

Granular data provides a clear view of localised demand accessed via the GOV.UK housing statistics portal[24]. Additional insight is available through Gateway to Homechoice, the choice-based lettings system used by several Suffolk councils, which offers real-time registration and availability data across Babergh, Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk, and Ipswich[25].

The scale of housing need has already prompted strategic responses from local authorities. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have published a joint Homes and Housing Strategy that prioritises the delivery of affordable homes, improvement of council housing stock, and adaptation to climate change[26]. East Suffolk Council's Housing Action Plan highlights a critical shortfall in housing delivery: while the Government's revised housing need figure for East Suffolk is 1,655 homes per year, the district has only delivered an average of 803 homes annually over the past five years – an 80% gap between need and supply[27]. West Suffolk Council has also recognised the urgency of the issue through its Housing, Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which outlines measures to prevent homelessness, expand access to private rentals, and mitigate the impact of reduced funding for housing-related support[28].

Demographic and population trends further reinforce the need for a strategic response. Data from the Suffolk Observatory[29] and the Office for National Statistics[30] shows that Suffolk's population is growing steadily, particularly in urban centres such as Ipswich. Suffolk also faces a rising proportion of older residents,

24 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-rents-lettings-and-tenancies
25 https://www.gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk
26 https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/w/homes-and-housing-strategy
27 https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Housing-Action-Plan/Housing-Action-Plan-July-2025.pdf
28 https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/s55783/6-2025-2026-Q1-Performance-Report-Appendix-G.pdf
29 https://www.suffolkobservatory.info/population/
30 https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E10000029-suffolk

which increases demand for accessible and supported housing. Additionally, migration from London and other urban areas is placing upward pressure on housing demand in rural and coastal districts.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that Suffolk is experiencing a sustained and multifaceted housing challenge. The combination of high waiting lists, under-delivery of new homes, demographic shifts, and increasing homelessness points to a strategic issue that requires coordinated action across districts. The availability of detailed data and existing local strategies provides a strong foundation for **One Suffolk** to support targeted investment and policy intervention.

The integration of planning, development, and housing delivery within a single council significantly strengthens Suffolk's capacity to respond to local needs. This unified approach enables more strategic targeting of capital investment and fosters more effective collaboration with registered providers, housing associations and developers.

By aligning local plans with broader strategic priorities, Suffolk is better positioned to deliver the right homes in the right places. It also amplifies the county's voice in national and regional forums – particularly with agencies such as Homes England – enhancing Suffolk's influence over investment decisions and helping to fast-track the delivery of affordable housing.

Operating at a Suffolk-wide spatial scale allows for more coordinated and evidence-based decisions about where new housing should be located. It ensures that development is supported by essential infrastructure - such as transport links, schools and healthcare facilities - and enables a more joined-up response to housing affordability challenges.

CASE STUDY

Planning at scale: A smarter approach to homelessness

There are a number of examples that illustrate the benefits a single unitary model would bring:

- **a young person leaving care could be supported through a coordinated pathway involving housing, mental health services and employment support – rather than navigating separate systems across different councils**
- **someone repeatedly presenting at A&E with housing-related stress could be more easily flagged across services and offered preventative support before reaching crisis point**
- **organisations like the NHS and VCFSE sector would benefit from a single point of contact, improving coordination and outcomes for those with complex needs**
- **a unitary authority could benefit from strategic scale and vision to move away from short term fixes – like costly, reactive spot-purchasing – and instead plan and commission purpose-built supported housing**

In contrast, creating two or three unitaries would retain much of the current fragmentation, introduce new inconsistencies and make it harder to deliver joined-up support. For homelessness services to be effective, Suffolk needs a single, strategic authority – one that can plan, prevent and respond at scale.

To meet rising demand, Suffolk's districts have developed individual housing strategies, with some establishing council-owned housing companies.

Examples include Edmundham Developments, a joint venture with Lovell Partnerships Limited, and Babergh Growth in partnership with Norse Group. These partnerships - often involving other councils or private sector organisations - demonstrate the importance of scale in delivering large, complex projects and adapting to evolving housing needs.

A Suffolk-wide approach to housing delivery will provide Suffolk with greater leverage and resilience in securing long-term investment. It will also accelerate the provision of high-quality homes, ensuring that growth is inclusive, sustainable and responsive to the needs of communities across the region.

Waste management

Suffolk's waste disposal service is a well-established, Suffolk-wide operation that delivers statutory responsibilities efficiently and sustainably. As the designated Waste Disposal Authority, Suffolk County Council currently manages a complex network of infrastructure and contracts that ensure waste is treated, recycled, or disposed of in a way that protects the environment and delivers value for money. A single unitary council would preserve and enhance this model, while fragmentation into two or three councils would introduce significant cost, complexity and risk either by splitting the service or by requiring a new governance model to be established to maintain a Suffolk-wide Waste Disposal Authority.

The current model benefits from economies of scale, shared infrastructure and a unified strategy. It enables Suffolk to operate major assets like the Energy from Waste (EfW) facility, 11 recycling centres and four waste transfer stations efficiently. These facilities serve overlapping catchments and are optimised for Suffolk-wide logistics. A single council would also allow for even better integration of waste collection and disposal functions currently split between county and district councils, unlocking further efficiencies and service improvements, and hence better value for money.

Splitting waste disposal across multiple councils would be highly disruptive. The EfW contract, which generates millions in income and is critical to Suffolk's waste strategy, legally requires a single public body to hold it. Disaggregating this contract would not only be legally complex but would also jeopardise financial returns and operational stability. Recycling centres serve cross-boundary populations, making cost apportionment and access policies contentious and potentially inconvenient for residents. Both recycling centre and transfer station contracts rely on the efficient haulage of waste to end destinations, and disaggregation into smaller contracts would add significant cost through reduced fleet flexibility, efficiency and resilience. Disaggregating Suffolk-wide waste contracts will lead to increased overhead costs levied by contractors who will need to duplicate meetings, administration and management/reporting, as well as duplication of contract management resource within the councils. Smaller councils would also struggle to maintain specialist expertise and resilience, particularly in areas like closed landfill management, infrastructure development and contract negotiation.

Even if a shared service model were retained, it would require new governance arrangements that risk inefficiency and conflict, with 'one team, three masters' as each council could be under different political leadership. The fragmentation of Suffolk's waste disposal function would erode economies of scale, increase costs for residents and compromise Suffolk's ability to meet national policy reforms and environmental targets. Simply put, two or three councils cannot deliver what one unified council can.

Waste collection remains fragmented across the borough and district councils, each with its own policies, systems and service models. The current way of working builds in inefficiencies, duplicated costs and inconsistent experiences for residents. The upcoming national "Simpler Recycling" reforms in 2026 will require all councils to adopt consistent recycling standards, making this an opportune moment to align all services. However, there is still scope for local difference, with residents experiencing different recycling and waste collections, leading to confusion and inefficiency. Transitioning to a single unitary council would enable full harmonisation of waste services integrating collection and disposal into

a simpler, single, accountable system. **One Suffolk** council would not only streamline bin collection but would also reduce administrative overheads and allow for more strategic planning of routes. It would unlock commercial opportunities, such as expanding trade waste services across the county and would reduce software licensing costs by consolidating digital systems.

In summary, a single unitary council would preserve the strengths of Suffolk's current waste disposal system while enabling a more coherent, efficient and resident-focused waste collection service. It would ensure Suffolk is well-positioned to meet future environmental targets, manage risk effectively and deliver better value for money. Suffolk's waste team is recognised for its excellence in contract management, infrastructure delivery and partnership working.

Regulatory services: Trading standards, licensing and environmental health

Trading Standards enforces over 80 Acts of Parliament and 2,000 supporting pieces of legislation, with a very broad remit including fair trading, illegal tobacco and vapes, intellectual property, weights and measures, food standards, animal health and welfare and environmental protection. Furthermore, licensing is a critical component of this regulatory framework, covering a wide range of activities from alcohol sales and taxi operations to animal welfare, street trading and tattoo parlours. These licensing functions are essential for ensuring public safety, consumer protection and business compliance across Suffolk.

Unifying regulatory services under a single council will deliver a consistent, Suffolk-wide approach to protecting consumers, businesses and safeguarding public health. These services are essential for regulating food safety, workplace health, animal welfare, air quality and licensing. These are vital services for local businesses, visitors and residents. They shape the local community and how people experience and feel about their local area. For example, the county council's recent residents' survey highlighted 58% valued pubs, bars, restaurants and cafes and 49% valued entertainment venues and facilities in their local area. Ensuring that these operate responsibly, safely and legally is fundamental to enabling people to enjoy, feel safe and proud of their local area. A single council would enable shared intelligence and data, more effective join up and deployment of resource and aligned policies, such as fee setting ensuring that all residents and businesses are held to the same high standards, regardless of location.

Alignment of policy is important for two reasons, one to support county-wide strategic objectives and also to simplify for residents and businesses. For example, there are currently five licensing authorities within the county, each with different processes and fees. This creates duplication, inconsistency and confusion for operators and passengers, undermines enforcement efforts, and creates loopholes that compromise public safety. **One Suffolk** would offer standardised criteria for driver vetting and vehicle standards and ensure that fare structures are led by data and local insight and are consistent over sensible local geographies. This in turn will enhance trust and accountability across the whole of Suffolk. Similarly, street trading fees need to operate on a more transparent and consistent structure across the whole of Suffolk, for example varying by town size and reflecting the diversity of Suffolk's towns, villages and communities. This will reduce confusion among traders and address the current perception of unfairness, as fees vary significantly across Suffolk. For example, West Suffolk applies a consistent fee structure, whereas Ipswich varies fees based on location. A single licensing authority enables **One Suffolk** to offer local flexibility within a standardised system and consistent framework, helping to deliver more responsive, fair, and safe regulatory services.

Regulatory services under **One Suffolk** would also support more efficient use of specialist officers and digital systems, reducing administrative burden and improving responsiveness. With new national responsibilities emerging such as regulating vapes and non-surgical procedures, a unified model ensures Suffolk is equipped to meet future challenges while maintaining public confidence in the safety and fairness of local services.

While two or three unitaries would deliver some of these benefits through alignment of functions currently split across different tiers of government, the case for a single unitary is made on the grounds of capacity and scale. A single Suffolk-wide trading standards

CASE STUDY

Streamlining licensing and regulatory services

After transition from six district/borough councils and a county council into a single countywide unitary council in 2009, Cornwall Council consolidated its licensing, trading standards and environmental health functions into a single integrated service. This led to the creation of the Business Regulatory Support (BRS) hub, which acts as a one-stop shop for businesses seeking compliance advice and licensing support. The unified model improved consistency, reduced duplication and enhanced public protection. In its second year, BRS handled over 1,600 business enquiries – a 47% increase – while generating over £1 million in income as well as safeguarding 57 specialist posts. Officers trained across multiple regulatory domains enabled joined-up inspections and advice, whilst digital tools streamlined application processes. Cornwall's experience demonstrates how a single countywide unitary council can deliver efficient, business-friendly regulatory services while maintaining high standards of public safety and compliance.

service has the capacity to maintain specialist knowledge, which enables support for businesses and colleagues on complex areas of law. If this were disaggregated across a number of smaller councils those smaller services would lack the capacity and specialist expertise and would dilute the specialisms required to tackle complex, cross-border fraud and regulatory enforcement. This fragmentation risks reducing the effectiveness of regional and national operations and the ability of the services to tackle organised criminality, thus reducing consumer protections at a local level. One unitary: creates a comprehensive, single data set which will inform and shape predictive analytics to drive prevention; it ensures that the whole of Suffolk has access to specialist officers and not just the authorities in which they are employed; and it provides additional capacity to act quickly in managing surges in particular issues.

Tailor & enable

Some services thrive through local responsiveness, identity and community engagement. Under **One Suffolk**, these place-based services will be supported through a shared strategic framework that empowers local leadership and enables tailored delivery. This approach recognises the value of local insight and flexibility, while ensuring alignment with Suffolk-wide priorities and standards. The following section illustrates this typology – highlighting the benefits of tailored local delivery within a wider strategic framework.

Public health and leisure services

Prevention is a central pillar of the **One Suffolk** operating model, which underscores the strategic importance of aligning public health and leisure services. This integration represents a significant opportunity to reimagine how Suffolk delivers proactive, community-based support for healthier and more active lives.

At present, leisure services are delivered across five Suffolk authorities by seven different providers. Leisure services in West Suffolk are delivered by Abbeycroft, whereas in East Suffolk they are delivered by Places and Everyone Active. Abbeycroft and Everyone Active also deliver services in Babergh and Mid Suffolk respectively but in both of these districts there are other community operators. Ipswich, on the other hand, delivers services in house via Ipswich Fit. Each of these providers operates independently with varying levels of investment, programming, community engagement and significantly different degrees of financial resilience. This was evident during both the COVID-19 pandemic and surges in energy costs, when substantial financial support was required not only for operators in Suffolk but across the country. This fragmented landscape can lead to inconsistent access to facilities and services, duplication of effort and missed opportunities for collaboration. For example, West Suffolk residents visit council leisure facilities nearly twice as often as those in Ipswich (2.90 vs. 1.71 visits per capita). By bringing these services together under a single unitary structure, Suffolk could establish a unified leisure offer that is equitable, strategically coordinated and better aligned with the needs of its diverse communities. A consolidated model would allow for consistent standards, shared infrastructure and more effective use of resources, while also enabling Suffolk-wide initiatives that promote physical activity, social inclusion and wellbeing.

Given the varying contractual positions that exist, this will take time. However, this work is especially important given the substantial variation in childhood obesity rates across Suffolk's five councils, which range from 16% to 25%. Such disparities reflect deeper inequalities in access to health-promoting services and environments, and underscore the need for a more joined-up approach to prevention. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a single strategic voice to ensure that there is coordination, leadership and integration with other services across Suffolk as a whole. This can only be achieved through a single unitary council.

For Suffolk, this integration will also support the development of locality-based services – particularly vital in rural areas – and enable the new unitary council to make the most of Suffolk's physical and natural assets to encourage more active lifestyles.

Equally important is the strategic opportunity to align leisure services with public health, which is currently delivered solely by the county council. The current separation of leisure and public health limits the potential for leisure to contribute meaningfully to preventative health strategies, despite its critical role in promoting active lifestyles and mental wellbeing.

A unitary authority would enable direct strategic alignment between these two domains, fostering a more integrated approach to health improvement. Leisure centres will become hubs for public health delivery, offering services such as weight management, smoking cessation and social prescribing in accessible, community-based settings. Joint commissioning, shared outcome frameworks and integrated workforce development would ensure that leisure services are not only recreational but also instrumental in addressing key public health challenges. This alignment would support a whole-system approach to wellbeing, positioning Suffolk as a leader in innovative, place-based health and leisure integration. Furthermore, **One Suffolk** has a unique opportunity to advance the ambitions of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Sport England around Active Wellbeing. These ambitions are rooted in social prescribing and the co-location of services, aiming to create a more integrated and accessible approach to health and wellbeing.

Public health in Suffolk already operates at the county level and demonstrates the power of integrated, place-based approaches through programmes like Feel Good Suffolk, financial resilience work and the Holiday Activities and Food fund (HAF). These initiatives are commissioned and led by the county council but tailored and delivered locally by districts and boroughs. They benefit from strategic scale, data and intelligence, while remaining responsive to local needs. **One Suffolk** would continue this approach with reduced bureaucracy and fewer organisational interfaces, allowing these initiatives to be scaled, localised and embedded across the county. This ensures that prevention is not just a principle but a practice – delivered through local assets such as leisure centres, libraries, community hubs and digital platforms.

Delivery at a Suffolk-wide level is especially important because public health funding in Suffolk is low – the lowest in the East of England and among the bottom 20 nationally. Any disaggregation would therefore have a disproportionate impact on reach and effectiveness. A larger single unitary council would be better placed to support technical specialists that smaller unitary teams would struggle to resource. Scale also provides resilience and capacity to manage health protection and emergency incidents effectively.

Join up & align

Currently, across Suffolk's two-tier system of local government, six separate corporate services departments are responsible for delivering core functions such as finance, IT, legal, and human resources. While each of these services shares the same strategic purpose – to enable effective organisational delivery and safeguard the interests of residents through sound financial management and compliance with statutory obligations – their duplication creates inherent inefficiencies.

This is particularly evident in highly transactional and lower-value activities such as revenues and payroll, where fragmentation leads to unnecessary complexity and resource overhead. **One Suffolk** presents a clear opportunity to consolidate corporate services into a single, joined-up delivery model. This will not only reduce resource requirements and generate financial savings but also standardise processes for residents and partners – for example, in how Council Tax is paid, invoices are submitted, or fees are processed.

The following section illustrates this typology through enabling services, highlighting how joined-up delivery can generate better value for money and a more consistent experience for Suffolk's residents.

Enabling services

While several councils in Suffolk already operate joint back-office services, moving to a single Suffolk Council presents a timely and strategic opportunity to build on this progress and unlock even greater efficiency, consistency and impact. Enabling services such as HR, IT, finance, procurement, communications, customer services and legal could be fully integrated into Suffolk-wide teams, reducing duplication, streamlining operations and delivering better value for money. For example, a unified HR function could standardise recruitment and payroll, while a single legal team could provide consistent, high-quality advice and reduce reliance on external providers. Similarly, IT services could be consolidated to support a unified digital infrastructure, reducing the complexity of maintaining multiple systems as a single IT platform would improve cybersecurity, enable better data sharing and support more advanced automation across services. Finance teams could centralise budget planning, financial reporting and audit functions, improve transparency and enable strategic investment decisions.

This vision aligns with Suffolk County Council's Fit for the Future programme, which represents a strong first step toward the blueprint of a future council, one that is digitally enabled, strategically scaled and designed around real user journeys. The programme has already demonstrated how shared infrastructure, automation and coherent governance can improve outcomes and deliver tangible benefits, including an estimated £4 million in savings. A single council would allow Suffolk to scale this transformation further, avoiding fragmentation and ensuring alignment across all enabling services.

For residents, the benefits are equally compelling. One council would offer a more seamless and equitable experience, with one point of contact, consistent branding and unified digital platforms. Whether applying for benefits, reporting a missed bin, or seeking legal advice on housing, customers would interact with one 'front door', making services simpler, faster and more transparent. The opportunity to embed this transformation at scale, sustain momentum and create a future-ready Suffolk that delivers better outcomes for all has never been greater.

CASE STUDY

Fit for the future programme

Suffolk County Council's Fit for the Future programme is a strategic transformation initiative designed to advance service delivery and improve outcomes for residents, businesses and staff. The programme focuses on outward impact – delivering services that are simple, joined-up and rooted in real user journeys – whilst ensuring consistent governance and progress across workstreams. It leverages digital tools, automation and shared data to streamline operations, reduce duplication and enable cross-organisational integration. It exemplifies how a consistent framework – across digital platforms, processes and governance – can drive efficiency and improve user experience, while still supporting local responsiveness.

Key delivery areas include digital enablement, service design, inclusive access, workforce reform and cultural change. These are supported by a central governance function that ensures accountability, tracks benefit and maintains alignment across the programme. Benefits – both cashable and non-cashable – are realised through system rationalisation, automation and improved workforce efficiency.

The programme is built on strategic scale, shared infrastructure and coherent delivery – advantages that would be significantly undermined by splitting responsibilities across two or three unitary authorities. Fragmentation would introduce inefficiencies, dilute accountability and disrupt the integrated model that is already delivering value. A single unitary council remains the strongest option to sustain transformation momentum, maximise impact and value and build a future-ready organisation. Suffolk is already capable of, and realising the benefits of operating at the scale of a single unitary in data and governance-heavy services.

Revenues & benefits

One Suffolk offers a unique opportunity to reshape revenues and benefits into a more consistent, efficient and equitable model. At present, delivery is split between two partnerships – Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) and Shared Revenues Partnership (SRP) – each operating with distinct policies, governance, systems, staffing and performance standards. This fragmentation has led to uneven service experiences across the county, with residents receiving different levels of support depending on their local authority. Examples of this variation include:

- processing times for housing benefit claims range from 15 to 22 days across Suffolk
- Council Tax collection rates differ markedly, from 99.11% to 95.73%
- automation and digital uptake are uneven – ARP has achieved 97% automation for Universal Credit changes and 89% for online single person discount applications, while SRP continues to rely heavily on manual processing

Importantly, the fact that councils have already moved towards shared service models demonstrates a clear recognition that delivery of these services over larger areas brings tangible benefits. These partnerships were established to improve resilience, reduce costs and enhance service quality – objectives that remain central to the case for **One Suffolk**.

A single authority across Suffolk would allow these benefits of scale to be fully unlocked. It would enable the consolidation of systems, harmonisation of policies and adoption of best practices across the board. Operationally, this would reduce duplication, improve resource allocation and enhance fraud detection through integrated data and analytics. It would also provide a stronger foundation for performance monitoring, allowing Suffolk to track and improve key metrics such as processing times, benefit uptake, cost per claim and digital engagement. For residents, a unified service would offer a single point of contact, consistent communication and streamlined digital access. It would eliminate the postcode lottery that currently exists, replacing it with a transparent, responsive and equitable system that delivers faster processing, clearer guidance and fairer outcomes.

Standardise & localise

To improve efficiency and user experience, certain services will benefit from a consistent framework – whether through digital platforms, processes, or governance models. At the same time, it is essential to retain local access points and responsiveness to community needs. The **One Suffolk** model supports this balance by standardising core elements while enabling channel choice, local adaptation and delivery.

Culture & heritage

Libraries, cultural institutions, heritage sites and leisure activities are central to the quality of life in Suffolk. They contribute to a healthier, happier county – making it a better place to live, work and visit. These services help people feel more confident, connected and well, and often serve as vital spaces for community engagement and personal development.

CASE STUDY

The Hold – A model for unified public service delivery in Suffolk

The centralisation of Suffolk's archive service into The Hold at Ipswich exemplifies the benefits of county-wide strategic planning, partnership and investment. This transformation has delivered measurable improvements in public engagement, operational efficiency, and digital access. As Suffolk considers restructuring into three unitary authorities, this case study demonstrates why a unified model – **One Suffolk** – is essential to protect and extend the gains made through centralised services.

Strategic objectives

The Hold was developed to address longstanding challenges in Suffolk's archive service and to align with broader public service goals:

- **preservation:** replace outdated facilities with a secure, climate-controlled repository for Suffolk's historic records
- **accessibility:** create a welcoming, inclusive space for exhibitions, research and community engagement
- **digital transformation:** expand online access to collections and support remote learning and research
- **partnership development:** strengthen collaboration with the University of Suffolk and other cultural institutions
- **efficiency and sustainability:** consolidate operations to reduce duplication and ensure long-term viability

These objectives directly support Suffolk's cultural strategy, digital inclusion agenda and levelling-up ambitions.

Implementation and investment

Following a strategic review in 2012–13, Suffolk County Council secured £10.8 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with additional investment from the University of Suffolk and the Suffolk Archives Foundation. Construction began in 2018 and was completed in 2020.

Key features of The Hold include:

- a state-of-the-art archive repository
- exhibition and event spaces
- dedicated learning rooms
- public research facilities
- digital infrastructure for remote access

Outcomes and impact

The Hold has delivered significant benefits across multiple domains

Stakeholder perspectives

"The Hold has transformed how we engage with Suffolk's history. It's not just a building – it's a community space." — Local resident and volunteer archivist

"Our partnership with Suffolk Archives has enriched our curriculum and created new research pathways." — Dr. Helen Lewis, University of Suffolk

"This is a model of what joined-up public service delivery can achieve." — Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Heritage

Area of Impact	Evidence of Success
Public Engagement	Over 50,000 visitors in first two years; 200+ community-led projects launched
Education	3,000+ school pupils engaged annually; new university modules integrated
Digital Access	40% increase in online archive usage; virtual exhibitions accessed globally
Cultural Value	Recognised as a regional cultural hub; supports Ipswich's regeneration strategy
Operational Efficiency	£250,000 annual savings through service consolidation and shared infrastructure

Risks of fragmentation under a three-unitary model

Restructuring Suffolk into three separate unitary authorities poses serious risks to the sustainability and coherence of services like The Hold.

A unified governance model under **One Suffolk** would preserve the strategic alignment, economies of scale and inclusive ethos that underpin The Hold's success.

Risk Area	Potential Impact
Governance Fragmentation	Loss of strategic oversight; inconsistent funding and priorities
Service Duplication	Increased costs from replicated infrastructure and staffing
Access Inequality	Uneven service provision across districts; risk of postcode lottery
Partnership Disruption	Threats to university collaboration and county-wide programming
Digital Disintegration	Fragmented digital platforms and reduced investment in online access

Lessons learned

Unified Vision Enables Scale: County-wide planning allowed for ambitious investment and long-term thinking.

- **Partnerships thrive under stability:** the Hold's success is rooted in consistent governance and shared goals
- **Digital access requires central coordination:** online platforms and digitisation efforts benefit from unified infrastructure
- **Community engagement needs equity:** a single authority ensures all residents have equal access to heritage services

Conclusion

The Hold is more than an archive – it is a symbol of what Suffolk can achieve through unified public service delivery. Its success demonstrates the value of strategic centralisation, cross-sector collaboration and inclusive cultural investment. As Suffolk considers its future governance structure, The Hold stands as a compelling argument for **One Suffolk** – a single unitary authority capable of delivering coherent, efficient and equitable services across the county.

The formation of the new **One Suffolk** council presents a unique opportunity to bring Cuture and Heritage services together into a more integrated, locally responsive offer.

Suffolk's network of public venues, parks and open spaces represents a cornerstone of the county's cultural identity, community wellbeing and local economy. These assets – ranging from performance halls and museums to heritage gardens and biodiverse parks—are deeply embedded in the lives of residents and visitors alike. Their success depends on coherent, county-wide governance and investment. A move toward **One Suffolk** offers the opportunity to protect and enhance these shared resources, ensuring equitable access and strategic development across all communities.

Among Suffolk's most celebrated venues is The Apex in Bury St Edmunds, a purpose-built performance space renowned for its acoustics and diverse programming. It plays a vital role in the town's night-time economy, attracting audiences for music, comedy and spoken word events while supporting local hospitality and retail. Similarly, Snape Maltings, located on the Suffolk coast, has earned international recognition as a centre for classical and contemporary music. It hosts the Aldeburgh Festival and other major events that draw visitors from across the UK and beyond, contributing significantly to the region's cultural tourism.

In Ipswich, The Hold stands as a flagship example of modern public service delivery. Developed by Suffolk County Council in partnership with the University of Suffolk, it combines archival preservation with public exhibitions, learning spaces and digital access. Its success illustrates the power of strategic collaboration and centralised investment. Nearby, the Corn Exchange and Christchurch Mansion offer further cultural depth, with the former serving as a civic venue for events and the latter housing important works by Gainsborough and Constable. In smaller towns, venues like Leiston Film Theatre and Moyse's Hall Museum continue to provide accessible arts and heritage experiences, reinforcing Suffolk's commitment to inclusive cultural provision.

These venues are not only cultural assets – they are economic engines. They attract visitors, support local businesses and provide employment in the creative and hospitality sectors. Their programming fosters social inclusion, intergenerational engagement and lifelong learning, making them indispensable to Suffolk's broader strategic goals.

Equally important are Suffolk's parks and open spaces, which contribute to public health, environmental resilience, community cohesion and the local visitor economy. Christchurch Park in Ipswich, a Grade II listed landscape, hosts events such as Brass on the Grass and provides a tranquil setting for recreation and reflection. Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds, with its historic ruins and floral displays, is central to the town's identity and a magnet for tourists, attracting over one million visitors annually. The most recent VisitEngland survey (published June 2025) ranked the Abbey Gardens as the 12th most visited free attraction in England and the top free attraction in the East of England – demonstrating its economic significance to the town and wider Suffolk economy. These are just two of a number of examples across Suffolk.

These green spaces are free, inclusive and accessible to all. They serve as venues for community events, safe areas for families, and sanctuaries for mental and physical wellbeing. Their contribution to climate resilience and biodiversity also aligns with Suffolk's environmental ambitions.
Many of these venues and parks benefit from active Friends groups – volunteer-led organisations that promote stewardship, fundraising and programming. The Friends of Christchurch Park, Friends of Abbey Gardens, and Friends of Holywells Park are just a few examples of civic pride in action. These groups strengthen social bonds, enhance local ownership and reduce pressure on public budgets. The Suffolk Archives Foundation, which supports The Hold, demonstrates how community engagement can amplify the impact of public investment.

The strategic importance of these assets becomes even clearer when viewed through the lens of governance. A single unitary authority would ensure consistent access to cultural and green infrastructure across the county, eliminating disparities in service provision. It would enable more effective planning and funding, protect partnerships with universities and national bodies, facilitate shared procurement and promote Suffolk's shared heritage and sense of place. Moreover, it would support the local economy by sustaining tourism, creative industries and community enterprise.

In contrast, fragmentation into two or three unitary councils risks diluting these benefits. It could lead to uneven service provision, duplicated costs and weakened strategic oversight – particularly for assets that serve the whole of Suffolk. The success of venues like The Hold and parks like Christchurch Park depends on unified governance, long-term investment and inclusive access.

Suffolk's public venues and open spaces are more than amenitie – they are pillars of community life, economic resilience and cultural identity. Their continued success depends on coherent leadership and strategic vision. **One Suffolk** offers the best framework to protect and enhance these shared treasures, ensuring they remain accessible, vibrant and sustainable for generations to come.

Libraries, in particular, have the potential to play an even greater role as community hubs. Beyond their traditional functions, they can host a wide range of services – from health and wellbeing support to digital inclusion initiatives, community events and advice services. This kind of co-location will help make public services more visible, approachable and efficient.

CASE STUDY

North Yorkshire Council – Strategic delivery of culture, heritage and leisure as a unitary council

Following its transition to a unitary authority in 2023, North Yorkshire Council unified cultural, heritage, library and leisure services previously delivered by eight separate councils. This strategic consolidation enabled the development of a single county-wide Cultural Strategy, shaped through extensive public consultation and launched in 2024. The new approach has delivered clearer strategic direction, improved access – particularly in rural areas – and stronger alignment with health, education and economic priorities.

As a single authority, North Yorkshire has significantly enhanced its ability to attract external investment, securing major funding from Arts Council England and gaining national recognition for local institutions like Craven Museum. The council's community empowerment model has ensured services remain locally rooted, with strong volunteer and VCFSE involvement. Innovations such as the Digital Creative Hub and the annual Cultural Symposium have fostered collaboration and adaptability across the sector. North Yorkshire's experience demonstrates the value of unitary delivery: more coherent planning, better value for residents, and a stronger, more resilient cultural ecosystem that reflects and supports the diverse communities it serves.

Our residents' survey highlights that access to the natural environment, leisure and entertainment facilities, and historic places of interest are among the most valued aspects of local life. Yet currently, these services are fragmented. For example, four separate culture, heritage and visitor economy strategies are being developed or delivered by different district and borough councils.

By consolidating these into a single, **One Suffolk** Culture, Heritage and Leisure Strategy, rooted in local communities and places, the new council can unlock greater opportunities for collaboration, resource-sharing and innovation. A unified approach will deliver better value for residents and ensure that services are more accessible, sustainable and impactful.

This joined-up model will also strengthen Suffolk's position when engaging with regional and national stakeholders, increasing the potential to attract external investment from organisations such as Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Sport England. Crucially, it will preserve the distinct local identities and connections that communities cherish – not just as users, but as active contributors. Many of these services are supported by volunteers and run by VCFSE organisations, both large and small.

Through the community empowerment model embedded in **One Suffolk**, these valued services can play a central role in helping area committees deliver on local priorities – ensuring that culture, heritage and leisure remain at the heart of Suffolk's future.

CASE STUDY

Delivering front line services

Collette lives in a small market town where she's a short walk to her ageing parents' home. Collette is keen to make sure her parents enjoy living independently and well for as long as possible. For them, an important part of that is still having a car. However, with her father's mobility worsening due to his chronic arthritis, there are fewer opportunities for them to enjoy the car and they are feeling more isolated.

Whilst Collette enjoys being close to her parents, she can feel lonely now her children all live away from home. After a brief internet search, she finds the One Suffolk Council website and discovers that an arts group meets at the library on Wednesdays. The arts group is welcoming, and Collette quickly makes friends as well as reconnecting with her passion for art.

Collette is about to walk home from her weekly visit to the group, when she sees a flyer in the reception. Following a short chat with a friendly member of staff, Collette realises that they could apply online for her father's blue badge.
Arriving early for her group the following week, Collette completes and submits the form with a bit of help from the friendly staff member. They encourage her to sign up to a weekly training session at the Library to help people become more digitally confident. In the same visit, she also managed to pay for her father's road tax due to the co-located post office.

Whilst talking to the library staff member about her parents, Collette expressed concern about how they were coping. Together, they agreed that support might be helpful. With Collette's consent, the staff member arranged for the Library at Home service to visit her parents and used an online directory to connect her with a local charity, funded by **One Suffolk**, that helps residents remain independent in their homes.

Governance and strategic management of parking in suffolk

Off-street car parking

Over time financial pressures have meant that the district and borough councils have increasingly relied on car parking charges to supplement finances. This has raised significant concerns amongst businesses and across local high streets, particularly due to the uneven nature of car parking charges across Suffolk. These variations affect footfall, place strain on small businesses and often negatively impact perceptions of towns and villages. This is especially challenging for residents in our rural areas where there is a high dependence on cars to access shops and benefit from our high streets.

The parking payment system is also varied, which creates complexity and confusion. For example, East Suffolk and West Suffolk focus on the RingGo app to handle payments with Ipswich, Babergh and Mid Suffolk favouring digital tickets via MiPermit, while other individual car parks still rely on pay-on-exit systems. Further confusion is added through the roll-out of different parking promotion ideas such as the "free from 3" initiative which is implemented in some locations and not others and on different days of the week in different parts of Suffolk.

A single unitary council will be able to remove this tension. **One Suffolk** will undertake a thorough Suffolk-wide review of parking and parking charges (on- and off-street), in close consultation with BIDs, DMOs, residents and town and parish councils. This review can explore different options such as dynamic pricing (e.g. lower rates for shorter, or longer stays), loyalty schemes, promotional or free periods, more integrated transport strategies and establishing a more transparent reinvestment programme so that residents can clearly see the tangible benefits of parking charges. Importantly, by doing this across the whole of Suffolk it will be equitable, eliminate competitiveness and mitigate the uneven impact that currently exists.

One Suffolk will also have a vital role to play in the roll-out and installation of more electric vehicle (EV) charging points with car parks being an obvious starting point. Managing coverage in a rural area will require careful planning and strategic oversight if it is to help change behaviours and increase uptake.

On-street car parking

Suffolk County Council assumed responsibility for Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) in April 2020, transitioning enforcement from the police to local authorities under the Traffic Management Act 2004. Enforcement is delivered through agency agreements with district and borough councils, with Ipswich Borough Council serving as an early adopter and operational model.

Exemplar unitary authorities such as the London Borough of Barnet and North Yorkshire Council demonstrate how CPE can be both financially sustainable and strategically reinvested. Barnet generates over £22 million annually, reinvesting surplus into highways and travel concessions. North Yorkshire uses enforcement income to support transport projects and digital infrastructure.

Suffolk has begun to realise similar benefits. Local enforcement has improved compliance, reduced congestion and supported town centre vitality. Revenue, though modest, is increasingly reinvested into transport services such as signage, maintenance and electric vehicle infrastructure. Under legislation, any surplus must be used for transport-related improvements.
Integrated digital services are central to modern parking governance. These include online permit systems, real-time enforcement dashboards and mobile payment platforms. A key innovation is the adoption of Digital Traffic Regulation Orders (D-TROs), which replace paper-based legal documents with map-based, interactive formats. Councils such as Lambeth and Southwark have used D-TROs to streamline consultation, accelerate approvals and reduce appeals due to clearer signage and data consistency.

For the public, these digital services offer tangible improvements. Residents can access parking rules and restrictions via mobile apps or interactive maps, reducing confusion and improving compliance. Visitors benefit from seamless payment options and clearer signage. In Lambeth, digitised kerbside data enabled the transformation of parking spaces into community areas, enhancing urban liveability and sustainability.

A future move to a single unitary authority would enable a unified enforcement strategy, reduce duplication and allow surplus income to be pooled for Suffolk-wide investment. It would also support integrated digital services – such as D-TROs, permit platforms and real-time data tools – delivering a more efficient, transparent and user-friendly experience for residents and visitors alike.

High street and town centre markets

High street and town centre markets are vital civic assets. They foster social cohesion, stimulate local economies, support entrepreneurship and the local agri-business sector. They also enhance the vibrancy of urban spaces, fostering pride and belonging. In Suffolk, where economic challenges and demographic shifts are reshaping local priorities, markets offer a great opportunity to drive inclusive growth and community-led regeneration. Suffolk is home to an array of markets, with traditional provisions markets typically run by the District and Borough Council, and specialist markets operated by Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and other private and voluntary organisations. As a result of its strategic overview and unified approach, **One Suffolk** provides the best opportunity to support and invest in these diverse locally important parts of the community and economy.

Local markets attract footfall, which in turn increases dwell time in town centres and boosts spending in nearby shops and businesses. They also provide low-barrier entry points for entrepreneurs and micro-businesses, supporting local employment and offering flexible work opportunities.

Farmers' and speciality markets are booming across the UK, benefiting farmers, local economies, consumers and the environment. This benefits producers with better income and direct sales and consumers with fresh, affordable food and greater local choice.

Our residents' survey demonstrated that 63.4% of residents value access to the main towns of Suffolk and 46.7% the retail and shopping opportunities Suffolk has to offer, of which markets are a key aspect.

The **One Suffolk** proposal outlines a strategic framework to support, expand and future-proof local markets, through a review that considers infrastructure investment, policy reform, community engagement and targeted economic development.

Using the market town of Bury St Edmunds as an example, the total number of visitors for the year to date (Aug 2025) is 2,716,228 which is 1.2% up on the previous year[31]. The Business Improvement District (BID) in the town organises specialist markets throughout the year, such as the August Bank Holiday weekend Food & Drink Festival. Over the last three years, the event has grown in size, increasing footfall over the two-day period from 27,352 in 2023 to 37,678 in 2025. Comparing the footfall over the two days of the 2025 event to the same days the previous week, when the event was not taking place, footfall is shown to be 116.8% greater. Looking at footfall data for the days on which the traditional twice-weekly market takes place, currently operated by the District Council, it is clear that Wednesdays outperform comparable weekdays (Monday – Thursday). This is an example of where local data can be used to inform action.

The **One Suffolk** proposal will focus on:

- Planning, licensing and highway service reform: including simplifying trader licensing processes, reducing administrative barriers and allowing flexible planning for pop-up and mixed-use developments. Also, establishing clear and consistent guidelines and frameworks that all departments follow for licensing, planning and highway services will ensure consistent experiences for markets and traders that move around Suffolk.
- Promotion and engagement: for example by launching seasonal campaigns and themed market events, partnering with local media and influencers to increase awareness, and involving residents in the design of market layouts and programming.
- Skills and enterprise development: collaborating with colleges and enterprise hubs on trader training, supporting youth entrepreneurship through market incubators, and promoting sustainable business practices and local sourcing.
- Learning from and sharing best practice: **One Suffolk** will work with local businesses, traders, business representatives (e.g. BIDs) and residents to help the County's markets thrive. It will also build on existing good practice (e.g., West Suffolk council's markets review and plans). **One Suffolk**'s new relationship with town and parish councils and its area committees provide a further mechanism to do this. Opportunities that could be explored include trialling additional specialist events (such as food festivals) to attract more footfall
- Implementation and governance: coordinating among planning, transport, business support, licensing and community engagement teams, as well as forming a Market Development Taskforce to supervise implementation, assessment and partner liaison.

Markets are not just retail spaces – they are civic platforms for economic resilience, social connection and sustainable growth. By investing in their future, **One Suffolk** will unlock a powerful tool for revitalising town centres and empowering communities.

31 West Suffolk Council: Committee report template July 2024

Smarter.

A Suffolk-wide system greatly increases the level of data and insight available, which means that it is easier and more cost-effective to transition to a more intelligence-led council. This creates opportunities around prevention and the ability to identify risk early, intervene quickly and prevent crises from escalating. For example, the creation of a digital twin of Suffolk. This virtual model simulates Suffolk's physical environment and can be used to enhance decision-making and resource allocation in relation to urban planning, highways maintenance and infrastructure development.

A single unitary council for Suffolk also avoids significant disruption, cost and risk to the delivery of a number of critical and complex services. This means effort, resources and funding can be focused on improving the services and ultimately delivering better outcomes. As opposed to expending significant resources and funding on establishing and setting up new services and markets with little to no evidence that they will ultimately deliver better outcomes.

Simpler.

By joining up services across Suffolk, **One Suffolk** will not only simplify the delivery of key services, such as housing, planning, and waste, but also make it easier for a wider range of stakeholders to engage effectively. Rather than multiple relationships these partners will just need to engage with a single system. This will significantly improve coordination, reduce bureaucracy and administrative overhead and ultimately help deliver better outcomes for residents.

Better.

One Suffolk combines the strategic scale and economics of efficiency with the ability to deliver locally and provide tailored support for individual people and places. This means services can be tailored to local needs while being underpinned by strategic resilience, consistent standards and clear accountability – a combination that is a pre-requisite for improved outcomes.

As part of this, as a larger authority **One Suffolk** will be better able to recruit and retain experienced directors and key professionals (whereas as a result of fragmented responsibilities and reduced demand smaller authorities cannot justify specialized expertise), which will impact positively on service quality.

Delivering the best possible value for money for residents

Local government reorganisation presents both a financial opportunity and challenge.

Lessons from the recent creation of unitary councils[32] have clearly shown that "savings take time to achieve, and new councils need to ensure these are planned over the medium-term". This financial challenge is exacerbated by the fact that to enact reorganisation there is a need to incur notable one-off transition costs in the short term and that many of the councils involved are starting the process from a position of limited fiscal strength.

Given the current financial position and the mismatch in timing between costs and savings, it is critical that the new council is financially resilient in the short-term so that it can work through and beyond the transition process to the point where multi-year savings – as opposed to one-off measures – can be realised. The existing authorities in Suffolk will also play a role in supporting this financial resilience through the transition period. A single unitary council for Suffolk is the only means of ensuring this.

This section sets out how one unitary council can drive financial benefits compared to the current cost of local government in Suffolk, minimise the costs and risks of transition and ultimately provide a foundation of longer-term financial resilience – particularly when compared to two or three unitary models. In particular we have significantly developed our financial analysis (see Section 5) from the initial high-level top-down analysis used in the Interim Plan[33] and have provided more detailed, granular and locally driven analysis of the financial costs and benefits of LGR.

Driving benefits

Potential financial benefits from reorganising the existing two-tier Council structure across Suffolk can be estimated using current financial data published by each Council and applying detailed assumptions. In the short-term these benefits relate to the process of reorganisation with particular opportunities in relation to senior management and democratic services. One council for Suffolk is the most simple and efficient structure reducing the number of organisations which in turn significantly reduces the need for management roles across all levels of the organisation.

While this reduction in roles will incur redundancy costs (see below) these are material savings and deliver a recurring benefit to the new authority.

Alongside this, and as noted earlier, the reduction in councillor numbers with the removal of a second tier of Local Government will also deliver day one savings with regard to democratic services.

Over the short-medium term, a unitary authority can provide a more efficient operating model as a result of amalgamating multiple organisations. This offers the potential for savings in the running costs of the organisation in back office and cost of property by removing duplication, combining IT systems and standardising processes. This will lead to a reduction in required headcount and therefore reduces the need for office space and associated costs such as energy, cleaning and maintenance.

32 Grant Thornton (2024) Learning from the new unitary councils
33 Suffolk County Council's Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk was submitted to Government in March 2025

Whilst this is an opportunity presented by local government reorganisation the scale of the benefit has not been costed at this point as the opportunity exists across all configurations and the scale will be dependent upon a detailed review of assets and subsequent decisions made by the new authority. Across Suffolk there is already substantial co-location which will reduce the scale of the opportunity across all configurations.

A single unitary council offers the greatest potential to drive these efficiency savings, in part through the creation of one rather than two or three different councils, but also because it removes any distractions and disruptions to the process from having to simultaneously disaggregate services. A single council based on the existing county council footprint and the proposed ICB boundaries provides an established and mature delivery platform for the districts and borough councils to integrate onto. As a result, officer time and resources can be focused on the integration and alignment of services enabling them to more quickly settle into a business-as-usual operation.

Transition and disaggregation costs and risks

Upfront investment is required to support restructuring, such as integrating systems, harmonising pay structures and managing transitional costs. These expenses are expected to be offset by future efficiencies in service delivery and administration. As noted, within this phasing is important, as funding is required to be identified to enable reforms years before expected realisation of savings.

While many of the transition costs will be common across one, two or three unitary authorities, the simple fact is that multiple authorities will require many of these costs to be duplicated (albeit at a reduced scale) by the number of authorities being created. This is applicable to the core transition costs identified in our financial modelling as the costs related to redundancy are dependent upon the level of savings delivered. A single unitary will have higher one-off redundancy costs but will deliver greater recurrent benefits through a reduced headcount compared to other configurations.

In addition to these costs there are substantial costs and associated risks associated with the splitting of social care services and other services like highways. As can be seen in the financial analysis this makes a notable difference to the scale of costs – and the level of risk – associated with two or three unitary councils (over £130 million over a five-year period). This factor places a significant financial burden on any option requiring more than one unitary council. On top of the costs of splitting county services the three unitary model proposed by the districts and borough actually involves splitting district services as the proposed boundaries are not coterminous with existing administrative boundaries. This fact further adds to the transition costs and risks and removes the benefit and potential of savings whilst also significantly destabilising service delivery.

Longer term financial resilience

By analysing the current financial position of each authority and considering their medium-term financial strategy (including the management of debt) coupled with how different configurations would drive savings and costs it is possible to consider the impact on longer-term financial resilience. Through this analysis it is clear that one council for Suffolk provides the best foundation to manage financial risk and deliver greater financial resilience without leaving any area isolated – which would not be the case under a three unitary council model.

Greater financial resilience would in turn enable the new unitary council to free up resources for frontline services and help to keep Council Tax as low as possible. This in turn offers notably better value for money for Suffolk's residents.

The disaggregation of social care services requires a level of nuance that goes beyond splitting expenditure by population. Demand and cost profiles across Suffolk are not even and therefore, were disaggregation to take place, then the disaggregation expenditure and budgets would need to align to these. By mapping the social care spend based on location we have explored the level of imbalance that would be created across the configurations where social care disaggregation is required. The split of Council Tax income based on households' data has also been analysed to map the relationship between expenditure and this core source of income.

In a two unitary configuration there is a slight imbalance between the two newly created authorities with the Eastern configuration having a higher level of expenditure due to the allocation of social care expenditure. However, the Eastern configuration also shows a higher level of Council Tax income at a similar proportion to the differential on expenditure.

For a three unitary configuration we have identified a range due to the nuances around mapping social care expenditure (for more details on these methods please see Appendix eight). At the lower end of the range there is no clear imbalance between the three unitary councils, with the east configuration having the highest expenditure but the relationship between income and expenditure being relatively balanced across the three unitaries. However, at the higher end of the range the imbalance between the authorities becomes much starker with the Eastern configuration seeing a significant increase in expenditure, indicating that there is an imbalance between the newly created authorities which poses a clear risk to both the immediate and longer-term financial resilience. Further detail can be found in Appendix seven.

An important consideration in relation to financial resilience is the management of debt. As per the 2024/25 accounts, debt across Suffolk is £1,222 million, with 54% of this relating to the County Council, 20% to Ipswich and 10% to Babergh. Were three councils created, as part of the disaggregation of the balance sheet, allocating debt to the new structure will have to be carefully considered to ensure equity of rates and maturity as well as alignment to the assets that generated the debt. For this proposal the allocation of debt has been done on a population basis, this shows an imbalance in the distribution, with the East having the higher distribution c. 37% and the West a lower share at 28%. This creates an imbalance across Suffolk and a risk to the resilience of the new council as debt level has the potential to become unaffordable over time.

While there are no issues of stranded debt, the negative DSG reserve, does have a significant impact on the debt of the County Council. Therefore, while the statutory override permits the County Council to have a negative DSG Reserve, this override only exists until 31 March 2028. The Government are aware of the challenges of the DSG and the Government White Paper on SEND (to be published in the autumn) is expected to outline the proposals for managing this national issue. However, it is important to highlight that disaggregation of this debt to smaller unitary councils – as would be the case with the two and three unitary council options – will present a risk to their resilience.

Smarter.

One Suffolk is the most financially efficient model for Suffolk. It delivers the greatest savings compared to the alternative options.

The scale of disaggregation costs required both in relation to splitting existing county services (which we have modelled) and district services (which are proposed as part of the preferred configuration for the districts) are so significant that it simply does not make financial sense.

Based on our analysis, this would mean that the three unitary model of local government in Suffolk will actually cost more than the current two-tier model that exists.

Simpler.

Over the short to medium term, a unitary authority can provide a more efficient operating model as a result of amalgamating multiple organisations. This drives savings in the running costs of the organisation both people and property.

A single unitary council offers the greatest potential to drive these efficiency savings, in part through the creation of one rather than two or three different councils, but also because it removes any distractions and disruptions to the process from having to simultaneously disaggregate services. A single council based on the existing county council footprint and operation provides an established and mature delivery platform for the districts and borough councils to integrate onto. As a result, officer time and resources can be focused on the integration and alignment of services enabling them to more quickly settle into a business-as-usual operation.

Better.

While the creation of a single unitary council in Suffolk will not remove the financial sustainability challenges that are facing local government as a whole, one council for Suffolk provides the most resilient foundation from which to manage financial risk.

Greater financial resilience would in turn enable the new unitary council to free up resources for front-line services and help to keep Council Tax as low as possible.

Being the most effective local partner for Government

The Devolution White Paper is clear. The relationship between Central and Local Government "must be a genuine relationship of equals, mutual respect, and collective purpose built around the missions to transform the UK"[34]. **One Suffolk** is the most viable means of achieving this within Suffolk. Two or three unitary authorities will create competing and potentially conflicting voices, they will limit relationships, diminish the collective purpose and hinder mission delivery.

34 See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper

One voice for Suffolk

A single unitary authority will ensure that the many and varied needs of Suffolk's diverse communities can be communicated clearly and effectively both to the mayor in their central role in delivering growth and improving outcomes as well as the full breadth of central government departments that interact with and engage with local government.

At one level this is as simple as departments having one conversation instead of three. More significantly it is about forming a genuine partnership around a place, one that is focused on strategic needs and priorities with a shared commitment to delivering outcomes.

To build this successful partnership with Central Government **One Suffolk** will establish a single countywide unitary authority that will:

- Work on the basis of equals
- Give you confidence in the effectiveness of the new unitary council's governance, financial management and public accountability
- Build on Suffolk's track record of good performance
- Develop shared missions with clear outcomes that align local plans with national priorities
- Establish strategic partnerships to deliver collaborative projects in areas such as clean energy, digital health and smart agriculture.
- Create a model that enables strong community involvement, using data and local insight to facilitate prevention
- Support the newly established Norfolk and Suffolk mayor and Combined Authority in unlocking the region's significant economic potential and champion the area

Throughout this case for change we have demonstrated that these are foundational elements of **One Suffolk**.

We have seen through the engagement undertaken as part of developing our plans that [74%] of residents have a sense of belonging to Suffolk (second only to their village or town [81%]).

However, currently 60% of residents are either undecided or against a unitary model of local government. A finding that highlights the importance of close working with Central Government to make the case for unitarisation to the public. This is not a statement about the number of different authorities in Suffolk, rather it will be about working together to demonstrate to the public that the changes will make it simpler for residents to understand and access services (as currently [70%] are not confident or undecided that it will and [75%] are not confident or undecided about whether it will improve value for money).

Given these concerns it is vital that together we provide clarity and build confidence around the benefits of unitary government and critical that unitarisation does improve value for money with the analysis developed as part of this work showing that a single authority for Suffolk is best placed to deliver this.

Working together with central, devolved and local government, **One Suffolk** will speak with a single voice to the communities and businesses in Suffolk. This will be immensely powerful and important in building confidence in the change that will take place.

One partner for Government

A single unitary authority for Suffolk is also the most effective means of working together on the shared missions you have established.

Kickstart economic growth – as noted earlier, both in terms of enabling devolution and driving growth locally **One Suffolk** is the most effective option. A single unitary authority will enable core sectors to thrive. It will create economies of scale that are more effective at unlocking investment, and it will ensure that benefits and opportunities are spread across a much wider geography. Two or three unitary authorities instantly undermine this. It creates artificial boundaries not recognised by businesses, it limits opportunities to more tightly defined boundaries, it prevents a strategic approach, and it creates unnecessary competition and complexity. Two or three authorities will also significantly undermine the pace of delivery on the 16 NSIPs – projects that are not only critical for Suffolk but the nation as a whole.

Make Britain a clean energy superpower – Clean energy sits at the heart of Suffolk's growth ambition. It will be a crown jewel in the Strategic Authority and by working together with government **One Suffolk** can increase progress towards clean energy and energy security goals. The opportunities are huge and exciting. However, two or three authorities will reduce opportunities to progress at pace on clean energy both in terms of growth and in relation to delivering net zero. For example, three planning authorities with narrowly defined boundaries would result in the Norwich to Tilbury pylon NSIP proposal passing through two different planning areas and impacting all three, significantly complicating the process. **One Suffolk** is the best partner to enable change at pace while ensuring consistency across Suffolk and a consistently fair deal for residents and communities.

Take back our streets – This case for a single countywide unitary council in relation to this mission is most compelling as **One Suffolk** would be coterminous with the Police boundary and therefore a single strategic partner. However, through its community empowerment offer, it will also provide local but simpler opportunities for neighbourhood policing to engage with – for example through its 16 Area Committees.

Reforming our childcare and education systems – Delivering on the mission to reform childcare and education requires a system that places families first and ensures every child, regardless of need, can thrive. A single unitary authority for Suffolk provides the clarity, consistency and accountability necessary to drive meaningful change across the county. Fragmented governance risks inconsistent provision, diluted accountability and slower progress on critical reforms particularly for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The **One Suffolk** offer enables a unified approach to early years, education and SEND services, ensuring that families experience seamless support and that children receive the right help at the right time. By working as one partner for Government, Suffolk can deliver on national ambitions with local precision creating a childcare and education system that is inclusive, resilient and focused on outcomes for every child and family.

Build an NHS Fit for the Future – One Suffolk supports the delivery of this mission in three key ways. First is alignment of **One Suffolk** and the new, more strategic ICB area; therefore, making it simpler and easier to work together. Two or three authorities would require more resource from the NHS to engage with the numerous councils in the Suffolk. Second, it is through joint working that alignment will really enable the development of effective solutions with regard to prevention. This starts with maximising the opportunities around public health and wellbeing, where **One Suffolk's** community empowerment mechanisms can root these vital services in communities and better target joint resource to tackle areas of greatest need and support more community and prevention-based care interventions. Third is through preventing distraction, disruption and risk from the splitting up of adult and children's social care. The breaking up of these services raises very real risks to the NHS in terms of safeguarding and for example, in increasing the risk of delayed transfers out of hospital to home. Moreover, it reduces the opportunity to integrate with countywide social care services for adults and children/young people that is the best way to deliver the shift from hospital to community, from analogue to digital and from sickness to prevention.

Smarter.

One Suffolk will foster innovation through strategic partnerships with private sector companies, universities and research institutions. This will involve collaboratives projects in areas such as clean energy, digital health and smart agriculture. These partnerships will help drive growth, advance Suffolk's delivery of clean energy and help build a stronger place-based health system.

Two or three unitary councils across Suffolk significantly weakens Suffolk's ability and capacity to lead on national priorities and limits Suffolk's effectiveness as a trusted local delivery partner. It requires multiple conversations and trade-offs which will significantly hinder delivery.

Simpler.

One Suffolk provides a single voice for Suffolk. It enables the needs and opportunities of Suffolk to be communicated clearly. It enables the many and varied needs of Suffolk's diverse communities to be communicated effectively both to the mayor as well as the full breadth of central government departments that interact with and engage with local government.

Better.

One Suffolk is better for Government as it enables the new unitary council to be a true local partner in the delivery of your missions. A single unitary council can help: drive growth in nationally significant industries; accelerate the delivery of clean energy; enhance joint working with the police; deliver a unified approach to early years education and SEND; and maximise the opportunities around embedding a focus on prevention to maximize health and wellbeing.

Section four

A blueprint for a single unitary council in Suffolk




Suffolk needs a unitary council that is forward-thinking, resilient and built to last. A council that acts not as a top-down authority or parental figure, but as a facilitator and enabler – empowering individuals and communities to take charge of their own futures – and fully committed to service delivery that is accessible and responsive.

A new unitary council that is different by design

To make this a reality we have created a set of design principles to support a decision-making framework for the complex transition process to the new unitary council. This framework will enable the new unitary council to establish a dynamic culture, where decisions are focused on future requirements and needs, co-created and difficult decisions are made in an evidenced, timely, compassionate way. It will take the new unitary council beyond transition and ensure it is on the necessary accelerated trajectory to deliver genuine transformation in local government services.

What the new unitary council will do

A new unitary council for Suffolk will:

- prioritise prevention and build on community strengths
- root services in the communities so that they are accessible and responsive to local contexts
- make services about people – not structures or processes – and prioritise the needs of residents
- manage risks ensuring all services are compliant, safe and stable
- deliver within budget constraints ensuring a financially sustainable future

How the new unitary council will do it

In doing this the behaviours, standards and ways of working of **One Suffolk** will:

- collaborate across departments, partners and place
- make evidence-based decisions focused on outcomes
- maximise digital and new technology to enhance productivity and service delivery
- empower the voices of Suffolk to shape decisions
- simplify and streamline.

A blueprint for the future

The creation of a new, Suffolk-wide single unitary council will provide a unique opportunity to introduce a new operating model, at the heart of a broader integrated system of public service delivery in Suffolk. At its core is a commitment to prevention and potential and surrounding this are two key interdependencies that shape how services are designed and delivered

First, there is a need to balance scale with personalisation. This will ensure that **One Suffolk** delivers smart, inclusive services – efficient where possible, personal where necessary.

Second, the new council needs to be strategic and localised. **One Suffolk's** scale also gives it the power to lead strategically, yet the strength of Suffolk also lies in its diversity as communities have distinct identities, needs and assets and that's why some services must be localised – strategic in ambition, local in delivery.

These interdependencies are not just philosophical, they are operational. The model therefore recognises that different services carry different levels of risk and lend themselves to varying degrees of standardisation.

The operating model is then delivered through a balanced integration of people, processes and systems with each component appropriately aligned to its functional purpose to ensure the effective delivery of strategic aspirations.

The **One Suffolk** operating model is also purposefully anchored in place, recognising that meaningful public service must be shaped by and responsive to the distinct character and needs of each locality. Therefore, a key delivery mechanism for delivering at a local level is through the network of area committees and Suffolk's Town and Parish Councils.

A new model of local government

We envisage a future for Suffolk shaped by a new kind of place leadership – one that is forward-thinking, resilient and built to last. At the heart of this vision is a council that acts not as a top-down authority or parental figure, but as a facilitator and enabler – empowering individuals and communities to take charge of their own futures.

This is a council focused on prevention and unlocking the strengths of local people and places – not just reacting to problems or masking the symptoms of deeper issues. The new unitary council will champion early support and community-led solutions to help Suffolk grow and succeed from the ground up.

One Suffolk is committed to truly modern service delivery – designed to be accessible, inclusive and responsive. Residents will have genuine channel choice, whether digital, face-to-face, or through trusted local networks. This approach creates the capacity to add real value, enabling the new unitary council to deliver expert, personalised support where it's needed most.

And when people do need help, they will find a council that is accessible, compassionate and effective. There will be no wrong door – residents will only need to tell their story once to receive the right support, at the right time, from the right people.

Design principles

To bring this vision to life, we have developed a set of design principles that will serve as a core decision-making framework – especially vital during periods of complex and evolving change. In the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), where diverse councils, cultures and communities converge, these principles will provide a consistent, transparent and unifying foundation for action.

For Suffolk, the design principles translate the new unitary council's values and ambitions into clear, action-oriented statements. They will be used to assess, challenge and shape decisions at every level – ensuring that choices remain grounded in a shared, coherent approach.

Over time, these principles will become an organisation-wide compass – guiding all parts of the council through preparation, transition and transformation. They will enable the new unitary council to make confident, "no regrets" decisions that align with the collective purpose and direction, even in uncertainty.

We have categorised our design principles into two categories:

- **What the new unitary council will do.** This defines the new unitary council's purpose, focus and priorities. It articulates the outcomes the new unitary council will aim to deliver for Suffolk's communities and how it will create value. These principles ensure the new unitary council's efforts are aligned with strategic goals, community needs and public benefit, grounding the work in clear and consistent direction.
- **How the new unitary council will do it.** This outlines the behaviours, standards and ways of working that shape delivery. It sets expectations for how teams work together, make decisions and engage stakeholders. Furthermore, it sets out how services should be designed to deliver to ensure a people-centred public service.

Design principles for **One Suffolk**

What the new unitary council will do…	
It will prioritise prevention and build on community strengths	• focus is on addressing root causes rather than reacting to problems • recognise and invest in the strengths, assets and potential of individuals and communities
Its services are rooted in communities - accessible and responsive to local context	• design and deliver services that reflect the unique characteristics of Suffolk's towns, villages, coastal and rural areas • make accessing services and engaging with officers simpler and easier • embed Suffolk's identity, values and local understanding into every decision and service • protect and enhance Suffolk's natural and built environment to support sustainability and pride in place
Its services are about people – not structures or processes – prioritising the needs of residents	• design our services around the real needs, experiences and voices of the people **One Suffolk** serves • leverage economies of scale to unlock capacity for tailored, personalised and impactful support • offer flexible and accessible channels, ensuring there is no 'wrong door', allowing residents to engage with services in the way that best suits their needs, preferences and circumstances
It will manage risks ensuring all services are compliant, safe and stable	• ensure all actions are compliant, ethical and protect the most vulnerable • safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and embedded in all service delivery and decisions
It will deliver within budget constraints ensuring a financially sustainable future	• drive value by ensuring that every pound spent delivers maximum benefit for Suffolk's people, places and businesses • prioritise resources where they can make the greatest impact

Design principles for **One Suffolk** (continued)

How the new council will do it...	
It will collaborate across departments, partners and places	• break down silos to work as one system with colleagues, communities and partners in health, education, business and the voluntary sector. • work together to share insight, align goals and co-design solutions
It will make evidence-based decisions focused on outcomes	• use data and lived experience to drive decisions, measure impact and continuously improve • data drives day-to-day decision making as it is embedded into service design and delivery
It will maximise digital and new technology to enhance productivity and service delivery	• harness technology to improve access, efficiency and outcomes, reducing manual tasks and activities • by automating routine tasks, **One Suffolk** will create space for human interaction where it has the biggest impact
It will empower the voices of Suffolk to shape decisions	• build a strong, two-way partnership between local government and communities, including councillors and town and parish councils, by empowering both to act, deliver and collaborate around a shared purpose • decisions are shaped by those who live and work in Suffolk, ensuring that change reflects local identity and meets community needs
It will simplify and streamline how it works	• remove unnecessary complexity, duplication and bureaucracy - making it easier for stakeholders to access services and for staff to deliver them

An operating model to deliver new ambition for Suffolk

The creation of a new, Suffolk-wide single unitary council will provide a unique opportunity to introduce a modern operating model, at the heart of a broader integrated system of public service delivery in Suffolk. This will replace the management arrangements of the six existing councils.

The **One Suffolk** operating model is built on a dynamic balance – recognising that delivering modern public services requires both scale and personal connection, both strategic reach and local relevance.

At its core is a commitment to Prevention and Potential – a proactive, strengths-based approach that seeks to unlock the capabilities of people and places before problems arise. Surrounding this are two key interdependencies that shape how services are designed and delivered:

Balancing scale with personalisation

For services that are transactional and routine – such as Council Tax processing, parking permit administration and standard customer enquiries – economies of scale allow the new unitary council to maximise efficiency and ensure that automation and digital platforms can be complemented by the ability to engage with an officer for those residents that need additional support.

But not all services can be standardised. For those facing complex challenges – such as in social care or homelessness – personalised support is essential. These services must be tailored to individual needs, delivered with empathy, expertise and a human touch. This will ensure that **One Suffolk** delivers smart, inclusive service delivery: efficient where possible, personal where necessary.

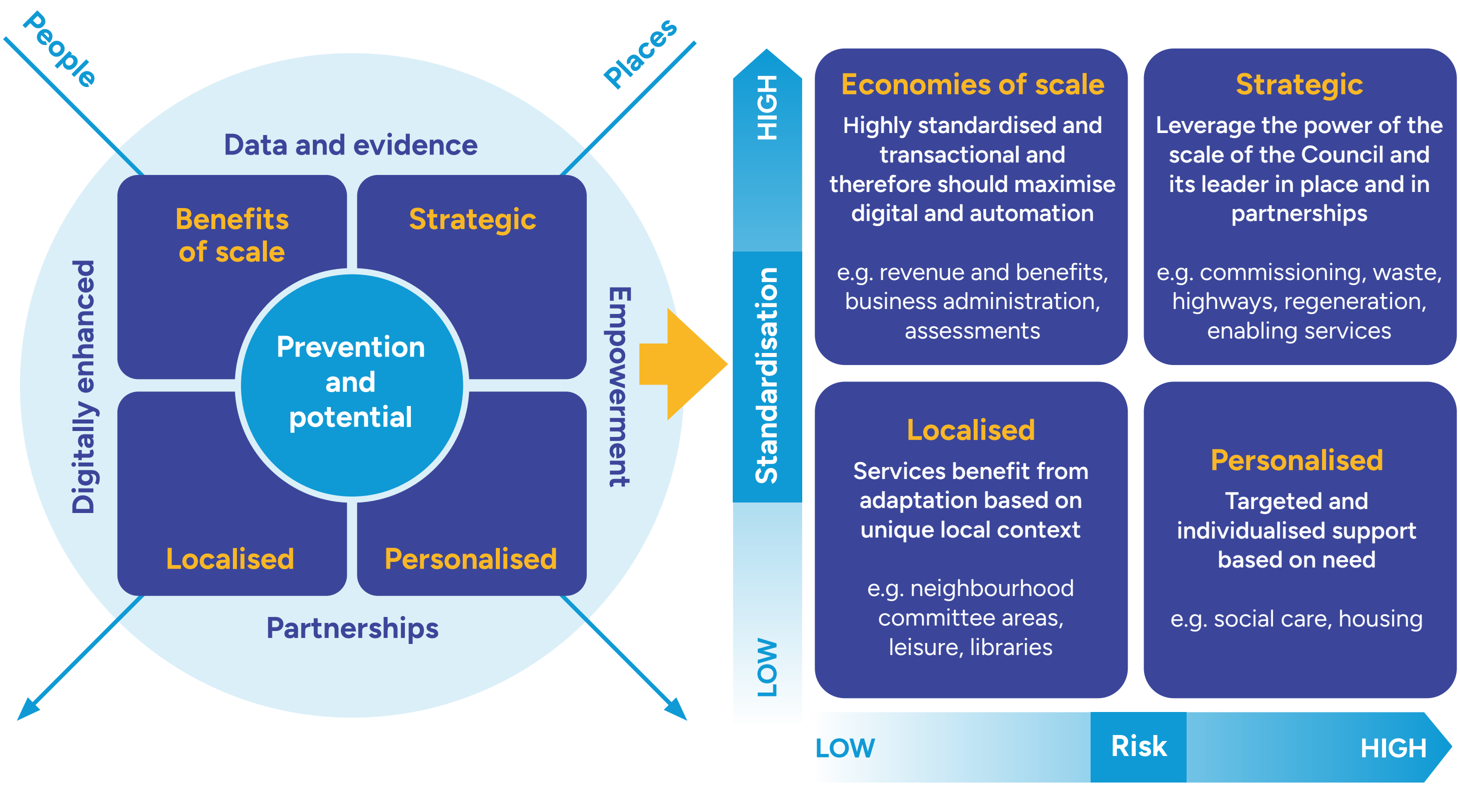
Strategic vs localised

Suffolk's scale gives it the power to lead strategically – coordinating across systems, shaping place-based investment and driving county-wide transformation in areas like infrastructure, regeneration and commissioning.

Yet the strength of Suffolk also lies in its diversity. Communities have distinct identities, needs and assets. That's why some services must be localised – adapted to reflect the unique context of each place, for example through town and parish councils, area committees, libraries, or leisure services.

This interdependency ensures that **One Suffolk** is both a leader in place and a partner in communities – strategic in ambition, local in delivery.

Figure 06: One Suffolk operating model



A framework grounded in standardisation and risk

These interdependencies are not just theoretical – they are operational. The model recognises that different services carry different levels of risk and lend themselves to varying degrees of standardisation. High-volume, low-risk services can be standardised and automated to achieve benefits of scale both financially and in relation to service user experience. Whereas high-risk, complex services require a more personalised, adaptive approach.

By mapping services against these dimensions, Suffolk can make informed, confident decisions about how best to deliver value – ensuring that every service is designed with both its nature and its impact in mind. This framework supports decision making throughout the transition and into transformation as **One Suffolk**.

Enablers of the operating model

The successful delivery of this operating model is grounded in the enablers set out in the 'how the new unitary council will do it' design principles – a practical framework that ensures the vision is not only aspirational but also has strong foundations.

Data and evidence provide the foundation for intelligent, insight-led decision-making. They allow services to be targeted, performance to be measured and continuous improvement to be embedded across the organisation.

Digital capability unlocks efficiency, accessibility and innovation – enabling automation where appropriate and creating the capacity to deliver expert, personalised support where it's needed most. It enhances, rather than replaces, the human connection at the heart of great public service.

Partnerships – both within the council and across Suffolk's wider system – are essential to maximising the opportunities of **One Suffolk**. By aligning efforts across services, sectors and communities, the council can deliver more joined-up, place-based solutions and amplify its impact.

Empowerment ensures that individuals and teams across the organisation – and within communities – have the confidence, tools and autonomy to shape solutions and drive change.

What the operating model will mean

The operating model is delivered through a balanced integration of people, processes and systems. Each component must be appropriately aligned to its functional purpose to ensure the effective delivery of strategic aspirations. When harmonised, these elements enhance one another, driving improved outcomes and operational excellence. This approach is inherently holistic, recognising that sustainable success stems from the interplay of human capability, efficient workflows and enabling technologies.

What will the operating model mean for people, processes and systems?

	People	Processes	Systems	Pen portrait potential example
Benefits of scale	• staff are multi-skilled to deliver high volume, consistent services efficiently	• standardised, automated workflows that reduce duplication, cost and capacity to deliver low value tasks	• scalable digital platforms and shared infrastructure for core services • maximise technology such as AI and chatbots	A resident applies for a parking permit online. The system automatically verifies eligibility, processes payment and issues the permit—no staff intervention needed, freeing up time for more complex queries.
Personalised	• multi-disciplinary teams around individuals • case coordinators provide a single point of contact as opposed to navigating multiple services	• manual and administrative tasks standardised and automated to release capacity for resident-facing activity e.g. children's social care • processes are not siloed by department meaning there is no 'wrong front door'	• data is seamlessly integrated rather than siloed, enabling a unified view of each individual - such as a single view of debt - which supports more effective, collaborative and person-centred solutions	A single parent struggling with debt and housing is supported by a case coordinator who brings together housing, benefits and mental health services. The coordinator uses a unified system to track progress and ensure consistent support.
Strategic	• leaders and teams aligned around shared vision and long-term outcomes both within the council and with external partners	• evidence-led planning and commissioning • outcome-based performance frameworks • strategic programme management	• collaboration platforms for multi-agency working • system-wide integration tools	The council works with NHS and education partners to develop a county-wide strategy for early years development, using shared data and joint commissioning to target areas of greatest need.

What will the operating model mean for people, processes and systems? (continued)

	People	Processes	Systems	Pen portrait potential example
Localised	• community-facing teams with deep local knowledge and relationships • officers embedded in neighbourhoods	• flexible processes tailored to local needs • local engagement and co-design mechanisms • delegated decision-making	• data infrastructure which enables assessable data insights for area committee geographies and effective data sharing between local partners	An Area Committee identifies a disused green space and works with local residents to transform it into a community garden. Officers support the project using local data and delegated budgets.

Empowering places: a localised approach to delivery

Suffolk's identity is deeply rooted in its places – from coastal communities and rural heartlands to proud market towns and growing urban centres. These places are more than locations; they are the foundation of community life, belonging and local pride.
The **One Suffolk** operating model is purposefully anchored in this sense of place, recognising that meaningful public service must be shaped by and responsive to the distinct character and needs of each locality.

We are deliberately going into detail about this because we believe it is a critical part of the operating model of the new unitary council. With 786,231 residents, localised delivery is not just a design choice – it is a strategic imperative. It enables Suffolk to operate at scale while remaining deeply connected to the people and places it serves. As the Council grows in its delivery, it will not feel more distant. On the contrary, it will feel more present, more responsive and more embedded in the everyday lives of communities than ever before. This is how the new unitary council will ensure that scale strengthens, rather than dilutes, its connection to place.

A key delivery mechanism for delivering at a local level is through the network of area committees and Town and Parish Councils. At its core, the model is structured around 16 area committee geographies. These geographies are not new constructs. They are based on the existing, integrated delivery boundaries of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs), which have already successfully underpinned collaboration between health services, local authorities and community organisations. It is an approach that will ensure that the model builds from the strong foundation of established relationships, shared data and a common understanding of local needs.

The 16 partnership areas strike a balance between capturing the unique identity of each place and ensuring that the model remains practical and sustainable (see figure seven). These areas vary in population size, from around 21,000 to 70,000. This flexible approach avoids a "one-size-fits-all" model and instead respects the distinctiveness of Suffolk's towns, villages, coastal and rural communities, aligning closely with parish and town council boundaries and reflects the different community assets within them. We know from our residents' survey[1], that community facilities are important to local people. For example, local shops, community centres and schools are how people interact with their local places as well as valuing local green spaces. This also builds on learning from other unitary councils that have evolved and adapted their community models so that they balance strong community empowerment with sustainable resources. The intention would be to consult on these boundaries to ensure that they work across a broad range of stakeholders as part of the transition process.

Figure 07: Map of 16 area committee geographies

1 Residents' Survey - Have your say! - **One Suffolk** Council

Table 04: Evaluation of the scale of area committees: strengths and weaknesses

Number of area committees	Estimated population size for Suffolk	Strengths	Weaknesses
Proposed model: 16 area committees **(similar to Wiltshire Council Area Boards model)**	20,000 – 70,000	• aligned to INT boundaries meaning that agencies are already used to working within these areas and there is already pre-existing data and insight about these areas • manageable scale of engagement balancing local representation and deliverability • Wiltshire has successfully been delivering this model for a decade	• the scale of the area committees does not reflect 'neighbourhood' levels. This more granular level of community representation will need to be supported by town and parish councils
Fewer area committees e.g. 5 **(similar to Westmorland and Furness Locality Boards model)**	~50,000 – 100,000	• lower cost of delivery for the Council	• replicates the previous two-tier model • not local enough to capture local priorities
More area committees e.g. 30 **(similar to North Yorkshire Community Partnerships model)**	~10,000 – 35,000	• captures local uniqueness to a greater extent than other models response to local needs and priorities	• the cost of delivering this model is high and considered unsustainable within financial constraints • requires a high level of community capacity to deliver • pan-county agencies (e.g. Police) lack the capacity to engage consistently across all area committees, undermining their role as effective multi-agency forums • although North Yorkshire proposed this more localised approach only 5 out of 30 partnerships have been put in place to date

CASE STUDY

Wiltshire Council Area Boards

Wiltshire became a unitary authority in 2009. It introduced 18 Area Boards to strengthen local democracy and foster community engagement. These boards provide a structured platform for local decision-making, enabling councillors and residents to set priorities that align with Wiltshire Council's business plan. They oversee the allocation of grants, including those for youth, older and vulnerable adults and councillor-led initiatives and support community-led action, strategic partnerships and local planning.

Each Area Board brings together elected councillors, public service partners (such as police, health services, schools and housing associations) and local residents to address a broad range of priorities. These include youth services, support for vulnerable adults, environmental sustainability and infrastructure improvements. They also manage some community assets and oversee groups such as the Local Highway and Footway Improvement Groups (LHFIGs), making them a cornerstone of responsive, place-based governance. According to Wiltshire Council's own evaluations, Area Boards are widely recognised for their ability to empower communities, foster collaborative problem-solving and maintain transparency and inclusivity. Their adaptability and strong local partnerships demonstrate how local governance can deliver real impact at the neighbourhood level.

Each committee will be led by ward councillors, who will be more visible and accountable leaders of place with a clear convening role within their communities to get things done. They will work in partnership with local people, businesses, parish and town councils, community groups and public service partners, including the NHS, police, education and the VCFSE sector, to co-produce local strategies and action plans that help deliver the council's strategic priorities. This principle of data led, local determination draws on existing good practice within Suffolk e.g. East Suffolk Council's Community Partnerships. East Suffolk's Community partnerships' priorities and actions are informed by a data pack for each partnership area that is regularly updated and supplemented by local intelligence, where the data is used for a wider discussion in community stakeholder workshops. Harnessing digital technologies to improve efficiency and accessibility, **One Suffolk**'s area committees' datasets could use such tools as PowerBI to provide at a glance information similar to Wiltshire[2] and building on the County Council's quarterly performance report[3].

2 https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/9071/Community-Area-Joint-Strategic-Needs-Assessment
3 Corporate performance and risk management - Suffolk County Council

Evolving the model

The recently introduced English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill offers a significant opportunity to strengthen local governance and community engagement. Mechanisms such as the area committees are able to play an increasingly influential role in the operation and delivery of the new unitary council. For instance, these Committees could serve as forums for identifying, coordinating and promoting local assets that may be eligible under the new Community Right to Buy. This would empower communities to safeguard and enhance valued local assets. However, we are mindful through extensive engagement with Town and Parish Councils that there are genuine concerns. Some communities are apprehensive about the responsibilities associated with asset ownership, while others fear that asset transfers may simply shift financial burdens from the local authority to local groups. Therefore, our priority is to first establish the area committees and ensure they operate effectively and efficiently before expanding and extending their powers.

This localised approach is not just about governance – it is a direct expression of the operating model's core: Prevention and Potential. By unlocking the value of local assets such as green spaces and community centres, the new county-wide unitary council can enable their use for health promotion, social connection and lifelong learning. Done collaboratively and in partnership with local stakeholders, this model supports people to live healthier, more connected lives.

CASE STUDY

East Suffolk Council's Community Partnerships

East Suffolk Council has established eight Community Partnerships, aligned with ward boundaries and natural geographies. Each partnership brings together East Suffolk councillors and key stakeholders – including representatives from town and parish councils, Suffolk County Council, the Police, the NHS, businesses, VCFSE organisations, community groups and youth representatives.

Working collaboratively, these partnerships address locally identified challenges and deliver tangible improvements within their communities. Priority issues tackled to date include isolation and loneliness, mental health and wellbeing, transport and travel, the impact of Covid-19 and financial inequality. Views of these partnerships are mixed.

To support informed decision-making, a regularly updated data pack is produced for each partnership area, helping to guide focus and action.

To enable meaningful impact, the Council has allocated a dedicated delivery budget to each Community Partnership. This funding is specifically earmarked to address priority issues identified by each Community Partnership and is invested in local projects that deliver meaningful impact within their communities.

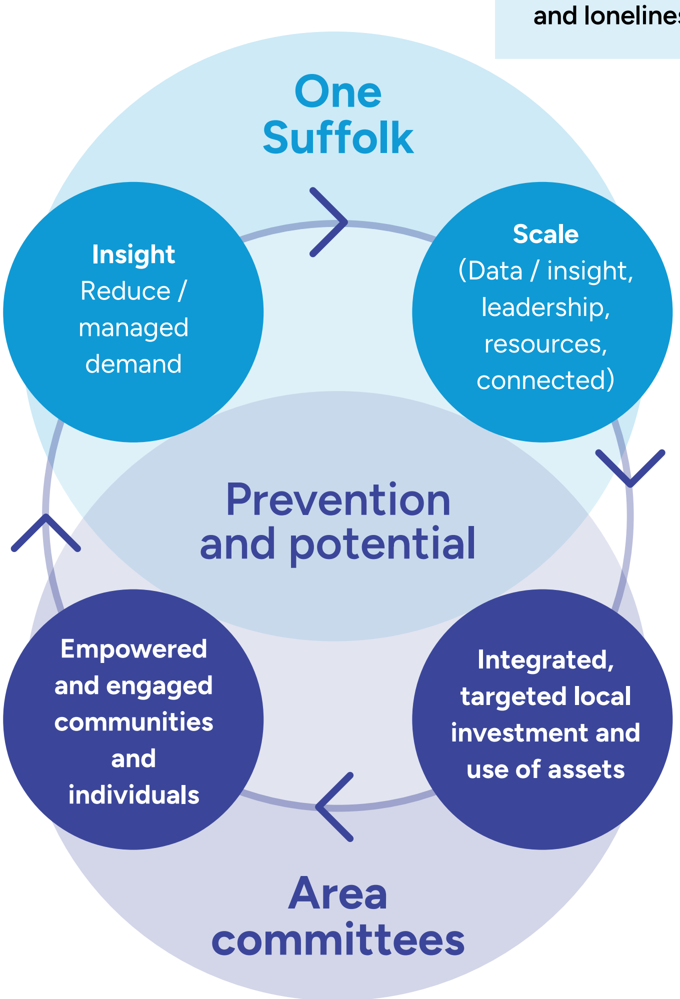


Figure 08: Summary of area committee approach

CASE STUDY

Future Suffolk – how **One Suffolk** is better connected and more accessible for local people, who are enabled to make a positive difference to their families and communities.

Collette's youngest – Kayla – has just left the family home having secured a place at the University of Suffolk's BSc in paramedic science. She wanted to live in Ipswich to be closer to her studies and also enjoy the vibrant nightlife and great connections to her friends at university in London and working on East Coast of Suffolk in the clean energy sector. Kayla has been surprised by how much she values visiting the (now) City's parks, finding those green spaces great for studying on a sunny day as well as a fun venue for the different festivals that she frequently enjoys.

Collette is delighted that Kayla is enjoying her new independence. However, she is committed to staying in the small market town she calls home where she's a short walk to her ageing parents' home. Collette is keen to make sure her parents enjoy living independently and well for as long as possible. For them, an important part of that is still having a car. However, with her Dad's mobility worsening due to his chronic arthritis, there are fewer opportunities for them to enjoy the car.

Whilst Collette enjoys being close to her parents, she still feels lonely at home now her children all live away from home. After a quick internet search, **One Suffolk** Council's website appears and she quickly discovers that an arts group meets on a Wednesday in the library. The arts group is welcoming and Collette quickly makes friends as well as reconnecting with her passion for art. Collette is about to walk home from her weekly visit to the group, when she sees a flyer in the reception. Following a short chat with the friendly reception staff, Collette realises that she could apply for a blue badge for her Dad. Arriving early for her group the following week, Collette completes and submits the form with a bit of help from the friendly reception staff. Next time, she thinks she'll have the confidence to complete the form online.

Collette feels at home with the arts group she even meets some of them for lunch to savour some of the locally smoked Suffolk seafood. One of her friends mentions their sister who lives in Wiltshire is part of a project where volunteers use art to help connect lonely older people through a shared interest. Her friends are interested to see if they could do something similar.

Now more familiar with its website, Collette discovers on the Council's website that there is an Area Committee with members from local people, groups and councillors. Collette and her friends contact their local councillor who invites them to attend an Area Committee meeting to understand how they work. Healthy ageing is one of the priorities chosen by the Committee as local data highlights a growing ageing population. Collette and her friends pitch their idea and the committee agrees it could be something the local integrated neighbourhood team is interested in, given their work on social prescribing (non-medical interventions to help tackle poor physical and mental health and boost people's confidence to be more independent).

One particularly promising area for the evolution of this model is in supporting Suffolk's ageing population. Projections indicate that within 20 years, 1 in 3 residents will be aged 65 or over, and nearly 1 in 5 will be over 75[4]. In this context, ageing well becomes a critical priority. Strong area committees could play a pivotal role by fostering community-led initiatives that reduce isolation, encourage physical activity and support the management of long-term health conditions as set out in the ten-year plan for the NHS and Neighbourhood health services.

The same potential exists for early years' development, mental health support, skills and employment initiatives that address the wider determinants of health. If implemented effectively, this approach can play a proactive role in prevention, reduce health inequalities and help people of all ages realise their potential.

As with Community Right to Buy, the approach will be measured and collaborative – focusing first on establishing strong foundations before expanding responsibilities. In doing so, the new unitary council will ensure that local delivery is not only effective but also aligned with the values and ambitions at the heart of **One Suffolk**.

4 Source: 2022-based ONS population projections

Improved outcomes and cost efficiencies

The creation of a single Suffolk-wide council changes how public services are delivered and how public value is realised. By consolidating the back-office functions of six authorities into one integrated structure, the model removes duplication and unlocks new levels of efficiency, agility and strategic coherence. This streamlined approach enables a leaner leadership model, reducing overhead while fostering clearer accountability and faster, more aligned decision-making across the system. For example, rather than six separate finance teams each managing their own budgets and reporting cycles, a single, unified finance function can operate with greater consistency, speed and strategic oversight at a lower cost to the taxpayer.

Co-location of teams further amplifies these benefits. By rationalising the estate and potentially reducing the number of buildings required, the council can significantly lower facilities management costs while also advancing its environmental commitments. A practical example might be the consolidation of multiple customer service centres into a single, hub – reducing rent, utilities and maintenance costs while improving collaboration and service quality. Staff working side-by-side across disciplines are better able to share insights and respond holistically to resident needs.

The scale of the new organisation strengthens Suffolk's position in the market, enabling it to negotiate larger, more favourable contracts with third-party providers. Instead of six separate waste management contracts, for instance, a single county-wide agreement can deliver better value, improved service standards and simplified oversight. Crucially, it also opens the door to smarter delivery models – such as route optimisation across the county with artificial boundaries removed. By using data and mapping technology to redesign collection routes, **One Suffolk** can reduce fuel consumption, vehicle wear and staffing costs, while improving reliability and environmental performance. Fewer miles travelled means lower emissions, contributing directly to Suffolk's ambition to be a greener, more sustainable county.

Together, these changes create a more financially sustainable council – one that is better equipped to invest in prevention, innovation and long-term outcomes. The efficiencies gained are not simply about reducing costs; they are about creating the conditions for smarter, more responsive public services that deliver real and lasting value for Suffolk's people and places.

Section five

Options and financial appraisal

When comparing one, two or three unitary configurations against both the criteria for local government reorganisation and the associated costs and benefits the outcome is clear. Qualitatively and quantitatively, a single unitary option is more cost effective and better meets the range of critical success factors than both a two and a three unitary configuration.

Unified versus fragmented

While all three options would deliver a single tier of local government for Suffolk, both the two and three unitary options result in a fragmented approach that would limit growth and create variability in the economic and social base. This raises issues of undue advantage and disadvantage all of which will create uneven impacts in terms of future demand. For the one unitary council, by its nature, there is no variance and so this issue is simply removed.

A single unitary council will also provide the strongest foundation to work with the mayor and strategic authority to deliver housing that meets local needs and drive forward economic growth – providing a single voice into the strategic and decision – making process.

This means one unitary council for Suffolk is better placed to deliver positive outcomes for individuals and communities as it facilitates the simplest and least risky transition to the new state. It is the strongest and most stable delivery platform from which to drive change – meaning the benefits from alignment and integration can be realised more quickly.

By contrast, establishing two or three unitary councils risks creating fragmented leadership and competing priorities. Rather than focusing on the broader strategic opportunity, decision-making may become influenced by localised interests – for example, resistance to infrastructure projects perceived as disruptive to specific communities, even if they offer wider regional benefits.

This fragmentation also necessitates rebuilding critical services such as social care from scratch in each new council, diverting organisational energy toward transition logistics rather than improving outcomes for residents and communities.

Simple versus complex

Given the need to disaggregate services under the two and three unitary options and the complexity involved there will be limited opportunities to deliver service improvements and public service reform. For the one unitary option the focus will be more on integration and whilst this is not straightforward it does provide the best and most simple opportunity to improve service delivery.

The risks of disaggregation and the complexity involved will create challenges for the most vulnerable and raise the risk of post-code lotteries emerging across Suffolk. This splitting of services can be avoided under the one unitary option (particularly when compared to the three unitary option where both district and county services will be fragmented in some form). Therefore, the one unitary option is the only option that does not unduly impact on crucial services and introduce unnecessary complexity into the Suffolk system.

The one unitary option provides the strongest delivery platform from which to create a more resilient public sector model over the medium term. Not least because it aligns with the NHS, police and fire boundaries and therefore instantly facilitates better cross service working.

Savings versus costs

Detailed and prudent financial analysis shows that a single unitary council in Suffolk delivers the highest net benefit over five years and the largest recurring annual benefit after this five-year period.

The scale of the difference is stark. After five years a single unitary council will have delivered £78.2 million of benefit while the two unitary option will have cost an additional £48.0 million and the three unitary option £145.3 million more.

On an ongoing basis our analysis shows that one unitary council will be £39.4 million cheaper a year than the current local government system in Suffolk, for the two unitary council model it will be £7.3 million cheaper but for the three unitary option it will actually cost £13.1 million more to operate than the current local government system of county and districts.

This variation is primarily driven by the cost and impact of disaggregating services currently delivered by Suffolk County Council which will require additional people and create an administrative overhead not currently in the Suffolk system. It is important to note that for the three unitary option the disaggregation costs do not include the costs associated with disaggregating district services which would also be required given that this option splits historic district boundaries. This will notably increase the disaggregation costs.

The one unitary council does also offer the greatest benefit generating potential, as it creates the largest economies of scale and optimisation of services and processes in terms of the integration of activities currently split across five districts and borough councils.

The case for change sets out a clear and compelling argument for a single Suffolk-wide council. In reaching that conclusion we have identified and appraised several different configurations. In preparing our interim plan[1] we initially considered seven different spatial configurations.

Through the initial analysis this longer-list was short-listed to three options which represent distinct and viable alternatives with one (the three unitary model) actively being promoted by the districts and borough councils within Suffolk.

This section provides an overview of the options appraisal we have undertaken to assess the viability of these three options, considering their ability to deliver against our ambitions and priorities for local government in Suffolk; the requirements and expectations expressed by residents, businesses and wider stakeholders; and the government's vision and objectives for local government reorganisation and wider devolution.

Alongside the options appraisal which considers both qualitative and quantitative factors this section sets out a detailed financial case in terms of the costs and benefits of the different options and then summarises this in terms of the economic case for change.

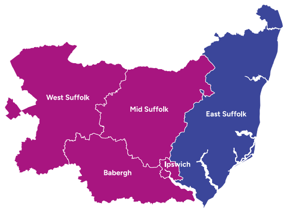
Outline of the different options

The table below sets out the three different options being appraised alongside headline socio-economic measures in terms of their size by way of: population, geography, employee numbers, economic scale and housing.

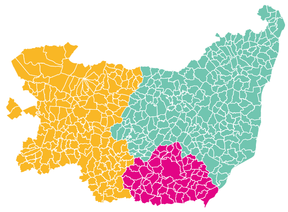
Figure 05: Socio-economic characteristics of three possible options for unitary government in Suffolk

One unitary option[1]

Two unitary option



Three unitary option[3]



Socio-economic measure[2]	One unitary option: One Suffolk	Two unitary option: West	Two unitary option: East	Three unitary option: West	Three unitary option: South	Three unitary option: East
Population						
Population (2024)	786,231	396,293	389,938	264,037	260,814	261,380
Population (2040)[4]	844,496	436,703	407,793	291,586	265,925	286,985
Total Dependency Ratio (2024)	67%	66%	69%	64%	62%	74%
Deprivation (% LSOAs in most deprived decile)	5%	0%	10%	0%	8%	7%
Geography						
Area Hectares	379,997	249,947	130,050	152,715	44,869	182,413
Rurality (% LSAOs rural)	37%	54%	21%	46%	18%	50%
Economic scale						
Employee numbers	339,000	172,000	167,000	124,840	124,580	89,579
GVA (£m) 2024	22,979	11,118	11,861	8,333	8,745	5,901
Number of businesses	31,020	16,975	14,045	11,031	9,305	10,684
Business /10,000 pop	395	428	360	419	359	405
Housing						
Housing target	5,167	2,716	2,451	1,797	1,550	1,820
Housing target as a % of 2023 dwellings	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%	1.5%	1.4%	1.4%

1 Suffolk County Council's Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation was submitted to Government in March 2025
2 For a detailed list of sources & methodologies please see **appendix ten**
3 Please note 3 unitary boundaries are based on civil parishes. Due to data available best fit matches and modelling assumptions have been used to calculate socio-economic measures for this option. Please see **appendix ten** for details
4 For an explanation on the rationale for using these population figures please see **appendix three**

Options appraisal

Approach to appraising each option

Using a combination of HM Treasury headings and the six criteria set out by the Secretary of State in the government's guidance for proposals for reorganisation (which have been aligned with HM Treasury guidance) we have identified 25 critical success factors (CSFs). For each of these CSFs we developed a red, amber, green scoring matrix, with red indicating that an option does not meet the CSF, amber that the CSF is partially met and green meeting the CSFs.

We then scored each of the criteria for each of the options.

Appendix six sets out more details on each of the individual criteria, the scoring framework that was used and the scores given for each of the 25 CSFs.

Headline summary of the options appraised

	One unitary council	Two unitary councils	Three unitary councils
	Green	Green	Amber
A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government	All three options would deliver a single tier of local government for Suffolk. With the one unitary option creating an economy of scale that is recognised locally as the economic geography. For the two and three unitary options the challenge from a socio-economic perspective is one of variability between the different unitary councils that would be created. For example, in the two unitary option the western unitary would have over a fifth more businesses than in the east; while in the three unitary option the GVA is notably higher in the western and southern unitaries than it is in eastern. This variability continues when considering issues of undue advantage and disadvantage with the two and three unitary options again showing uneven variation in the highest levels of deprivation, levels of rurality and dependency ratios all of which will create uneven impacts in terms of future demand. For the one unitary council, by its nature, there is no variance and so this issue is removed. This variance in demand can also be seen in considerations around the appropriateness of the tax base with one of the three unitary councils having a notably lower Council Tax to core spending power ratio. A single unitary council will also provide the strongest foundation to work with the mayor and strategic authority to deliver housing that meets local needs – providing a single voice into the decision-making process. As well as delivering better outcomes for individuals and communities as it facilitates the simplest and least risk transition to the new state – meaning the benefits from alignment and integration can be realised more quickly. By contrast two or three unitary councils will create different voices and introduce unhelpful elements of competition and "NIMBYism" into housing decisions which will delay and disrupt delivery. With the need to split and then establish new critical services such as social care meaning that organisational focus will be consumed with the transition process to the detriment to residents and communities.		

	One unitary council	Two unitary councils	Three unitary councils
Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	The single unitary option is the only option above the 500,000-population size referenced by government, with the three unitary options creating authorities that are closer to 260,000 making them some of the smaller unitary authorities in the country and therefore limiting capacity to withstand financial shocks. Even by 2040 none of the three unitary options will exceed a population of 300,000. The creation of unitary government in Suffolk – regardless of options – will not solve the financial challenges facing the local government sector. However, the one unitary option offers the greatest level of savings compared to the other two options and to the existing local government footprint in Suffolk. This places it on a more financially resilient footing. The scale of disaggregation costs will pose significant financial challenges to both the three and the two unitary options. For the two and three unitary options the scale of costs associated with disaggregation are significant and as a result have profound implications for value for money. For the three unitary option the boundaries proposed will require some form of disaggregation of every single council service. Given the presence of other viable options this simply cannot be considered good value for money. This is particularly apparent in the need to manage the costs of transition. The scale of disaggregation costs involved in the three unitary option mean that savings from the creating new unitary councils never outweigh the costs for this option.		
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	Given the need to disaggregate services under the two and three unitary options and the complexity involved there will be limited opportunities to deliver service improvements and public service reform in the short to medium term. For the one unitary option the focus will be more on integration and whilst this is not straightforward it does provide the opportunity to improve service delivery. The risks of disaggregation will create the challenges for the most vulnerable and raise the risk of post-code lotteries emerging across Suffolk. This splitting and fragmentation of services can be avoided under the one unitary option (and particularly when compared to the three unitary option where both district and county services will be fragmented in some form). Therefore, the one unitary option is the only option that does not unduly impact on crucial services. The one unitary option provides the strongest delivery platform from which to create a more resilient public sector model over the medium term.		

	One unitary council	Two unitary councils	Three unitary councils
Proposal 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	All three options will consider local, cultural and historic identity albeit placing different emphasis on local priorities and issues and have been informed by a broad range of consultations with different stakeholders across Suffolk. The resident survey undertaken as part of this business case identifies that a quarter (25%) of residents are against any form of unitary government with a further 12% "slightly against". As such there is a consistent challenge across all three options to "make the case" locally.		
New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	The single unitary option creates one strategic voice for Suffolk making it easier to engage and drive forward devolution. The two and three unitary options introduce competition and competing voices and will naturally require investment to be spread evenly as opposed to strategically and where it can drive the greatest growth dividend.		
New unitary structures should enable strong community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	All three options create new opportunities for more effective community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment as this is seen as an important element of any local government structure within Suffolk and has been part of the feedback given consistently by stakeholders – particularly the extensive town and parish council network across Suffolk.		
Total			
Rank	1	2	3

Having considered and compared three different options for unitary government across Suffolk, drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, it is clear that one unitary council best meets the range of different criteria set and is the only option that can deliver against the government's ambition for public sector reform.

Financial assessment

Approach to the financial analysis

The financial analysis conducted for this case draws on the most granular data available, incorporating benchmarks from both established and newly formed unitary councils. These benchmarks, alongside existing performance metrics, have been used to inform the parameters and inputs of our analysis.

The financial analysis looks at five broad components:

- the recurrent savings from reorganisation
- the recurrent savings from transformation
- the one-off transition costs (including redundancies)
- the costs of disaggregating and splitting services
- Council Tax harmonisation

A breakdown of our analysis including setting out every assumption we have made is provided in Appendix Seven.

In undertaking our analysis, we have been guided by three core principles:

1) To learn the lessons from the previous rounds of local government reorganisation and in particular the extent to which savings have been overpromised and underdelivered[5]
2) The need to carefully consider timing and the phasing of both when expenditure is incurred and when any savings may materialise
3) Acknowledging from the outset that some costs and savings are more difficult to estimate at this stage in the process and therefore a prudent approach is required (reflected in the sensitivity analysis below).

Headline summary of the financial analysis of the different options

The financial analysis, summarised in the table below, clearly shows that a single unitary council in Suffolk delivers the highest net benefit over five years and in terms of recurring annual benefit after this five-year period. The scale of the difference is stark. After five years a single unitary council will have delivered £78.2 million of benefit while the two unitary option will have cost an additional £48.0 million and the three unitary option £145.3 million more.

On an ongoing basis our analysis shows that one unitary council will be £39.4 million cheaper a year than the current local government system in Suffolk, for the two unitary council model it will be £7.3 million cheaper but for the three unitary option it will actually cost £13.1 million more to operate.

This variation is primarily driven by the cost and impact of disaggregating services currently delivered by Suffolk County Council which will require additional people and create an administrative overhead not currently in the Suffolk system. It should be noted that for the three unitary options the disaggregation costs do not include the costs associated with disaggregating district services which would also be required given that this option splits historic district boundaries.

The one unitary council does also offer the greatest benefit generating potential as it creates the largest economies of scale and optimisation of services and processes in terms of the integration of activities currently split across five districts and borough councils.

Table 06: Summary financial analysis of three possible options for unitary government in Suffolk

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Total annual benefit	£39.7m	£21.1m	£14.3m
One-off transition costs	£47.2m	£47.8m	£47.1m
Annual disaggregation cost		£13.5m	£27.0m
Five-year impact of disaggregation		£67.6m	£135.2m
Net benefit after five years	£78.2m	-£48.0m	-£145.3m
Recurring net benefit after five years	£39.4m	£7.3m	-£13.1m

Total annual benefit' is the total savings for each option when compared to the current cost of local government in Suffolk; 'One-off transition costs' are the costs incurred to establish the new unitary council(s); 'Annual disaggregation costs' are the costs incurred in splitting existing Suffolk County Council services; 'Five-year impact of disaggregation' is the recurring disaggregation costs profiled over a five year period; 'Net benefit after five years is the total savings profiled over five years minus the costs incurred during that period; 'Recurring net benefit after five years' is the annual recurrent savings minus the annual recurrent costs from year six onwards.

5 See https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/globalassets/1.-member-firms/united-kingdom/pdf/publication/2024/report---learning-from-the-new-unitary-councils_v08.pdf

Annual net benefit

Not only is the single unitary configuration the best financial option for Suffolk, it also delivers benefits quicker than the other two options. The table below shows that a single unitary configuration delivers an annual net benefit from year one post-vesting day whereas a two unitary configuration does not begin to deliver an annual net benefit until year four post-vesting day. A three unitary configuration does not deliver an annual net benefit as the ongoing costs from disaggregation are higher than any benefits realised.

Table 07: Comparison of net annual benefit (2025/26 – 2032/33)

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Annual net benefit	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
One unitary council	-£0.345m	-£3.777m	-£20.383m	£2.117m	£7.215m	£16.926m	£37.018m	£39.427m	**£78.198m**
Two unitary councils	-£0.397m	-£4.530m	£20.179m	-£16.038m	-£12.249m	-£8.035m	£6.133m	£7.624m	**-£48.031m**
Three unitary councils	-£0.397m	-£4.937m	-£18.728m	-£34.333m	-£31.466m	-£28.567m	-£13.761m	-£13.134m	**-£145.323m**

Cumulative net benefit

The annual net benefit of a single unitary for Suffolk will result in the initial costs of transition being offset in year 3 post-vesting day. For the two unitary and three unitary configurations the transition costs are not offset in the first five years post-vesting day with two unitaries taking c.11 years post-vesting day to offset transition costs (including disaggregation) whilst the three unitaries will see the cumulative net cost of local government reorganisation continue to increase as the costs outweigh any benefits generated.

Table 08: Comparison of net cumulative benefit (2025/26 – 2032/33)

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day				
Cumulative net benefit	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33
One unitary council	-£0.345m	-£4.122m	-£24.505m	-£22.388m	-£15.173m	£1.753m	£38.771m	£78.198m
Two unitary councils	-£0.397m	-£4.927m	-£25.106m	-£41.144m	-£53.393m	-£61.428m	-£55.295m	-£48.031m
Three unitary councils	-£0.397m	-£5.334m	-£24.062m	-£58.395m	-£89.861m	-£118.428m	-£132.189m	-£145.323m

Comparison between the different components of our analysis

Benefits from reorganisation

Benefits from reorganisation (shown in table below) are those benefits that will be delivered as a direct result of local government reorganisation in Suffolk. Our financial modelling has these benefits as recurrent and will be delivered in and around vesting day.

A single unitary council for Suffolk will deliver the highest level of benefits from reorganisation. The reason for this is that, in a single unitary, there will be a lower number of senior management than in the two and three unitary configurations. Each newly created council will require a chief executive, a director of adult social care, a director of children's social care, a section 151 officer, a monitoring officer and a wider leadership team. Therefore, there will be duplication across two or three unitary councils, increasing the cost and reducing the annual benefit. A three unitary configuration will not only deliver a lower annual benefit than a single unitary configuration, but the cost of senior management will also be higher than the current cost of senior management across Suffolk. The reason for this is that senior management in a unitary council will receive a higher salary than in a district and the number of senior managers required, along with the modelled salary plus on-costs, delivers a negative annual benefit to Suffolk.

Benefits from democratic services will be delivered as a result of having a lower number of members, and associated costs, than the current number and cost across Suffolk. Our assumption in this analysis is that there will be the same number of members across Suffolk in each of the configurations, but a single unitary configuration delivers the highest annual benefit as there will be more savings from other spend on democratic services (i.e. committees and member support). In a two unitary and three unitary configuration there will be duplication of roles and committees that will come at an increased cost to a single unitary configuration. Given that the three unitary option is proposing a total of 180 members the savings identified in this analysis will be reduced.

When considering the annual benefit from external audit fees across the different configurations, a three unitary configuration, once again, delivers a negative annual benefit for Suffolk as the modelled external audit fees for the newly created authorities will exceed the current cost for local authorities across Suffolk. A single unitary configuration delivers the highest annual benefit as, although the fee for the authority is higher than for the individual authorities in the two and three unitary configurations (based on benchmarking of local authorities that have recently gone through local government reorganisation) the cumulative position is more favourable in the single unitary configuration.

Benefits from transformation

Local government reorganisation in Suffolk presents an opportunity to deliver services in a different way whilst also increasing the synergy between services. There is also an opportunity to reduce and remove duplication and inefficiency in the local government system across Suffolk in areas such as enabling

Table 09: Comparison of benefits delivered as a direct result of reorganisation

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Total annual benefit – senior management	£5.963m	£2.892m	-£0.429m
Total annual benefit – democratic services	£2.945m	£2.589m	£2.232m
Total annual benefit – external audit fee	£0.513m	£0.319m	-£0.117m
Total annual benefit from reorganisation	**£9.421m**	**£5.800m**	**£1.686m**

services, contracts and IT. These benefits are benefits from transformation and our financial modelling has recognised them as such.

As part of section three we have identified a number of opportunities to innovate and change the way that current county services are delivered which have the potential to deliver a range of savings. However, in order to be prudent we have not assumed any savings from education and social care services currently delivered at a county level as, in a single unitary the services will initially continue on their current basis (including already planned transformation), and in the two and three unitary model the complexity and disruption caused by disaggregation of these services will not create an environment where savings will be delivered in the medium term. We feel that this is the most prudent approach, especially given that the demand pressures that exist within adult and children's social care and SEND – which have not been modelled as part of this analysis – are likely to offset any savings that are made.

Although some services may deliver savings in a two and three unitary model more quickly, overall, the scale of benefits delivered in a single unitary model is significantly greater than other configurations. This is because there is a greater opportunity for the alignment of services, the adoption of more efficient operating models and best practice which, in the longer term, will deliver greater benefits to local government in Suffolk. Our financial modelling indicates that, as a result of continued duplication and inefficiency across service delivery models in a three unitary configuration there is the risk that there will be a negative annual benefit as services are amalgamated. This does not reflect the increased costs associated with disaggregation of county services which are covered in the 'Disaggregation costs' section.

This pattern is reflected in enabling services where a single unitary model delivers the highest annual benefit when compared to the other configurations. The reason for this is that, under a two unitary and three unitary configurations, there will be duplication of roles across each of the newly created authorities. For example, a unitary council requires a treasury management function and if there are two or three authorities created then these roles will be duplicated. A single unitary council in Suffolk offers the greatest opportunity to deliver benefits through the creation of more efficient and leaner enabling services.

In addition to these savings there are other areas where benefits can be delivered as a result of local government reorganisation in Suffolk. These are as follows:

- **Customer services** – our assumption is that, to ensure that residents can access services in an appropriate manner, under a single unitary council there would be a need for a higher level of customer service resources than in the two and three unitary model. This is reflected in higher savings in the two and three unitary options than in a single unitary option. However, the difference is c. £1 million and this is more than offset by other benefits offered by a single unitary council.
- **Contracts** – local government reorganisation creates an opportunity to review contracts across Suffolk and, where appropriate, consolidate contracts with the same suppliers and rationalise contracts where there are multiple suppliers for similar services. A single unitary council offers the greatest opportunity to consolidate and rationalise contracts as all existing authorities will be consolidated into a single council and all contracts can be reviewed. In a two and three unitary configuration the opportunity will be smaller as each newly created council will only be in a position to review and consolidate contracts of its predecessor authorities. On this basis, the benefits delivered in a single unitary are higher than other configurations.
- **IT** – as with contracts, a single unitary offers the greatest opportunity for benefits from the consolidation and rationalisation of IT applications, infrastructure and people. This is because there can be a review and consolidation across the whole of Suffolk rather than a fragmented approach across different areas. On this basis, a single unitary council offers the greatest benefit from IT services.

Table 10: Comparison of benefits delivered through transformation

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Total Annual Benefit – Service Delivery	£4.492m	£0.352m	-£0.354m
Total Annual Benefit – Enabling Services	£7.649m	£3.379m	£0.743m
Total Annual Benefit – Other	£18.175m	£11.593m	£12.191m
Total Annual Benefit	**£30.316m**	**£15.324m**	**£12.580m**

- **Property and assets** – across each of the configurations there will be an opportunity to review and rationalise assets. Due to the detailed exercise required to map current assets and the decisions on the future of assets resting with the newly created authorities we have not assumed any savings for any of the configurations.

Transition costs

Transition costs are the one-off costs that are required to facilitate local government reorganisation across Suffolk including supporting the aggregation of services. These costs will create the frameworks and deliver the activities required to transition from the current two-tier model of local government in Suffolk to a future model of unitary government.

Table 11: Comparison of total transition and redundancy costs

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Transition costs	£33.871m	£37.960m	£40.206m
Redundancy costs	£13.347m	£9.879m	£6.922m
Total	**£47.218m**	**£47.839m**	**£47.128m**

Our financial analysis shows that the transition costs across each of the proposed configurations are broadly the same. A single unitary council has lower transition costs for areas such as programme management and IT, but this is offset by higher redundancy costs (assuming the worst-case scenario with few people leaving pre-vesting day). Higher redundancy costs are directly linked to the higher recurrent benefits from reduction in senior management in a single unitary configuration as a smaller senior management cohort across a single Suffolk unitary will require a higher level of redundancy to move from the current senior management structure. In a two and three unitary configuration the ongoing benefits are lower as there will be more senior managers across Suffolk, negating the lower one-off redundancy costs.

Table 12: Breakdown of transition costs by unitary option

Transition costs	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Public engagement	£1.168m	£1.268m	£1.372m
Programme management	£6.048m	£8.100m	£9.790m
Transformation	£3.304m	£1.681m	£1.120m
Information technology	£15.897m	£18.282m	£18.282m
Predecessor council	£1.311m	£1.311m	£1.311m
New council	£0.395m	£0.790m	£1.185m
Shadow authority	£2.666m	£3.077m	£3.492m
Sub-total	**£30.789m**	**£34.509m**	**£36.552m**
Contingency	£3.082m	£3.451m	£3.654m
Total	**£33.871m**	**£37.960m**	**£40.206m**

Public engagement across each of the configurations will be similar in cost due to the activities required being the same no matter how many authorities are created.

The disaggregation of existing county services and the aggregation of district and borough services and, in the case of three unitary configuration, the disaggregation of some district services across new boundaries means that there is additional complexity from a programme management perspective. There are some roles in the programme management activity that will be duplicated or increased across the two and three unitary council.

Transformation costs are directly linked to the savings from transformation. As a single unitary council delivers higher savings from transformation there will be higher, one-off, transition costs to support the delivery of these savings and the aggregation of services.

The aggregation of IT services across a single unitary council will be more straightforward than in the two and three unitary configurations, especially as there are current arrangements across Suffolk where the county provides IT services for some of the district councils. On this basis the transition costs will be lower for a single unitary council, but we do note that any IT transition activity will be complicated, and the costs will develop as more work is done on mapping current systems and designing a target operating model for IT services.

Predecessor council costs will be the same across all configurations as it relates to the final year audit of the predecessor authorities in Suffolk. Costs associated with the new council will be lower in a single unitary council as for each unitary created there will need to be a rebranding and design process. Costs for the shadow authority are also lower in a single unitary council as there will be a lower number of senior managers recruited into the shadow authority roles.

Table 13: Breakdown of redundancy costs by unitary option

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Redundancy cost – senior management	£10.153m	£8.641m	£6.480m
Redundancy cost – enabling services	£2.452m	£1.180m	£0.442m
Redundancy cost – service delivery	£0.742m	£0.058m	£0.000m
Total	**£13.347m**	**£9.879m**	**£6.922m**

As noted, redundancy costs are higher in a single unitary council than the two and three unitary configurations because this option will require fewer senior management roles than is currently the case across Suffolk and will also be able to operate with leaner enabling services.

Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs are the additional costs that will be incurred in both the two unitary and three unitary models as a result of splitting services that are currently delivered by Suffolk County Council. Currently these services are delivered across the whole county but the creation of two or three unitaries to deliver these services will result in increased costs in a number of areas. Some costs in these areas will be split between the newly created authorities on the basis of geographical allocation and there will be no additional costs when compared to the status quo. However, across all key services currently delivered by Suffolk County Council there will be certain costs that, when disaggregated across the newly created authorities, will create additional management and/or administrative overhead and, in some instances, there will be direct duplication of costs (i.e. in some staff roles). Disaggregation costs do not impact on the single unitary option as there is no disaggregation of services currently delivered by Suffolk County Council.

Disaggregation costs in a three unitary configuration will cost double the disaggregation costs in a two unitary configuration as there will be additional duplication and increased costs the more unitary councils created. This is reflected in the table below.

Under the three unitary configuration there will be a need to disaggregate services currently delivered at a district level across the newly created authorities. Our financial analysis has not included additional costs in relation to this disaggregation for the three unitary configuration but the disaggregation of district services will have complexities and is highly likely to incur additional costs – over and above those presented below – as a result.

Costs associated with the aggregation of district services are captured in the one-off transition costs in our financial analysis. We do not anticipate there to be any ongoing costs in the aggregation of services as, once these services have integrated and embedded, they will be in a position to deliver benefits from transformation. Additional resources to support this integration, embedding and delivery of benefits are captured in the programme management and transformation transition costs set out above and will be required for all three configurations.

Table 14: Comparison of disaggregation costs by service area

	One unitary council (£m)	Two unitary councils (£m)	Three unitary councils (£m)
Adult social care	£0.000m	£3.391m	£6.782m
Children's and young people	£0.000m	£4.808m	£9.617m
Highways and transport	£0.000m	£3.195m	£6.390m
Other services	£0.000m	£2.123m	£4.245m
Total	**£0.000m**	**£13.517m**	**£27.034m**

Profiling the costs and benefits

Benefits

Benefits from reorganisation will be delivered on or around vesting day and will be recurrent benefits. This is the same across each of the configurations in Suffolk.

Where services delivered at a district level are amalgamated there will be opportunities for benefits from transformation. Due to the disruption created across all configurations and the need for services to integrate, embed and mature, any benefits will not be delivered immediately upon reorganisation and will only be delivered once services have integrated and moved towards a new target operating model.

Considering this, a critical element of the benefits from transformation is the phasing of the benefits. Our broad assumptions are that it will take at least two years in a single unitary for savings from transformation to be delivered. We do acknowledge that, where there are a smaller number of districts amalgamating into a new unitary council, as is the case with the three unitary configuration, the complexity of aggregation is reduced and savings from transformation may be delivered more quickly. Therefore, there are some district level of services that could deliver savings from transformation sooner (albeit at a lower scale) in a two and three unitary configuration than in a single unitary configuration.

The phasing of benefits from enabling services is also an important consideration as immediately upon vesting day there is likely to be a need for additional resources in these areas to support the transition. The costs associated with this are reflected in the 'Transition costs' section. Whilst these services are balancing the transition and managing business as usual activity we do not anticipate there to be an opportunity for benefits to be delivered. Once these services have integrated, embedded and designed and implemented the future operating models then benefits can be delivered through more efficient service delivery and a reduction in staff numbers when compared to the current position in Suffolk.

Table 15: Comparison of financial benefits over time (2025/26 – 2032/33)

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
One unitary council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.392m	£14.287m	£30.316m	£30.316m	**£78.311m**
Two unitary councils	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.688m	£6.057m	£15.324m	£15.324m	**£38.393m**
Three unitary councils	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.371m	£3.014m	£12.580m	£12.580m	**£28.545m**

Costs

The costs associated with transition are one-off in nature and, predominantly, will be incurred in advance of any benefits. Transition costs are critical to facilitating the activities required to successfully deliver local government reorganisation in Suffolk. Our assumption is that, across all configurations, transition costs will be delivered on the same profile.

Redundancy costs for senior management will be incurred on or around vesting day. Other redundancy costs will be incurred in line with the delivery of benefits from transformation.

Table 16: Comparison of costs over time (2025/26 – 2032/33)

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Transition costs (excl. redundancy)	**2025/26**	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**2030/31**	**2031/32**	**2032/33**	**Total**
One unitary council	£0.345m	£3.777m	£10.230m	£7.304m	£5.598m	£5.185m	£1.122m	£0.310m	**£33.871m**
Two unitary councils	£0.397m	£4.530m	£11.538m	£8.321m	£6.220m	£5.756m	£0.855m	£0.343m	**£37.960m**
Three unitary councils	£0.397m	£4.937m	£12.248m	£8.985m	£6.489m	£6.012m	£0.772m	£0.366m	**£40.206m**

The implications and impact of Council Tax harmonisation

While it is recognised that decisions around Council Tax harmonisation will be a matter for the new council, the current range in Council Tax amounts paid across Suffolk means that it is important to consider the implications of harmonisation as early as possible.

As part of this it is essential to balance a range of factors including:

- equity and ultimately ensuring everyone in the new council pays the same for the services they receive;
- maximising the resources available to the new council to ensure the greatest level of financial sustainability and protect critical services;
- balancing the cost-of-living considerations with the provision of services in terms of the impact on residents.

Part of the challenge in Suffolk is the scale of the range between the highest and the lowest Council Tax areas. Ipswich has the highest lower tier Council Tax in the country at £419.58 (Band D equivalent) which when compared to Mid Suffolk (the lowest in Suffolk) at £175.03, means the gap to close through harmonisation is £244.55.

It is a position that is further complicated by town and parish precepts which while outside of the harmonisation process do impact unevenly, particularly because Ipswich is not currently parished and therefore has no precepts. Therefore, a further important consideration will be whether the creation of a town council in Ipswich also results with a precept being levied.

Given the scale of the Council Tax gap, we have modelled the implications of 11 different scenarios which range from harmonising at the highest level as quickly as possible through to harmonisation at the lowest level as slowly as possible. Through debate and discussion with Suffolk County Council cabinet and Conservative working group members around the different options two over-arching principles have emerged:

1) A desire to seek to harmonise as quickly as possible in order to foster simplicity both in terms of administering the billing process as well as in communicating Council Tax requirement to residents.

2) An ambition to keep Council Tax as low as possible so that the financial pressure on residents is reduced while still ensuring service delivery and financial stability is maintained – it is an ambition that seeks to ensure that residents share in the financial benefits from re-organisation.

To illustrate this, below we present three scenarios that would enable Council Tax to be harmonised within the first year of the new authority

- **To the lowest** – Council Tax harmonised to the lowest Band D rate across councils in Suffolk. This would see the Band D rate for all areas not currently at the lowest level reduce in the first year of a new unitary council. This is the current preference of the existing Suffolk County Council administration.

- **To the average (i.e. excluding Ipswich)** – Council Tax harmonised to the average Band D rate of all districts in Suffolk (excluding Ipswich in the calculation of the average). The Band D rate for some areas would increase to harmonise at the average whilst the Band D rate in other areas would decrease.

- **To the average** – Council Tax harmonised to the average Band D rate of all district and borough councils in Suffolk. The Band D rate for some areas would increase to harmonise at the average whilst the Band D rate in other areas would decrease.

Whilst under each of the scenarios there will be a lower level of Council Tax income generated across Suffolk than in the baseline scenario much of this is attributable to the assumptions on post-harmonisation Council Tax uplift. Our assumption is that post-harmonisation Council Tax uplift will be the average of current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) assumptions across Suffolk which will offset gains seen in alternative options delivered over a prolonged period. The actual uplift decision will be for the newly created administration and due to the pace of harmonisation an actual uplift in excess of the current MTFS assumptions would generate a higher level of Council Tax across Suffolk. The difference between the different scenarios for Council Tax harmonisation have not been included in the net benefit of the different configurations but any reduction in Council Tax income from the baseline would have an impact on the net benefit delivered by local government reorganisation.

Given the scale of the gap, it is not possible to harmonise to the highest rate in a single year, therefore there are a range of phased options that could see the four district authorities harmonising in one year and then subsequent harmonisation to the Ipswich level in the future.

What is apparent is that a single unitary council for Suffolk presents the most straightforward and potentially equitable means of resolving this complex picture. Particularly when it is considered that the proposed three unitary model will involve splitting district boundaries and therefore introduce both more complexity around the harmonisation process and potentially significant burden on some residents who may be required to pay much higher rates than they would have under a one unitary model.

Table 17: Summary of Council Tax harmonisation scenarios

Scenario	Range of Band D movements in harmonisation year (%)	Range of Band D movements in harmonisation year (£)	Total Council Tax income generated across Suffolk in 2028/29	Difference to the baseline Council Tax income generated across Suffolk* in 2028/29
Harmonise to the lowest	-11.98% to 0.00%	-£262.94 to £0.00	£533.847m	-£32.045m
Harmonise to average (excluding Ipswich)	-11.08% to 1.02%	-£243.25 to £19.69	£539.289m	-£26.603m
Harmonise to the average	-9.39% to 2.95%	-£205.98 to £56.97	£549.591m	-£16.302m

*The baseline Council Tax income for Suffolk is the amount of Council Tax that would be generated were local government reorganisation not to take place and Council Tax were to increase at the levels set out in the medium-term financial plan. This enables a comparison of the impact of the different scenarios on the Council Tax income across Suffolk.

Section six

Implementing the change

An effective change management programme is essential to the successful launch of a **One Suffolk** council and to realising the benefits outlined in this business case. We fully recognise the scale and complexity of the challenge – delivering a fundamental transformation while maintaining high-quality, uninterrupted services for residents across Suffolk.

Comprehensively planned, appropriately resourced

To meet this challenge and maximise the opportunity to revitalise local government, the change programme will be comprehensively planned and appropriately resourced. The approach will be informed by the experiences of other newly established unitary councils, drawing on both best practice and lessons learned to shape a robust and resilient transition.

To successfully transition to a single unitary authority model as part of Suffolk's local government reorganisation (LGR), councils must adopt a structured yet adaptive framework that lays a strong foundation for transformation. This is not just a technical exercise – it is a once-in-a-50-year opportunity to reshape how local government serves its communities. The framework will:

- balance strategic oversight to guide long-term vision and decision-making
- ensure operational continuity to safeguard essential services
- have governance alignment to ensure clarity and accountability
- include stakeholder engagement to build trust and consensus.

By embedding these principles from the outset, Suffolk can create a resilient, responsive and future-ready council capable of delivering better outcomes for residents, businesses, staff and partners.

Summary implementation framework

Below is a summary of the implementation framework capturing four key pillars of: phases of change, council-wide workstreams, service level change and facilitators of effective change. This practical framework is synthesised from recent government guidance, sector expertise and best practices from ongoing LGR experiences in England.

Figure 09: Overview of implementation framework

Phases of change	Council-wide workstreams	Service level change	Managing risk and realising value
Prepare	Vision and culture	Preserve and optimise	Governance and decision-making
Transition	Organisational structure	Integrate and scale	Dedicated programme management office
Stabilise and improve	Service delivery models	Join-up and align	Independent assurance
Transform	Processes	Tailor and enable	Risk management framework
	Digital, data and technology	Standardise and localise	External comms and stakeholder engagement
	People and HR		Legal and constitutional
	Finance and commercial		
	Property and assets		

Phases of change

Figure 10: High level summary of implementation timetable and phases of change

The programme is envisaged in four phases over a five-year period (assuming 1 April 2028 go live):

Vesting day 1 April 2028

September 2025 - March 2025	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31
Prepare	**Transition**		**Stabilise and improve**	**Transform**	
Pre-MHCLG decision	Post decision / pre shadow elections	Post shadow election	Year 1 post-vesting day	Years 2 and 3 post-vesting day	

Each phase will be supported by a clear and robust governance framework, including a Transformation Programme Board tasked with overseeing the achievement of savings (see the Managing risk and realising value section for further details).

Prepare

While awaiting the government's decision on local government reorganisation, Suffolk councils will continue to deliver high-quality services and progress transformation initiatives that represent 'no regrets' actions – steps that add value regardless of the outcome.

In parallel, councils will maintain open engagement with communities and partners to shape a shared understanding of the future of local government in Suffolk. To ensure readiness, councils will voluntarily share data with partners, undertake scenario planning and develop draft transition and implementation plans. These preparatory actions will position Suffolk to respond swiftly and confidently to any government announcement.

Transition

Following a positive decision from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Suffolk will enter the first formal phase of transition. The first year of transition will focus on stability, coordination and laying the operational and democratic foundations for the new council. The second year of transition will shape the new council's culture, capabilities and strategic direction, ensuring it is ready to operate effectively from vesting day and deliver improved outcomes for Suffolk's residents.

Table 18: Summary of key transition phase activities

Transition year 1 (2026/27)	Transition year 2 (2027/28)
• Finalise and activate transition and implementation plans • Launch communication and engagement strategies to ensure transparency and build trust • Begin the transition to the new unitary council, including early integration planning • Prepare for shadow elections, including electoral logistics and public awareness • Establish interim leadership arrangements and initiate shadow working practices • Develop operational protocols and business continuity plans to safeguard services.	• Recruit statutory officers to provide professional leadership and ensure legal compliance • Agree the new authority's constitution to define governance and decision-making structures • Set the first budget and establishing financial controls to ensure fiscal discipline • Define the identity, values, and purpose of the new council • Draft strategic documents to guide future priorities and service delivery • Begin the structured merging of organisational structures, systems, and teams.

Stabilise and improve

Following vesting day and the formal establishment of the new Suffolk unitary council, the immediate priority will be to stabilise operations and ensure continuity of service delivery. This phase is not about wholesale transformation, but about embedding the new structures, maintaining public confidence and creating the conditions for future improvement.

The focus will be on:

- **Service continuity:** Ensuring that residents experience a seamless transition, with no disruption to essential services
- **Incremental improvements:** Where capacity allows or where there is a clear and urgent need, targeted improvements will be made to enhance efficiency, responsiveness, or user experience
- **Embedding new ways of working:** Supporting staff through change, aligning teams to new structures and reinforcing the values and behaviours of the new organisation
- **Laying the groundwork for transformation:** During this phase, detailed transformation plans will be finalised, informed by early operational insights and engagement with communities and partners.

This phase is about consolidation – building confidence in the new council's ability to deliver, while preparing for the more ambitious reform and innovation that will follow.

Transform

With the new Suffolk unitary authority stabilised and operational, the focus will shift to delivering the full transformation programme and delivering the ambitious vision for **One Suffolk**. This phase will be guided by a clearly defined operating model and a commitment to achieving long-term efficiencies, improved outcomes for residents and financial sustainability.

Transformation plans will be implemented to deliver savings from Year 3 onwards, in line with the financial modelling set out earlier in the business case. This cautious and phased approach will ensure that the council lays strong foundations before undertaking significant service redesign. It also reflects a deliberate strategy to prioritise stability and continuity in the early stages, while enabling meaningful change over time.

Council-wide workstreams

The successful transition to a new Suffolk unitary council will depend on the coordinated delivery of a wide range of cross-council and enabling workstreams. These themes represent the core building blocks of the new organisation and must be carefully scoped, sequenced and integrated to ensure a coherent, resilient and future-ready transformation.

This section outlines the key council-wide themes that will underpin the implementation process. Each theme is interdependent and must be managed in alignment with the overall programme roadmap. They are not isolated tasks, but interconnected domains that collectively shape the future operating model of the new authority.

The approach will be to treat these themes as strategic enablers of change, ensuring that transformation is not only technically sound but also culturally embedded and operationally sustainable. These themes will guide how services are designed and delivered, how people and systems interact and how the new council defines its identity and purpose.

Summary of key activities by workstream

Vision and culture	Embedding a unified culture and strong leadership ethos will be critical to shaping the identity and effectiveness of the new council. This theme will focus on: • **values and behaviours:** Co-creating shared organisational values that reflect the vision of **One Suffolk** and are lived by all—not just words on a page • **cultural integration:** Acknowledging and respecting the legacy, strengths, and identities of the organisations coming together, while building a cohesive and inclusive culture • **bottom-up engagement:** Empowering staff to shape the new culture through dialogue, involvement and ownership • **leadership development:** Equipping leaders at all levels to inspire, guide and support teams through change.
Organisational structure	The creation of a new council requires the design of a fit-for-purpose organisational structure that supports strategic leadership, operational delivery, and democratic accountability. This includes: • **leadership and governance model:** Define and fill senior roles (chief executive, directors, heads of service) and establish governance structures to lead and oversee the new council • **functional alignment:** Grouping services into coherent directorates or portfolios based on strategic priorities and operational synergies • **span of control:** Establishing clear lines of accountability, decision-making authority, and reporting relationships. The organisational structure will be designed to support both the immediate needs of transition and the long-term ambitions of the new council.
Service delivery models	Each service area will require a tailored delivery model that reflects its statutory obligations, operational complexity, and community impact. The new council will need to: • **map existing services:** Understand delivery arrangements across current councils • **assess integration opportunities:** Identify where services can be aggregated or streamlined • **design future state models:** Develop high-level service blueprints that define scope, delivery channels, and performance expectations. Service delivery models will be developed iteratively, with a focus on continuity, quality, and innovation. The change journey of service areas will vary which is captured and explored more fully in the next section on 'service level change'.

Summary of key activities by workstream (continued)

Processes	Process design and optimisation are critical to ensuring that the new council operates efficiently and consistently. This workstream will focus on: • **process mapping and harmonisation:** Identifying and aligning key business processes across legacy councils • **standard operating procedures (SOPs):** Developing SOPs for core functions to ensure consistency and compliance • **workflow automation**: Exploring opportunities to automate routine tasks and improve productivity • **process ownership and governance:** Assigning responsibility for process design, maintenance and improvement. Efficient processes will underpin service delivery, financial management and customer experience.
Digital, data and technology	Digital infrastructure and data governance are foundational to the success of the new council. This theme will address: • **systems integration:** Consolidating IT platforms, applications and infrastructure to support unified operations • **data migration and quality:** Ensuring accurate, secure and compliant transfer of data from legacy systems • **digital service delivery:** Enabling online access to services and information for residents and staff • **cybersecurity and resilience:** Implementing robust security protocols and disaster recovery plans • **technology strategy:** Developing a digital roadmap aligned with organisational goals and resident needs. Digital transformation will be a key enabler of efficiency, transparency and innovation.
People and human resources	The transition will significantly shape the workforce and organisational culture; a motivated, skilled, and unified team is essential to delivering the vision of the new council. This theme will address: • **workforce planning:** Identifying staffing requirements, skills gaps and recruitment needs • **TUPE and employment law compliance:** Managing staff transfers in accordance with legal obligations • **organisational development:** Supporting staff through change with training, coaching and engagement • **employee engagement:** Creating channels for staff feedback, involvement and recognition.

Summary of key activities by workstream (continued)

Finance and commercial	Financial integrity and commercial agility are vital to long-term sustainability, with planning closely aligned to service priorities, risk management and transformation goals. This theme will include: • **budget consolidation:** Merging financial plans, reserves and liabilities across councils • **financial controls and reporting:** Establishing robust systems for budgeting, monitoring, and auditing • **commercial strategy:** Reviewing contracts, partnerships and income-generating opportunities • **procurement frameworks:** Designing compliant and efficient procurement processes. • **funding and investment planning:** Identifying capital requirements and funding sources for transformation.
Property and assets	The new council will inherit a diverse portfolio of physical and digital assets. Effective asset management will support service delivery, financial sustainability and community engagement. This workstream will address: • **asset inventory and valuation:** Cataloguing and assessing the value and condition of assets • **ownership and transfer arrangements:** Managing legal and operational aspects of asset transfer • **estate strategy:** Developing a strategy for office space, depots and community facilities • **asset optimisation:** Identifying opportunities to rationalise, repurpose or divest assets • **facilities management:** Ensuring continuity of maintenance, security and compliance.

Service level change

Not all services will require the same approach to transition. The council recognises that some services, particularly those involving vulnerable populations or statutory responsibilities, carry higher risks and complexities. As such, the implementation strategy will be differentiated based on service type, operational dependencies and risk exposure.

The concept of "migrating to the most competent platform" is central. This concept recognises that today, services are delivered by multiple authorities with differing levels of resource, capability, maturity and resilience. In some areas, excellence already exists and can be scaled. In others, fragmentation has led to duplication, confusion for residents and avoidable costs. The transformation process will therefore seek not just to consolidate, but to elevate – building on strengths, addressing weaknesses and designing services that are fit for the future.

The migration process will not be uniform. It will vary depending on the nature of the service, the capacity of existing delivery partners and the needs of local communities. For this reason, the playbook adopts a typology of change – a model for understanding the kinds of transitions and transformations different services will undergo.

The five change typologies that apply to this transition and transformation are described in the following way:

Table 19: Change typologies

Change type	Description	Core design challenge
Strengthen and optimise	Where a service already operates effectively, with high capability, strategic reach, and system leadership, the task is to retain core strengths and extend coverage.	Maintain stability during transition while unlocking efficiency and outcomes improvement.
Integrate and scale	Where multiple fragmented service models exist, integration is needed to remove duplication, resolve inefficiencies, and improve user experience.	Design a single coherent model that improves value for money, quality, and simplicity.
Join up and align	Where services are closely linked in terms of outcomes but structurally or culturally disconnected, they must be realigned for joined-up delivery.	Build new collaborative workflows and governance without compromising professional identity or legal clarity.
Tailor and enable	Where services are place-based and thrive through local responsiveness and identity, change should empower local leadership within a shared framework.	Balance local freedom with strategic consistency and back-office efficiency.
Standardise and localise	Create a consistent framework or platform (e.g. digital or process) while retaining local responsiveness and access points.	Design for equity and consistency while maintaining community accessibility and trust.

The following sections will examine each typology to identify the key considerations and mitigations that need to be managed for a successful and seamless transition and a strong foundation for transformation.

Strengthen and optimise

Services such as social care and highways are currently delivered by Suffolk County Council and under a single unitary authority, these services would remain intact – eliminating the need for disaggregation. This continuity ensures that no significant transitional arrangements are required, allowing uninterrupted service delivery.

Instead of diverting energy into managing change, efforts can be focused on driving continuous improvement and aligning services with the **One Suffolk** target operating model. The real opportunity for transformation begins on vesting day, when all services are unified under one authority. This integration will foster collaboration across departments – such as housing and social care – unlocking a single view of the individual and enabling a truly person-centred approach.

Integrate and scale

As the new unitary council integrates services previously delivered to varying standards and policies across different district council areas – such as housing – and those split across tiers – such as waste management – the priority is to create a unified, high-quality delivery model. Key preparatory work includes building a comprehensive understanding of current service models, policies, standards, people, processes and systems. This foundation will support the design of a future model aligned with the new council's operating framework. Crucially, we will assess best practice from within Suffolk and beyond to ensure the new model is not only consistent but also an improvement, building on the legacy of previous organisations. A phased transition will mitigate risks, particularly around third-party contracts and decisions on in-house versus external delivery.

Join up and align

Services requiring join-up and alignment often aim for the same outcomes but operate with differing processes, systems, structures and capabilities. A key challenge is ensuring that enabling services – such as finance, legal and HR – can simultaneously support the establishment of the new authority while managing the closure of legacy organisations. Their deep organisational knowledge is essential, but they must also be forward-looking to ensure statutory and financial obligations are met from day one. These services must be aligned to the new organisational structure and ready to interface with it effectively.

Preparation will involve mapping current systems, processes and workforce structures, followed by designing a future model that supports joined-up delivery. Dual running may be required during transition to maintain continuity while winding down legacy operations. Given national recruitment challenges in these professional areas, retaining skilled staff through strong engagement and clear communication will be critical.

Tailor and enable

Tailoring and enabling place-based services means empowering local leadership within a consistent strategic framework that supports responsiveness and community identity. A key delivery mechanism for this approach is the effective use of local assets – such as libraries, community centres and cultural buildings. Preparatory work will include a comprehensive asset mapping exercise to capture what assets exist, their locations, current uses and physical condition. This will enable the new council to identify short- and medium-term opportunities to optimise asset utilisation.

In parallel, establishing area committees will be essential to embed local governance and accountability. This will require early engagement with town and parish councils, residents and local partners to build interest and participation. These committees will serve as a vital interface between the council and communities, ensuring that local voices shape service delivery. By assessing best practice from within Suffolk and externally, the new model can build on the legacy of previous organisations while enhancing local empowerment and strategic coherence.

Standardise and localise

Recognising the inherent tension between the need to standardise and the imperative to localise, it is essential to strike a careful balance that ensures consistency without compromising local relevance. Standardising and localising services such as front-door triage, complaints handling and customer contact is critical to delivering a consistent, high-quality experience for residents while maintaining local accessibility and trust. These services often form the first impression of the council, so clarity, responsiveness and equity are essential.

The existing 'Fit for the Future' programme provides a strong foundation, already working to standardise transitional processes and enhance digital channels. This trajectory of change can continue through the transition phase, ensuring readiness for the new organisation.

Crucially, localisation must not be lost in the drive for consistency; it should be actively nurtured by amplifying and building on the good practice already evident across Suffolk authorities. By identifying and celebrating what works well locally—whether in service design, community engagement or digital innovation—the new authority can embed proven approaches into a unified framework that respects and reflects local identity.

Preparatory work will include mapping current service models, technologies and access points across legacy organisations to identify variation and best practice. From this, a unified framework can be designed – standardising core processes and platforms while allowing for local flexibility in delivery. Staff training, system integration and clear resident communication will be key to minimising disruption.

Managing risk and realising value

Delivering a successful transition to a new Suffolk unitary authority requires a balanced and proactive approach to managing risk while ensuring the realisation of long-term value. This approach has been shaped by learning from other new unitary authorities, drawing on both best practice and lessons learned to inform Suffolk's strategy.

While the scale and complexity of change present inherent challenges, robust risk management and disciplined value tracking will ensure the programme remains resilient, focused and capable of delivering its intended benefits. This section outlines how risks will be identified, mitigated and monitored, and how value will be defined, measured and realised throughout the transformation journey.

Governance and decision-making

To ensure effective oversight, strategic alignment and operational delivery throughout the transition to **One Suffolk**, a three-layered governance model will be adopted. This structure provides clarity of roles, enables agile decision-making and ensures that both transformation and business-as-usual (BAU) activities are managed in parallel.

The governance model is designed to balance strategic leadership, executive coordination and focused delivery. Each layer plays a distinct but interconnected role:

- **Political leadership:** Provides democratic oversight, strategic direction and accountability.
- **Officer leadership**: Drives programme execution, manages risk and ensures operational coherence.
- **Working groups:** Deliver targeted, time-bound outputs through task-and-finish arrangements, enabling agile delivery and reducing pressure on core services.

This structure allows for flexibility and renewal of focus at each phase of the programme – from Transition through to Transformation – ensuring governance remains relevant, responsive and proportionate to the stage of delivery.

Once a decision is made on the preferred configuration for Suffolk, a Transition Executive and an officer Transition Programme Board will be established to lead the preparations for the new council, prior to vesting day. Post-vesting day, these would be replaced with the Cabinet and Management Team of **One Suffolk.** The Executive would lead the delivery of the Transition Plan and also oversee key business-as-usual milestones for each of the six councils to ensure that any risks to service continuity are mitigated.

Figure 11: Three-layered governance model to drive implementation

	Transition	Stabilise & improve	Transform
Layer 1 - political leadership	**Transition Executive** Membership from all six councils	**Implementation Executive** **One Suffolk** Cabinet	**Strategic Transformation Executive** **One Suffolk** Cabinet
Layer 2 - officer leadership	**Transition Programme Board** Chief officers from each of the six councils	**Implementation Board** **One Suffolk** Management team	**Transformation Programme Board** **One Suffolk** Management team
Layer 3 - working groups	**Transition Delivery Teams** Relevant representatives from all six councils	**Operational Integration Teams** Relevant representatives from service areas, HR, finance, legal, IT	**Transformation and Innovation Delivery Groups** Relevant representatives from service areas, HR, finance, legal, IT

PMO

Dedicated programme management office

To manage the scale and complexity of the transition to **One Suffolk**, a dedicated programme management office (PMO) will be established. Led by a programme director, accountable to the executive, the PMO will coordinate delivery across all workstreams, manage interdependencies and ensure risks are actively identified and mitigated.

The PMO will draw on talent from across the six councils, blended with external advice. Crucially, it will be designed to enable change – not create an industry in itself – operating as an agile function that supports delivery.

During the transition phase, the programme director will report monthly to all six councils via the executive, providing transparency and assurance. The PMO will also lead on risk management, using a robust framework to monitor and mitigate transition-specific risks.

As the programme evolves, the PMO will adapt to support stabilisation and transformation, maintaining strategic alignment and delivery focus throughout.

Independent assurance

Independent assurance provides objective oversight to help manage risk during the transition to **One Suffolk**. It offers external scrutiny at key milestones, ensuring delivery remains on track and risks are identified and addressed early. By challenging assumptions and validating progress, assurance strengthens transparency and builds confidence among stakeholders. Drawing on lessons from other unitary transitions, this approach supports continuous improvement and helps safeguard service continuity. It complements internal governance by providing a critical check on programme performance, ensuring the transition is delivered with discipline, accountability and resilience.

Risk management framework

A robust risk management framework will be adopted to support the safe and effective delivery of the transition to **One Suffolk**. This framework will include clear escalation protocols to ensure that risks are identified early, assessed consistently and mitigated proactively across all programme phases. It will be embedded within the programme management office (PMO) and aligned with governance structures to enable timely decision-making and accountability. Ongoing liaison with external regulators and service commissioners will be maintained to ensure statutory obligations are met and service quality standards upheld. This approach will help safeguard continuity, protect public value and build confidence in the transition process.

External communications and stakeholder engagement

The transition to **One Suffolk** will affect a wide range of stakeholders, including residents, businesses, staff and partners. This workstream will ensure that all stakeholders are actively engaged, well-informed and supported throughout the reorganisation.

A proactive engagement strategy will be essential to establish future relationships, build trust, manage expectations and secure buy-in across these diverse groups.

A structured stakeholder mapping exercise will be undertaken to identify all key groups impacted by the reorganisation. For each stakeholder group, the specific impacts of the change will be assessed – whether related to governance, service delivery, employment, or representation. Based on this analysis, tailored stakeholder engagement plans will be developed to ensure that communication is relevant, timely and responsive to each group's needs and concerns.

For example, early engagement with political and executive stakeholders is critical to building consensus, clarifying roles, and aligning strategic objectives. Establishing a shared understanding of the vision and transitional arrangements will help foster trust, reduce uncertainty, and enable coordinated leadership throughout the change process.

As a further example, clear and consistent communication with recognised staff unions and representative bodies will be prioritised to ensure transparency around planned changes and to provide reassurance about support structures available to staff. This will include regular briefings, access to dedicated engagement channels, and opportunities for feedback and dialogue.

A comprehensive external communications strategy will also be developed to support wider engagement with the public and external partners. This strategy will define key messages, communication channels, and engagement timelines. Messaging will be tailored to different stakeholder groups to ensure clarity and relevance, and feedback mechanisms will be embedded to support two-way communication.

Legal and constitutional

This workstream will establish the legal and governance framework for the new unitary authority, ensuring a smooth and compliant transition from the predecessor councils. The first priority is to review all statutory requirements and statutory instruments (SIs) that underpin LGR, including those that support the formation of the continuing authority. This legal foundation will guide the development of core governance documents and transitional arrangements.

A new local code of corporate governance, aligned with Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) principles, will be drafted and approved to reflect the new council's commitment to transparency, accountability, and effective leadership. In parallel, the new constitution will be prepared and adopted, alongside updated codes of conduct, member allowances schemes, and governance protocols, all of which must be in place before vesting day.

To support effective decision-making, the new committee structures and delegation schemes will be mapped, replacing fragmented arrangements and clarifying who is responsible for what decisions and when, particularly during the transition period. Key governance documents – such as standing orders and the scheme of delegation – will be updated to reflect interim arrangements and communicated widely to officers and members to ensure clarity and compliance. Training will be delivered to both officers and elected members on the new decision-making frameworks and escalation protocols, helping to prevent operational bottlenecks and ensure consistent governance practice.

Finally, electoral arrangements will be clarified, including the establishment of shadow authorities, the definition of new wards and the scheduling of future elections. These steps will ensure democratic continuity and readiness for the council's formal launch.

Summary of key risks and mitigations

The following table outlines some initial thinking about key risks and their associated mitigating actions. As part of the transition process a detailed risk register will be developed.

Table 20: Summary of key risks and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating action
Leadership and governance during transition	• Appointing senior management and leadership early in the "shadow period" to build teams and establish governance • Getting governance arrangements right is critical to avoid delays and legal issues on day one • Shadow authorities require clear structures to oversee transition and ensure accountability.
Financial sustainability and accounting	• Managing financial complexities including disaggregation and aggregation of budgets from predecessor councils • Producing high-quality, audited legacy accounts early to provide a financial foundation for the new council • Harmonising Council Tax rates politically and practically • Ensuring finance teams have sufficient capacity and capability, including working with external auditors • Medium- to long-term financial planning supported by robust savings and transformation programs • Avoiding overreliance on reserves and managing capital programme delivery effectively.

Risk	Mitigating action
Complex organisational integration	• Merging multiple councils' staff, terms and conditions, values and behaviours, services and policies into a single unitary authority • Managing redundancies, staffing restructures and continuous communication to minimise disruption • Aligning differing priorities and cultures from legacy bodies • Ensuring legal continuity and transferring all property, rights, liabilities and contracts smoothly.
Service delivery and maintaining business-as-usual	• Continuing delivery of essential public services without disruption during complex restructuring • Integrating systems and processes to harmonise service delivery • Addressing geographic and demographic considerations to ensure effective local service coverage.
IT and data integration	• Overcoming legacy IT silos and disparate systems to build unified, flexible and scalable digital platforms • Developing comprehensive IT and digital transformation plans within defined timelines (e.g. removing duplicated systems within three years) • Ensuring cyber security, data protection and reliable disaster recovery are embedded from the start.
Performance, procurement and risk management	• Establishing a robust performance management framework linked to new unitary outcomes rather than legacy arrangements • Upgrading procurement and contract management capabilities to suit the larger scale and complexity • Embedding strong governance, including internal audit, counter-fraud measures and corporate risk strategies during and after transition.
Political and stakeholder consensus	• Building consensus across diverse councils and political groups, which is often challenging but crucial • Managing public consultation and ensuring community engagement throughout the process • Dealing with potential political disputes, especially regarding boundaries, service footprints and financial arrangements.
Timelines and project management	• Working within demanding national timetables (e.g. proposals due in late 2025, shadow elections in 2026, vesting day in 2028) • Resourcing and maintaining a strong programme management office and dedicated teams • Balancing reorganisation demands with ongoing service delivery and workforce pressures.
Dual delivery with devolution initiatives	• Coordinating the complex simultaneous delivery of local government reorganisation and the establishment of a strategic authority • Navigating overlapping governance layers and funding frameworks with clarity.

Section seven

Conclusions: meeting the government's criteria

Section seven – Conclusions: meeting the government's criteria

When the Secretary of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to the leaders of Suffolk's authorities to develop proposals for local government reorganisation, the letter set out six criteria that the proposals needed to address. We believe that we have addressed each of the criteria in this proposal and in doing so set out a strong and robust case for a single unitary council in Suffolk, one that is simpler, smarter and better.

This single unitary council also meets each of the criteria set by Government and is summarised below.

Criteria	Our proposal
1a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas with an appropriate tax base which does not create undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area	• **Suffolk is a geography where residents feel they belong:** our residents' survey showed that nearly three-quarters of residents felt a sense of belonging to Suffolk. There was not the same sense of belonging to district and borough areas. • **Unified economic strategy delivery: One Suffolk** enables the delivery of a county-wide economic strategy already agreed upon by Suffolk's public and private sector leaders. It provides a coherent structure to implement this strategy effectively across sectors like clean energy, agri-food and logistics. • **An appropriate tax base:** Analysis shows that **One Suffolk** has an appropriate tax base, particularly when compared to the three unitary configurations where one of the authorities is notably weaker due to higher levels of social care provision. One unitary council is also the most effective means of addressing Council Tax harmonisation in an equitable manner. • **No undue advantage or disadvantage:** By adopting a Suffolk-wide geography, the new unitary council will facilitate strategic decision making enabling the new unitary council to target services and investment on those places that need them most. The new unitary council will not be influenced by artificial boundaries and by creating a single unitary council it removes the issue or unevenness that clearly exists in the two and three unitary configurations.

Criteria	Our proposal
1b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply to meet local needs	• **A strategic, consistent and joined-up approach to housing:** A single unitary council in Suffolk presents a unique opportunity to integrate together housing, planning, highways and social care into a more coherent system – essential for tackling the root causes of housing challenges – and ensuring the right type of homes are built in the right place. • **A Suffolk-wide housing strategy:** A single unitary council would provide the foundation for a single strategy enabling more effective and consistent alignment and integration delivered more equitably and consistently regardless of postcode. It will strengthen Suffolk's ability to respond to complex challenges such as rising homelessness, the accommodation needs of care leavers, demand for specialist housing such as extra care and supported living and the delivery of more affordable homes. • **Enhanced partnership work:** A single housing authority offers a simpler, clearer point of engagement for partners such as the NHS, police, voluntary sector and housing providers – facilitating joined-up planning, faster decision-making, and improved outcomes for residents.
1c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement	• **Robust, granular and prudent analysis:** Which has built up the costs and benefits of LGR from the bottom up, sought to learn and reflect lessons from the previous rounds of LGR; takes careful account of the timing and phasing of costs and benefits; and acknowledges from the outset that some costs and savings are more difficult to estimate. • **Highest net benefit over five years**: Our financial analysis shows that a single unitary council in Suffolk delivers £78.2 million of benefit after five years while the two unitary option will have cost an additional £48.0 million and the three unitary option £145.3 million more. • **Greatest ongoing benefit:** One unitary council will be £39.4 million cheaper a year than the current local government system in Suffolk, for the two unitary council model it will be £7.3 million cheaper but for the three unitary option it will actually cost £13.1 million more to operate.
1d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described	• **Smarter, data-driven leadership: One Suffolk** enables joined-up services through a critical mass of integrated data, modern platforms and strategic commissioning, removing duplication and delays, and delivering responsive, personalised support. • **Simplified governance and reduced complexity:** Residents, businesses and stakeholders have a single clear point of contact and accountability for local government services. • **Joined-up, resilient services: One Suffolk** enables integrated delivery across housing, health and social care, strengthens workforce recruitment, and improves outcomes through consistent standards, faster response times and a unified approach rooted in local communities.

Criteria	Our proposal
2a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more	• **The only option with a population above 500,000:** The two unitary option is closer in size to 400,000. The three unitary option has a population well below 500,000 and closer to 260,000, even with population growth to 2040 these areas will remain below 300,000 which will make them some of the smaller unitary authorities in the country.
2b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal	• **No clear rationale for other options:** There is no clear and obvious rationale for the creation of authorities of below 300,000 particularly given the risks and costs associated with disaggregating social care services. • **A single strategic voice:** From a devolution perspective the stronger rationale is for the creation of one unitary council that can communicate strategically and consistently with the mayor.
2c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that Council Taxpayers are getting the best value for their money	• **The highest levels of financial benefit:** Our financial analysis shows that a single unitary council in Suffolk delivers £78.2 million of benefit after five years while the two unitary option will have cost an additional £48.0 million and the three unitary option £145.3 million more. • **Better value for money:** One unitary council will be £39.4 million cheaper a year than the current local government system in Suffolk, for the two unitary council model it will be £7.3 million cheaper but for the three unitary option it will actually cost £13.1 million more to operate.
2d) Proposal should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities for existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest to save projects	• **Careful consideration of phasing:** The annual net benefit of a single unitary for Suffolk will result in the initial costs of transition being offset in year 3 post-vesting day. For the two unitary and three unitary configurations the transition costs are not offset in the first five years post-vesting day with a single unitary taking c.11 years post-vesting day to offset transition costs (including disaggregation) whilst the three unitary will see the cumulative net cost of local government reorganisation continue to increase as the costs outweigh any benefits generated. • **Clear approach to managing transition costs:** The funding of transition costs will be a collaborative approach between all the Suffolk councils, with reserves being considered as the first call for funding these, in advance of savings being delivered (where reserves can then be replenished). However, given the wider financial challenges in Suffolk, reserves will need to be maintained at a level to provide financial resilience for the new unitary council and therefore consideration will also be given to the use of Capital Receipts flexibilities as well as discussion with government regarding the flexible use of borrowing to help manage the upfront transition costs.

Criteria	Our proposal
2e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisations may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable	• **This criterion is not applicable to Suffolk councils.**
2f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation	• **The most effective management of debt:** As per the 2024/25 accounts, debt across Suffolk is £1,222 million, with 54% of this relating to the County Council, 20% to Ipswich and 10% to Babergh. Were three councils created, as part of the disaggregation of the balance sheet, allocating debt to the new structure will have to be carefully considered to ensure equity of rates and maturity as well as alignment to the assets that generated the debt. For this proposal the allocation of debt has been done on a population basis, this shows an imbalance in the distribution, with the East having the higher distribution c. 37% and the West a lower share at 28%. This creates an imbalance across Suffolk and a risk to the resilience on the new council as debt level has the potential to become unaffordable over time. This issue is mitigated through the creation of one new unitary council. • **A DSG challenge:** There are no issues of stranded debt, however, the negative DSG reserve, will have a significant impact on the debt of the County Council if no action is taken by government. The statutory override permits the County Council to have a negative DSG Reserve, however this override only exists until 31 March 2028. The continuing forecast increase of this deficit is impacting on the level of debt the County Council is incurring. The government is aware of the challenges of the DSG and we await the government White Paper on SEND in the Autumn, to outline the proposals for managing this national issue. However, it needs to be highlighted that disaggregation of this debt to smaller unitary councils will present a risk to their resilience.

Criteria	Our proposal
3a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services	• **Migration to the most competent platform:** A single unitary council avoids disrupting the delivery of sensitive and complex services such as children's and adult social care, which risk poorer outcomes if divided among smaller authorities. • **Joined-up services: One Suffolk** unites health, care, housing, planning and safety into a single system, improving coordination within the council and with wider stakeholders and other agencies and ultimately improves outcomes for residents. • **Dual power of scale and personalised support: One Suffolk** combines the strategic scale and economics of efficiency with the ability to deliver tailored support for individual people and places.
3b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money	• **Intelligence-led and integrated services:** A single unitary council creates a number of opportunities for reform by bringing services together and increasing the amount of data and information held, which is no longer split across different councils. This will enable services to be more responsive and tailored, for example, reducing homelessness when young people transition out of care. • **Geographic alignment: One Suffolk** would have the same geographic focus as the NHS, police and fire services which will facilitate better joint working and simply the process of bringing forward reform, particularly around preventative activities. A single unitary council for Suffolk will also deliver better value for money to the public sector as a whole as it will reduce the need for other public services to have to duplicate engagement with two or three unitary councils. • **Efficient structures: One Suffolk** removes duplication across councils, streamlining governance and back-office functions to free up resources for frontline services and deliver better value for money.
3c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety	• **Avoids unnecessary fragmentation:** By operating on a Suffolk-wide footprint, a single unitary council minimises the impacts on crucial services and enables adults, children and SEND to continue on their respective transformation and improvement journeys. The creation of three unitary authorities by contract would create fragmentation not just of county services but also fragmentation of the district services. • **Minismises impacts on crucial services:** The creation of three unitary authorities unduly impacts on the critical services of adult and children's social care, SEND and homelessness as each of these services will need to be split and reorganised (for example the locality working of the county does not align with the boundaries proposed). Conversely for the single unitary option, by bringing housing alongside stable social care services provides an opportunity to positively impact upon social care.

Criteria	Our proposal
4a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal	• **Extensive engagement:** We have conducted a Suffolk-wide residents' survey with over 8,000 responses, asking about local identity, decision-making, service priorities and views on the proposed unitary model. Fifteen 'Local Matters' events were held across Suffolk, enabling face-to-face dialogue between residents, councillors and officers. Additionally, 46 briefings with town and parish councils were conducted, including those with differing views, to ensure open and inclusive debate and BIDs and DMOs were consulted. Targeted outreach to children and young people was achieved through youth parliament engagement and school presentations. • **Feedback that has shaped our proposal:** The feedback we have received has influenced the different commitments we have made throughout this proposal, it has shaped our approach to community empowerment, it has informed our design principles and blueprint for the new council and it has informed our options appraisal.
4b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance	• **Locally grounded:** Our proposal seeks to reflect local identity, not least in the fact that three quarters of residents feel a sense of belonging to Suffolk, an important factor underpinning our **One Suffolk** approach. • **Protecting historic civic functions:** We have committed to keeping these as we understand their significance locally.
4c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, and explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed	• **Extensive engagement:** We have conducted a Suffolk-wide residents' survey with over 8,000 responses, asking about local identity, decision-making, service priorities and views on the proposed unitary model. Fifteen 'Local Matters' events were held across Suffolk, enabling face-to-face dialogue between residents, councillors and officers. Additionally, 46 briefings with town and parish councils were conducted, including those with differing views, to ensure open and inclusive debate and BIDs and DMOs were consulted. Targeted outreach to children and young people was achieved through youth parliament engagement and school presentations. • **Feedback that has shaped our proposal:** The feedback we have received has influenced the different commitments we have made throughout this proposal, it has shaped our approach to community empowerment, it has informed our design principles and blueprint for the new council and it has informed our options appraisal.

Criteria	Our proposal
5a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA/mayor	• **As Suffolk is part of the Devolution Priority Programme this criterion is not applicable.**
5b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution	• **Strategic place leadership:** Representative of and connected to all Suffolk's communities, **One Suffolk** will improve the Mayoral Strategic Authority's strategic and place leadership. • **Most efficient use of the MSA's resources: One Suffolk**'s single county-wide leadership will be informed by understanding local needs and characteristics across the whole county and therefore, be able to better target the MSA's funding, delivery and influence to the benefit of Suffolk. • **Support the mayor to advocate for Suffolk:** As representative and place leader for the whole of Suffolk, **One Suffolk** is best able to advocate and champion for the whole county and support the mayor in campaigning for the best deal for the Suffolk and Norfolk MSA's communities. • **Stronger investment case:** A single council offers a unified voice and strategic oversight, making it easier to attract and coordinate investment, particularly for large-scale infrastructure projects and nationally significant initiatives like Sizewell C and Freeport East.
5c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities	• **As part of the Devolution Priority Programme work is progressing well on the establishment of the Strategic Authority and there is a strong working relationship with Norfolk County Council.**

Criteria	Our proposal
6a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged	• **Simplified access and accountability:** A single council makes it easier for residents to know who is responsible, access services and engage in local decision-making through clear democratic structures. • **Empowered localism: One Suffolk** enables better empowerment of town and parish councils within a coordinated Suffolk-wide framework, supporting tailored action and stronger local democracy. • **Stronger local voice: One Suffolk** enables strategic leadership informed by local voices, using local data. Newly proposed area committees will be vital in ensuring decisions reflect community needs and priorities.
6b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement	• **Providing access to funding: One Suffolk** commits to providing funding that will be used to address local issues, support community initiatives and respond to emerging opportunities. This financial autonomy reinforces the important leadership role we see communities playing, as well as enabling swift, place-based action and enhancing the convening and influencing capacity of the area committees as a whole. • **Key points of contact:** Responding to feedback, **One Suffolk** will create an operational structure where each local area works with dedicated council officers, who will provide support, coordinate and connect activity in the area and ensure access to local data and intelligence. • **Establish a model that is both standardised and adaptable:** While the structure and core functions of our area committees will be consistent across Suffolk, each committee will have the flexibility to operate in a way that reflects its unique context. This balance ensures efficient service delivery while remaining deeply rooted in local realities.

Appendix one

Unpacking the challenges facing Suffolk

An elderly and ageing population[1]

As of mid-2024, nearly 25% of Suffolk's estimated population of around 786,231 was aged 65 or older[2]. Although as can be seen in **Figure 1**, the distribution of this population is uneven, with certain areas, particularly some parts of East Suffolk - already seeing over 50% of residents aged 65 and above.

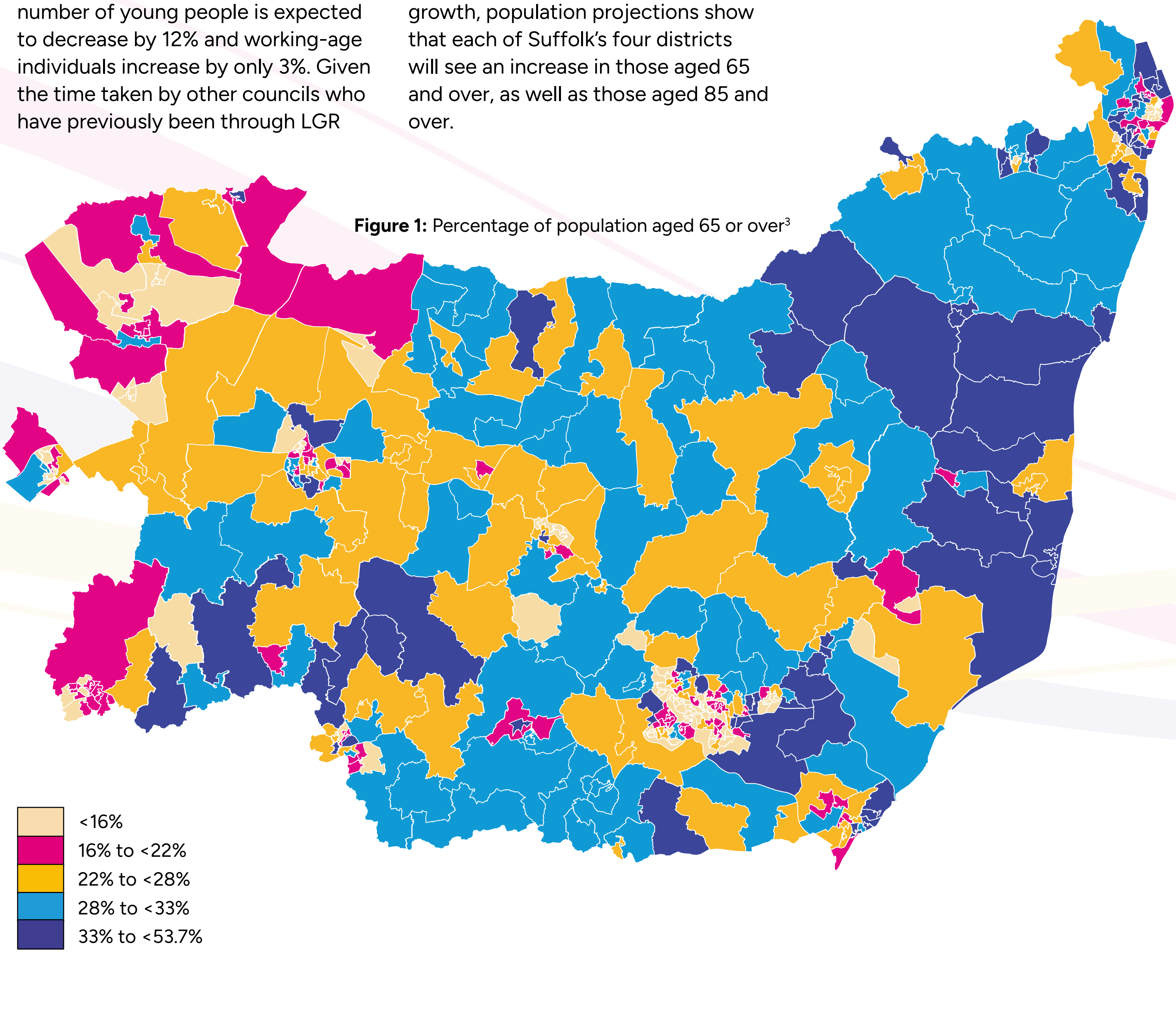
By 2040, while the overall population is projected to grow by 7.4%, there is forecast to be a 31% increase in the elderly population[4]. By then, and in less than 15 years, almost one-third of Suffolk's residents will be over 65, and 1 in 18 will be over 85. By contrast, the number of young people is expected to decrease by 12% and working-age individuals increase by only 3%. Given the time taken by other councils who have previously been through LGR to transition and establish a position of 'business as usual', this challenge – and the associated demand it will create – has to be front and centre in any decision about the shape of local government in Suffolk.

This population growth will not be uniform across the county. For example, Ipswich is expected to see a slight population decline of 1%, while Mid Suffolk, making up 14% of the total population in 2024, is projected to experience the highest growth at 14%. As noted, East Suffolk currently has, and will continue to have, the highest proportion of elderly residents, placing even greater demand pressures. Regardless of the scale of growth, population projections show that each of Suffolk's four districts will see an increase in those aged 65 and over, as well as those aged 85 and over.

This demographic shift will place significant additional pressure on social care and healthcare services, particularly in remote rural areas. Older individuals typically require more complex support, including home care, residential care and medical assistance, continuing to put pressure on local government to expand services, workforce and funding.

1 ONS population estimates and projections
2 ONS 2024 mid-year population estimates
3 ONS LSOA population estimates, 2022
4 ONS 2022-based mid-year population projections

Figure 1: Percentage of population aged 65 or over[3]



To illustrate this, it is important to consider the Total Dependency Ratio (TDR) – the proportion of dependents to the working-age population – as this provides a helpful indicator of the likely pressure on local government services. A higher dependency ratio suggests greater pressure on working-age populations to support both older and younger dependents.

As seen in the table below, Suffolk's TDR[5] is currently 67%, and within this East Suffolk is highest at 76%, then Babergh at 72% and Ipswich lowest at 57%. These figures in 2040 are predicted to increase over time and in East Suffolk rise to as high as 87%.

In setting out plans for a new unitary council, ensuring that older adults can age well and maintain independence for as long as possible has been a central priority. **One Suffolk** is the only model, which provides cohesive alignment to health boundaries, improving connectivity (and mobility associated with that), social inclusion, access to services and the use of technology to support independent living.

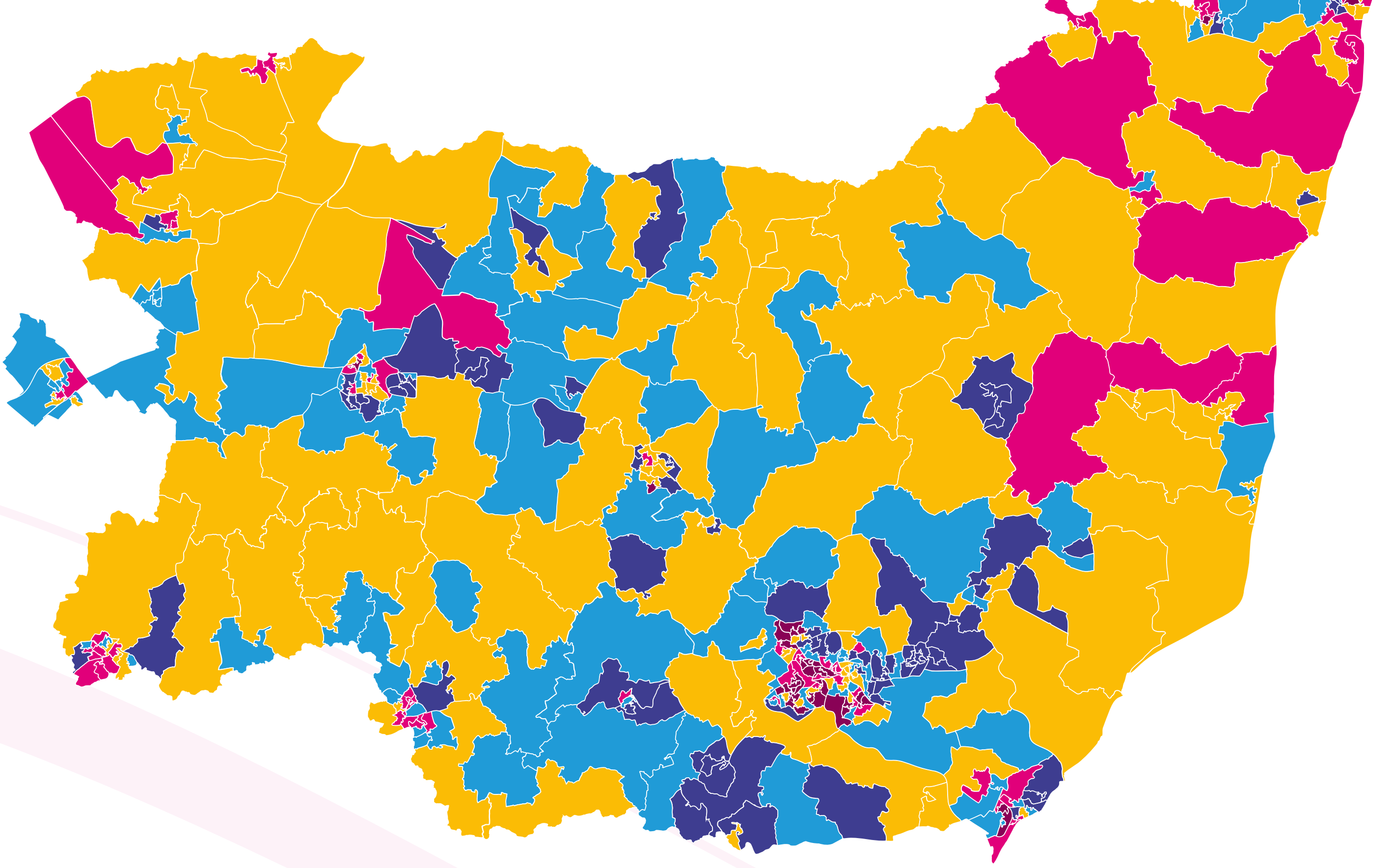
Table 1: **Current dependency ratio and future dependency ratio by local authority area**

Authority	Total Dependency Ratio[6]	Total Dependency Ratio (2040)[7]
East Suffolk	76%	87%
Babergh	72%	83%
Mid Suffolk	68%	76%
West Suffolk	61%	67%
Ipswich	57%	56%
Suffolk County	67%	74%

5 & 6 Calculated using ONS 2024 mid-year population estimates

7 Calculated using ONS 2022-based mid-year population projections

Figure 2: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 by LSOA in Suffolk



National Rank

- Least deprived 20%
- Next least deprived 20%
- Mid deprived 20%
- Next most deprived 20%
- Most deprived 20%

Growing social inequality

While Suffolk fares relatively well in national comparisons of deprivation, deeper analysis reveals that levels in Suffolk have been rising over the past decade, driven mainly by low educational attainment, with pockets of deprivation and inequalities that affect specific groups within the population[8]. The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[9] placed Suffolk just outside the least deprived third of local authorities. However, 22 areas fell into the most deprived 10% nationally - 12 in Ipswich and 10 in the Waveney area of East Suffolk **(see figure 2).**

Higher levels of deprivation have a range of implications. For example, it is often linked to poorer health outcomes, and while life expectancy in Suffolk remains above the national average, the headline masks a growing internal divide. The life expectancy of the most deprived 10% has plateaued since 2010, with recent data indicating a decline - especially among women. People in deprived areas also tend to live more years in poor health, with higher rates of chronic illness and multimorbidity, particularly in mid-life.

Recent adult social care (ASC) trend data also show that not only are more people accessing services, but they are doing so at a younger age and are more likely to come from deprived areas. In 2023–2024, the most deprived 20% of communities accounted for 23.5% of new ASC clients, compared to just 9.7% from the least deprived areas[10]. The Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (IDAOPI) also highlights financial vulnerability among older residents, particularly in Ipswich and East Suffolk[11].

8 Suffolk in 20 years – healthy, wealthy and wise?, Public Health & Communities, Jan 2025

9 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) in England, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

10 SCC ASC Insight and Intelligence Hub

11 Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index, English Indices of Deprivation, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

Child poverty is also a rising concern. The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) highlights vulnerabilities, particularly in Ipswich and the Waveney area of East Suffolk[11]. The number of middle-layer super output areas (MSOAs) with at least 30% of children eligible for free school meals is increasing - these include parts of Ipswich, Lowestoft, Felixstowe, Bury St Edmunds, Sudbury, and Stowmarket[12].

Addressing these issues will clearly be a first-order priority for the new council in terms of managing the demand for services it creates but more importantly in terms of improving the lives of Suffolk's residents. The risk with two or three council authorities – particularly if Suffolk is split into three – is that there would be a disproportionate spread of deprivation, with two authorities responsible for significantly more deprived areas and the associated demand than the third. By contrast, a single unitary council provides a single strategic entity that enables a total place approach to planning and investment to be adopted. This will not only create more resilience in terms of resources, but it opens up opportunities from investment across a larger geography.

Physical and digital isolation and access to services

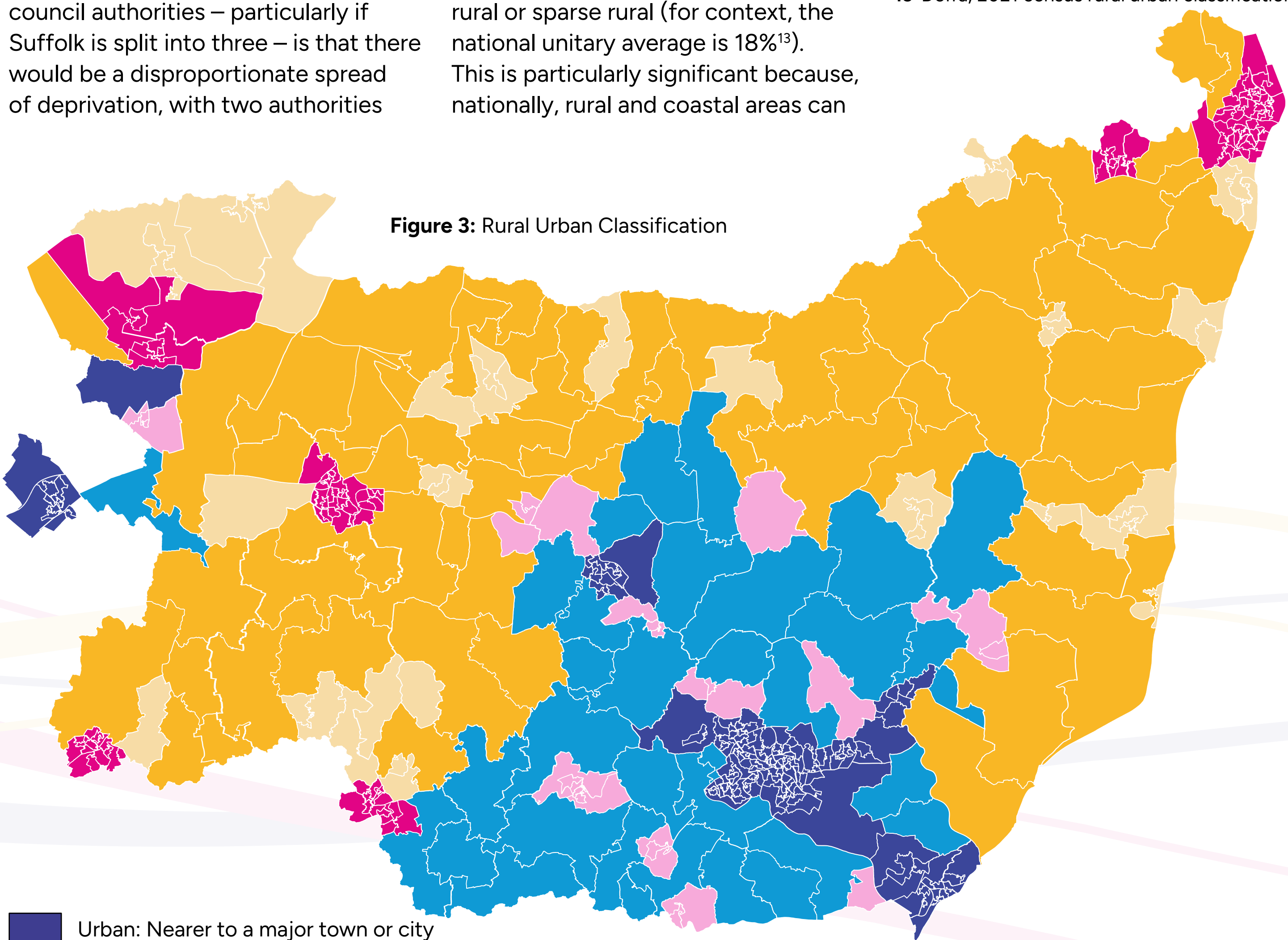
Suffolk's geography poses unique challenges, particularly for residents in rural and coastal communities. Suffolk has 50 miles of coastline and 37% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) (see **Figure 3** below) are defined as rural or sparse rural (for context, the national unitary average is 18%[13]). This is particularly significant because, nationally, rural and coastal areas can often face limited access to essential services such as healthcare, social care, education and public transport. As the elderly population increases (as noted above), the demand for accessible services - especially home-based or community care - will grow, and the isolation risk increases. Meeting these needs in remote areas will be even more of a challenge, potentially requiring investment in infrastructure, digital connectivity, and mobile service delivery at scale.

11 Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, English Indices of Deprivation, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

12 Suffolk in 20 years – healthy, wealthy and wise?, Public Health & Communities, Jan 2025

13 Defra, 2021 census rural urban classification

Figure 3: Rural Urban Classification



Urban: Nearer to a major town or city
Urban: Further from a major town or city
Larger rural: Nearer to a major town or city
Larger rural: Further from a major town or city
Smaller rural: Nearer to a major town or city
Smaller rural: Further from a major town or city

Public transport access in Suffolk is also below the national average, with wide disparities between urban centres and rural areas. The Department for Transport (DfT) reports that, in 2019, while 70% of people in England could access a GP within 15 minutes by public transport or walking, in Suffolk this figure was around 53%, with some rural communities falling below 40%[14]. Similar trends are evident for access to further education, employment centres, and hospitals, where public transport travel times can be double the national average. This affects not only access to services but also daily commutes and contributes to economic disadvantage and transport inequality.

To further illustrate the impact that a lack of accessibility has on social and economic factors, the 2021 Census showed that a lower proportion of work commutes are under 10 kilometres compared to the national average, and commutes over 20 kilometres are more common, particularly in rural areas such as Mid Suffolk, West Suffolk and Babergh[15,16]. As a result, car dependency in Suffolk is higher than the national average with implications for both carbon emissions and social exclusion, particularly when it is noted that public transport usage to commute to work is nearly four times lower than the England average[17], reflecting poor availability, low service frequency and poor geographic coverage. It is a finding that is exacerbated by the fact that 16% of Suffolk households do not own a car[18], a figure that rises to over 42%[19] in older populations. It is a mismatch that contributes to transport poverty, with knock-on effects for employment access, school attendance, and health appointments.

In an increasingly digital economy, digital connectivity can often be as significant as physical connectivity. This is also an area where Suffolk faces acute challenges. The percentage of premises that have coverage from a gigabit-capable broadband service is much lower than the national average (79%) across three of the districts - Mid Suffolk (55%), Babergh (70%) and West Suffolk (71%)[20].

While smaller councils may intuitively feel more 'local', the nature of isolation in Suffolk would actually be exacerbated by two or three councils. First, two or three authorities would introduce artificial boundaries which may mean that for some residents their closest local government facility or service is actually a different one to the one physically closest to them, creating unnecessary challenges around access. Second, some of the solutions around isolation in terms of better public transport and better access to super-fast broadband require strategic investment solutions that can only be delivered over a larger geographic area, at scale. Ultimately, the delivery of home-based and community care services is more effectively managed by a larger authority, where scale brings greater flexibility, capacity, resilience and consistency - benefits that smaller councils often struggle to achieve on their own.

Education, skills and the resultant economic disparities

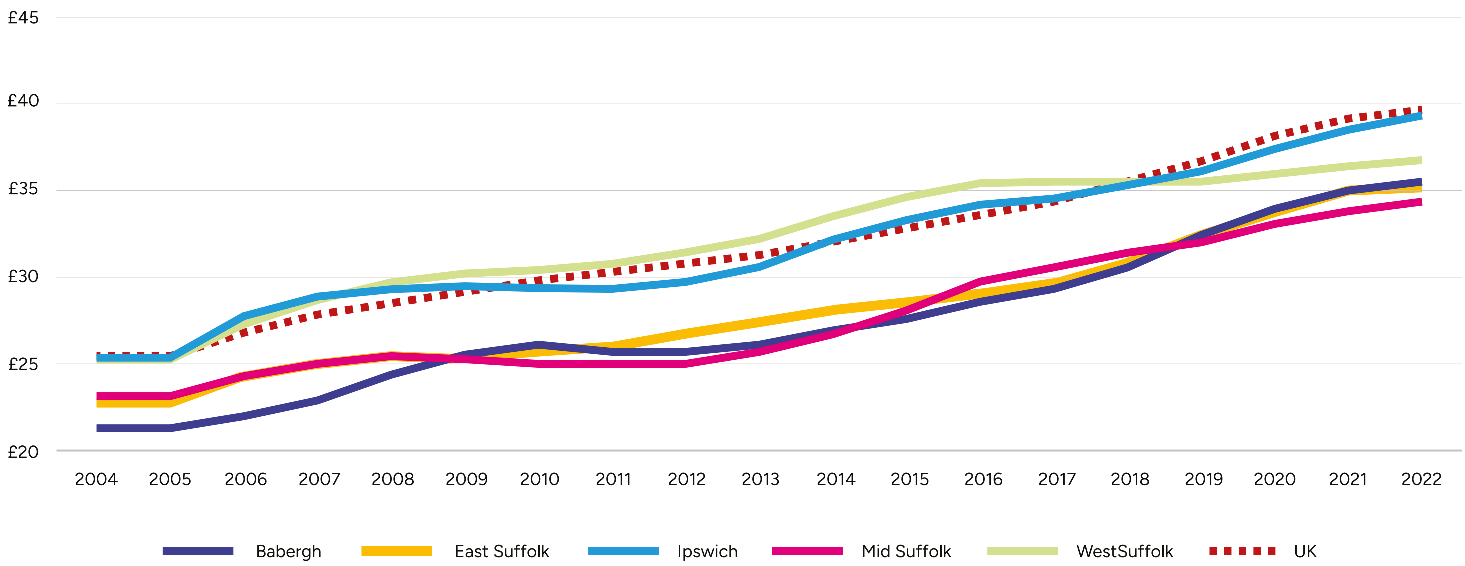
Suffolk faces persistent challenges around educational attainment and workforce skills. Residents are less likely than average to work in high-skilled, high-paid professions and more likely to be employed in lower-wage sectors like care, leisure and other service roles. Rural and coastal areas, in particular, struggle to attract and retain highly qualified professionals[21]. This contributes to Suffolk's lower gross median full-time weekly pay (£692), which remains below the UK average (£732)[22].

West Suffolk and Ipswich rank in the bottom 20% nationally for composite education scores and, as of 2024, 23.4% of Suffolk residents have no formal qualifications, compared to the national average of 18.2%[23], which directly impacts employability and earning potential. Although the proportion of residents with university-level qualifications is increasing, it still lags behind national figures and the rate of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) remains a concern, especially in more deprived areas. It also links to the challenge around an ageing population and the need this creates to ensure that residents can stay in work longer.

This skills gap is also evident from the earliest stage of education with only 68% of children in Suffolk deemed school-ready at the age of 5 – below the government target of 75% and a measure that correlates strongly with exam outcomes later. If this challenge is to be addressed, there is a need to be working at scale with multiple partners to ensure the best possible support to families and children.

14 Journey Time Statistics 2019, DfT
15 Travel to work, Census 2021
16 Please note that Census 2021 data was collected during a period of significant change in work patterns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many people working from home or on furlough. This may have influenced travel to work patterns.
17 Method of travel to work, Census 2021
18 Car or van availability, Census 2021
19 MHCLG, English indices of deprivation 2019: Accessibility and transport domain
20 Ofcom fixed broadband availability across the UK, Jan 2025
21 Suffolk in 20 years – healthy, wealthy and wise?, January 2025, Public Health & Communities
22 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - resident analysis, 2024
23 DfE education and training statistics, 2024

Figure 4: Productivity: current price GVA (B) per hour worked over time[24]



Together this matters because the relationship between skills, education and productivity growth is dynamic and mutually reinforcing. A highly skilled and educated workforce is more productive, leading to a higher economic output and greater prosperity. In turn, productivity growth creates opportunities for skills development and education by increasing demand for specialist knowledge and fostering innovation. Therefore, education and skills development are essential for sustained productivity growth and long-term economic success. **Figure 4** illustrates productivity output across the district and borough councils in Suffolk, compared to the UK average, from 2004 to 2023. Across Suffolk, three out of five districts are consistently below average.

While Suffolk has experienced positive compound annual growth in GVA(B) over the last decade, this growth has been unevenly distributed across Suffolk (see **Figure 5**). Areas such as Babergh have seen more modest growth, aligned with reliance on lower-productivity sectors. This disparity in growth risks entrenching economic imbalances within Suffolk, particularly as high-growth areas attract further investment, infrastructure and skilled labour.

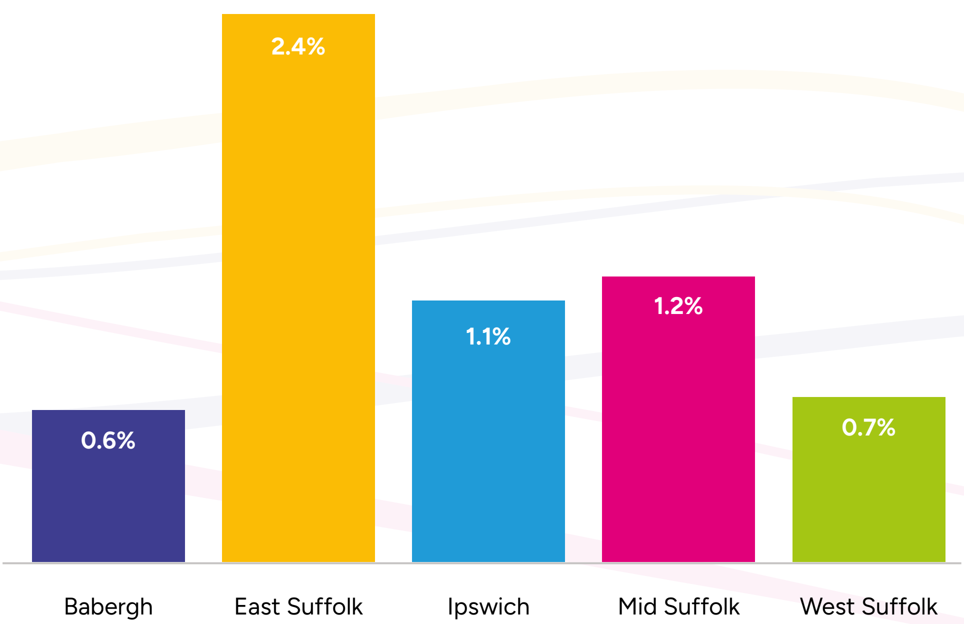
These challenges all contribute to Suffolk's widening productivity gap, which stood at £2.6 billion in 2022 and is forecast to grow to £3.7 billion[26] by 2042. Closing this gap will require coordinated investment in education, training, and workforce development.

24 Subregional productivity: labour productivity indices by local authority district, Employment and labour market, ONS

25 GVA (balanced) by industry by local authority, chained volume measure, ONS

26 Suffolk in 20 years – healthy, wealthy and wise?, Public Health & Communities, Jan 2025

Figure 5: GVA compound annual growth rate over the past decade[25]



Suffolk has a number of notable opportunities – particularly within clean energy – to become a national leader in a sector identified by Government in its industrial strategy[27] as one of eight sectors with the "highest potential...to increase national productivity". If Suffolk is to maximise this opportunity for all of its residents, then it requires a strategic, coordinated response. Piecemeal interventions driven by two or three councils will fail to make the most of the opportunities for economic growth and investment that devolution creates.

Providing the right number of homes, of the right type and in the right place

Suffolk faces a range of housing challenges that reflect both national pressures and local complexities. There has been an increase in housing targets, which have been described by local councils as "extremely challenging"[28]. For instance, East Suffolk has seen an 87% increase and West Suffolk 57%[29], prompting concerns about the capacity of local infrastructure and services to support such rapid growth.

The number of households across Suffolk is projected to grow between 2023 and 2043. However, the composition of these households is expected to shift. There is a projected increase in adult-only households, particularly those consisting of a single person, while households with dependent children are projected to decline - especially in Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, and West Suffolk[30].
At the same time, housing stock remains relatively low in both East and West Suffolk when compared to their growing populations, adding further pressure to the availability of affordable housing[31]. Whilst on aggregate Suffolk has been able to deliver against national housing targets over recent years, housing delivery in Suffolk has been inconsistent (for example, some districts have overdelivered and some have underdelivered). This has been more by accident rather than by design and underlines why a single joined-up approach would be significantly more effective in ensuring the right homes are built in the right places.

More generally, housing affordability is a concern across Suffolk, with rising property prices and rental costs making it increasingly difficult for residents – especially younger people and low-income households – to access suitable housing[32,33]. While social housing waiting lists across the county have remained relatively stable over the past decade, there has been an increase in demand since 2021 in all districts except Ipswich[34]. This recent upward trend reflects growing pressures on the housing system, also evidenced by a rise in the use of temporary accommodation as councils work to meet urgent housing needs. In 2023/24, the rate of households in temporary accommodation across Suffolk rose to 1.2 per 1,000 residents, up from 0.9 the previous year[35]. There are growing concerns around homelessness and rough sleeping, and councils are working to improve prevention and support services through better coordination between housing and health and care providers[36].

The condition of existing housing stock also presents challenges. Many homes in Suffolk suffer from poor energy efficiency and outdated infrastructure, which not only affects residents' quality of life but also complicates efforts to meet net-zero targets. A 2024 report commissioned by Suffolk County Council emphasised the need for strategic investment in upgrading older homes and addressing housing hazards[37].

Additionally, second home ownership – particularly in coastal and rural areas – has reduced the availability of housing for permanent residents and contributed to inflated local prices. In response, districts like Babergh, Mid Suffolk and East Suffolk have introduced council tax premiums on second homes to encourage more efficient use of housing stock.

Given the nature and range of challenges the creation of unitary government in Suffolk provides a generational opportunity to bring together different services to start to tackle the issues from housing itself, to planning, highways and social care. There is, however, a critical need to ensure that Suffolk's housing response is highly strategic and as a result is something that can only fully be addressed at a Suffolk-wide level. Operating at this spatial scale will better enable planning of where new housing developments should be; it will ensure house-building is accompanied with the appropriate infrastructure; and it will support a more comprehensive and coordinated response to addressing housing affordability.

27 See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68595e56db8e139f95652dc6/industrial_strategy_policy_paper.pdf
28 Cllr Andrew Stringer, Mid Suffolk's cabinet member for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure
29 Local Government Chronicle, Mapped: Housing targets for each council under proposed method, July 2024
30 ONS Housing projections for England 2018-based
31 MHCLG Live tables on dwelling stock
32 ONS House price statistics for small areas in England and Wales
33 ONS House price to residence-based earnings ratio
34 MHCLG, Live tables on rents, lettings and tenancies
35 MHCLG, Tables on homelessness
36 For example, West Suffolk https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Policies_Strategies_and_Plans/More_plans_and_policies/housing-homelessness-reduction-rough-sleeping-strategy.cfm
37 BRE Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and Database for Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council, July 2024

Appendix two

Projected population figures

The following population forecast figures have been used to underpin this business case development and modelling. These figures are taken from ONS 2022-based population baseline projections ("migration category"). These are the latest population projections from ONS, updated in June 2025, and are designated as accredited official statistics.

Table 1: Population forecasts

Year: Source:	2021 ONS 2021 Census	2024 ONS 2024 mid-year population estimates	2040 ONS population projection (migration category)
Suffolk	760,688	786,231	844,497

Justification for using ONS population projections rather than developing a bespoke Suffolk-based housing-led population forecast

The decision to use ONS population projections is underpinned by several key considerations:

- **Transparency and reliability:** ONS projections are official statistics, ensuring consistency and compatibility with other datasets used across government and public sector analyses, including those produced by the Suffolk Observatory. Their methodology is well-established, trusted and subject to rigorous quality assurance.

- **Limitations of housing-led forecasts:** Housing-led population forecasts would be shaped by the development of input assumptions - such as those around housing delivery and household size - which would not be subject to the same level of scrutiny as those used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in their official statistics. These forecasts would incorporate planned housing delivery and targets, which are often aspirational and influenced by political or funding constraints. Historically, Suffolk has not consistently met its housing targets, and it is widely acknowledged that achieving future targets will be increasingly difficult. This raises important questions about the robustness of the assumptions underpinning housing-led models, which are difficult to substantiate using real-world evidence, such as historic completion rates or current delivery trajectories at this point in time.

  Additionally, the last Census revealed a sharp rise in single-person households as a key driver of housing demand – recent rapid shifts are difficult to reflect accurately in forecasting assumptions and can lead to significant volatility and sensitivity in projected figures.

- **Contextual accuracy:** While it is acknowledged that ONS projections - being trend-based - may understate population growth in areas experiencing rapid expansion or where local insight suggests that assumptions (particularly around migration) may not fully reflect current dynamics, we do not consider this to be representative of Suffolk's growth profile.

- **Stability and long-term perspective:** ONS population projections are based on long-term demographic trends - fertility, mortality and migration - providing a stable and gradual trajectory of change. In contrast, housing-led forecasts can fluctuate substantially due to revisions in local plans or delays in housing delivery, reducing their reliability for strategic planning.

Therefore, while housing-led projections may be useful for short-term planning directly tied to housing completions, population-based projections offer a neutral baseline that reflects demographic demand rather than potential housing supply. It is our opinion that ONS projections therefore provide a more robust foundation for longer-term strategic planning.

Appendix three

Suffolk County Council Local Government Reorganisation survey

About

Context

1. Suffolk County Council produced an online survey to capture residents' views of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals.

2. This survey was designed to be accessible to all (regardless of LGR background knowledge) and focused on local identity, local democracy, and priorities for LGR.

3. The purpose of this survey was to inform proposals for LGR, which will be submitted to the UK government on the 26th September 2025.

4. This engagement piece took place from 10th June 2025 – 18th August 2025.

Sample

1. The total sample number is 8,189 completed survey returns.

2. The survey was promoted through:
   a. Leaflets distributed to 100% of postcodes across Suffolk
   b. Social media advertising (including boosted promotions)
   c. Targeted online advertising
   d. Posters and hard copy surveys distributed in Suffolk libraries
   e. Suffolk County Council's website which directed respondents to the **One Suffolk** webpage and a link to the survey.

3. Respondents were also able to request a paper copy, which was posted out to them and could be returned via FREEPOST.

4. All best efforts and distribution methods were deployed to maximise participation of various demographic groups. Methods were put in place to ensure even demographic and geographic representation and to encourage responses by underrepresented groups or locations.

Analysis Methods

1. Closed questions: the online survey platform used to create the survey analysed responses by calculating the proportion of respondents choosing each option. Please note, some questions allow respondents to select more than one option. The questions with multiple answers reflect the proportion of all answers given (and not % of respondents). These figures are best interpreted as an indication of the popularity of an answer.

2. Free text: the thematic analysis tool within the survey platform was used to identify and refine key topics, and to provide the number of comments each topic received.

3. Due to rounding of percentages, in some instances the total combined percentage of responses may be above or below 100%.

Headline Findings

Local identity

Residents' local identity

Respondents were asked to select the level of belonging they felt to four specific locations/regions across Suffolk. The findings were as follows:

- My village or town
  - Net sense of belonging: 79%
  - Neither: 10%
  - Net no sense of belonging: 11%
- My local district or borough
  - Net sense of belonging: 49%
  - Neither: 25%
  - Net no sense of belonging: 27%
- Suffolk
  - Net sense of belonging: 73%
  - Neither: 13%
  - Net no sense of belonging: 14%
- East Anglia
  - Net sense of belonging: 63%
  - Neither: 21%
  - Net no sense of belonging: 17%

Why residents value their local area

Respondents were asked to select statements that describe why they value their local area (select all that apply). Of all answers given, the top 5 answers were:

1. Access to the natural environment of the countryside: 83%
2. Access to the natural environment of the coast: 77%
3. Access to the main towns of Suffolk: 63%
4. Pubs, bars, restaurants, and cafes: 59%
5. Access to historic places of interest: 58%

Local democracy

Engagement with democratic processes

Respondents were asked to indicate, if they wanted to raise an issue about their local area, how they would go about it (select all that apply).
Of all answers given, the top five answers were:

1. My town/parish: 39%
2. My district/borough councillor: 38%
3. My MP: 37%
4. My district/borough council: 30%
5. The county council: 20%

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they have contacted any of the highlighted individuals or organisations in the past 12 months (select all that apply). Of all answers given, the top 5 answers were:

1. None of the above: 43%
2. My local MP: 22%
3. My town or parish councillor: 20%
4. My district/borough council: 17%
5. My town or parish council: 17%

Getting involved in decision-making

Respondents were asked if they are or would like to be involved in any of the following areas of local decision-making. The findings were as follows

- Taking part in public consultations
  - Currently involved: 17%
  - Would like to be involved: 47%
  - Do not want to be involved: 36%
- Knowing more about my councillors and how to contact them
  - Currently involved: 16%
  - Would like to be involved: 45%
  - Do not want to be involved: 40%
- Taking part in focus groups or resident panels
  - Currently involved: 6%
  - Would like to be involved: 40%
  - Do not want to be involved: 54%
- Attending or watching council meetings
  - Currently involved: 12%
  - Would like to be involved: 25%
  - Do not want to be involved: 63%

Respondents were asked, if they are not already involved, what is preventing them from getting involved in local decisions-making. Of all answers given, the top five answers were as follows:

1. It doesn't make a difference: 34%
2. I have other priorities: 34%
3. Lack of time: 31%
4. Other: 16%
5. Committed to other local volunteering: 13%

Of those who answered 'Other', the top five common themes were as follows:

1. Don't know how to
2. Lack of information/publicity
3. Age
4. Health/disability issues
5. Negative comments about existing councils

What services residents value

Respondents were asked to highlight which council service areas are most important to them (choose up to four). The top 5 answers were as follows:

1. Transport and infrastructure: 65%
2. Waste and recycling: 55%
3. Housing and planning: 50%
4. Partnerships with local NHS services to improve population health: 48%
5. Adult social care: 34%

Understanding of local government reorganisation

Awareness of proposals for local government reorganisation

Residents were asked how much they knew about the proposal to bring together existing county and district/borough services to create a unitary model of local government, before completing the survey. The answers were as follows:

- I knew a little: 28%
- I knew a fair amount: 25%
- I'd heard about it but didn't know any details: 21%
- I'd not heard about it before today: 17%
- I knew a lot about it: 10%

Residents were then asked how much they knew about the proposal to bring together existing county and district/borough services to create a unitary model of local government, having read the information provided. The answers were as follows:

- I have a good understanding of it: 56%
- I'm not sure if I understand it or not: 23%
- I fully understand it: 14%
- I don't really understand it: 5%
- I don't understand it at all: 2%

Having read the information about the proposal, residents were then asked to what extent they are in favour or against the idea of creating a unitary model of local government in Suffolk. The answers were as follows:

- Net in favour: 50%
- Neither for nor against: 14%
- Net against: 37%

Priorities for local government reorganisation in Suffolk

Simpler for residents

Respondents were asked how confident they are in the fact these changes would make it simpler for residents to understand and access services. The results are as follows:

- Net confident: 32%
- Neither confident nor unconfident: 20%
- Net unconfident: 46%
- Don't know: 1%

Cost savings

Respondents were asked how confident they are in the fact these changes would improve the value for money of council services. The results are as follows:

- Net confident: 32%
- Neither confident nor unconfident: 20%
- Net unconfident: 47%
- Don't know: 1%

Priorities for improvement

Residents were asked to highlight the one area that should be the priority for improvement as part of LGR for Suffolk. The answers were as follows:

- Meeting local needs: 33%
- Value for money: 31%
- Being listened to: 21%
- Easy access to services: 11%
- Other: 4%

Residents were asked for any comments or concerns about the proposed move to unitary arrangements in Suffolk (free text). Respondents left 4,510 general comments, a summary of the most common themes is below:

Saving money through efficiency and removing duplication

- Widespread frustration with the current two-tier system, with suggestions that moving to a unitary model would streamline decision-making and reduce administrative overheads.
- Overlapping responsibilities between district and county councils result in inefficiencies, confusion and wasted resources. A single authority is viewed as a means to consolidate services and provide greater clarity for residents.
- Merging councils could reduce operational costs, enabling more funding to be directed towards frontline services such as special educational needs and disability (SEND), highways and waste collection.

Waste of time/money

- The costs involved in setting up a new authority will cancel out any savings and savings will take too long to achieve
- A new system will cost much more to run
- Too much money has been spent on councils promoting their preferred options.

Support - seems sensible/ practical/best option/get on with it!

- One unitary authority would standardise services throughout the county.
- A single council would reduce the number of councillors and also cut red tape
- One unitary authority would lead to less confusion about who provides which service.

Note: There was a significant jump in the number of people making comments supportive of the One Suffolk proposal as soon as the districts and borough councils published their proposed council boundary map on 7 August 2025. It is unclear what would have been the impact had they released their map earlier in the business case development process.

Negative comment based on experience of existing councils (county, district and borough)

- Concern that poor service received in the past would be magnified in a unitary authority model.
- Council workers are not currently delivering a good service as too many are working from home.
- Difficult to make contact with councils now so it will only get worse.

Don't agree with proposals/ happy with current system

- The current system works fine as it is – no need to change it.
- Currently, local councillors are easily accessible. A larger council or councils could mean they are difficult to speak to.
- Local services are easy to access without the need to travel.

Concerns about the size of a single authority

- Larger towns will be favoured and the needs of smaller ones overlooked.
- Those providing services will have less local knowledge and will be too distant from the areas they are serving.
- One council will be so big that decision-making will be slower and based on a 'one size fits all' mentality.

Need to maintain and improve existing services

- Respondents are concerned that reorganisation could lead to a decline in service quality, particularly in areas such as road maintenance, waste collection, public transport and social care
- Respondents are seeking clear evidence that any savings will be reinvested into frontline services, amid concerns that the motivation behind the changes is purely cost-driven
- There were calls for improved communication, more joined-up working across services and increased investment in frontline staff.

Additional questions surrounding the proposal

- Survey responses indicated varying levels of understanding among residents regarding LGR, devolution and the **One Suffolk** proposal
- Many respondents expressed confusion or uncertainty about the structure, purpose and implications of the proposed reorganisation - highlighting the need for clear communication and ongoing engagement
- Questions were raised about transparency, accountability and the decision-making process - with respondents uncertain about how leadership would operate and how local voices would be represented under the new model.

Need to serve all residents equally

- Respondents emphasised the need for any new local government structure to serve all residents equitably, with particular attention to rural and coastal communities.
- They also highlighted the importance of a fair distribution of resources across the county, particularly for high-cost services such as adult social care.
- These views reflect a strong desire for inclusive governance that acknowledges Suffolk's geographic and demographic diversity.

Ensuring the process is democratic

- Residents expressed significant frustration over the cancellation of local elections in May 2025, following Suffolk's inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme.
- Respondents expressed a desire for a public vote on the proposed changes and reported feeling excluded from the decision-making process.
- Calls were made for transparency and accountability from the new authority with questions around who will lead it and how the leaders will be selected.

Ipsos survey

Methodology

Suffolk County Council commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct a survey of residents to assess residents' views about their local area and perceptions of potential LGR.

Ipsos UK carried out 1,002 telephone interviews with Suffolk residents aged 18+ between 7th July 2025 and 22nd July 2025. Each telephone interview lasted around ten minutes and covered questions such as sense of belonging, engagement with the council, perceptions of policy priority, and perceptions of LGR. Fieldwork was completed via Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) using Random Digit Dialling (RDD) and targeted mobile sample, used to identify those who live in Suffolk.

Telephone numbers were randomly selected for an interview for this survey. Unlike the consultation carried out by Suffolk County Council, residents could not volunteer to take part in the survey in order to express their views on LGR. A public consultation is a valuable way to gather opinions about a topic, but while the consultation was open to everyone, those who provided a response were a self-selecting group and so some residents may have been more likely to take part than others. This means that the responses from any consultation can never be 'representative' of the population as a whole, as would be the case with this representative sample survey undertaken by Ipsos UK. Data are weighted to the most up-to-date population statistics for Suffolk.

Ensuring survey results are statistically reliable is important when comparing data between different groups within the sample to ensure that any differences are real (i.e. statistically significant). A sample size of 1,002 permits a good level of analysis by key demographic variables (such as age, gender and work status).

Participants to the survey are only samples of the total population, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been surveyed. However we can predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values from knowing the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given.

It is important to note that margins of error relate only to samples that have been selected using strict random probability sampling methods. However, in practice it is reasonable to assume that these calculations provide a good indication of the confidence intervals relating to this survey and the sampling approach used. Unless otherwise stated, all comparisons made in the report commentary between sub-groups are based on statistically significant differences. Data points which appear as asterisks denote a figure of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.

Headline findings

Local identity

Why residents value their local area

Respondents were asked what they value most about their local area. Residents in Suffolk are most likely to say that they value access to the natural environment of the countryside when thinking about their local area. Of all answers given, the top five answers were:

1. Access to the natural environment of the countryside: 31%
2. Access to urban green spaces: 18%
3. Local community and volunteering activities: 17%
4. Access to the natural environment of the coast: 11%
5. Retail and shopping opportunities: 11%

Residents' local identity

Respondents were asked to select the level of belonging they felt to specific locations/regions across Suffolk.

While a majority in Suffolk are likely to say they feel a sense of belonging to the county, and their town or village, they have less of a sense of belonging to their local district or borough.

The findings were as follows:

- Suffolk
  - Net sense of belonging: 69%
  - Neither/don't know: 14%
  - Net no sense of belonging: 17%

- My village or town
  - Net sense of belonging: 65%
  - Neither/don't know: 16%
  - Net no sense of belonging: 18%

- My local district or borough
  - Net sense of belonging: 42%
  - Neither/don't know: 26%
  - Net no sense of belonging: 32%

Local democracy

Engagement with democratic processes

Respondents were asked to indicate how, if they wanted to raise an issue about their local area, they would go about it.

People in Suffolk are most likely to say they would contact their district/borough council, county council or MP if they wanted to raise a local issue.

However, a similar proportion said they don't know who they would contact.

The findings were as follows:

1. Your district/borough council: 20%
2. The county council: 18%
3. Your MP: 16%
4. Your town/parish: 11%
5. Your district/borough councillor: 7%
6. Your county councillor: 2%
7. A resident association or housing association: 2%
8. Local media: <1%
9. Someone else: 6%
10. Don't know: 18%

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they have contacted any of the highlighted individuals or organisations in the past 12 months.

Three in five residents in Suffolk said they have not contacted any of their local MPs, councils or councillors in the past 12 months.

The findings were as follows:

1. None of the above: 62%
2. Your district/borough council: 13%
3. The county council: 12%
4. Your local MP: 10%
5. Your town or parish councillor: 7%
6. Your town or parish council: 7%
7. Your district/borough councillor: 5%
8. Your county councillor: 5%
9. Don't know: 1%

Getting involved in decision-making

Respondents were asked, if they are not already involved, what is preventing them from getting involved in local decision-making.

Around a third of people in Suffolk say that a lack of time and other priorities prevents them from getting involved in local decision-making.

A quarter say that they do not get involved because it would not make a difference.

The findings were as follows

- Lack of time: 32%
- You have other priorities: 30%
- It doesn't make a difference: 26%
- Lack of interest: 14%
- Committed to other volunteering: 8%
- You are already involved: 6%
- Something else: 13%
- Don't know: 2%

What services residents value

Respondents were asked to highlight which, out of a list of council services, was most important to them.

There is no council service area that stands out as most important to residents in Suffolk.

However, of those selected, they are most likely to say that Education/SEND and partnerships with local NHS services are most important.

The findings were as follows:

- Education and SEND: 18%
- Partnerships with local NHS services to improve population health: 16%
- Transport and infrastructure: 14%
- Housing and planning: 11%
- Adult social care: 10%
- Economic development and jobs: 9%
- Children's social care: 7%
- Waste and recycling: 4%
- Leisure and community services: 3%
- None of the above: 5%
- Don't know: 5%

Understanding of LGR

Awareness of proposals for LGR

Residents were asked how much they knew about the proposal to bring together existing county and district/borough services to create a unitary model of local government, before completing the survey.

Over half of residents in Suffolk said they had at least heard of the proposals related to LGR. However, just one in six said they knew a lot or a fair amount.

The answers were as follows:

- A lot about it: 6%
- A fair amount: 9%
- A little: 19%
- Heard about it but didn't know any detail: 22%
- Not heard about it before today: 43%

When looking into the findings by age group they were as follows:

- 18-34
  - A lot about it: 6%
  - A fair amount: 2%
  - A little: 11%
  - Heard about it but didn't know any detail: 19%
  - Not heard about it before today: 61%
  - Don't know: 1%

- 35-54
  - A lot about it: 4%
  - A fair amount: 5%
  - A little: 18%
  - Heard about it but didn't know any detail: 19%
  - Not heard about it before today: 54%

- 55+
  - A lot about it: 6%
  - A fair amount: 15%
  - A little: 24%
  - Heard about it but didn't know any detail: 26%
  - Not heard about it before today: 28%

Residents were then asked to what extent they are in favour or against the idea of creating a unitary model of local government in Suffolk.

Residents are split in terms of whether they are in favour or against the proposal to create a unitary model of local government in Suffolk. A third are in favour, with a further third neither for nor against.

The answers were as follows:

- Net in favour: 32%
- Neither for nor against/don't know: 39%
- Net against: 29%

When looking into the findings by age group they were as follows:

- 18-34
  - Net in favour: 34%
  - Net against: 19%

- 35-54
  - Net in favour: 29%
  - Net against: 26%

- 55+
  - Net in favour: 33%
  - Net against: 35%

Priorities for LGR in Suffolk

Simpler for residents

Respondents were asked how confident they are in the fact these changes would make it simpler for residents to understand and access services.

Just under half of residents in Suffolk are not confident that the proposed changes would make it simpler for residents to understand and access services. A quarter think that the proposed change would help to make it simpler.

The results are as follows:

- Net confident: 25%
- Neither confident nor not confident: 27%
- Net unconfident: 45%
- Don't know: 3%

Cost savings

Respondents were asked how confident they are in the fact these changes would improve the value for money of council services.

Around one in five are confident that a unitary model in Suffolk would improve value for money of council services. Just under half do not have confidence that a unitary model would improve value for money.

The results are as follows:

- Net confident: 22%
- Neither confident nor not confident: 30%
- Net unconfident: 45%
- Don't know: 3%

Priorities for improvement

Residents were asked to highlight the one area that should be the priority for improvement as part of LGR for Suffolk.

Three in ten residents in Suffolk think that being listened to and meeting local needs should be the priority areas for improvement, as part of LGR.

The answers were as follows:

- Being listened to: 30%
- Meeting local needs: 29%
- Easy access to services: 22%
- Value for money: 14%
- Something else: 1%
- Don't know: 3%

Appendix four

Disaggregating social care: immediate costs and escalating risks

Disaggregating social care services is a highly complex and resource-intensive transformation, not simply a matter of re-commissioning existing services under a new structure.

Unlike administrative reconfiguration, disaggregation alters the fundamental operating environment - carrying significant upfront and ongoing costs, as well as material risks to service quality, financial sustainability and continuity of care.

These costs can be considered in terms of i) immediate costs and ii) risks driving additional and ongoing costs. These are examined in more detail in the following sections.

Categories of immediate cost

At a high level, the immediate costs of disaggregating social care fall into three main categories:

1. Redundancy and workforce restructuring costs

These are one-off costs associated with consolidating or eliminating roles during the reorganisation process. They include costs such as:

- redundancy payments where functions are duplicated or no longer required
- costs related to restructuring/ duplicating leadership and middle management teams
- legal and HR costs related to TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings), including consultation processes and harmonisation of terms.

These costs can be substantial and are considered in **section five** of the main business case.

However, there are additional workforce risks that need to be considered when disaggregating social care. Additional workforce instability and cost escalation considerations are explored in section A, including risks such as operational disruption due to uncertainty, staff departures and competition to recruit leadership and specialist roles. Staff losses, especially among senior or specialist personnel, can create gaps in service delivery, weaken governance, and compromise statutory compliance.

2. Transition costs

Transition costs arise from the process of closing down existing councils and standing up new ones. They include:

- additional service delivery and programme management resources needed to maintain performance while the new model is built
- the duplication of management, operational and statutory roles which will be required across new authorities, for example Principal Social Workers, data insight and commissioning teams
- interim staffing and agency to backfill gaps
- delays to existing transformation programmes and anticipated savings as resources are diverted to managing the transition.

Again, these costs are considered in **section five** of the main business case.

However, a critical driver of the risk in increasing cost in this phase is the loss of economies of scale. Fragmenting service delivery into smaller units can increase per-unit costs, dilute market leverage, and lead to higher provider fees, increased overheads, and inconsistent service quality, especially in rural or low-demand areas. This is examined in the detailed risks in section A of this appendix.

3. Infrastructure, systems, and programme investment

Significant investment is needed to ensure the new authorities are operationally viable from day one. This includes:

- procurement of new IT systems and licenses due to non-transferable shared platforms.[1] Data migration, system separation and GDPR compliance
- rebuilding governance structures, policies and performance frameworks
- training staff in new protocols and systems
- establishing new physical locations, with the risk of duplicating or underusing existing estates

Again, these costs are considered in **section five** of the main business case.

However, there are additional risks which should be considered – such as data sharing between new councils and systems may decrease data quality, integration and performance oversight, undermining the ability to monitor outcomes, share insights, or respond effectively to demand. As well as impact preventative work and safeguarding continuity. Details can be found in section A.

1 Please note in financial analysis these costs may sit within an IT line as opposed to a social care line.

Note on optimism bias and contingency planning in the main financial analysis

Financial forecasts associated with large-scale structural reforms – such as service disaggregation and transformation programmes – are inherently exposed to optimism bias. This risk reflects the common tendency to underestimate complexity, duration and scope, often resulting in overstated savings projections and understated transitional costs.

To mitigate these risks, the main financial modelling incorporates a dedicated contingency allowance, specifically designed to absorb the impact of:

- unplanned cost escalation
- procurement delays
- contract renegotiation
- system inefficiencies.

This contingency strengthens the model's resilience to forecasting uncertainty and supports more credible long-term financial planning.

It is important to note that the following section outlines social care–specific risks, particularly relevant to the 1-unitary council, 2-unitary council and 3-unitary council scenarios. These risks represent additional considerations beyond the standard contingency allowance and should be evaluated in their own right when assessing overall feasibility, deliverability and system impact.

A – Risks driving additional and ongoing costs

In addition to these immediate outlays, disaggregation introduces deep-rooted risks in social care that can compound financial pressure over time, impact reputation and directly affect service users.

Risks across social care have been split into eight categories and a summary of each is included below. Please note detailed risks can be found in the risk register included as **appendix five.**

1. Workforce instability and cost escalation

The adult social care sector continues to face well-evidenced and persistent workforce challenges. According to Skills for Care (2023/24) national data, turnover in local authority services across all roles stood at 16.2%, with a vacancy rate of 7.2% – nearly three times higher than the broader UK economy's rate of 2.6%. In the East of England, the vacancy rate was comparatively lower at 5.2%. Notably, Suffolk outperformed both national and regional benchmarks, with a turnover rate of 12.8% and a vacancy rate of 3.8%[2].

However, 100% of new recruits in Suffolk were sourced internally, compared to 89% nationally – a figure that points to significant internal churn and limited external pipeline resilience. Adding to these concerns, 29% of Suffolk's local authority adult social care workforce is aged 55 or older, raising strategic questions about future sustainability and succession planning.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has highlighted the urgency of these challenges, reporting that as of October 2023, councils across England faced a vacancy rate of 16%. To bridge these gaps, local authorities have become increasingly dependent on agency workers, with an estimated 5.4% increase in spending between 2022/23 and 2023/24 - placing further strain on already stretched budgets[3].

In children's social care, the national picture is similarly concerning. Vacancy rates for 2023/24 were markedly high, standing at 17.3% nationally and 12.4% across the East of England. Notably, Suffolk performs significantly better, recording a vacancy rate of just 2.5%[4]. While this indicates relative workforce stability at a local level, it also highlights the disparity in workforce pressures across regions – and underscores the growing challenge of maintaining consistent service capacity in a nationally stretched labour market.

In this context, disaggregation of services introduces further substantial risks to workforce stability and cost management. By duplicating leadership, management and statutory roles across newly formed or restructured organisations, the demand on an already stretched pool of qualified professionals intensifies. This is particularly pronounced in senior and specialist roles - such as Directors of Children's Services (DCS) and Adult Social Services (DASS) - where national shortages persist[5,6,7]. Recruitment delays in these critical posts risk undermining strategic momentum, damaging morale and weakening service delivery.

The need to replicate roles across two or three settings drives up recruitment competition and inflates workforce costs. Where permanent appointments prove difficult, organisations increasingly rely on interim and agency staff, which escalates expenditure and disrupts service continuity. The breakdown of regional recruitment and retention models further constrains access to shared talent pipelines, reducing overall system resilience.

Fragmentation also creates inconsistencies in employment terms and conditions, which can lower morale and accelerate staff turnover, which can drive up vacancies. Smaller units operating in silos may experience inefficiencies in leadership structures, unclear lines of accountability and weakened operational oversight - especially during transitional periods. Although some aspects remain difficult to quantify with precision, the cumulative impact of these risks is clear: higher churn, reduced consistency in care, and mounting long-term costs. Ultimately, uneven workforce distribution may lead to service inequality and variable quality across areas, while overstretched senior leaders face growing risks to performance and morale.

2 Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set, Skills for Care
3 https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-call-immediate-action-adult-social-care-workforce
4 Children's social work workforce, Dfe
5 https://www.careengland.org.uk/the-issues-revolving-around-pay-financial-challenges-and-workforce-retention-in-adult-social-care/
6 Care England and Hft Sector Pulse Check 2024
7 Investigating Variation in Pay in Adult Social Care by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)

2. Financial risks and reduced resilience

Disaggregating financial planning across newly separated services introduces a range of structural and operational challenges. To begin with, there is the complexity of allocating historic and ongoing budgets equitably, which may lead to disputes and inconsistencies in service delivery. Legacy funding arrangements are often difficult to unpick and attempts to redistribute resources can generate unintended disparities across local areas.

The costs associated with systemic separation, including contract renegotiation and service redesign, are material and often underestimated. These transitions typically entail optimism bias in financial forecasts, prompting the need for robust contingency planning.

Smaller authorities emerging from disaggregation may experience a loss of purchasing power, diminishing opportunities for efficiency through bulk commissioning and shared procurement. This fragmentation can drive up costs and reduce negotiating leverage, particularly in the complex markets of social care (more detail in commissioning and market management risks section).

Disaggregating social care is a risk to realising anticipated savings either through delays or failure to realise those savings, with transition costs expected to consume short to medium term especially where duplicated infrastructure or prolonged restructuring consume resources.

Over time, financial pressures may mount - particularly those with limited ability to raise local revenue relative to demand. Sustainability therefore becomes a critical concern, as these authorities may lack the fiscal flexibility to absorb shocks, invest in innovation, or maintain specialist and preventative services, weakening long-term resilience and forcing a shift to more reactive, cost-intensive models. The loss of economies of scale further constrains flexibility in responding to fluctuating service demands and cost pressures, limiting their ability to absorb shocks or invest in innovation.

3. Commissioning and market management risks

Disaggregating commissioning arrangements can weaken a council's ability to manage provider markets effectively and negotiate cost-efficient contracts. Larger councils benefit from economies of scale that enable them to secure more favourable rates with providers - particularly for large strategic contracts such as Care UK, community equipment. Fragmentation reduces this purchasing power and leaves smaller commissioners with limited influence, especially in highly competitive or under-supplied service areas.

Centralised commissioning teams also house specialist expertise – ranging from contract negotiation to market shaping – that is difficult to replicate across two or three smaller authorities. Disaggregation increases the risk of skills gaps, leading to inflated costs and inconsistent decision-making. Renegotiation of large Suffolk-wide contracts (e.g. Care UK) becomes unavoidable and is likely to result in price variation and reduced consistency across localities.

Strategic alignment with partners such as Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) may also be lost. Many frameworks – particularly for homecare – are designed at a countywide scale to mirror health system structures. Unpicking these arrangements can destabilise provider relationships and undermine efforts to deliver integrated care, especially where commissioning priorities diverge post-disaggregation, potentially destabilising the market and increasing costs.

Higher fees due to fragmented commissioning and competition between new authorities could inflate fees or misalign priorities. For example, in ASC, demand often outstrips provision. Two or three councils competing for the same providers would likely inflate costs. A consortium approach (i.e. smaller unitary councils working together to commission services) might not be viable in the medium term due to the need for aligned inflationary uplifts and rate-setting - which would be difficult to coordinate post-disaggregation. Any such arrangement could not be put in place until the new councils were established, making it difficult to plan on the basis of this scenario.

Disaggregation also introduces operational inefficiencies, such as duplicated or inconsistent services, which drive up administrative and service costs. Fragmented planning may lead to over- or under-commissioning, poor alignment between demand and supply, and increased reliance on costly out-of-area or cross-border placements. These placements are harder to monitor for quality and cost and are subject to inflation uplifts from host authorities – reducing financial control for placing councils.

In mental health, Section 117 legislation adds complexity. Responsibility for individuals detained under Section 3 lies with the authority in which the person was sectioned. This is a legal responsibility which cannot be shifted. Post-disaggregation, in a two or three council situation, this may result in an increasing number of people moving between authorities for their long term, complex placements once sectioned, losing continuity with their social worker and case history. This would have an impact on safety and quality of care and ultimately would be likely to increase costs.

Finally, smaller authorities may face increased challenges in sustaining specialist services – particularly in rural or low-demand areas – due to limited internal capacity and resource constraints. This can lead to inconsistent availability of key services and a growing reliance on costly out-of-area placements, which not only escalate financial pressure but also disrupt care continuity.

Fragmentation across newly formed units reduces the system's ability to flex and respond to fluctuations in demand. Without shared infrastructure and coordinated commissioning, smaller councils may lack the agility to absorb surges or reallocate resources effectively. In such a landscape, inconsistent governance structures and oversight create opportunities for providers to exploit gaps in accountability and decision-making. Vulnerable individuals may experience variability in care access, quality, and outcomes, potentially undermining public confidence and equity across the system.

4. Strategic, governance and partnership breakdown

Disaggregating local authority functions can significantly disrupt the strategic coherence underpinning public service delivery. At the heart of this disruption is the potential loss of mature, cross-sector partnerships – with NHS bodies, police, education providers, and voluntary organisations. These relationships, often built over years through shared governance structures and personnel, may require renegotiation and re-establishment, particularly where structural realignment leads to shifts in leadership or jurisdiction.

Newly formed councils may adopt divergent engagement models, policies, and operational processes, which create inefficiencies and undermine equity. For example, NHS trusts and schools frequently operate across local authority boundaries; fragmenting the local government landscape risks inconsistency in engagement, oversight, and service integration – compromising collaborative working.

Disaggregation also poses a threat to strategic planning capacity. Fragmented leadership and reduced multi-agency collaboration weaken the ability to plan long-term across systems such as health, education, safeguarding, and early intervention. The dissolution of pooled initiatives and cross-boundary alignment jeopardises effective system-wide decision-making, particularly in areas requiring coordinated pathways and preventative approaches.

Evidence increasingly shows that reduced preventative and early intervention activity leads to higher demand, and more costly interventions later on[37,38,39]. But these impacts also ripple beyond the social care system, affecting hospital admissions, housing stability, independent living and support for unpaid carers and families.

Structural fragmentation also creates barriers for county-wide statutory partners – such as Police and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) who may lack the capacity to engage effectively with two or three smaller councils smaller unitary authorities. Their operational footprints are unlikely to flex to support bespoke arrangements for each unitary, raising risks around safeguarding duties, continuity of shared casework and strategic commissioning.

Paradoxically, while smaller councils might aim to be more responsive, they often centralise service delivery to contain costs. This may reduce access for residents, especially in rural or peripheral areas, and diminish local responsiveness and equity. Over time, the loss of strategic coherence across newly separated authorities can lead to fragmented delivery models, erode public confidence and weaken the overall resilience of integrated care systems.

37 Action for Children's FOI-based analysis (2021) shows that missing chances for early help increases the number of children going into care and pressures on social services https://www.willispalmer.com/lack-of-early-intervention-leads-to-re-referrals/
38 The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) highlights that prevention and early intervention can reduce the need for intensive support, improve outcomes, and lower long-term costs–yet progress is often hindered by collaborative working and fragmented commissioning https://www.scie.org.uk/integrated-care/prevention-in-social-care/
39 A 2020 review in the International Journal of Mental Health Systems found that delays in early support for youth mental health often result in poorer long-term outcomes and increased service demand https://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13033-020-00356-9

5. Systems, data, and interoperability risks

Social care relies heavily on integrated digital systems and shared data to deliver safe, efficient, and coordinated services - especially for individuals with complex or long-term needs. Disaggregating service structures introduces considerable risk to this digital infrastructure.

Legacy systems, particularly case management platforms, may not be divisible across newly formed authorities, necessitating full-scale replacement or costly redevelopment. Even where separation is technically possible, it can result in at least short-term service disruption, limited reporting capacity and reduced continuity of care. These transitions carry further risk in data migration, where loss, corruption, or misclassification of case data may compromise GDPR compliance and weaken safeguarding.

Incompatibility between newly adopted systems may further hinder data quality, integration and performance oversight, undermining the ability to monitor outcomes, share insights, or respond effectively to demand. The loss of access to historic case records poses a particular threat to preventative work and safeguarding continuity.

Beyond technical implications, smaller authorities may struggle to sustain viable IT infrastructure - including data warehousing, and back-office operations. Over time, this may result in reduced efficiency, fragmented service coordination and diminished organisational resilience, with critical downstream effects on care quality, accountability and strategic planning.

These risks have serious implications for compliance, efficiency and continuity of care - particularly for individuals with complex needs.

6. Estates and assets inefficiency

Disaggregation of services introduces challenges around the management and optimisation of physical assets. Shared infrastructure – such as buildings, technology systems and vehicles, need to be reallocated for ownership, access rights and future use. These negotiations can delay operational readiness and risk disrupting service continuity, particularly during the transition period.

Realignment of organisational boundaries may lead to a mismatch between estates and service demand, with some areas left with underutilised buildings or fleets while others face shortages. Office space may be duplicated unnecessarily, while original sites lose occupancy, creating long-term cost inefficiencies.

Split governance structures can hinder coordinated asset planning and limit opportunities for strategic rationalisation. New leases may be required, and services could struggle to secure suitable venues, especially in rural or constrained settings. Fragmentation reduces the system's ability to flexibly allocate estate resources in response to demand or service redesign, ultimately potentially increasing overheads and lowering estate efficiency.

However, unitarisation introduces potential opportunities to improve estate utilisation and coordination, particularly where former district, borough and county assets are brought under one unified authority. A single governance structure may enable better planning, reduce duplication and improve access to shared estate resources.

If two or three unitary councils are established rather than a single integrated authority, these efficiencies become harder to achieve. Although the traditional two-tier division between counties and districts is removed, geographical fragmentation remains, which may lead to inconsistent estate access, reduced cross-boundary coordination and duplicated strategic estate planning functions. The absence of a single social care estates strategy across the wider footprint may undermine efforts to optimise space, streamline infrastructure and co-locate services.

7. Service user impact and hidden social costs

Perhaps most significantly, disaggregation can negatively impact service users. Transitioning into new governance arrangements often creates confusion over access, with unclear pathways and shifting responsibilities disrupting timely intervention. Inconsistent thresholds, eligibility criteria and assessment timelines between newly formed authorities may lead to variation in service delivery, potentially delaying support for vulnerable individuals.

These changes heighten the risk of people falling through gaps - particularly those navigating transitions between services or undergoing statutory assessments. Safeguarding pathways may be compromised due to fragmented multi-agency protocols and blurred legal responsibilities, leading to missed opportunities for intervention at critical junctures.

The emergence of unequal service quality across different authorities may produce inequities in access, care standards, and outcomes. This can increase demand for corrective or compensatory interventions and strain system-wide resources. Service user continuity is especially threatened by an uptick in out-of-area placements, which sever established relationships with social workers and interrupt access to historic case records. These disruptions pose risks to both safety and care quality, with long-term social and financial consequences that may not be immediately visible during transition.

8. Legal, statutory, and reputational risks

Service disaggregation raises the complexity of managing statutory duties, regulatory compliance and organisational accountability. During transitional periods, when governance structures are still embedding, gaps in protocols and unclear lines of responsibility can increase the likelihood of missed statutory deadlines and performance failures - particularly where workforce or system disruptions are already present.

These vulnerabilities may trigger regulatory concerns, with inspection bodies such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) scrutinising leadership stability, governance, and service continuity. Disruptions to ongoing transformation programmes, especially those dependent on multi-agency collaboration, risk stalling progress and eroding public trust.

Operational disputes over case responsibility or placement funding further complicate delivery, delaying access to support and exacerbating risks to vulnerable individuals. Where statutory duties are not met, councils may face formal challenges, including judicial reviews, financial penalties, or external intervention.

If not carefully managed, these risks could have lasting impacts on reputation, regulatory standing and overall system integrity. A clear accountability framework and robust transitional planning are essential to safeguarding legal compliance and public confidence.

B – Quantifiable risk appraisal for social care disaggregation

A risk appraisal was undertaken to identify which social care–specific risks could be quantified using financial modelling (see detailed risk register **appendix five**). Each risk was evaluated against the following criteria:

- whether it presented a differential across options (e.g. 1 unitary vs. 2 or 3 unitaries)
- whether it could be isolated from immediate costs, broader contingency allowances, or other identified social care risks
- whether the financial impact was monetisable
- whether the impact was material to overall cost estimates.

Risks meeting all four criteria were included in the quantifiable risk appraisal. For each risk, the estimated financial impact across adult social care and children's services was assessed for each shortlisted local government reorganisation option, and these values were then aggregated to determine an indicative expected cost value.

Quantifiable risks: methodology & assumptions

The quantifiable social care risks underpinning the financial modelling fall into three core categories: workforce, commissioning and care market, and early intervention/de-escalation. The following table outlines the assumptions and high-level methodological approach used to estimate indicative risk costs for each option.

Table 1: Quantifying risk

Risk	Assumptions [40]	Methodology
WORKFORCE RISKS		
Increased recruitment competition – the need to duplicate key roles across new or restructured organisations intensifying recruitment competition in an already constrained market. The increased demand is likely to drive up staff costs and create challenges in securing experienced, high-quality candidates.	• Increase 5%[41] for additional direct staff costs for creation of each additional unitary, across both ASC and CYP (A) • Applies to additional direct pay costs identified in main financial analysis assumed to be filled by permanent staff (B) • Permanent staff assumed to fill 75% of new roles in 2 unitary configuration (C) • Permanent staff assumed to fill only 37.5% of new roles in 3 unitary configuration (D) • Assumes all additional roles have to be filled.	• 2UA config: A x B x C • 3UA config: A x B x D.
Interim / agency / consultant staff to fill duplicated posts.	• Costs for interim / agency 50%[42] higher than permanent staff, across both ASC and CYP (A) • Applies to additional direct pay costs identified in main financial analysis (B) • For 2 unitary assumed 25% of additional costs filled by interim (B) • For 3 unitary assumed 63% of additional costs filled by interim (C) • Assumes all additional roles must be filled.	• 2UA config: A x B x C • 3UA config: A x B x D.
COMMISSIONING AND CARE MARKET RISKS		
% uplift on care purchasing due to risks around commissioning and market shaping.	• Average 2% uplift for 2UA configuration • Average 3% uplift for 3UA configuration.	• Care purchasing budget x assumed % uplift.
Increase in out of area (OOA) placements due to imbalances in demand and supply based on new geographical boundaries.	• Applies to nursing, residential & supported living ASC placements • Applies to residential, internal fostering, IFA and other CYP placements • OOA placements for ASC and CYP assumed as 10% increase from average cost for each placement type.	• MSOA placement mapping or originating address compared to placement address with new UA boundaries = indicative OOA demand by placement type • Calculate difference in cost between original and OOA placement multiplied by the #OOA placements.
EARY INTERVENTION / DE-ESCALATION RISK		
A shift in the mix of demand due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities.	• 0.5% increase in demand across placement types for 2UA configuration • 1% increase in demand across placement types for 3UA configuration • Assumes none are out of area.	• Current placement numbers x increase in demand • Additional placements x cost per placement.

40 Unless explicitly stated no assumptions have been made about growth in demand or inflation

41 LSE/Kent research using adult social care workforce data estimates that a 5% real wage increase in SC is likely to boost employment by 9-11%

42 Based on external reports such as the DfE commissioned report estimated that agency children & families social workers cost councils about 53% more than permanent equivalents when factoring in all contractual benefits (2023)

43 These figures represent indicative quantifications, designed to show the relative scale of financial risk differences across options based on consistent assumptions. While not definitive predictions, the risk estimates highlight the compounding exposure associated with disaggregation.

Quantifiable risks: Aggregated results

A comparative appraisal of quantified social care risks across the shortlisted options reveals a clear escalation in risk exposure with increasing levels of structural disaggregation. The table below presents the Net Present Value (NPV) of social care risk contingency per year under each configuration.

Table 2: NPV of social care risk contingency for the shortlisted options per year

Net Present Value (£million)[43]	(BAU) Current structure	1 Unitary	2 Unitary	3 Unitary
Workforce	0	0	3.11	10.05
Commissioning and care market	0	0	13.30	19.96
Early intervention / de-escalation	0	0	1.26	2.36
Total Quantified Risks	**0**	**0**	**17.66**	**32.37**

The escalation in risk is primarily driven by fragility in commissioning and care market oversight. Smaller authorities face diminished purchasing power and increased structural complexity, leading to weaker provider engagement and rising costs. While the risk of additional out-of-area placements contributes to cost pressures, it is less impactful than the broader uplift effects observed across all care purchasing. Alongside this, workforce instability remains a critical concern. Smaller configurations struggle with recruitment and retention, increasing reliance on interim personnel and creating volatility in service delivery – particularly in senior and specialist roles.

Strategic coherence also diminishes in more fragmented models. Disruption to multi-agency collaboration undermines early intervention, safeguarding capabilities and long-term planning, reducing the ability of smaller authorities to de-escalate need effectively, resulting in increased pressure on both adult and children's social care systems.

Whilst the quantified estimates set out above illustrate both immediate financial risks and longer-term threats to service equity, continuity, and resilience, it is important to recognise that not all risks identified in the broader risk register can be captured through fiscal modelling. Several significant non-financial risks – such as reputational damage, diminished public confidence and challenges to statutory compliance – remain outside the scope of this quantification but are nonetheless critical to strategic planning and risk mitigation frameworks.

Conclusion: disaggregation is not just recommissioning – it's rebuilding

Disaggregation is far more than a case of recommissioning, which implies a straightforward, like-for-like transfer of services. In reality, splitting social care services fundamentally alters the operating environment. New authorities must:

- design, commission and procure services, effectively from scratch, without the same economies of scale and often without the benefits of existing relationships
- rebuild core infrastructure, including IT systems, governance frameworks and workforce structures
- re-establish market presence, which can take time and may not yield the same service quality or cost-efficiency.

Currently, the countywide model operates with a matrix approach to locality-based working – combining the strategic scale and resilience of a larger system with the flexibility and responsiveness of local delivery. This structure enables services to be locally tailored and community-focused, while still benefiting from central coordination and clear accountability, shared infrastructure, consistent standards and equitable access. It carefully supports both local delivery and flexibility with system-wide resilience and fairness.

Disaggregating this model risks losing those advantages. It is not a linear or administrative task - it is a multi-dimensional transformation that affects every layer of service delivery, from specialist front-line teams to strategic governance. The short- and medium-term impact is typically one of higher costs, increased risk, and reduced resilience. The true costs of disaggregation lie not only in direct financial expenditure, but also in the risk to service continuity, quality, equity, and statutory compliance.

It is also important to acknowledge that a new single unitary authority does not represent business as usual. While it is less disruptive than two or three unitary council configurations, it would still require transition planning – particularly in aligning with functions previously managed at district level, such as housing. However, the **One Suffolk** model presents opportunities to strengthen social care outcomes.

A consolidated authority is better positioned to align housing and adult social care strategies, improving the ability to deliver supported accommodation, reduce delayed discharge and promote independent living. It also enables more comprehensive and sophisticated data integration across services, facilitating earlier identification of need, more effective care planning and stronger safeguarding oversight. This unified governance arrangement may further support more coherent commissioning, consistent standards and equitable access across the system.

In the context of social care - where the lives and wellbeing of vulnerable individuals are directly affected - these risks must also be considered in full before any structural change is undertaken.

Appendix five

Detailed social care risk register

Risks across social care have been split into eight categories:

A. **Workforce:**
risks relating to workforce instability

B. **Financial:**
risks relating to the estimation and treatment of costs, funding and overall cost management

C. **Commissioning and care market:**
risks relating to decreased influence in the care market and out of boundary provision

D. **Strategic and governance:**
risks relating to the loss of strategic and governance coherence

E. **Data and systems:**
risks relating to integrated systems and shared data

F. **Infrastructure and estates:**
risks relating to physical assets

G. **Impact on service users and families:**
risks relating to service access and quality

H. **Legal and statutory:**
risks associated with the complexity of legal and statutory responsibilities

#	Risk	Approach
A1	Role duplication and recruitment Challenges: replicating roles that already exist e.g. senior leadership, middle management, and statutory functions increases demand for an already limited pool of professionals. In a nationally competitive market for roles like Directors of Children's Services (DCS) and Adult Social Services (DASS), recruitment delays can undermine strategic progress, staff morale, and frontline performance/ service outcomes. Strain on specialist capacity: disaggregated services stretch a limited specialist workforce across multiple settings, intensifying shortages and impacting quality.	Quantifiable aspects modelled in risks (A2, A3, A6)
A2	Increased recruitment competition: the need to duplicate key roles across new or restructured organisations is intensifying recruitment competition in an already constrained market. This is particularly acute for senior leadership, middle management, and specialist roles, where national shortages exist. The increased demand is likely to drive up staff costs and create challenges in securing experienced, high-quality candidates.	Quantifiable, modelled increased recruitment competition risk
A3	Rising dependence on interim and agency staff: extended use of interim personnel inflates workforce costs and reduces continuity in service delivery and strategic planning.	Quantifiable, modelled increased usage of interim and agency risk among duplicated staff costs.

#	Risk	Approach
A4	Loss of collaborative recruitment models: breaking up pooled regional recruitment and retention initiatives can limit access to shared talent pipelines, weakening workforce resilience.	Quantifiable aspects modelled in risks (A2, A3, A6)
A5	Inefficiencies and ambiguity in leadership structures, particularly during transition: creating unclear accountability and reduced operational effectiveness.	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it remains a material consideration and should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
A6	Variability in employment terms: diverging conditions of employment across disaggregated units may erode morale and exacerbate staff turnover, driving up vacancies.	Quantifiable, modelled increased usage of interim and agency risk among duplicated staff costs. Equal pay risk covered in main financial analysis.
B1	Complex and potentially inequitable budget allocation. Complexity of fairly splitting historic and ongoing budgets may impact delivery and lead to inequality & disputes	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it remains a material consideration and should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
B2	Costs from system separation, contract renegotiation, and service redesign.	Quantified in main financial analysis (other than risks around commissioning and market contract renegotiation) Contingency accounts for optimism bias & change to forecast cost estimates.
B3	Loss of purchasing power of smaller areas, reducing efficiencies & making commissioning more expensive (see more detail in section 3 below).	Increased overheads & duplication covered in main financial analysis. Risk details surrounding commissioning & market risks in the relevant risk below
B4	Delays or failure to realise anticipated savings.	Covered in main financial analysis
B5	Financial sustainability - Financial strain on smaller authorities (or those with a lower council tax raising ability compared to demand), could mean ongoing costs could become unaffordable, limiting their ability to absorb shocks or invest in innovation.	Covered in the main financial analysis when examining financial sustainability/viability
C1	The council benefits from economies of scale and can currently negotiate more favourable rates with providers as a result. Disaggregation reduces those economies of scale. Smaller commissioners may struggle to influence provider markets.	Quantifiable, modelled increased market costs. Risks (C1 - C5) accounted for together

#	Risk	Approach
C2	The council has a centralised pool of skilled commissioners and other specialised teams and can currently negotiate more favourable rates with providers as a result. Disaggregation makes it more likely that there will be gaps in those skillsets leading to increased costs.	Quantifiable, modelled increased market costs. Risks (C1 - C5) accounted for together
C3	In ASC, there are a number of large countywide contracts (e.g. Care UK, community equipment). These benefit from established, negotiated positions. Disaggregating them would require renegotiation, likely resulting in increased costs and uneven pricing across localities.	Quantifiable, modelled increased market costs. Risks (C1 - C5) accounted for together
C4	Additionally, major contracts such as the homecare framework are also commissioned in alignment with the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) on a countywide basis – unpicking these arrangements would mean there was no longer a single approach for ICBs to align to, potentially destabilising the market and increasing costs.	Quantifiable, modelled increased market costs. Risks (C1 - C5) accounted for together
C5	Higher fees due to fragmented commissioning and competition between new authorities could inflate fees or misalign priorities. For example, in ASC, demand often outstrips provision. Two or three councils competing for the same providers would likely inflate costs. A consortium approach (i.e. smaller unitaries working together to commission services) might not be viable in the medium term due to the need for aligned inflationary uplifts and rate-setting - which would be difficult to coordinate post-disaggregation. Any such arrangement could not be put in place until the new authorities were established, making it difficult to plan on the basis of this scenario.	Quantifiable, modelled increased market costs. Risks (C1 - C5) accounted for together
C6	Inconsistent or duplicated services, driving up costs.	Increased overheads & duplication covered in main financial analysis.
C7	Under- or over-commissioning due to lack of strategic oversight and fragmented planning.	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it remains a material consideration and should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
C8	Service demand and supply may be misaligned, increasing reliance on more costly out-of-area placements.	Quantifiable, modelled increased risk OOA placements
C9	Disaggregation would also mean a number of residents would end up in cross-border placements, the equivalent of current out-of-county placements. This increase in cross-border placements would make it harder to monitor cost and quality. The standard convention for these placements is to follow the host authority's inflationary uplifts, reducing cost control for the placing council.	Increase in OOA modelled via risk above (C8)

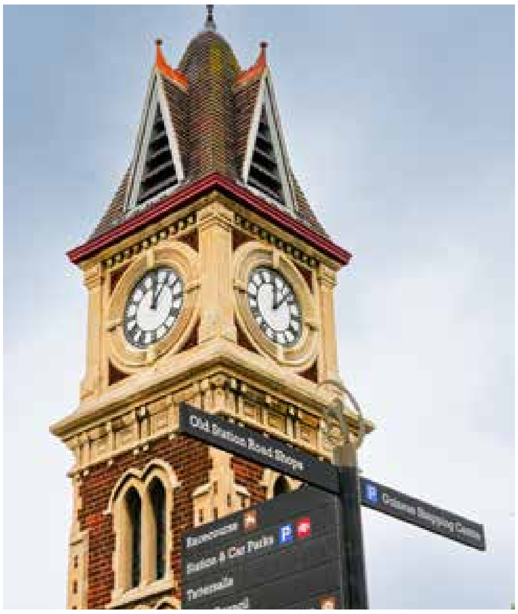
#	Risk	Approach
C10	There are particular impacts in relation to mental health and Section 117 legislation which states that people who are detained under Section 3 become the responsibility of the authority in the area where they are detained. This is a legal responsibility which cannot be shifted. In a two or three unitary situation, you would therefore have an increasing number of people moving between authorities for their long term, complex placements once sectioned, losing continuity with their social worker and case history. This would have an impact on safety and quality of care and ultimately would be likely to increase cost.	Increase in OOA modelled via risk above (C8)
C11	Reduced ability to respond and flex resources to fluctuations in demand.	Quantifiable aspect of risk already reflected in increases in OOA placements
C12	Some specialist services may be unsustainable in smaller units / smaller authorities may lack internal specialist capacity leading to inconsistent service availability, especially in rural or low-demand areas, which may require more costly out-of-area placements.	Increase in OOA modelled via risk above (C8)
D1	Loss of established partnerships. Disrupted relationships with NHS, education, police, education, and voluntary sectors. Risk of damaging mature relationships due to changes in structure and personnel. Established partnerships may need to be renegotiated	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
D2	Divergent engagement, policies and processes between new authorities may create inefficiencies and inequities. Particularly e.g. local NHS bodies and schools operate across LA boundaries; two or three new LAs may weaken consistency of engagement. County-wide statutory partners – such as Police and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) – may lack the capacity to engage effectively with two or three smaller unitary authorities. Their operational footprints are unlikely to flex to support bespoke arrangements for each unitary, raising risks around safeguarding duties, shared casework and strategic commissioning.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
D3	Dilution of strategic planning capacity, loss of multiagency planning, pooled initiatives, and cross-boundary alignment. Fragmenting leadership may weaken capacity to plan long-term across broader systems like health, education, and care. This fragmentation weakens overall system planning and delivery - particularly in integrated care pathways, safeguarding and early intervention.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
D4	Less localised service delivery. Balance of large & bureaucratic vs responsive. Paradoxically, smaller councils may centralise services to manage costs, reducing local access, responsiveness and equity.	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it remains a material consideration and should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.

#	Risk	Approach
E1	Legacy systems may not be divisible, requiring full replacement or redevelopment.	Covered in contingency & IT costs of main financial analysis
E2	Legacy systems may not separate cleanly, disrupting services and limiting reporting.	Covered in contingency & IT costs of main financial analysis
E3	Data migration risks e.g. case management systems, affecting continuity of care and GDPR compliance.	Covered in contingency & IT costs of main financial analysis
E4	Incompatibility between new systems may reduce data quality, reporting and integration.	Covered in contingency & IT costs of main financial analysis
E5	Loss of historic records can undermine safeguarding and planning.	Quantified in lack of safeguarding / early intervention activity / de-escalation
F1	Disputes over ownership or access to shared assets (e.g., buildings, tech, vehicles).	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
F2	Potential for underused estates in low-demand areas and vice versa (mismatch of assets and new geographical boundaries).	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
F3	Duplication of office space – and equally original infrastructure left without adequate utilisation.	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
F4	Transition-related delays in making premises operational. Estates may be split inefficiently or require new leases; services may be left without accessible venues.	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
G1	Confusion over access during transition periods.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities

G2	Inconsistent thresholds and timelines may cause delays or variation in service.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
G3	Vulnerable individuals falling through gaps in new structures, especially during assessments or transitions.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
#	**Risk**	**Approach**
G4	Disruption to safeguarding pathways and legal duties, due to unclear responsibilities and diverging protocols. Confusion over thresholds, responsibilities, and multiagency protocols may cause missed opportunities for intervention, especially during transition.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
G5	Unequal service quality or eligibility criteria between new authorities.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
G6	Variation in service quality across new authorities may lead to inequity and increased demand for corrective interventions.	Quantified by modelling a shift in demand mix due to later identification of early intervention / de-escalation opportunities
G7	Lack of continuity. Increased OOA placements losing established relationships with social workers and access to case history risk compromising both safety and quality of care.	Quantified in OOA placements
H1	Non-compliance. Missed deadlines or performance failures, due to workforce or system disruptions or unintended non-compliance with statutory duties due to unclear protocols, gaps in accountability	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
H2	OFSTED/CQC concerns about stability and leadership.	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
H3	Risk of disrupting progress in ongoing transformation programmes	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.
H4	Disputes over case responsibility or placement funding could delay support.	This risk cannot currently be quantified with precision. However, it should be factored into strategic planning and mitigation frameworks.

Appendix six

Options appraisal methodology



Establishing the critical success factors in relation to local government reorganisation

Critical Success Factors (CSFs) identify the key factors that will determine the success or failure of a project. They serve as vital signposts that guide evaluation and decision-making processes. It is no different with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

In evaluating the different options for LGR in Suffolk, careful consideration must be given to how well each option aligns with the identified CSFs. It is a process that involves scrutinising how well each of the options for LGR will fulfil the different CSFs. Those options that are unlikely to deliver a significant number of the desired CSFs should be discounted, while those options that are considered most likely to deliver the CSFs have to be considered as part of the preferred way forward.

The HM Treasury Guide to Developing the Project Business Case sets out a starting point for identifying and agreeing CSFs. These cover[44]:

- **Strategic fit and business need** – delivers business need and services requirements and aligns with other strategies, programmes and projects.
- **Potential value for money** (social and economic) – optimises public value considering costs, benefits and risks.
- **Supplier capacity and capability** – ability to be delivered by potential suppliers and be attractive to them.
- **Potential affordability** – can be funded from available sources and within sourcing constraints.
- **Potential achievability** – likelihood of delivery considering organisations' ability to respond to the changes and access appropriate skills for successful delivery.

Whilst these provide a solid framework, this is not an exhaustive list and nor are they specifically relevant or tailored to the questions that relate to local government reorganisation. Therefore, in order to appropriately appraise the different LGR options in Suffolk it is necessary to develop specific CSFs.

To do this we have taken the HM Treasury headings as guidance and combined these with the criteria for "unitary local government" provided by the Secretary of State in the government's guidance around proposals for reorganisation. Using the six criteria provided by government, the table below sets out the 25 CSFs we have identified and against which options have been assessed. As part of this (and as shown in the third column of the table) we have tested the alignment of our CSFs with the five headings provided by HM Treasury in order to provide reassurance that the full breadth of issues has been appropriately considered, noting that while we have only shown alignment to one of the five headings for many of the CSFs they actually align with multiple of the headings.

44 See HM Treasury Guide to developing the programme business case

Table 1: Critical success factors

CSF Number	CSF Description	Alignment with HM Treasury guidance
A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government		
1	Creates a sensible economic area	Potential achievability
2	Creates authorities with an appropriate tax base	Potential affordability
3	Does not create undue advantage or disadvantage	Potential achievability
4	Delivers increased housing to meet local needs	Strategic fit and business need
5	Delivers better outcomes for individuals and communities	Strategic fit and business need

CSF Number	CSF Description	Alignment with HM Treasury guidance
Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks		
6	Population of 500,000 or more	Potential achievability
7	Financially resilient on 'day 1'	Potential achievability
8	Delivers efficiencies and improves value for money	Potential value for money
9	Costs of transition and transformation can be managed within existing budgets	Potential affordability
10	Debt can be adequately managed	Potential affordability
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens		
11	Improves service delivery	Potential value for money
12	Creates opportunities for public service reform	Strategic fit and business need
13	Protects those most at risk	Capacity and capability
14	Avoids unnecessary fragmentation of services	Capacity and capability
15	Does not unduly impact crucial services	Capacity and capability
16	Creates a more resilient public sector model over the medium-term	Potential achievability
17	A competent and robust delivery platform for safe services on 'day 1'	Potential achievability
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		
18	Considers and reflects local, cultural and historic identity	Strategic fit and business need
19	Reflects local views	Strategic fit and business need

CSF Number	CSF Description	Alignment with HM Treasury guidance
New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements		
20	Unlocks devolution	Strategic fit and business need
21	Facilitates economic growth and opportunity	Strategic fit and business need
22	Supports the delivery of government's missions	Strategic fit and business need
23	Offers sensible population size ratios within the Strategic Authority	Potential achievability
New unitary structures should enable strong community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment		
24	Enables strong community engagement	Capacity and capability
25	Creates opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	Capacity and capability

Developing a framework to assess the options against the critical success factors

Each of the different options were given a red, amber or green score for each CSF, with red indicating that it does not meet the CSF, amber that the CSF is partially met and green meeting the CSF. The scoring of each option was based on the matrix below which considers a range of qualitative and quantitative factors.

Table 2: Options appraisal framework

Red	Amber	Green
CSF 1 – Creates a sensible economic area		
The size of the local economy in terms of GVA and jobs is below unitary authority averages There is a low level of self-containment in travel to work patterns The boundaries are not recognised locally as a clear economic area	The size of the local economy in terms of GVA and jobs is around the unitary authority averages Self-containment is around 50% in travel to work patterns The boundaries would be recognised locally by some but not by others (e.g. specific sectors, business groups)	The size of the local economy in terms of GVA and jobs is in upper quartile of unitary authority averages There is a high level of self-containment in travel to work patterns The boundaries would be recognised locally as a clear economic area

CSF 2 – Creates authorities with an appropriate tax base		
The Council Tax base provides for less than 40% of the new authority's core spending power	The Council Tax base provides for 40-59% of the new authority's core spending power	The Council Tax base provides for 60% of the new authority's core spending power
CSF 3 – Does not create undue advantage or disadvantage		
The new authorities are notably different in terms of population, housing growth, economic scale, levels of deprivation and geographic size	The new authorities have some differences with regard to the population, housing growth, economic scale, levels of deprivation and geographic size	The new authorities are comparable with regard to the population, housing growth, economic scale, levels of deprivation and geographic size
CSF 4 – Delivers increased housing to meet local needs		
The new authorities do not have the necessary land available to deliver the estimated scale of new homes required Wider stakeholder structures and systems are complex and likely to lead to delays in delivery and a lack of coordination and alignment with other critical infrastructure (e.g. primary care and schools)	The new authorities have some land available to deliver the estimated scale of new homes required Wider stakeholder structures and systems are likely to be supportive but the number of parties to consult may lead to delays in delivery and could result in a lack of coordination and alignment with other critical infrastructure (e.g. primary care and schools)	The new authorities have land available to deliver the estimated scale of new homes required Wider stakeholder structures and systems are aligned and there are strategic mechanisms in place to minimise delays and ensure effective coordination and alignment with other critical infrastructure (e.g. primary care and schools)
CSF 5 – Delivers better outcomes for individuals and communities		
The complexity of establishing the new authorities is likely to result in worse services and limit the outcomes for individuals and communities	Alignment of services in unitary government is likely to deliver better outcomes, but this will be hindered by the complexity of disaggregating other services	The alignment of services in unitary government is highly likely to deliver better outcomes
CSF 6 – Population of 500,000 or more		
The population is notably below 500,000 and there is no clear rationale for the size of the authorities	The population is below 500,000 and there is some rationale for the size of the authorities proposed OR The population is 500,000 or more but there is limited rationale for the size of the authorities	The population is 500,000 or more and there is a strong rationale for the size of the authorities proposed OR The population is below 500,000 and there is a very strong rationale for the size of the authorities proposed

CSF 7 - Financially resilient on 'day 1'		
Based on estimates of income and expenditure and the likely level of reserves the authorities (or at least one of the authorities if multiple) cannot be considered financially sustainable	Based on estimates of income and expenditure and the likely level of reserves the authorities can set a balanced budget in the short-term but there are concerns around medium-term financially sustainability	Based on estimates of income and expenditure and the likely level of reserves the authorities can set a balanced budget in the short-term and appear financially resilient over the medium-term
CSF 8 – Delivers efficiencies and improves value for money		
The complexity of establishing the new authorities is likely to remove any efficiencies in operation and increase the costs of service delivery	The complexity of establishing the new authorities is likely to mitigate some of the efficiencies in operation and some of the savings made could be offset by additional costs of delivery	The alignment and integration of services in unitary government is likely to create efficiencies and economies of scale which will improve value for money
CSF 9 – Costs of transition and transformation can be managed within existing budgets		
Costs of transition and transformation cannot be managed within existing budgets	Costs of transition and transformation can be managed within existing budgets, but this is likely to create a strain on resources and limit financial resilience	Costs of transition and transformation can be managed within existing budgets
CSF 10 – Debt can be adequately managed		
Debt cannot be adequately managed and raises concerns around the financial sustainability of (or some of) the authorities	Debt can be managed but this is likely to create a strain on resources and limit financial resilience	Debt can be adequately managed
CSF 11 – Improves service delivery		
The alignment and integration of services in unitary government is limited due to the complexity of establishing unitary authorities and therefore service delivery is hindered rather than improved	The alignment and integration of services in unitary government is likely to improve service delivery – although this will vary between services given the differing levels of complexity involved	The alignment and integration of services in unitary government is likely to improve service delivery

Red	Amber	Green
CSF 12 – Creates opportunities for public service reform		
The alignment and integration of services in unitary government is complex which will significantly delay public service reform as the focus will be on transition There is limited alignment in geography with key stakeholders and other public services that will also hinder the speed of reform	The alignment and integration of services in unitary government has some complexity which will delay public service reform as the focus will be on transition There is some alignment in geography with key stakeholders and other public services that will help facilitate reform	The alignment and integration of services in unitary government can be delivered relatively quickly and in a manner that enables the focus to shift towards public service reform There is strong alignment in geography with key stakeholders and other public services that will help facilitate reform
CSF 13 – Protects those most at risk		
The changes proposed create challenges and risks that are most likely to be felt by those that are most vulnerable There is a real risk of a postcode lottery with regard to provision	The changes proposed create challenges and risks that if not appropriately mitigated and managed could be felt by those that are most vulnerable There is a chance that a postcode lottery could emerge with regard to provision	The changes proposed limit the potential challenges and risks that could be felt by those that are most vulnerable
CSF 14 - Avoids unnecessary fragmentation of services		
The changes proposed result in the fragmentation of a significant number of services	The changes proposed result in the fragmentation of some services	The changes proposed do not fragment services
CSF 15 – Does not unduly impact crucial services		
The changes proposed have significant negative implications for the delivery of social care, children's services, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and homelessness	The changes proposed have some negative implications for the delivery of social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness OR The changes proposed have significant negative implications for some but not all of the following services: social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness	The changes proposed have limited negative implications for the delivery of social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness

CSF 16 – Creates a more resilient public sector model over the medium-term		
The complexity of establishing the new authorities is likely to take many years to transition to a position of 'business as usual' and with that create additional costs that limit potential savings. As such medium-term resilience is at risk There is little clarity around how the complexities surrounding transition will be managed and resourced	The complexity of establishing the new authorities will create transition cost pressures and limit the speed at which savings can be realised and therefore have implications for resilience over the medium-term The complexity of establishing the new authorities is clearly mitigated by a detailed transition plan with appropriate resources and capacity to enable savings to be delivered and new operating models implemented	The alignment and integration of services in unitary government is likely to create efficiencies and economies of scale that will improve resilience over the medium-term There is a clear implementation plan that will guide transition alongside resources and capacity to aid transformation
CSF 17 – A competent and robust delivery platform for safe services on 'day 1'		
The new authorities will have to implement multiple new delivery models and for some services will have to establish entirely new delivery platforms (including leadership teams, delivery teams, systems and governance)	The new authorities will have to implement some new delivery models and for some services they will have to establish elements of a new delivery platforms (e.g. leadership teams, delivery teams, systems or governance)	The new authorities will have to implement some new delivery models, but the establishment of new delivery platforms is limited
CSF 18 – Considers and reflects local, cultural and historic identity		
The new authorities give no consideration to local, cultural and historic identity	The new authorities give some consideration to local, cultural and historic identity	The new authorities give notable consideration to local, cultural and historic identity
CSF 19 – Reflects local views		
The new authorities do not reflect local views	The new authorities give some consideration to local views	The new authorities give notable consideration to local views
CSF 20 – Unlocks devolution		
The new authorities create complexity that will limit the implementation of devolution and significantly hinder its ability to deliver strategic and longer -term impacts	The new authorities create an element of competition within the wider Strategic Authority that could hinder its ability to deliver strategic and longer-term impacts	The new authorities will support the implementation of devolution and will facilitate the Strategic Authority in delivering strategic and longer-term impacts

CSF 21 – Facilitates economic growth and opportunity		
The new authorities are limited in their ability to drive the growth of key sectors as they are split across multiple jurisdictions. This makes the identification and implementation of strategic priorities complex and limits the ability to communicate in a clear unified way The complexity limits the potential benefits of devolution The benefits of growth will be limited to specific geographic boundaries and there is a negative impact on equality of opportunity. Opportunity will very much depend on the post code in which residents live Businesses will not recognise the geography and there will be significant competition for investment	The new authorities are able to support the growth of key sectors and contribute to the identification and implementation of strategic priorities and can communicate the needs and opportunities of their locality There are some benefits for devolution but this is countered by a degree of complexity They have the potential to ensure that the benefits of growth are spread across different communities within their locality but are limited in the influence over other authorities The equality of opportunity depends on what exists within their locality and the ability to form strategic relationships Businesses will recognise the geography, but it may not relate to how they operate and securing investment will require coordination and agreement	The new authorities are able to drive the growth of key sectors, facilitate the identification and implementation of strategic priorities and enable communication around needs and opportunities in a clear unified way They enhance the benefits of devolution and enable the new Strategic Authority to fulfil its potential They have the potential to ensure that the benefits of growth are spread across different communities and that there is an equality of opportunity The structures will support engagement with businesses and make securing investment into the area as simple as possible
CSF 22 – Supports the delivery of government's missions		
Complexity and fragmentation limit the ability of the new authorities to respond in a coordinated way The collective impact on missions is diluted as a result of artificial boundaries There are multiple and competing voices around key issues	There is some alignment between the new authorities and the missions although engagement between central and local is more complicated Systems and structures need to be coordinated and aligned to enable the delivery of missions There are multiple voices around key issues	The new authorities are aligned with the missions and there is a simple and effective means of engagement between central and local Systems and structures facilitate the delivery of missions There is a unified voice around key issues

CSF 23 – Offers sensible population size ratios within the Strategic Authority		
Population size ratios are highly varied and create complexity for the Strategic Authority	There is some variation in size ratios, but it is not unreasonable and can be appropriately managed through the governance of the Strategic Authority	There are sensible and comparable size ratios within the Strategic Authority
CSF 24 - Enables strong community engagement		
The new authorities limit community engagement both in terms of their structures and their approach to service delivery and governance There are significant population groups that are not being engaged with at all	The new authorities create some opportunities for community engagement but have limitations in either their service delivery structure and/or governance models Engagement is targeted on some groups but not all within the area	The new authorities create a broad range of different opportunities for community engagement and it is built into both delivery structures and governance Engagement also reflects the different communities that live within the area
CSF 25 – Creates opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment		
There are very limited opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment Service delivery is focused on a larger geography	There are some opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment Some service delivery is focused on smaller localities Empowerment is limited to consultation rather than decision-making	There are significant opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment Smaller localities are a core building block of service delivery Neighbourhoods are genuinely and actively involved in decision-making

Identifying the options

To ensure that early decisions were grounded in robust evidence, the initial stage involved identifying and thoroughly examining a long list of seven potential configuration options for local government reorganisation (excluding BAU). This initial phase focused on using publicly available data to assess the viability and implications of each option through two key analytical lenses:

1. **Socio-economic review** - a comprehensive review across more than 25 socio-economic indicators, including demographics, deprivation, labour market conditions, economic performance, and housing. This analysis provided a detailed snapshot of each proposed unitary configuration, allowing us to: compare the scale and characteristics of each proposed unitary authority; benchmark these against existing unitary authorities in England; and understand the degree of variation within each configuration.
2. **Financial review** - a financial assessment focusing on: financial resilience; unit costs and spending variation; and levels of indebtedness. This analysis was based on Revenue Outturn data and supplemented by financial data published by individual councils.

This assessment identified a shortlist for more detailed analysis in the full Business Case. The shortlist includes:

1. A single unitary authority covering the entire Suffolk area
2. Two unitary authorities (West and East division)
3. Three unitary authorities (Bespoke boundaries comprising a West, East and South unitary)

These options have been compared to the existing two-tier system in Suffolk (the business-as-usual option) as well as with each other.

These options were selected because:

- they represent distinct and viable alternatives
- they are actively being considered or promoted by district and borough councils within Suffolk
- early analysis showed limited variation in headline socio-economic and financial metrics between the different two and three unitary configurations

Scoring the options

Each of the options was scored in a workshop comprising members of Suffolk County Council's corporate leadership team.

The table below provides an overview of the scores along with a summary rationale for the score given.

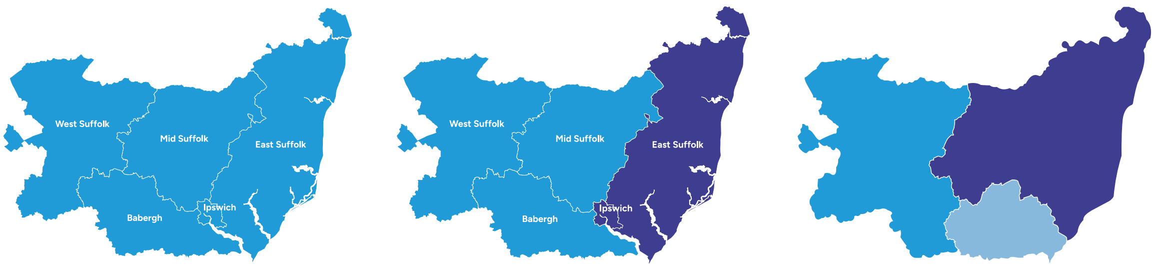


Table 3: Options appraisal

	1 Unitary Option	2 Unitary Option	3 Unitary Option
A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government			
1. Creates a sensible economic area			
	The one unitary option creates an economy of scale - placing it in the upper quartile of existing unitary authorities on the basis of GVA, employees and businesses. This provides a strong and stable economic base. Suffolk as a whole is also recognised as the local economic geography - with a recently published economic strategy intentionally focused on this geography. For the two unitary option, the authorities would be of comparable size in terms of GVA although the business base is notably different with the western unitary having over a fifth more businesses than the east. For the three unitary options the GVA of the west and south is notably higher - 41% and 48% respectively - than the east underlining notable disparity between these areas. There is also variability in both the number of employees (with the east 39% less than the other two) and businesses where the south has 16% less than the west). For the three unitaries all of the authorities are within the interquartile range of existing unitaries. The three structure does split Suffolk's three largest market towns of Ipswich, Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds into each of the three unitary authorities.		

A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government			
2. Creates authorities with an appropriate tax base			
	For all three options Council Tax provides for 60% of the new authorities' core spending power. However, for the three unitary option there are notable variances between the authorities in terms of the disaggregation of social care spend which has unequal implications on the proportion of total expenditure that can be covered by Council Tax.		
3. Does not create undue advantage or disadvantage			
	For the single unitary there is no variance and as such no advantage or disadvantage. For the two and three unitary options there is notable variation in deprivation levels particularly in terms of the proportion of LSOAs in the top 10% most deprived. There is also variation in the levels of rurality. For the three unitary model there is additional variation in the dependency ratios, the proportion of young people, the proportion of older people and the working age population between the three unitaries - all of which will create impacts in terms of demand and have the potential to result in undue disadvantage.		
4. Delivers increased housing to meet local needs			
	A single unitary will have far greater opportunity to coordinate and work with the mayor and Strategic Authority to deliver housing - providing a single strategic voice into the decision-making process. For two authorities this is complicated by two different voices and an element of competition and it is further exacerbated with three unitary councils. While three authorities may have more of a locality focus this is likely to exacerbate issues of "NIMBYism" and create challenges around the new boundaries.		
5. Delivers better outcomes for individuals and communities			
	A single unitary provides the best opportunity to deliver better outcomes as it facilitates the most simple and least risky transition to the new state. This means that benefits from alignment and integration can be realised more quickly. For the two and particularly the three options the challenges around disaggregating critical services such as social care (and in the case of the three all services given district and borough boundaries are being split) mean that organisational focus will be taken up with this at the detriment to residents and communities.		
Sub-total			

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	
6. Population of 500,000 or more	The single unitary option has a population above the 500,000, with the two unitaries closer in size to 400,000 with growth to 2040 expected to take them above 400,000. The three unitary option has a population well below 500,000 and closer to 260,000, even with population growth to 2040 these areas will remain below 300,000 which will make them some of the smaller unitary authorities in the country and no clear rationale for the creation of authorities of that size.
7. Financially resilient on 'day 1'	The creation of unitary authorities will not solve the financial challenges facing local government. However the one unitary option offers the greatest level of savings compared to the other two options which places it on a more financially resilient footing. The scale of disaggregation costs will pose significant financial challenges to both the three and the two unitary options.
8. Delivers efficiencies and improves value for money	The financial analysis shows that the single unitary offers the greatest potential for savings when compared to the existing local government structure in Suffolk and as a result the best opportunity for driving value for money. For the two and three unitary options the scale of costs associated with disaggregation are significant and as a result have profound implications for value for money. For the three unitary option the boundaries proposed will require some form of disaggregation of every single council service. Given the presence of other viable options this simply can not be considered good value for money.
9. Costs of transition and transformation can be managed within existing budgets	Given the need to incur the costs of transition prior to the realisation of any savings there will be pressure on council budgets. Our analysis of how costs and savings will be phased show that these costs can be covered in existing budgets within 5 years for the one and two unitary options but that this is not the case for the three unitary option where the scale of disaggregation increases the costs significantly.
10. Debt can be adequately managed	If DSG is excluded then financing costs for debt are less than 10% of the overall budget for the single unitary. For the two and three unitaries the smaller budgets mean that financing costs make up a greater proportion of the overall budget.
Sub-total	

Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	
11. Improves service delivery	Given the need to disaggregate services under the two and three unitary options and the complexity involved there will be limited opportunities to deliver service improvements in the short-term. For one unitary the focus will be more on integration and whilst this is not straightforward it does provide the opportunity to improve service delivery.
12. Creates opportunities for public service reform	Given the need to disaggregate services under the two and three unitary options and the complexity involved there will be limited opportunities to deliver public service reform in the short-term. For one unitary the focus will be more on integration and whilst this is not straightforward it does provide the opportunity to focus on public service reform and to do things differently - this is particularly the case as there will be strong geographical alignment with police, health and fire services.
13. Protects those most at risk	The risks of disaggregation under the two and three unitary options are significant which creates challenges for the most vulnerable. The presence of multiple unitary authorities also raises the risk of post-code lotteries as service levels vary. A single unitary is the least risky option.
14. Avoids unnecessary fragmentation of services	The three unitary option actively creates fragmentation not just of county services but also fragmentation of the district services. The two unitary options does result in fragmentation of county services which is deemed as unnecessary given the viability of the single unitary option in Suffolk (something that is not the case in other areas).
15. Does not unduly impact crucial services	The three unitary option unduly impacts on the critical services of adult and children's social care, SEND and homelessness as each of these services will need to be split and reorganised (for example the locality working of the county does not align with the boundaries proposed). The two unitary option impacts on adult and children's social care and SEND and this is seen as unnecessary given the viability of the single unitary option in Suffolk. Conversely for the single unitary option by bringing housing alongside a stable social care service provides an opportunity to positively impact upon social care.

16. Creates a more resilient public sector model over the medium-term			
	The creation of unitary authorities will not solve the financial challenges facing local government and all options present challenges around transition and the integration of services. However, the one unitary option offers the greatest opportunity to create a more resilient model. Without the distraction and complexity of disaggregation there is an opportunity, through a clear and robust integration plan, to create a more resilient model. For the two and three unitary options the challenges around disaggregation create additional costs and complexity which hinder the speed over which resilience can be achieved.		
17. A competent and robust delivery platform for safe services on 'day 1'			
	The creation of unitary authorities will not solve the financial challenges facing local government. However the one unitary option offers the greatest level of savings compared to the other two options which places it on a more financially resilient footing. The scale of disaggregation costs will pose significant financial challenges to both the three and the two unitary options.		
Sub-total			

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

18. Improves service delivery			
	All three options will give considerations to local, cultural and historic identity albeit placing different emphasis on local priorities and issues - therefore all three options have been given the same score.		
19. Reflects local views			
	The resident survey undertaken as part of this business case identifies that a quarter (25%) of residents are against any form of unitary government with a further 11% slightly against. As such there is a consistent challenge across all three options to "make the case". The process of developing the business case for both the one and the three unitary option have involved a broad range of consultations with different stakeholders.		
Sub-total			

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	
20. Unlocks devolution	The single unitary option creates one strategic voice for Suffolk making it easier to engage and drive forward devolution. The two and three unitary options introduce competition and competing voices and will naturally require investment to be spread evenly as opposed to strategically and where it can drive the greatest growth dividend.
21. Facilitates economic growth and opportunity	A single unitary authority can operate strategically to maximise the growth opportunities of different sectors and communicate the needs of those sectors clearly and consistently. Multiple unitary authorities under the two and three unitary model will create competing voices and a degree of confusion and complexity for the mayor. Local priorities will be naturally favoured over strategic ones.
22. Supports the delivery of government's missions	A single unitary provides a single partner for the government to engage with simplifying and supporting mission delivery. In particular one unitary will retain capacity and capability around Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) delivery which is critical to some of the government's missions. Multiple unitary councils as per the two and three unitary options will create multiple and potentially different voices aound key issues will could complicate delivery.
23. Offers sensible population size ratios within the Strategic Authority	Given that the outcome is not known about reorganisation in Norfolk it is not possible to differentiate between the different options in Suffolk.
Sub-total	

New unitary structures should enable strong community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment			
24. Improves service delivery			
	All three options would create new opportunities for more effective community engagement as this is seen as an important element of any local government structure within Suffolk.		
25. Creates opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment			
	All three options would provide the opportunity to better empower neighbourhoods and use smaller localities as an important building block for service delivery.		
Sub-total			

Total			
Rank	1	2	3

Appendix seven

Financial analysis

This appendix details the assumptions and workings used in undertaking the financial analysis. The purpose is to provide transparency and give confidence in the analysis that has underpinned the proposal for **One Suffolk**.

Methodology

The diagram below provides an overview of our methodology. The sections that follow unpack the different elements that have formed part of the financial analysis.

Inputs

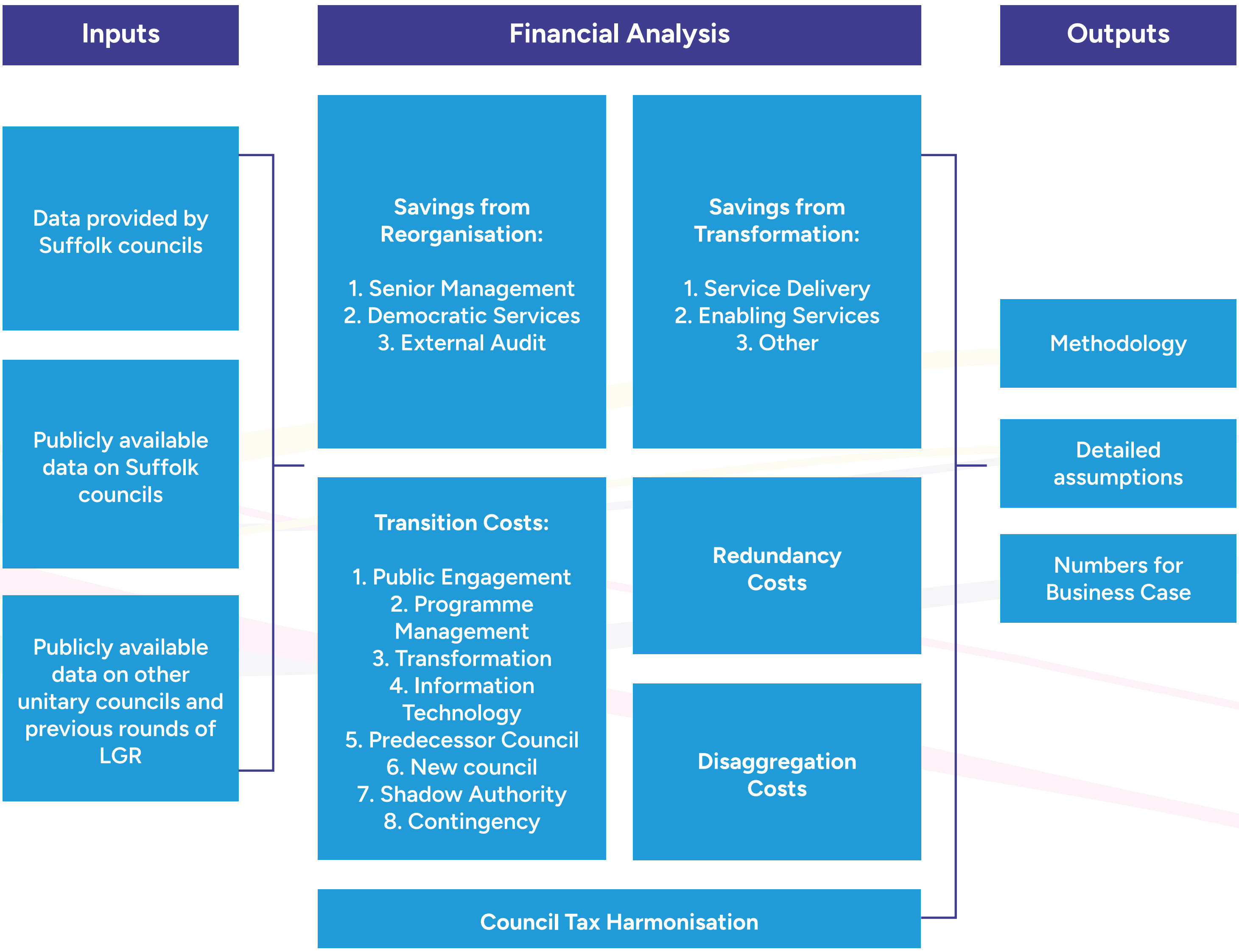
A range of data sources have been provided by Suffolk councils and these have been used to form the baseline of the financial analysis. Data sources include the 2025/26 Revenue Account ('RA') and Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 and 2024/25. This data has formed the "baseline" of our analysis and was agreed with the district and borough councils. This baseline data has then been supplemented by publicly available data from a range of sources and assumptions – as detailed throughout this appendix – to inform the financial analysis.

Financial analysis

The financial analysis has been based around the following six elements:

a. **Savings from reorganisation** – the savings that will be delivered on and around vesting day as a direct result of local government reorganisation.
b. **Savings from transformation** – the savings opportunities that will be created in the newly formed unitary council following local government reorganisation.
c. **Transition costs** – the one-off costs associated with managing the transition from the current local government structure in Suffolk to a new unitary model, including the aggregation of services.
d. **Redundancy costs** – the one-off costs associated with redundancies relating to staffing changes in the new authority.
e. **Disaggregation costs** – the costs associated with the disaggregation of services currently delivered at a county level in the two and three unitary configurations.
f. **Council Tax harmonisation** – the process of harmonising the Band D Council Tax rates in the newly created council.

Figure 1: Overview of methodology



Outputs

This appendix sets out the detailed methodology and detailed assumptions used in the financial analysis and supports the financial analysis detailed in the main body of this document.

Savings from reorganisation - approach

Senior management

Establishing a baseline

Using data from publicly available sources for each of the Suffolk councils (Statement of Accounts and Pay Policy Statements) it was possible to identify the current senior management structures across Suffolk. These were split into three tiers of senior management:

Tier 1 – Chief executive (head of paid service)
Tier 2 – Executive directors (or equivalent)
Tier 3 – Assistant directors (or equivalent).

The analysis deliberately excluded any tiers below this on the basis that the savings associated with these levels would be delivered through transformation rather than reorganisation. Roles associated with Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service were also excluded as these will move to the newly created Strategic Authority and therefore will not be part of local government reorganisation.

The total costs of senior management (salary plus on-costs and pensions) were taken from the Statement of Accounts and Pay Policy Statements. As is expected, the information in the Pay Policy Statements showed that there were cost ranges across different tiers. Therefore, the baseline includes three sensitivity levels (upper, mid and lower). Where appropriate, this has been triangulated against senior management cost data provided by each of the local authorities.

This gave the following baseline position for Suffolk, with Table 1 showing the total current costs and Table 2 showing the number of people at each tier of management:

Table 3 show the baseline salary for each tier by council. This data point is based on the mid-point of the upper and lower thresholds identified in the publicly available data used. This includes pensions and on-costs assumed at 19.40% for pension contributions and 14.18% for employer NICs.

Table 1: Total current cost of senior management across Suffolk based on the three sensitivities

Sensitivity	Current cost of Senior Management
Upper	£11.523m
Mid	£10.575m
Lower	£9.626m

Table 2: Total number of roles at each management Tier by council area

Tier	Babergh and Mid Suffolk	East Suffolk	Ipswich	West Suffolk	Suffolk
Tier 1	1	1	1	1	1
Tier 2	2	3	2	2	5
Tier 3	6	11	6	3	29

Table 3: Salary costs by Tier and council area

Tier	Babergh and Mid Suffolk	East Suffolk	Ipswich	West Suffolk	Suffolk
Tier 1	£216,818.37	£209,400.01	£223,686.39	£189,702.30	£264,126.40
Tier 2	£159,193.30	£150,918.68	£153,791.99	£129,272.71	£190,815.69
Tier 3	£122,213.01	£124,247.43	£130,144.32	£116,238.64	£135,916.31

Developing the assumptions

In order to shape and inform assumptions around the future structure of the new councils information was collected on the senior management structures and costs of other unitary councils across England. Population data for each unitary council was also used based on the assumption that there is a correlation between the population of a council area and the number of senior officers required and the pay scales for these senior positions.

Table 4 shows the estimated size of the management teams at each tier based on the different configurations being considered in Suffolk (namely one council, two councils and three councils). Table 5 shows the estimated salary cost by grade. These numbers have been directly informed by the average size of senior leadership teams in local authorities that have recently undergone local government reorganisation and are of similar size to the different councils that could be created in Suffolk.

The actual senior management structure and pay policy of the newly created council(s) will be determined by the new administration(s) and the operating model implemented.

Calculating the savings

Number at relevant tier (Table 4) x Mid-point salary for relevant council size (Table 5)

For each option this calculation was repeated across each tier to calculate the total estimated cost of senior management in the new configuration. The savings were calculated as the difference between the calculated cost and the current cost of senior management across Suffolk. See Table 8 below for the calculated saving.

Table 4: Number of senior managers required by grade and configuration

Number by Grade	One Council	Two Councils	Three Councils
Tier 1	1	2	3
Tier 2	6	12	18
Tier 3	22	45	68
Total	**29**	**59**	**89**

Table 5: Mid-point salary plus on costs by grade and configuration

Salary plus on costs by Grade	One Council	Two Councils	Three Councils
Tier 1	£279,117	£233,670	£221,986
Tier 2	£190,256	£165,362	£157,094
Tier 3	£145,022	£116,241	£110,429

Limitations of analysis

The current management structures for Suffolk are based on publicly available information. Where possible this has been triangulated with the individual councils. The exact salaries and structures of the new authorities will be set by the Shadow Authority. Therefore, we have benchmarked based on available data and the actual position may be different.

Democratic services

Establishing a baseline

The current cost of members has been obtained from the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts and includes all allowances. The current cost of members across Suffolk is £3.699 million (see Table 6 below).
The current number of councillors and ward numbers has been obtained from publicly available data sources. The data shows that there are currently 308 councillors across Suffolk with 200 wards.

Developing the assumptions

Information on the number of electors per councillor across English local authorities has been used as a benchmark. Three initials scenarios were been analysed for each of the potential configurations across Suffolk as follows:

- 3,000 electors per councillor as the lower sensitivity scenario – this would result in 118 less councillors across Suffolk
- 4,070 electors per councillor as the baseline scenario – this would result in 168 less councillors across Suffolk
- 5,755 electors per councillor as the higher sensitivity scenario – this would result in 209 fewer councillors across Suffolk.

Benchmarks on the average cost per councillor give a range of £17,203 to £19,014 per councillor. The mid-point benchmark of £18,108 has been used for this analysis, which is similar to the current per councillor cost for Suffolk County Council. This benchmarking is based on information from other unitary authorities and includes all allowances. For the final financial modelling, two scenarios were focussed on with regards to member numbers. The first is for a total of 140 members across Suffolk, the second is a total of 99 to align with the recent guidance issued by the Boundary Commission.

In addition to savings from member costs, the analysis also assesses potential savings from wider democratic services across Suffolk. The baseline for this has been calculated by taking the total spend on democratic services and removing the total spend on member allowances. This gives a democratic services spend of £3.274 million across Suffolk. It has been assumed that there is a direct correlation between the number of members and spend on democratic services. Under the two and three unitary model there will be some duplication in these additional costs as there will be a duplication of Scrutiny Committees, Regulatory Committees and the support surrounding these committees. On this basis it has been assumed that for each new unitary council created there is a reduction of 20% in the savings from the remaining democratic support spend. For the one unitary option there will be an additional £10,664 of saving per member to reflect the reduction in democratic services costs associated with the reduction in member numbers.

Calculating the savings

Total electors in Suffolk ÷ Proposed number of electors per councillor = new number of members for Suffolk

To be prudent it has been assumed that the number of members is the same regardless of the configuration of councils. **Figure 6** (**next page**) shows the reduction in the number of councillors across Suffolk. See Table 8 below for the calculated saving.

External audit fees

Local government reorganisation will also deliver a saving from the external audit fees of the predecessor councils. There has been a consideration around the final year of audit in the transition costs with regard to this. The current external audit fees for Suffolk have been calculated based on Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) scale rates and are £1.311 million per annum.

Each of the newly created councils will require an external audit and will therefore have an external audit fee. The assumption is that there is a correlation between the size of a newly created council and the external audit fee. Therefore, by benchmarking the current external audit fees of unitary councils and looking at the relevant population size of the new council(s), it is possible to estimate an external audit fee. Under previous iterations of local government

Table 6: Councillor numbers and associated expenditure

	Electors	Population	Wards	Councillors	Expenditure
Suffolk	569,821	776,442	62	75	1,340,000
Babergh	71,976	95,872	24	32	377,000
East Suffolk	193,670	247,100	29	55	706,000
Ipswich	97,997	139,378	16	48	352,000
Mid Suffolk	81,590	108,029	26	34	374,000
West Suffolk	124,588	186,063	43	64	550,000
	569,821	**776,442**	**200**	**308**	**3,699,000**

reorganisation the external auditor has been asked by PSAA to indicate the required audit fee. This has seen audit fees of c.20% above scale fees and therefore this adjustment has been included in the analysis (see Table 7 below).

There will be a cost in relation to the audit fees from closing down the predecessor councils and this has been reflected in the calculated savings from external audit fees in the first year post-vesting day.

The savings from the external audit fees are therefore calculated as the net savings when comparing the current external audit costs and the proposed external audit costs (see Table 8).

Savings from reorganisation – calculated savings

Table 8 below provides a summary of the savings from reorganisation for each of the options. With Tables 9, 10 and 11 showing the phasing of these savings for one, two and three councils respectively.

Figure 2: Change in councillor numbers as a result of local government reorganisation.

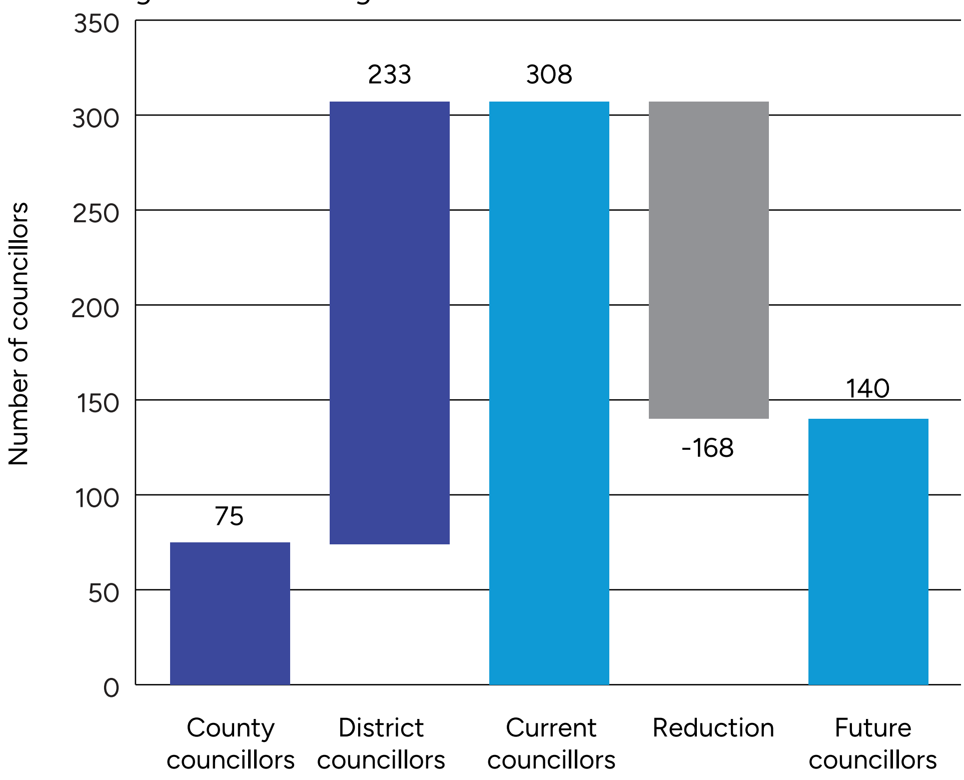


Table 7: Proposed cost of external audit across Suffolk

One council	Two councils	Three councils
£798,827	£992,970	£1,428,160

Table 8: Summary of savings from reorganisation

	One council	Two councils	Three councils
Senior Management savings	£5.963m	£2.892m	-£0.429m
Democratic Services	£2.945m	£2.589m	£2.232m
External Audit Fee	£0.513m	£0.319m	-£0.117m
Total	**£9.421m**	**£5.800m**	**£1.686m**

Table 9: Summary of savings from reorganisation – phased – one council

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Senior Management savings	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£5.963m	£5.963m	£5.963m	£5.963m	£5.963m	£29.815m
Democratic services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.945m	£2.945m	£2.945m	£2.945m	£2.945m	£14.725m
External Audit Fee	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.513m	£0.513m	£0.513m	£0.513m	£0.513m	£2.565m
Total saving from re-organisation	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£9.421m**	**£9.421m**	**£9.421m**	**£9.421m**	**£9.421m**	**£47.105m**

Table 10: Summary of savings from reorganisation – phased – two councils

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Senior Management savings	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.892m	£2.892m	£2.892m	£2.892m	£2.892m	£14.460m
Democratic services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.589m	£2.589m	£2.589m	£2.589m	£2.589m	£12.945m
External Audit Fee	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.319m	£0.319m	£0.319m	£0.319m	£0.319m	£1.595m
Total saving from re-organisation	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£5.800m**	**£5.800m**	**£5.800m**	**£5.800m**	**£5.800m**	**£29.000m**

Table 11: Summary of savings from reorganisation – phased – three councils

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Senior Management savings	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.429m	-£0.429m	-£0.429m	-£0.429m	-£0.429m	-£2.145m
Democratic services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.232m	£2.232m	£2.232m	£2.232m	£2.232m	£11.160m
External Audit Fee	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.117m	-£0.117m	-£0.117m	-£0.117m	-£0.117m	-£0.585m
Total saving from re-organisation	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£1.686m**	**£1.686m**	**£1.686m**	**£1.686m**	**£1.686m**	**£8.430m**

Savings from transformation - approach

Local government reorganisation in Suffolk presents an opportunity to transform the way in which services are delivered and, as a result, achieve financial savings. However, the journey to the delivery of these savings will require services to align, embed, integrate and mature. Therefore, there will be a period post-vesting day where services are focused on aggregation, integration and alignment before there is the opportunity to focus on transformation and the delivery of savings. Different configurations of new unitary councils will have different journeys to service maturity for different services and therefore there will be different periods at which savings start to be delivered following local government reorganisation.

Service delivery

For each of the RA categories we have assessed the pace at which the services will align and begin to deliver savings across each of the configurations in Suffolk and these are summarised in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Service maturity and phasing of savings by configuration

	Benefits realisation post-vesting			
Category	**One council**	**Two councils**	**Three councils**	**Rationale**
Adult Social Care	n/a	n/a	n/a	In a single unitary there will be limited initial change to the operating models for Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Social Care (CSC). Therefore, the analysis has not factored in any direct savings from transformation. Continuing to deliver ASC and CSC through a single unitary council will mean that there is limited disruption to the ongoing transformation work that disaggregation of services would present. This approach is supported by analysis of the changing unit costs of councils that have previously gone through local government reorganisation. When looking at real-term changes in the unit cost of ASC and CSC in areas such as Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole, Dorset and Buckinghamshire, over the period since unitarisation the unit costs have remained relatively static or increased slightly. This indicates that there has not been any substantial savings delivered in these areas from local government reorganisation and, in the case of Buckinghamshire, the continuing authority model has meant that there has been no material change to the unit costs in social care. Therefore, this assumption around savings from transformation is appropriate for Suffolk across all configurations.
Children's Social Care	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Education	n/a	n/a	n/a	Through analysis of changes in unit cost for other local authorities that have gone through local government reorganisation our assumption is that there is little opportunity to deliver significant savings from Education across any of the configurations. This is particularly the case for multiple unitaries where there will be disruption and disaggregation of services that add complexity. For a single unitary model, Education services will largely continue in the current format without disruption of disaggregation.

Table 12 (contd): Service maturity and phasing of savings by configuration

	Benefits realisation post-vesting			
Category	**One council**	**Two councils**	**Three councils**	**Rationale**
Highways and Transport	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Parking services are the main Highways and Transport function that are delivered at a district level. The vast majority of all other functions are currently delivered at a county level. Under a single unitary model the Highways and Transport function would continue to operate at that spatial scale, with the district services integrated into it. Were there to be a need to disaggregate Highways and Transport functions under the two and three unitary model then there would be significant complexities around the contractual position, establishing a service delivery model, embedding this and then maturing as a service before there is the opportunity to deliver savings from transformation. Therefore savings may take longer to be delivered. However, for reasonableness our modelling has assumed that savings are delivered on the same profile across all configurations. The savings profile for the configurations is further supported by the analysis of unit costs changes in areas that have previously gone through local government reorganisation. Following local government reorganisation there has been the ability of areas to reduce unit cost in Highways and Transport from year 2 post-reorganisation onwards. Therefore, the assumption of year 3 post-vesting day to begin to deliver savings from transformation is a reasonable profile.
Public Health	n/a	n/a	n/a	Public Health services are funded through the Public Health grant. Therefore, the analysis does not anticipate there to be any savings created in the delivery of Public Health services. The assumption is that the existing Public Health grant will remain at the same level as it currently is across Suffolk. Under the single unitary model there will be no change to the overhead costs associated with Public Health as there will remain a single council with Public Health responsibility. Under the two unitary and three unitary model there will be an increase in the management requirements for Public Health. This requirement will need to be funded from the existing grant so will reduce the amount available to deliver Public Health services across Suffolk.

Table 12 (contd): Service maturity and phasing of savings by configuration

	Benefits realisation post-vesting			
Category	**One council**	**Two councils**	**Three councils**	**Rationale**
Housing Services (General Fund only)	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Housing Services are predominantly delivered at the district level. Under all configurations there will be a need to integrate and merge these services to create a single delivery model for each of the newly created councils. Due to this aggregation of services there will be a need to align policies, approaches, systems and assets to create a new operating model. Immediately after reorganisation there will be a period of operation where the legacy approaches to service delivery are maintained while the new operating model is being developed. During this period and the subsequent period of integration and maturity the focus will be on service delivery rather than transformation. The baseline assumption is that it will be slightly easier and quicker to integrate a smaller number of predecessor authorities into a new unitary council, especially if there are existing arrangements of shared working. However, this is unlikely to result in a material difference as integration will be required across all configurations and the processes required will be the same. Therefore, the assumption is that savings from transformation in Housing Services will be delivered to a similar timescale across all configurations.
Cultural and Related Services	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	There is a mixed delivery model across Cultural and Related Services with some services delivered at a county level (i.e. libraries), others delivered at a district level (i.e. recreation and sport) and some delivered across both tiers (i.e. open spaces). A single unitary will require the amalgamation of these services into a single service delivery model. This may create some complexities, especially around recreation and sport where there are different leisure operators across Suffolk. This complexity will also exist in the two and three unitary options where there are different leisure operators in the legacy council areas. The contractual position of this is likely to impact on any savings from transformation as the operating model is likely to continue with these contracts until options for exiting/amalgamation/contract ending are explored in more detail. Excluding leisure services our assumption is that savings can begin to be delivered from year 3 post-vesting day onwards. This is because many of the other services require an alignment of processes and delivery models which can be relatively straightforward once an agreed model is decided upon. This aligns with the analysis of other areas that have gone through local government reorganisation and have seen a reduction in unit cost in the period beyond 2 years post-reorganisation. The timeline for benefits realisation remains the same across all configurations in Suffolk as, although it is likely to be slightly more straightforward to merge a smaller number of districts, the actions required will be similar and will take a similar amount of time to achieve before savings can be delivered.

Table 12 (contd): Service maturity and phasing of savings by configuration

Category	Benefits realisation post-vesting: One council	Two councils	Three councils	Rationale
Environmental and Regulatory Services	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Some Environmental and Regulatory services are delivered at a Suffolk-wide level, such as waste disposal, whereas the majority of activity, including waste collection and regulatory services, is delivered at a district level. Local government reorganisation presents an opportunity for synergies between these services to deliver efficiencies. For example, Suffolk County Council is a waste disposal authority whereas each of the individual districts and borough are responsible for waste collection. Bringing these services into a single unitary council presents an opportunity for them to become better aligned and more efficient. Delivering on this will take time following re-organisation as there will be a period where the waste collection services are aligned into a preferred operating model. It is anticipated that this can be delivered three years after the creation of the new unitary council. The position for the two and three unitary configurations is slightly different as this would also involve the disaggregation of services delivered at a county level, particularly waste disposal. However, there would be an opportunity to mitigate this through the creation of a county-wide waste disposal authority. On this basis the assumption is that savings can be delivered at the same profile as for a single unitary.
Planning and Development Services	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	The majority of Planning and Development Services are delivered at a district level. Therefore, local government reorganisation will see the merging of these services. Our assumption is that the merging of a smaller number of planning services will be more straightforward as there will be fewer policies, systems and approaches to harmonise. There is also unlikely to be the need to create local planning arrangements to ensure that planning is managed at an appropriate level across a single county unitary. This means that there may be the opportunity for savings to be delivered more quickly in the 2/3 unitary configurations. For prudence we have assumed that savings are delivered across the same profile for all configurations.
Central Services	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Central Services are currently delivered across both county services and at a district level. Many of these services will be aligned in all configurations of local government reorganisation in Suffolk. Therefore, the assumption is that they will have a similar delivery timeline on savings across all configurations. One consideration for the two and three unitary models is the disaggregation of coroners' court services that are currently delivered at a county level. There may be some complexities in this but it is not considered to impact on the timeline for savings.

Table 12 (contd): Service maturity and phasing of savings by configuration

	Benefits realisation post-vesting			
Category	**One council**	**Two councils**	**Three councils**	**Rationale**
Other Services	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Based on the RA data there is limited information on what is categorised under 'Other Services'. On that basis, this is not likely to be a priority focus in the transition planning and therefore it will take time for any savings from transformation to be delivered. This is reflected in the assumptions around the timing of savings.

Approach to calculating potential savings

The Revenue Account (RA) data for 2025/26 as provided by the individual councils have been used as the baseline of this financial analysis.

For each of the RA categories (and sub-categories) a unit cost has been calculated for each council. The unit cost has been calculated based on the most appropriate denominator available. For example, the majority of Environmental and Regulatory Services have been calculated on per/head of population whereas Waste Collection has been calculated as per/dwelling.

As this calculates a unit cost for each service area, the services delivered by Suffolk County Council have been split by the relevant denominators for that service line (i.e. for Highways and Transport Services delivered at a county level each of the district areas will have a unit cost allocated based on the population denominator).

The assumption is that local government reorganisation presents an opportunity for these services to be integrated and deliver change. For each of the configurations we have calculated the average unit cost for each of the sub-service RA categories. The analysis then assumes that these services will then be delivered at the average unit cost of all the predecessor councils. A minimum and maximum unit cost have also been modelled to identify a range, but the average was deemed more prudent and therefore suitable. Using the average does mean that there will be some service areas where costs may increase as a result of harmonising cost to the average. This reflects the current range in unit cost across Suffolk and the different approaches to service delivery and service cost that will need to be considered as part of local government reorganisation. Once services are integrated there may be an opportunity to deliver further efficiencies that reduce this unit cost but this has not been modelled at this point as it will be dependent upon decisions made by service areas and councils.

Phasing of savings

Our assumption is that once the transformation activity has been completed then the savings will be delivered in full from the first year we have assumed they will be delivered from.

Enabling services

Internal audit

Using publicly available data sources (i.e. Annual Audit Plans presented to Audit Committee) it was possible to calculate the current number of internal audit days across Suffolk. This was then benchmarked against the number of internal audit days of councils that have recently gone through local government reorganisation. Based on similar sized authorities it is possible to calculate the expected internal audit days for the newly created council(s). The difference between the current cost and the expected cost is the scale of savings to be delivered from internal audit. This saving has been split between non-staffing savings and staffing savings based on the current split between non-staffing and staffing costs.

Finance

Based on information provided by the councils in Suffolk it was possible to calculate a baseline position on the cost of finance across Suffolk and the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) operating in core finance functions. Based on an assumption of 100 FTE in a single unitary we have calculated the potential scale of savings that can be delivered through a new operating model for finance in Suffolk. For the two-unitary and three-unitary configuration we have assumed that there are a number of functions that would be duplicated (i.e. treasury management, payments and income team, corporate team, business partnering) with a finance function c.75% the size of the single unitary baseline. This percentage is to reflect that there would be duplication but, in some areas, the numbers required would be lower in a smaller council. On this basis it is possible to calculate a range of savings based on different sizes of finance functions in the newly created authorities. It should be noted that this does not include the pensions team. Under all of the different configurations a single authority would be the administering body for Suffolk Local Government Pension Scheme

Human resources and payroll

Using data provided by the councils in Suffolk it was possible to establish a baseline for the number of FTE and the average FTE cost for human resources and payroll. Based on experiences from other local authorities the analysis used a ratio of human resources and payroll FTE to employee numbers. The ratio for a 'lean' function was 1%, 1.50% for a 'standard' function and 2% for a 'support heavy' function. Using these ratios and estimated employee numbers it was possible to calculate the human resources and payroll requirement and compare this to the current FTE numbers and therefore calculate the saving based on a reduction. One limitation of this analysis is that the FTE numbers for Suffolk are based on the current levels and do not reflect potential reductions/increases in overall headcount as a result of local government reorganisation.

It should also be noted that Suffolk County Council already delivers payroll services on behalf of East Suffolk, Babergh and Mid-Suffolk. Therefore, under a single unitary model these arrangements can be built upon. Under a multiple unitary model there may be a need to disaggregate these arrangements which come with complexity and cost.

Procurement

Savings from procurement following reorganisation have been calculated based on a percentage reduction of FTE. It is noted that there is likely to be a need for an initial investment in procurement resources to assist with the transition period as there will be significant activity in relation to the novation of contracts and establishing new procurement policies. This will also assist in securing value for money of the newly established council(s) as having appropriate procurement resources in place should reduce the use of waivers for procurement during the transition period. Once the procurement function of the newly established council(s) are integrated then there will be an opportunity to ensure the operating model is efficient and effective.

Legal

By benchmarking the current legal services FTE across Suffolk with other county areas where legal services are delivered across both tiers of local authority, it is clear that the Suffolk position benchmarks favourably. Therefore, no savings have been assumed to be delivered through transformation of services. Once an operating model is established and ways of working are reviewed there may be opportunities for savings to be delivered but these are not considered material at this point.

Revenues and benefits

The current service delivery model for revenues and benefits across Suffolk is two providers. Babergh, Mid-Suffolk and Ipswich are served by Shared Revenue Partnership (SRP) whilst East Suffolk and West Suffolk are served by Anglia Revenue Partnership (ARP). Under the single unitary configuration there is an opportunity to merge these functions and deliver savings through efficiency gains, rationalised software licensing, removal of duplications and consistent billing. Under the two unitary configurations, the proposed boundaries mean that they are not aligned with the existing partnerships. Therefore, there will need to be disaggregation of these partnerships and the creation of new approaches. On this basis the assumption is that there will be limited savings from the two unitary options as the disaggregation is likely to create new revenue partnerships similar to SRP and ARP just on different boundaries. Under the three unitary configuration the arrangements would continue as they currently are with SRP and ARP continuing to deliver services across Suffolk. Therefore, the assumption is that there will be no savings from the three unitary configuration. The assumption for a single unitary council is that it will deliver 10% savings as the current partnership arrangements have already delivered efficiencies from close working and the expectation is that the savings will predominantly relate to removal of duplication as the partnership models merge into a single council.

Other

For 'other' enabling services there is an assumed reduction in FTEs of c.10% to reflect efficiencies that will be created in bringing the local authorities together through local government reorganisation. Other enabling services include areas such as communications.

Table 13 provides a summary of the phasing of the above savings and the associated rationale.

Table 13: Enabling services phasing of savings

Enabling service	Phasing of savings	Rationale
Internal Audit	Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period.	Due to the risk and complexity associated with local government reorganisation the assumption is that these savings will be delivered over a phased period. In the immediate period after reorganisation there will be a need for additional internal audit resources to review the internal control environment post-reorganisation.

Table 13 (contd): Enabling services phasing of savings

Enabling service	Phasing of savings	Rationale
Finance	Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period.	The complexities involved with the transition of financial data and financial systems in local government reorganisation, along with the need to closedown the predecessor authorities at the same time as establishing the financial baseline for the new council, means that there is likely to be a need for additional financial resources to support this. This is reflected in the transition costs. Over the longer term, as the new finance function is embedded and a desired operating model is developed, there will be opportunities for savings. The assumption is that these savings will be phased over a two-year period while the operating model is embedded and will begin from year 2 post-vesting day.
Human Resources and Payroll	Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period.	Local government reorganisation will require additional HR support during the transition period to assist with the scale and complexities of TUPE and redundancy, along with business as usual. Therefore, the transition costs have reflected the need for temporary additional resources to support HR. Post-vesting day, there will be a period where the Human Resources and Payroll functions are integrating and embedding. Once a desired operating model has been determined there will be a phased approach to savings across a two-year period. The scale and pace of savings will be informed by the HR support requirements around potential redundancy programmes in the newly created authority/authorities.
Procurement	Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period.	Due to the complexities involved with the novation of contracts and establishing procurement protocols for the newly created council(s) there is likely to be a need for additional procurement resources to support with the transition. This has been reflected in the transition cost section. Establishing a robust procurement function will be critical for securing value for money in procurement activity and therefore the assumption is that there will be a period of integration and embedding before a desired operating model is determined and savings will be phased over a two-year period.
Legal	N/A	Based on the benchmarking for legal services in Suffolk, no immediate savings from transformation are anticipated. In the transition costs analysis additional resources to support legal services with the complexity associated with local government reorganisation have been included.

Table 13 (contd): Enabling services phasing of savings

Enabling service	Phasing of savings	Rationale
Revenues and Benefits	Savings delivered in full from year 3 onwards.	For a single unitary there will be an integration of the two revenues and benefits partnerships that currently exist across Suffolk. This integration period will require an alignment of data, processes and systems. Alongside this a desired operating model will need to be determined. The successful execution of this will take a period of two years but will enable savings to be delivered in full.
Other	Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period.	In line with the other enabling services there will be a period of integration and embedding for these service areas so that savings will be delivered from year 2 onwards and will be phased over a two year period.

Savings from transformation - Other

Customer services

Across Suffolk there is currently a spend of £8.330 million on Customer services. These services are delivered by an establishment of 216.10 FTE.

To understand the potential scale of savings from customer services general benchmarks on the number of residents per customer service staff have been identified. The research shows that this number can range significantly for local authorities depending on the level of digital adoption and the level of face-to-face services. For a council that has significant face-to-face customer services operations the number of residents per customer service staff can be as low as 3,000 – 5,000. For a council that has high digital adoption and self-service the number can be as high as 10,000-15,000.

The current number of residents per customer service staff is 3,593 when taking into account the customer service staff across each of the current authorities. This indicates that there is significant scope for digital adoption across Suffolk and for this number to increase.

The assumption is that the customer services requirement for a single unitary council will be higher than for a two and three unitary model as ensuring that residents are able to access services on a local basis is critical. Therefore, the assumption is that the single unitary option will have a lower number of residents per customer service staff than the two and three unitary models.

The assumptions used in the analysis are as follows:

- One council – 7,500 residents per customer service staff
- Two councils – 8,250 residents per customer service staff
- Three councils – 9,900 residents per customer service staff.

These assumptions will deliver the following savings across the three configurations:

- One council - £4.293 million
- Two councils - £4.652 million
- Three councils - £5.250 million.

These savings will be delivered recurrently. The phasing of the savings will require the customer services to embed and mature which will take some time. There is also likely to be a need for increased digital adoption to realise these savings. Therefore, the assumption is that these savings will be delivered from year 3 post-vesting day onwards with 50% in the first year and then being realised in full from the following year.

Information technology (IT)

There are three areas of IT that offer potential for savings as a result of local government reorganisation in Suffolk. These are;

- **Applications** – when integrating multiple councils there will be an opportunity to consolidate and rationalise applications and licences. Where there are currently multiple systems operating across Suffolk delivering the same functionality (i.e. ERP system) there will be an opportunity to reduce the number of applications which will deliver financial savings. The exact roadmap for Suffolk will be determined once an initial diagnostic exercise has been completed to map the current systems and establish a desired state for IT services in the newly created council(s). Savings from the reduction in the number of applications have the highest savings potential as there will be a removal of costs associated with applications such as maintenance, professional services support and upgrades.
- **Infrastructure** – Through the optimisation of cloud storage and physical devices there is potential for savings through local government reorganisation. However, in Suffolk there is already integration across IT infrastructure so the scale of savings is limited in this area.
- **People** – Through the integration of IT functions into the newly created council(s). there is potential for savings through a more streamlined IT function. Across Suffolk there is already evidence of this streamlining through the IT services delivered by the county to Babergh and Mid-Suffolk. The exact level of savings will be dependent upon the configurations of councils across Suffolk and the nature of the IT service created in the new council(s).

The data provided by each of the councils in Suffolk have been used as the baseline for this financial analysis work. The current spend on IT across Suffolk is approximately £22 million. It is noted that there are some limitations to this data as it is based on the information provided by the individual councils and has not been triangulated against other sources of information.

Suffolk County Council has IT contracts for 25 applications out of an identified total of 34 corporate/IT applications that are likely to be replicated across the districts. This includes applications such as contact centre software, door entry security systems, risk management software and ERP system.

In a single county unitary these are a number of applications that have potential for review and consolidation.

The scope for consolidation and savings is smaller for the two and three unitary configurations as there will be fewer organisations coming together so, across the Suffolk system, less opportunity to rationalise applications.

Determining the exact level of IT savings that can be realised from local government reorganisation is difficult because there are a number of variables that will impact upon it. The time period within which any savings can be realised is also variable due to contractual positions and the time period required to execute the change programme.

Due to these variables the analysis has made high-level, broad assumptions around the scale of IT savings that can be delivered. A 16% reduction in staff and licensing spend for a single unitary equates to c.£3.370 million of annual savings once realised. Given the reasons noted above, for a two and three unitary configuration the assumption is a 7.5% reduction in overall costs across Suffolk which equates to £1.685 million. These savings would be recurrent in nature once delivered and could increase or decrease depending upon the exact decisions made during the transition period.

On staffing it is anticipated that there will be some consolidation as a new target operating model is established and therefore the savings in relation to staff are likely to vary.

Procurement - contracts

Using the publicly available contract registers for each of the councils in Suffolk, it is possible to identify where there are contracts in place with the same supplier across multiple Suffolk councils. The total value of contracts in Suffolk is in excess of £1 billion across over 915 suppliers.

The analysis has identified that across Suffolk there are contracts worth £227.980 million with 96 suppliers where there are either multiple contracts with the same council or contracts across multiple councils. Of these contracts, there are £32.397 million of contracts with 20 suppliers where there are contracts across multiple Suffolk councils. These predominantly relate to contracts for IT services and for housing services.

The creation of a single unitary in Suffolk will enable these contracts to be reviewed and opportunities for savings through the consolidation of contracts, the removal of duplication and the alignment of services that are currently delivered across multiple contracts. A 1% saving from the consolidation and review of contracts in a single unitary would deliver savings in excess of £10 million. This is considered to be a reasonable yet prudent saving as there will be a need for a detailed review of contracts as part of the transition process.

For a two unitary and three unitary option there will be some potential to consolidate contracts but this will come with some complications, especially in the three unitary model where there is disaggregation of the existing districts. On that basis, the assumption is that there is potential for 0.5% savings from the consolidation and review of contracts in these configurations, equating to £5.256m.

Delivery of any savings will require a detailed review of the contractual position and arrangements across the newly configured council(s). This is likely to require significant resource investment to ensure that it is delivered effectively. On this basis, it is anticipated that savings will not be delivered quickly and will be delivered from year 4 post-vesting day onwards.

Property/asset management

Across Suffolk, there is already substantial co-location with Babergh and Mid-Suffolk sharing space at Endeavour House, the main office of Suffolk County Council. Across the other areas of Suffolk there are office buildings that are located in key towns. It is anticipated that under a single unitary option, the majority of these buildings would be retained to ensure that there remains a local presence in these areas. The only exception to this is Grafton House, the headquarters of Ipswich Borough Council, which is located directly across from Endeavour House and under all configurations is likely to be no longer needed. This is because under all options there would be consolidation into Endeavour House as the Ipswich location for any newly created unitary. It is noted that Ipswich Borough Council currently has Grafton House up for sale as they only utilise 52% of the current space. Were this to be sold before vesting day then there would be no direct saving as a result of local government reorganisation. On that basis, the analysis has not assumed any savings from property and asset management.

It is likely that there will be opportunities to rationalise assets and realise asset disposals across all of the configurations but this will require a detailed mapping exercise and will also be influenced by decisions on how services are delivered in different areas.

Total savings from transformation

Tables 14, 15 and 16 summarise these savings and show the phasing pre-and post-vesting day for one, two and three councils respectively.

Table 14: **Phased savings from transformation – one council**

Service Delivery Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Education, ASC and CYP	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Highways and Transport	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.377m	-£0.377m	-£0.377m	-£1.131m
Public Health	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Housing Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.585m	£1.585m	£1.585m	£4.755m
Cultural and Related Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.331m	-£0.331m	-£0.331m	-£0.993m
Environmental and Regulatory Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.768m	£3.768m	£3.768m	£11.304m
Planning and Development Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.082m	£1.082m	£1.082m	£3.246m
Central Services (excluding Corporate Core)	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£1.163m	-£1.163m	-£1.163m	-£3.489m
Other Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.072m	-£0.072m	-£0.072m	-£0.216m

Enabling Services Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Internal Audit	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.518m	£1.036m	£1.036m	£1.036m	£3.626m
Finance	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.478m	£2.956m	£2.956m	£2.956m	£10.346m
Human Resources and Payroll	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.076m	£2.153m	£2.153m	£2.153m	£7.535m
Procurement	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.084m	£0.168m	£0.168m	£0.168m	£0.588m
Legal	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Revenues and Benefits	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.865m	£0.865m	£0.865m	£2.595m
Other	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.236m	£0.471m	£0.471m	£0.471m	£1.649m

Other Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Information Technology	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.370m	£3.370m	£6.740m
Customer Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.146m	£4.293m	£4.293m	£10.732m
Property/ Asset Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Contracts	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£10.512m	£10.512m	£21.024m
Total savings from transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.392m	£14.287m	£30.316m	£30.316m	£78.311m

Table 15: Phased savings from transformation – two councils

Service Delivery Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	**2025/26**	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**2030/31**	**2031/32**	**2032/33**	**Total**
Education, ASC and CYP	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Highways and Transport	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.134m	-£0.134m	-£0.134m	-£0.402m
Public Health	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Housing Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.609m	£0.609m	£0.609m	£1.827m
Cultural and Related Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£1.409m	-£1.409m	-£1.409m	-£4.227m
Environmental and Regulatory Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.737m	£2.737m	£2.737m	£8.211m
Planning and Development Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.171m	£1.171m	£1.171m	£3.513m
Central Services (excluding Corporate Core)	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£1.824m	-£1.824m	-£1.824m	-£5.472m
Other Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.798m	-£0.798m	-£0.798m	-£2.394m

Enabling Services Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	**2025/26**	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**2030/31**	**2031/32**	**2032/33**	**Total**
Internal Audit	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.145m	£0.290m	£0.290m	£0.290m	£1.015m
Finance	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.256m	£0.512m	£0.512m	£0.512m	£1.792m

Enabling Services Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Human Resources and Payroll	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.032m	£2.065m	£2.065m	£2.065m	£7.227m
Procurement	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.067m	£0.135m	£0.135m	£0.135m	£0.472m
Legal	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Revenues and Benefits	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Other	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.188m	£0.377m	£0.377m	£0.377m	£1.319m

Other Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Information Technology	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.685m	£1.685m	£3.370m
Customer Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.326m	£4.652m	£4.652m	£11.630m
Property/ Asset Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Contracts	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£5.256m	£5.256m	£10.512m

Total savings from transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.688m	£6.057m	£15.324m	£15.324m	£38.393m

Table 16: **Phased savings from transformation – three councils**

Service Delivery Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Education, ASC and CYP	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Highways and Transport	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.694m	-£0.694m	-£0.694m	-£2.082m
Public Health	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Housing Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.367m	£0.367m	£0.367m	£1.101m
Cultural and Related Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.839m	£0.839m	£0.839m	£2.517m
Environmental and Regulatory Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.094m	£0.094m	£0.094m	£0.282m
Planning and Development Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£1.307m	-£1.307m	-£1.307m	-£3.921m
Central Services (excluding Corporate Core)	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.008m	-£0.008m	-£0.008m	-£0.024m
Other Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.355m	£0.355m	£0.355m	£1.065m

Enabling Services Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Internal Audit	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.067m	£0.134m	£0.134m	£0.134m	£0.469m
Finance	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.844m	-£1.688m	-£1.688m	-£1.688m	-£5.908m
Human Resources and Payroll	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.988m	£1.977m	£1.977m	£1.977m	£6.919m
Procurement	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.042m	£0.084m	£0.084m	£0.084m	£0.294m
Legal	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Revenues and Benefits	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Other	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.118m	£0.236m	£0.236m	£0.236m	£0.826m

Other Category	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					
Sub-Category	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Information Technology	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.685m	£1.685m	£3.370m
Customer Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.625m	£5.250m	£5.250m	£13.125m
Property/ Asset Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
Contracts	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£5.256m	£5.256m	£10.512m

Total savings from transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.371m	£3.014m	£12.580m	£12.580m	£28.545m

Transition costs - methodology

Public engagement

Pre-vesting day, there are a number of engagement activities required that will incur costs. This is likely to include:

- **Public meetings/consultation** – The hosting of town hall-style meetings with public and wider stakeholders to consult on local government reorganisation. The aim will be to gather community feedback and consult with stakeholders on the changes coming through local government reorganisation. This will include targeted consultation events with key stakeholders such as the business community, along with workshops with the public to gather feedback.
- **Media and communications** – Comprehensive media campaigns including social media, radio and print media for the entire population. This will include the writing and distribution of press releases to local and regional media outlets. To support with the upcoming transition, this will also include targeted campaigns across all media platforms to inform residents of changes and the associated impact. This will include physical media in the form of informational flyers, pamphlets and posters in key locations such as libraries. A dedicated website and portal will also need to be established and maintained for public feedback and transparency.
- **Consulting fees** – Costs associated with external consultants to support with the design of the engagement strategy, managing the transition and handling public consultations. This will include work on strategic planning, risk assessments and advice on merger processes. Consultants will work to support the public engagement process, stakeholder mapping, engagement and conflict resolution.
- **Project management** – The use of project managers to co-ordinate all public engagement efforts, including managing timelines and deliverables. This will include the preparation of reports, progress tracking and managing communication between councils to support the public engagement.

Post-vesting day there will also be a number of engagement activities required that will incur costs. This is likely to include:

- **Public meetings/consultations** – The hosting of follow-up town hall-style meetings to provide updates, finalise plans and address any remaining concerns and issues.
- **Media and Communications** – Ongoing updates post-vesting day through press releases and media outlets specifically relating to local government reorganisation, before this becomes part of business as usual of the new authority
- **Consulting fees** – Ongoing consultancy support to finalise public engagement strategies, process handover and risk mitigation. Facilitation of final engagement with stakeholders to ensure merger success.
- **Project management** – Oversight of the final transition activities, co-ordination of follow-up communications and monitoring project progress to report back to stakeholders.

The assumptions on the activity and costs required across these different categories are based on a combination of work commissioned by local authorities and previous iterations of local government reorganisation. The detailed cost basis and activity basis are detailed in Tables 17 and 18 and is a baseline position for the creation of a single unitary.

Table 17: **Baseline Assumptions – Pre-Vesting Day**

Activity	Cost Component	Activity Breakdown	Basis of Estimate	Unit cost	Unit
Public Meetings / Consultations (Year 1-3)	Public Meetings (Year 1-3)	Hosting town hall-style meetings, gathering community feedback, and stakeholder engagement	Number of public meetings needed: 10-20 meetings over 3 years (depending on the complexity of the merger).	3,000	Per meeting
Public Meetings / Consultations (Year 1-3)	Consultation Events (Year 1-3)	Targeted consultation events with key stakeholders (e.g., council leaders, business community)	5-10 targeted events per year, including workshops and focus groups for local businesses and key stakeholders.	4,000	Per event
Public Meetings / Consultations (Year 1-3)	Workshops (Year 1-3)	Facilitating workshops to engage the public and gather feedback.	5-10 workshops per year, especially in areas with significant public interest or concern.	2,500	Per workshop
Media & Communications (Year 1-3)	Press Releases / Media Coverage	Writing and distributing press releases to local and regional media outlets.	5-10 press releases per year, depending on the complexity of the merger and local interest.	2,000	Per release
Media & Communications (Year 1-3)	Advertising (Social Media, Print, Radio)	Running targeted campaigns across social media platforms, local newspapers, and radio stations.	3-5 media campaigns per year, especially in the first three years for initial outreach.	15,000	Per campaign
Media & Communications (Year 1-3)	Information Packs / Flyers	Creating and distributing informational flyers or pamphlets in key locations (libraries, etc.)	2-4 print runs per year to ensure the public receives updated, relevant information regarding the merger.	1,500	Per pack/ print run
Media & Communications (Year 1-3)	Public Engagement Website/Portal	Maintaining a dedicated website or portal for public feedback and transparency	Ongoing costs for website maintenance, including content updates and hosting, for 3-5 years of the engagement.	5,000	Per year

Activity	Cost Component	Activity Breakdown	Basis of Estimate	Unit cost	Unit
Consulting Fees (Year 1-3)	Strategic Planning	Consultant work on strategic planning, risk assessments, and advising on the merger process	3-5 consultants working 20-30 days per year for strategic advisory.	1,000	Per day per consultant
Consulting Fees (Year 1-3)	Public Engagement Strategy	Creation of detailed public engagement strategy and stakeholder management	2-3 consultants working 10-15 days each per year to design and refine engagement strategy.	1,200	Per day per consultant
Consulting Fees (Year 1-3)	Stakeholder Engagement	Consultants to conduct stakeholder mapping, direct engagement, and conflict resolution	1-2 consultants working 15-20 days per year in meetings with local businesses, public interest groups, and unions.	1,000	Per day per consultant
Project Management (Year 1-3)	Project Management Team	Oversight and coordination of all engagement activities, managing timelines and deliverables	1-2 project managers working 15-30 days per year to coordinate between internal teams, stakeholders, and consultants.	800	Per day per manager
Project Management (Year 1-3)	Coordination & Reporting	Preparing reports, progress tracking, and managing communication between councils	2-3 coordinators working 10-15 days per year to track and report on the progress of the public engagement process.	600	Per day per coordinator

Table 18: **Baseline Assumptions – Post-Vesting Day**

Activity	Cost Component	Activity Breakdown	Basis of Estimate	Unit cost	Unit
Public Meetings / Consultations (Year 4-5)	Public Meetings (Year 4-5)	Hosting follow-up town hall-style meetings to provide updates and finalise plans	5-8 meetings total over 2 years.	3,000	Per meeting
Public Meetings / Consultations (Year 4-5)	Consultation Events (Year 4-5)	Holding focused events to address any remaining concerns or issues	3-5 events per year.	4,000	Per event
Media & Communications (Year 4-5)	Press Releases / Media Coverage (Year 4-5)	Ongoing updates through press releases and media outlets	4-6 releases total in the final two years, as the transition stabilises.	2,500	Per release
Media & Communications (Year 4-5)	Advertising (Social Media, Print, Radio, Year 4-5)	Running follow-up campaigns for public awareness and to address remaining concerns	2-3 campaigns per year for the final two years to ensure smooth transition.	20,000	Per campaign
Consulting Fees (Year 4-5)	Strategic Advisory (Year 4-5)	Ongoing consultancy for finalising transition strategies, process handover, and risk mitigation	1-2 consultants working 10-20 days per year for post-merger stabilisation.	1,000	Per day per consultant
Consulting Fees (Year 4-5)	Stakeholder Engagement (Year 4-5)	Facilitating final engagement with key stakeholders to ensure merger success	1-2 consultants working 10-15 days per year for managing final stages of engagement.	1,000	Per day per consultant
Project Management (Year 4-5)	Project Management (Year 4-5)	Oversight of final transition activities, coordination of follow-up communications	1-2 project managers working 10-20 days per year to ensure smooth transition in the final two years.	800	Per day per manager
Project Management (Year 4-5)	Coordination & Reporting (Year 4-5)	Monitoring project progress and reporting back to stakeholders	2-3 coordinators working 5-10 days per year to handle final reporting and coordination tasks.	600	Per day per coordinator

Detailed assumptions

Public meetings and consultations – No matter what the configuration of new councils in Suffolk, the number of public meetings required both pre-vesting day and post-vesting day will be the same. This is because these will be done on a locality basis rather than on a new council basis. Therefore, the number of meetings will remain the same but the content of these meetings and engagement will look slightly different and the cost will be the same for all configurations.

Media and communications – Pre-vesting day, there will be similar costs for media activity for all configurations in Suffolk. This is because the type of coverage required will be the same. Therefore, the pre-vesting day costs will be the same across all configurations. Post-vesting day, there will be a need for more tailored media and communications activity for each of the new authorities. The purpose of this tailored communication is to ensure there is clarity for the public over the new councils and what changes this will mean to them. Therefore, for every additional council the analysis has added and additional 10% to the costs for post-vesting day activity.

Consulting fees – The approach to pre-vesting day activity means that the assumption is that there will be broadly the same cost requirements for consultant support across all configurations. However, it is anticipated that there will be a need for each new council to create a bespoke strategy and therefore there will be some duplication in consultancy costs. Therefore, the analysis has applied an additional 10% to the strategic planning element of consultancy support for each additional council. This factor has also been applied to post-vesting day costs given the probability that different authorities will take different approaches. The analysis has not factored in the potential for local authorities to share resources post-vesting day.

Project Management – It is anticipated that the costs associated with the project management of public engagement will follow a similar pattern to that of the consulting fees costs. Pre-vesting day, it is anticipated that there will be broadly similar costs as the transition is managed across the whole of Suffolk. Post-vesting day, it is anticipated that each council will be adopting a bespoke approach and therefore the analysis has applied an additional 10% to the cost per additional council.

Programme Management

Managing the transition from the current two-tier system in Suffolk to a unitary model will require significant programme management support to ensure that the transition is well managed and executed. The assumptions with regard to the programme management resources required are set out below. These assumptions are based on a simple transition to a single county unitary. Therefore, as detailed later, the analysis adds additional resources to reflect the complexity and scale of transition to two or three councils in Suffolk.

Programme management resources

This will include:

- **Lead Director –** This role will oversee the whole of the transition programme for local government reorganisation and will need to be an appropriately senior role. Due to the nature of transition and reorganisation required there will need to be a lead director for each newly created council to drive forward and oversee the change required. They will be required in role for 4 years and expect a salary in the region of £150 thousand per annum. This salary would reduce slightly for the three unitary option to reflect the smaller councils being created. The role would oversee and be responsible for all elements of the programme management resource, including the management of external consultancy support.

- **Project Management –** These roles will support the Lead Director in managing the local government reorganisation transition programme. The baseline requirement for this is forecast to be 7x Project Managers for the four year period with an annual cost of £60 thousand per Project Manager. It is anticipated that these costs will increase dependent upon the number of councils created. For a single unitary model this would remain in line with the baseline, the creation of two councils in Suffolk would require resources 1.25x the baseline and three councils 1.50x the baseline requirement. Therefore, across the single unitary model there would be 7x Project Managers, 9x Project Managers for the two councils and 11 for the three councils.

- **Support finance –** To support the transition to a new unitary model in Suffolk, there will be a need for finance resources to create a robust financial platform for the new councils. It is anticipated that, due to the scale and complexity that would be created in splitting the county into separate unitary councils, there will be additional resource required the more councils that are created. The baseline finance support will be 3 roles at an average annual cost of £50 thousand per role and these will be required for a period of 4 years. The increase relating to scale and complexity of creating two and three councils reflects the same assumptions as for Project Management.

- **Support HR –** Local government reorganisation and the creation of new authorities will require HR support to deliver the TUPE of employees to the new authorities. There will also be a requirement for support around redundancy of senior management. It is anticipated that this additional HR support will equate to 3x FTE at £60 thousand per annum for the full three years. As the number of employees requiring TUPE will remain the same across the different configurations in Suffolk, there will be no difference between the different options. However, there is complexity and scale in the disaggregation of the county into multiple unitaries, so the same factor increase on the baseline position used for finance and project management has been used.

- **Support Legal –** There are a number of legal considerations associated with local government reorganisation, many of which are likely to require specific legal capacity and support. Therefore, the assumption is that additional support equivalent to 2x FTE at £60 thousand per annum will be required. It is anticipated that there will be a slight increase in this requirement as the number of authorities created increases due to the increased legal drafting required. Therefore, we have applied the same factor increase as the assumptions above.

- **Policy harmonisation –** a key activity during the transition period is the creation of a unified policy framework for the new council(s) ready for vesting day. This covers harmonised policies across areas such as HR, finance, data etc. Each of the newly created councils will require a Policy Harmonisation Lead to drive forwards the alignment of the policies prior to vesting day as the approach for each newly created council will differ based on different legacy policies and different policy frameworks. Dependent upon the configuration the costs will increase in line with the number of councils created. The assumption is that the Policy Harmonisation Lead will be required for a period of 4 years to cover both pre-vesting day and post-vesting day policy harmonisation and will come at an average cost of £60 thousand per annum.

- **Cultural Alignment –** Defining and embedding the culture of a newly created unitary will be a critical exercise in ensuring that change can happen and old ways of working are not reverted to. This is likely to require external consultant support and will cost in the region of £100 thousand per council.

The exact nature of how these roles are filled will be dependent upon the specific circumstances in Suffolk and there will be a mix of interim roles, redeployed existing staff and external consultancy support. The mix of delivery models will impact upon the costs incurred but this is an indicative cost of the roles and resources required to support the delivery of local government reorganisation in Suffolk. To reflect this uncertainty the analysis has included a 20% uplift on costs across all configurations to reflect the potential for increased costs/additional resources from external consultancy.

Transformation support (post-vesting day)

Once the initial reorganisation has been completed and the new authorities have been created there will be a need for transformation support to assist with the integration of services and the delivery of savings from transformation. There will be some internal resources that can be deployed to support this but the complexity, scale and pace of change required is likely to require external transformation support.

Our estimate at this point is that, for savings from transformation, there will be external transformation support requiring £1 of spend for between every £5 and £10 saved. This is based on the understanding of the costs associated with transformation and reflects a range due to complexities and other variables (i.e. use of internal resources).

Information technology

Experience from previous iterations of local government reorganisation have identified that budgeting for the transition of IT is extremely difficult. This is because there are a range of unexpected costs that can emerge during the transition. Costs are also intrinsically linked to the current IT arrangements across predecessor councils. Therefore, it is difficult to fully anticipate the scale and range of costs associated without an exercise that explores and maps the current IT infrastructure and system and then establishes a roadmap to a desired operating model. Based on an understanding of the activities and costs associated with IT transition in local government reorganisation the analysis includes an estimate of the likely costs involved. These costs have been subject to a sensitivity analysis with a range presented to reflect the inherent uncertainty around the actual costs.

Establishing a baseline

Understanding the current IT environment across local government in Suffolk is critical to informing the estimates and assumptions around potential transition costs. From initial analysis it is important to note the following;

- Suffolk County Council provide virtually all IT services for Babergh and Mid-Suffolk. Therefore, there is already alignment between the IT systems and processes of these councils and also an embedded methodology for bringing IT systems together at a single county level from individual districts.
- All Suffolk councils are on Office 365. This means that all councils are on the same platform which will mean that the transition required from an operating system will not be significant.
- Across Suffolk there are different systems in place across areas such as finance, revenues and benefits and other key systems. There are also different approaches in place around devices. These will be key considerations and activity areas for the transition associated with local government reorganisation
- Digital maturity will vary across Suffolk and will mean that different organisations are starting from different positions.

Identifying transition costs

Based on the activities required to deliver the transition of IT into the newly created authorities, the following activities and costs are likely to be required. These costs and activities will take place both pre-vesting day and post-vesting day.

Overall programme delivery

Programme management – this includes a Programme Director for IT transition across Suffolk, supported by Programme and Project Managers. The Programme Director should be of appropriate seniority to ensure that IT transition has the required profile to be delivered effectively. The role of the programme management function, supported by the technical expertise and consultancy support, will be to provide strong governance and leadership to the process and to drive forward a coherent change programme. These roles can be taken from existing resources but, given the need to continue with business as usual activity, the cost reflects the potential need for backfill arrangements. The Programme and Project Manager costs are included in the Technical Expertise costs below. The assumption on the costs of a Programme Director is £100 thousand per annum (plus on-costs) for a two-year period.

Technical expertise – Delivering the required change programme for IT will require appropriate technical expertise and specialism to inform the change. This includes roles such as Systems Analysts, Cyber Analysts, Systems Engineers, Data Architects and Data Engineers. These resources are likely to be a mixture of internal and external resources with an associated need to backfill roles. Suffolk County Council's IT lead has provided an estimate of an annual cost of £1.391 million over a two-year period to cover these requirements.

External consultancy support – The process of mapping the current arrangements and identifying a desired operating model is likely to need external consultancy support. Investing in these resources will be critical to provide capacity, expertise, impartiality and governance. The process will need to be owned by the local authorities involved but external support will assist effective execution of transition. Based on external support costs to deliver complex IT integration and transition it is anticipated that the costs of this will be between £0.258 million for a three-month exercise and £0.345 million for a four-month exercise. This is the estimated cost for a single county unitary.

Were there to be multiple new unitary authorities then there would be an increase in costs to reflect the complexity.

The first step required in the IT transition is the identification of the direction of travel and the plan required to deliver on this change. This will include the identification and agreement of the preferred systems to be implemented, the prioritisation of this and the future direction of IT in the newly created council(s). Once this has been articulated and agreed the next stage will be executing the transition. Given the diverse nature of systems, infrastructure and contracts in place across Suffolk it is likely that this will run beyond vesting day. Therefore, there may be a period where parallel systems are being run across the new councils. This will create complexities that will need to be managed to ensure strong data management and also strong security.

The costs associated with delivering the transition include:

Systems integration

1. **Creating a consistent front-end –** Alongside a focus of 'safe and legal' from day one, there should also be a focus on presenting a consistent front-end for public and staff. Therefore, resources will need to be invested in website development and integrated staff functions such as email.

2. **Data cleansing –** Cleansing the data in predecessor systems is an important step before moving to a single IT system. There will be resources required to cleanse this data.

3. **Data migration –** Once data has been cleansed and a preferred system has been agreed, then there will be costs associated with the migration of data.

4. **Professional services support –** The procurement of new systems or the transition to single systems from current applications will require professional services support from providers. This will come at a cost and there is also the risk that the support will be in short supply due to the scale of local government reorganisation taking place at the same time.

5. **Archiving –** Old systems will need to be archived to retain access to data for reporting purposes.

6. **Procurement/contract costs –** Where decisions are made to procure new systems there will be costs associated with the procurement. There may also be costs associated with exiting contracts if this approach is the preferred option.

Infrastructure alignment

1. **Servers and cloud storage –** There is a common Wide Area Network across Suffolk with the county council as the anchor tenant. This is currently on a long term contract. Under a single unitary this arrangement can continue but under the two and three configurations there may be a need to change these arrangements which would come at a cost.

2. **Cyber-security –** ensuring that systems are secure and strong cyber-security arrangements are in place will require investment of resources.

People

1. **Skills and experience –** ensuring a clear and fair split of existing resources into the newly created council(s) to assist with the transition journey. This is only applicable for the two and three unitary options where there will be a disaggregation from the county level.

2. **Culture and change management –** Resources will need to be invested to embed the right culture within the newly created IT function(s).

3. **Training –** There will be time and investment of resources required to upskill and train staff with the use of new systems.

Articulating the exact cost of IT transition in Suffolk as a result of local government reorganisation is extremely difficult due to the number of variables that will influence the cost. The exact costs will become much clearer once an initial exercise has been completed to map existing systems and set out a roadmap for the IT structure of the new council(s). In order to provide an indication of the potential range of costs for IT transition in Suffolk the analysis is based on some broad assumptions around the types of activities/costs (detailed above) and the costs that could be incurred to deliver this.

The headline assumption is that the integration of IT systems into a single unitary council will be simpler, and therefore cheaper, than the disaggregation of IT services into a multiple unitary model. Therefore, the analysis assumes a 15% uplift on the baseline costs for a two unitary and a three unitary model. The analysis assumes that there will not be much difference between the costs associated with the two and three unitary models.

These costs are summarised in Table 19.

Table 19: Estimated IT transition costs

Cost Category	Type of cost	Baseline - Lower	Baseline - Upper	Implementation Period
Programme Delivery – Programme Director	Annual	£0.135m	£0.135m	2 years
Programme Delivery – Technical Expertise	Annual	£2.782m	£2.782m	2 years
External Consultancy Support - Diagnostics	One-off	£0.258m	£0.345m	1 year
Systems Integration	One-off	£7.500m	£12.500m	4 years
Infrastructure Alignment	One-off			4 years
People	One-off			4 years

Rationale for cost basis
A number of previous business cases for ERP implementation projects have been reviewed, along with previous iterations of local government reorganisation to understand the potential IT costs. This has been supplemented with specific insights from technology consultants and IT leads from Suffolk County Council. This has enabled the development of a broad range of costs associated with the different activities involved (i.e. data migration and licensing). As previously noted a more detailed diagnostic and scoping exercise will be required at the start of the transition period to better develop a cost profile for the transition of IT services.

Predecessor councils

In the first year post-vesting day, there will be some residual costs associated with the predecessor councils that will need to be considered as part of the transition costs. These have been identified as:

1. **Audit fees for final year of operation –** each of the predecessor councils will require an external audit of the final year of operation. This cost will be offset by the external audit fees of the new council not being incurred until the second year of operation. The audit fees for the final year of operation have been taken from the PSAA 2024/25 schedule of external audit fees. The cost of this will be the same across all configurations in Suffolk.

2. **Resources for financial closedown –** Alongside the establishment of the new council(s) from a financial perspective there will be an associated requirement to complete the financial closedown of the predecessor councils. The initial assumption is that these resources will come from the existing resources within finance functions. However, there is the risk that between now and vesting day there is a loss of key financial personnel and there will be a need to bring in external resources. For this analysis no additional costs to support financial closedown have been attributed to any of the configurations but the requirement for this must be considered in the overall plan for Suffolk.

New council

In establishing the new council(s) rebranding and communications will be an important activity. For each of the newly created council(s) there will be a need for a new brand and the associated work required to replace branding of previous local councils. The assumption is that individual council(s) will appoint external support to complete this rebranding which means there will be additional costs for each new unitary council created. Alongside this rebrand there will also be a need for the changes to signage and livery to reflect the new brand. The assumption is that a similar level of costs will be incurred per unitary council created and the value is based on benchmarking of other local authorities that have gone through local government reorganisation.

Shadow authority

Prior to vesting day a shadow authority will also be created for each of the newly created unitary councils in Suffolk. The purpose of a shadow authority is to support with transition planning, establish a budget and financial processes, establish democratic oversight and appoint key leadership roles. Shadow elections will take place c.12 months prior to vesting day and the newly elected members will appoint senior roles to support management of the transition. The costs associated with the shadow authority are as follows:

- **Member allowances –** Upon conclusion of the elections to the shadow authority, the new authorities will have appointed members who will receive an allowance.
- **Allowances for leader and cabinet executive –** These are the critical roles in the shadow authorities and receive enhanced allowances.
- **Interim statutory roles –** We anticipate that each of the shadow authorities will have the following senior roles in place; Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 officer, Director of Adult Social Care, Director of Children's Services and Director of Place. Based on the analysis of the savings from senior management these roles are considered 'Tier 1' and 'Tier 2' roles. Based on the timeline from shadow elections to vesting day, it is anticipated that these roles will be in place for circa three months before vesting day and we have reflected this amount of costs to be considered during transition. The costs are based on expected costs of senior management for the new authorities.
- **Recruitment costs for senior officers –** Ensuring that the right individuals are appointed to these key senior roles will be a critical success factor for the newly created council(s). Therefore, the analysis includes recruitment costs associated with these roles. These costs are estimated at between 5% and 10% of the salary costs of these roles and will be incurred during the transition period.

Contingency

Because of the uncertainties associated with the costs around local government reorganisation, and in order to be prudent there is the need to also include a contingency line in the costs of transition. A contingency of 10% of transition costs has been included. This has been split across the period to reflect the uncertain nature of how costs will be incurred during transition.

Total transition costs

Table 20 provides a summary of the different transition costs incurred.

Table 20: Transition Costs

Transition cost	1 Unitary configuration	2 Unitary configuration	3 Unitary configuration
Public Engagement	£1.168m	£1.268m	£1.372m
Programme Management	£6.048m	£8.100m	£9.790m
Transformation	£3.304m	£1.681m	£1.120m
Information Technology	£15.897m	£18.282m	£18.282m
Predecessor Council	£1.311m	£1.311m	£1.311m
New Council	£0.395m	£0.790m	£1.185m
Shadow Authority	£2.666m	£3.077m	£3.492m
Sub-Total	**£30.789m**	**£34.509m**	**£36.552m**
Contingency	£3.082m	£3.451m	£3.654m
Total	**£33.871m**	**£37.960m**	**£40.206m**

Phasing of transition costs

Due to the nature of the local government reorganisation process, transition costs are going to be incurred both pre-vesting day and post-vesting day. These costs will be incurred well in advance of any savings being delivered as transition activity will be critical in successfully executing local government reorganisation, giving the newly created council(s) the opportunity to deliver potential efficiencies.

The assumptions on the phasing of transition costs are as follows:

- **Public engagement –** c.75% of the costs will be incurred pre-vesting day due to the scale of activity required to consult and communicate the upcoming changes. The remaining costs will be incurred in the first two years post-vesting day as the activity levels are reduced but there remains a need to continue the communication with the public as the changes take effect.
- **Programme management –** Effective programme management of the transition of local government reorganisation is critical and therefore this activity will act as a bridge between pre-vesting day and post-vesting day. The level of resource required to support programme management will remain relatively consistent across the period with a need to stand the support up quickly prior to vesting day and then unwind the support over a period of circa two years post-vesting day.

- **Transformation –** Costs associated with supporting the transformation activity of the newly created unitary council(s) will predominantly be incurred post-vesting day. This is because this activity will be critical in supporting the integration, maturity and subsequent transformation of the services created. Therefore, these costs have been phased over the period from vesting day.

- **IT –** Transition costs associated with IT will be incurred both before vesting day and post-vesting day. It will be important to quickly stand-up an IT transition programme for Suffolk and this will run into the new council(s) to establish and embed the IT systems, processes, infrastructure and operating model.

- **Predecessor council –** Transition costs associated with the external audit and financial closedown of the predecessor councils will be incurred in year 1 post-vesting day. This is because this is the period where the external audit will take place and also when there is likely to be a need for additional financial resources to support closedown.

- **New council –** The rebranding and comms associated with the new council(s) will be incurred over the period prior to vesting day and also post-vesting day. This is because the branding exercise will need to be part of the transition activities and then the activities associated with updating the livery and signage of the new council(s) can take place post-vesting day.

  The costs associated with the external audit of the new council(s) will commence from the 2nd year of operation and will be an ongoing cost. A cultural alignment exercise for the newly created council(s) is likely to take place during the first year of operation.

- **Shadow authority –** All costs associated with the shadow authority will be incurred in the final year pre-vesting day as this is when all the activity will occur.

The phasing of transition costs will have the same profile across all configurations in Suffolk and are set out in Tables 21, 22 and 23 below for the one council, two council and three council options.

Table 21: Phasing of transition costs – one council

	Pre-Vesting Day			Post-Vesting Day					Total
Transition Cost	**2025/26**	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**2030/31**	**2031/32**	**2032/33**	
Public Engagement	£0.000m	£0.444m	£0.444m	£0.140m	£0.140m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£1.168m**
Programme Management	£0.000m	£1.210m	£1.210m	£1.210m	£1.210m	£1.208m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£6.048m**
Transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.661m	£0.661m	£0.661m	£0.661m	£0.660m	£0.000m	**£3.304m**
Information Technology	£0.345m	£1.661m	£4.787m	£3.125m	£3.125m	£2.854m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£15.897m**
Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£1.311m**
New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.395m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£0.395m**
Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.666m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£2.666m**
Contingency	£0.000m	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.310m	**£3.082m**
Total transition costs	**£0.345m**	**£3.777m**	**£10.230m**	**£7.304m**	**£5.598m**	**£5.185m**	**£1.122m**	**£0.310m**	**£33.871m**

Table 22: Phasing of transition costs – two councils

	Pre-Vesting Day			Post-Vesting Day					Total
Transition Cost	**2025/26**	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**2030/31**	**2031/32**	**2032/33**	
Public Engagement	£0.000m	£0.482m	£0.482m	£0.152m	£0.152m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£1.268m**
Programme Management	£0.000m	£1.620m	£1.620m	£1.620m	£1.620m	£1.620m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£8.100m**
Transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.336m	£0.336m	£0.336m	£0.336m	£0.337m	£0.000m	**£1.681m**
Information Technology	£0.397m	£1.910m	£5.505m	£3.594m	£3.594m	£3.282m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£18.282m**
Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£1.311m**
New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.790m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£0.790m**
Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.077m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£3.077m**
Contingency	£0.000m	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.343m	**£3.451m**
Total transition costs	**£0.397m**	**£4.530m**	**£11.538m**	**£8.321m**	**£6.220m**	**£5.756m**	**£0.855m**	**£0.343m**	**£37.960m**

Table 23: Phasing of transition costs – three councils

	Pre-Vesting Day			Post-Vesting Day					Total
Transition Cost	**2025/26**	**2026/27**	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**2030/31**	**2031/32**	**2032/33**	
Public Engagement	£0.000m	£0.521m	£0.521m	£0.165m	£0.165m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£1.372m**
Programme Management	£0.000m	£1.958m	£1.958m	£1.958m	£1.958m	£1.958m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£9.790m**
Transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.224m	£0.224m	£0.224m	£0.224m	£0.224m	£0.000m	**£1.120m**
Information Technology	£0.397m	£1.910m	£5.505m	£3.594m	£3.594m	£3.282m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£18.282m**
Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£1.311m**
New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.185m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£1.185m**
Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.492m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£3.492m**
Contingency	£0.000m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.366m	**£3.654m**
Total transition costs	**£0.397m**	**£4.937m**	**£12.248m**	**£8.985m**	**£6.489m**	**£6.012m**	**£0.772m**	**£0.366m**	**£40.206m**

Redundancy costs - methodology

Senior management
The assumptions around redundancy costs are that the only redundancies required prior to vesting day will relate to the senior management changes that local government reorganisation will deliver. The approach to calculating redundancies is as follows:

Senior Management FTE reduction x cost of redundancy

The assumptions that were feed into this calculation were as follows:

- Senior Management FTE reduction = current Senior Management FTE less proposed Senior Management FTE in new council(s)
- Cost of redundancy was calculated using two components:
    - **Pension Strain costs –** these arise when employees aged 55+ are able to access the Local Government Pension Scheme early and at an unreduced level. The council must pay the pension fund the costs of early access. The exact costs are dependent upon age, service, salary and actuarial assumptions. For the purpose of this work two scenarios for Pension Strain costs were used across three periods of service (10, 20 and 30 years) and an average figure was calculated, these were: (i) Age 58, £85,000 salary; and (ii) Age 58, £150,000 salary.
- **Redundancy cost –** the following calculation was used to calculate contractual redundancy pay for senior officers in Suffolk

Years of Service x Enhancement Factor x Weekly Pay

- **Years of service –** Three variations on years of service (10, 15 and 20 years) were used with 15 years selected as the baseline position
- **Enhancement Factor –** an Enhancement Factor of 2 was used as this is the upper end of the rate used by most local authorities and was deemed most prudent
- **Weekly Pay –** This is based on the average weekly pay across staff employed across the Suffolk authorities.

Other staff
A similar approach has been used across both service delivery savings and enabling services. An element of the saving has been identified as being a reduction in FTE. The same approach around contractual redundancy and pension strain has been used, with average pay across all local councils used as the denominator.

Assumptions

The baseline modelling has assumed that 50% of the senior management made redundant will be eligible for Pension Strain. This is due to the age profile of senior management across Suffolk. As part of this a natural attrition rate of 15% has been assumed for the posts that will be made redundant through enabling services and service delivery transformation.

Redundancy costs - total

Tables 24, 25 and 26 show the total redundancy costs and their associated phasing across one, two and three councils respectively.redundant through enabling services and service delivery transformation.

Table 24: Phased redundancy costs – one council

Single Unitary	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					Total
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	
Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£10.153m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£10.153m**
Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.226m	£1.226m	£0.000m	**£2.452m**
Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.371m	£0.371m	£0.000m	**£0.742m**
Total Redundancy Cost	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£10.153m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£1.597m**	**£1.597m**	**£0.000m**	**£13.347m**

Table 25: Phased redundancy costs – two councils

Two Unitary	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					Total
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	
Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£8.641m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£8.641m**
Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.590m	£0.590m	£0.000m	**£1.180m**
Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.029m	£0.029m	£0.000m	**£0.058m**
Total Redundancy Cost	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£8.641m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.619m**	**£0.619m**	**£0.000m**	**£9.879m**

Table 26: Phased redundancy costs – three councils

Three Unitary	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					Total
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	
Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£6.480m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£6.480m**
Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.221m	£0.221m	£0.000m	**£0.442m**
Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£0.000m**
Total Redundancy Cost	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£6.480m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.221m**	**£0.221m**	**£0.000m**	**£6.922m**

Disaggregation costs

Disaggregation costs are those costs that will be incurred in the two and three unitary configurations through splitting up services that are currently delivered at a county level. The splitting up of services currently delivered at a county level will lead to duplication of costs that are avoided in a single unitary configuration.

To calculate the disaggregation costs in Suffolk the following approach has been followed:

1. Material budgets that are delivered by Suffolk County Council and that would need to be disaggregated under a multiple unitary model have been identified. This included:
   - Adult Social Care
   - Children and Young People
   - Highways and Transport
   - Waste Management
   - Public Health
   - Trading Standards
   - Coroners
2. Working with the finance leads and the service areas the spend in these budget lines was allocated into the following three categories:
   - **Current budget –** this spend will be disaggregated across the newly created council(s) at its current level and the creation of multiple unitary councils will not impact on the cost of delivering these services. These budgets will be split between the newly created council(s) based on where the activity will occur.
   - **Current budget plus overhead –** this spend will be disaggregated across the newly created council(s) and does not require any duplication. However, due to the nature of the service there is likely to be an additional cost to the overall operation of the spend area (for example, additional management oversight and/or administrative costs)
   - **Duplicated per council –** this spend would be duplicated across each of the newly created council(s). These services require duplication because they are needed to ensure that the service can be delivered, no matter the size of the area being served. An example of this is the ASC management team required to oversee the delivery of services.
3. For the non-social care and highways services, a rationale was developed to understand why costs fall into certain categories.
4. It is anticipated that these costs will be incurred on an annual basis from vesting day as new structures would need to be put into place to manage and deliver these services from day 1.

Table 27: Phased disaggregation costs – one council

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					Total
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	
Adult Social Care	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£0.000m**
Children's and Young People	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£0.000m**
Highways and Transport	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£0.000m**
Other Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	**£0.000m**
Total disaggregation costs	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**

Table 28: Phased disaggregation costs – two council

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					Total
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	
Adult Social Care	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.391m	£3.391m	£3.391m	£3.391m	£3.391m	**£16.955m**
Children's and Young People	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£4.808m	£4.808m	£4.808m	£4.808m	£4.808m	**£24.040m**
Highways and Transport	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.195m	£3.195m	£3.195m	£3.195m	£3.195m	**£15.975m**
Other Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.123m	£2.123m	£2.123m	£2.123m	£2.123m	**£10.615m**
Total disaggregation costs	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£13.517m**	**£13.517m**	**£13.517m**	**£13.517m**	**£13.517m**	**£67.585m**

Table 29: Phased disaggregation costs – three councils

	Pre-vesting day			Post-vesting day					Total
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	
Adult Social Care	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£6.782m	£6.782m	£6.782m	£6.782m	£6.782m	**£33.910m**
Children's and Young People	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£9.617m	£9.617m	£9.617m	£9.617m	£9.617m	**£48.085m**
Highways and Transport	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£6.390m	£6.390m	£6.390m	£6.390m	£6.390m	**£31.950m**
Other Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£4.245m	£4.245m	£4.245m	£4.245m	£4.245m	**£21.225m**
Total disaggregation costs	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£0.000m**	**£27.034m**	**£27.034m**	**£27.034m**	**£27.034m**	**£27.034m**	**£135.170m**

Other considerations for disaggregation

Impact on 'Fit for the Future' transformation programme

The core purpose of the 'Fit for the Future' transformation programme is to deliver change for Suffolk County Council and put the council in the strongest position around digital, service delivery, customer access, workforce and culture. As the transformation programme is working on a sprint basis, there are no immediate impacts of a two or three unitary configuration. However, were this to be the outcome there would be activity that would need to be reviewed, especially around IT investment, and this could result in savings not being delivered that otherwise would have were a single unitary council the preferred option.

Pay harmonisation

The harmonisation of pay post-vesting day is an important consideration as there will need to be a process by which pay scales and bandings are harmonised. This is to ensure that people are paid fairly and also to mitigate against any potential equal pay risks. There have been previous instances where pay harmonisation has been a significant issue following local government reorganisation. This is a risk that needs to be considered as part of the transition plan and is not a direct cost associated with local government reorganisation. Therefore, the numbers shown in Table 30 below have not been included in the overall financial analysis but are presented here to illustrate the potential scale of the risk.

To model the potential scale of the pay harmonisation risk the following steps were followed:

1. From the Pay Policy Statements of the individual councils the average pay across Suffolk was calculated.
2. Based on establishment data used to inform the Suffolk baseline it was possible to estimate the number of FTE for each council.
3. For Suffolk County Council FTE this was disaggregated across the districts and borough on the basis of the same percentage as the share of total expenditure of districts and borough from the Suffolk baseline.
4. The impact that harmonising to the maximum average pay and the average pay was then modelled for each newly created council across all configurations. This gives an indication of the potential financial impact of pay harmonisation, noting that individual approaches will be taken by each of the newly created councils to mitigate the financial impact. However, this is an issue that cannot be ignored during transition.

Table 30: **Potential pay harmonisation costs**

	Single Unitary configuration - Max	Single Unitary configuration - Average	2 Unitary configuration – Max	2 Unitary configuration - Average	3 Unitary configuration - Max	3 Unitary configuration - Average
Potential pay harmonisation costs	£16.962m	-£3.840m	£10.535m	-£2.709m	£8.245m	-£1.931m

The pay harmonisation risk is the greatest for the single unitary configuration as, under this configuration, there would be the largest number of employees impacted as this would create a larger council. Under the two and three configurations there is a lower risk but this risk would be unequally split between the different configurations. For example, in a three-unitary configuration there is only a pay harmonisation risk for the East Suffolk and South Suffolk configurations. Any disaggregation of the historic district and borough boundaries as proposed under the three unitary configuration will also increase the pay harmonisation risk.

Table 31: Financial analysis summary – one council

	Sub-Category	Item	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Savings	Savings from reorganisation	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£5.963m
		Democratic services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.945m
		External Audit	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.513m
	Savings from Transformation	Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Other	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Savings Sub-Total		£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£9.421m
Costs	Transition Costs	Public Engagement	£0.000m	£0.444m	£0.444m	£0.140m
		Programme Management	£0.000m	£1.210m	£1.210m	£1.210m
		Transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.661m	£0.661m
		Information Technology	£0.345m	£1.661m	£4.787m	£3.125m
		Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m
		New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.395m
		Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.666m	£0.000m
		Contingency	£0.000m	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.462m
	Redundancy Costs	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£10.153m	£0.000m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Disaggregation Costs	Disaggregation Costs	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Costs Sub-Total		£0.345m	£3.777m	£20.383m	£7.304m
	Total		-£0.345m	-£3.777m	-£20.383m	£2.117m
	Cumulative		-£0.345m	-£4.122m	-£24.505m	-£22.388m

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	Sub-Category	Item	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Savings	Savings from reorganisation	Senior Management	£5.963m	£5.963m	£5.963m	£5.963m	£29.815m
		Democratic services	£2.945m	£2.945m	£2.945m	£2.945m	£14.725m
		External Audit	£0.513m	£0.513m	£0.513m	£0.513m	£2.565m
	Savings from Transformation	Service Delivery	£0.000m	£4.492m	£4.492m	£4.492m	£13.476m
		Enabling Services	£3.392m	£7.649m	£7.649m	£7.649m	£26.339m
		Other	£0.000m	£2.146m	£18.175m	£18.175m	£38.496m
	Savings Sub-Total		£12.813m	£23.708m	£39.737m	£39.737m	£125.416m
Costs	Transition Costs	Public Engagement	£0.140m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.168m
		Programme Management	£1.210m	£1.208m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£6.048m
		Transformation	£0.661m	£0.661m	£0.660m	£0.000m	£3.304m
		Information Technology	£3.125m	£2.854m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£15.897m
		Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m
		New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.395m
		Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.666m
		Contingency	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.462m	£0.310m	£3.082m
	Redundancy Costs	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£10.153m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£1.226m	£1.226m	£0.000m	£2.452m
		Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.371m	£0.371m	£0.000m	£0.742m
	Disaggregation Costs	Disaggregation Costs	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Costs Sub-Total		£5.598m	£6.782m	£2.719m	£0.310m	£47.218m
	Total		£7.215m	£16.926m	£37.018m	£39.427m	£78.198m
	Cumulative		-£15.173m	£1.753m	£38.771m	£78.198m	£78.198m

Table 32: Financial analysis summary – two councils

	Sub-Category	Item	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Savings	Savings from reorganisation	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.892m
		Democratic services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.589m
		External Audit	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.319m
	Savings from Transformation	Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Other	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Savings Sub-Total		£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£5.800m
Costs	Transition Costs	Public Engagement	£0.000m	£0.482m	£0.482m	£0.152m
		Programme Management	£0.000m	£1.620m	£1.620m	£1.620m
		Transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.336m	£0.336m
		Information Technology	£0.397m	£1.910m	£5.505m	£3.594m
		Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m
		New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.790m
		Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.077m	£0.000m
		Contingency	£0.000m	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.518m
	Redundancy Costs	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£8.641m	£0.000m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Disaggregation Costs	Disaggregation Costs	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£13.517m
	Costs Sub-Total		£0.397m	£4.530m	£20.179m	£21.838m
	Total		-£0.397m	-£4.530m	-£20.179m	-£16.038m
	Cumulative		-£0.397m	-£4.927m	-£25.106m	-£41.144m

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	Sub-Category	Item	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Savings	Savings from reorganisation	Senior Management	£2.892m	£2.892m	£2.892m	£2.892m	£14.460m
		Democratic services	£2.589m	£2.589m	£2.589m	£2.589m	£12.945m
		External Audit	£0.319m	£0.319m	£0.319m	£0.319m	£1.595m
	Savings from Transformation	Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.352m	£0.352m	£0.352m	£1.056m
		Enabling Services	£1.688m	£3.379m	£3.379m	£3.379m	£11.825m
		Other	£0.000m	£2.326m	£11.593m	£11.593m	£25.512m
	Savings Sub-Total		£7.488m	£11.857m	£21.124m	£21.124m	£67.393m
Costs	Transition Costs	Public Engagement	£0.152m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.268m
		Programme Management	£1.620m	£1.620m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£8.100m
		Transformation	£0.336m	£0.336m	£0.337m	£0.000m	£1.681m
		Information Technology	£3.594m	£3.282m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£18.282m
		Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m
		New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.790m
		Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.077m
		Contingency	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.518m	£0.343m	£3.451m
	Redundancy Costs	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£8.641m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.590m	£0.590m	£0.000m	£1.180m
		Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.029m	£0.029m	£0.000m	£0.058m
	Disaggregation Costs	Disaggregation Costs	£13.517m	£13.517m	£13.517m	£13.517m	£67.585m
	Costs Sub-Total		£19.737m	£19.892m	£14.991m	£13.860m	£115.424m
	Total		-£12.249m	-£8.035m	£6.133m	£7.264m	-£48.031m
	Cumulative		-£53.393m	-£61.428m	-£55.295m	-£48.031m	-£48.031m

Table 33: Financial analysis summary – three councils

	Sub-Category	Item	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Savings	Savings from reorganisation	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.429m
		Democratic services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£2.232m
		External Audit	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	-£0.117m
	Savings from Transformation	Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Other	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Savings Sub-Total		£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.686m
Costs	Transition Costs	Public Engagement	£0.000m	£0.521m	£0.521m	£0.165m
		Programme Management	£0.000m	£1.958m	£1.958m	£1.958m
		Transformation	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.224m	£0.224m
		Information Technology	£0.397m	£1.910m	£5.505m	£3.594m
		Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m
		New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.185m
		Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.492m	£0.000m
		Contingency	£0.000m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.548m
	Redundancy Costs	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£6.480m	£0.000m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
		Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Disaggregation Costs	Disaggregation Costs	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£27.034m
	Costs Sub-Total		£0.397m	£4.937m	£18.728m	£36.019m
	Total		-£0.397m	-£4.937m	-£18.728m	-£34.333m
	Cumulative		-£0.397m	-£5.334m	-£24.062m	-£58.395m

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	Sub-Category	Item	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	Total
Savings	Savings from reorganisation	Senior Management	-£0.429m	-£0.429m	-£0.429m	-£0.429m	-£2.145m
		Democratic services	£2.232m	£2.232m	£2.232m	£2.232m	£11.160m
		External Audit	-£0.117m	-£0.117m	-£0.117m	-£0.117m	-£0.585m
	Savings from Transformation	Service Delivery	£0.000m	-£0.354m	-£0.354m	-£0.354m	-£1.062m
		Enabling Services	£0.371m	£0.743m	£0.743m	£0.743m	£2.600m
		Other	£0.000m	£2.625m	£12.191m	£12.191m	£27.007m
	Savings Sub-Total		£2.057m	£4.700m	£14.266m	£14.266m	£36.975m
Costs	Transition Costs	Public Engagement	£0.165m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.372m
		Programme Management	£1.958m	£1.958m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£9.790m
		Transformation	£0.224m	£0.224m	£0.224m	£0.000m	£1.120m
		Information Technology	£3.594m	£3.282m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£18.282m
		Predecessor Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.311m
		New Council	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£1.185m
		Shadow Authority	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£3.492m
		Contingency	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.366m	£3.654m
	Redundancy Costs	Senior Management	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£6.480m
		Enabling Services	£0.000m	£0.548m	£0.548m	£0.000m	£0.442m
		Service Delivery	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m	£0.000m
	Disaggregation Costs	Disaggregation Costs	£27.034m	£27.034m	£27.034m	£27.034m	£135.170m
	Costs Sub-Total		£33.523m	£33.267m	£28.027m	£27.400m	£182.298m
	Total		-£31.466m	-£28.567m	-£13.761m	-£13.134m	-£145.323m
	Cumulative		-£89.861m	-£118.428m	-£132.189m	-£145.323m	-£145.323m

Appendix eight

Financial sustainability considerations

The financial sustainability analysis undertaken looks at the potential imbalances created in the two and three unitary models as, although local government reorganisation will deliver savings to support the wider financial resilience of local government in Suffolk, it will not solve the financial challenges facing the sector.

Adult social care and children's social care disaggregation

Given the scale of expenditure on social care, this analysis has specifically focused on the financial sustainability of the proposed three-unitary council model for Suffolk by accounting for variations in social care spend across the county and to compare this with apportioned council tax income.

The challenge in undertaking this analysis is that the proposed three unitary council boundaries are based on civil parish geographies and data on care purchasing, which represents a significant proportion of the social care budget, was available at Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA) level for both Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children and Young People (CYP) services. Civil parish geographies do not align neatly with MSOA boundaries. This misalignment required the use of modelling assumptions to allocate MSOAs that span multiple parish areas and vice versa.

Two methodologies **(a)** and **(b)** were applied to allocate MSOA-level social care spend to the proposed three unitary councils, both using population weighting.

a. **Population-weighted centroid method –** Each MSOA was assigned to one of the proposed three unitaries based on the location of its population-weighted centroid. This is a single geographic point that represents the average location of a population within a specific area and gives more weighting to areas with higher population densities.

   This method provides a straightforward allocation but may be less accurate for larger MSOAs where the centroid does not reflect the full spatial distribution. Under this method, each MSOA's spend was allocated entirely to the unitary authority in which its centroid falls. ASC and CYP spend were aggregated separately to produce a ratio of spend between the proposed unitaries. These ratios were then applied to total ASC and CYP budgets to estimate adjusted social care expenditure per new unitary authority, reflecting current demand distribution.

b. **Aggregation method –** Parishes were matched to wards, assuming even population splits where parishes spanned multiple wards (e.g. 100% to one ward if fully contained, 50% if split between two). Parish populations were apportioned to wards based on these assumptions and aggregated to calculate the proportion of total population in each ward falling within each new unitary authority.

   MSOAs were matched to wards using an Office of National Statistics ('ONS') best-fit lookup, and assumed ward-level population proportions, forming each new unitary council, were applied to ASC and CYP care-purchasing spend. ASC and CYP spend were aggregated separately to produce ratios of spend between the proposed new unitaries. These percentages were then applied to total ASC and CYP budgets to estimate adjusted social care expenditure for each new unitary council, reflecting current demand distribution. This method offers an alternative to the population-weighted centroid approach, reflecting a more equal distribution of overlapping areas rather than centroid-based assignment.

Together, these two methods provide a range of possible allocations and help illustrate the sensitivity of the analysis to boundary complexities and assumptions required when working with imperfectly aligned datasets. These allocations were added to the overall expenditure taken from the baseline data used for the financial analysis to calculate an ASC and CYP adjusted expenditure figure. This has been compared to the baseline to assess the impact that a more accurate allocation of ASC and CYP expenditure has on the balance between the three unitary councils proposed. The baseline expenditure figure is based on allocation of spend based on each relevant population. The data used to inform this analysis are the 2021 census data as this is the most suitable parish level data available.

Council income was estimated based on the distribution of households across the three proposed unitary councils. Household counts were derived from 2021 Census data, which is available in a best-fit lookup to civil parishes. Income was apportioned to each unitary council based on these household proportions.

The allocation of social care spend is based on the MSOA that represents the current location of the customer.

Table 1: Allocation of social care spend and council tax income

Expenditure ASC Adjusted % split	Western	Eastern	Southern
Method A	27%	37%	35%
Method B	25%	43%	32%

Expenditure - CYP Adjusted % split	Western	Eastern	Southern
Method A	38%	35%	27%
Method B	36%	40%	24%

	Western	Eastern	Southern
Council Tax income % split	33%	33%	34%

Baseline	Western	Eastern	Southern
Other Expenditure	£136.800m	£145.197m	£138.976m
Adult Social Care Expenditure	£124.999m	£126.258m	£120.485m
Children's Social Care Expenditure	£53.585m	£48.328m	£54.265m
Total Expenditure	£315.384m	£319.783m	£313.726m
Council Tax Income	£166.258m	£186.313m	£164.358m
Council Tax as a % of Total Expenditure	53%	58%	52%

Method A	Western	Eastern	Southern
Total Expenditure	£296.518m	£337.405m	£311.254m
Council Tax Income	£166.258m	£186.313m	£164.387m
Council Tax as a % of Total Expenditure	56%	55%	53%

Method B	Western	Eastern	Southern
Total Expenditure	£286.381m	£367.174m	£295.338m
Council Tax Income	£166.258m	£186.313m	£164.358m
Council Tax as a % of Total Expenditure	58%	51%	56%

External debt

Using a methodology that splits debt on a population basis, it is possible to assess the level of external debt across the three configurations in Suffolk. For the three unitary configuration population has been distributed on a parish level basis to reflect the proposed changes to existing district and borough boundaries.

Based on the distribution of debt across the proposed configurations in Suffolk, the two and three unitary configurations show that there will be an imbalance in the distribution of debt. In a two unitary configuration the East has c.6% more of the total debt across Suffolk. An imbalance is also shown in the three unitary model with the Eastern unitary having c.37% of total debt across Suffolk, 8% higher than the Western unitary. The creation of imbalance in debt allocation across the proposed unitary councils does present a risk to financial sustainability. In a single unitary council the whole debt of Suffolk will sit in a single council.

Table 2: External debt

One council

Proposed Unitary Council	External Debt (£m)	Percentage of External Debt across Suffolk (%)
Single Suffolk Unitary	£1,222.398m	100.00%

Two councils

Proposed Unitary Council	External Debt (£m)	Percentage of External Debt across Suffolk (%)
Western	£573.855m	46.95%
Eastern	£648.543m	53.05%

Three councils

Proposed Unitary Council	External Debt (£m)	Percentage of External Debt across Suffolk (%)
Western	£357.646m	29.26%
Southern	£418.334m	34.22%
Eastern	£446.418m	36.52%

Reserves

Using a methodology that splits usable reserves on a population basis, it is possible to assess the potential allocation of reserves across the three configurations in Suffolk. This is based on information on usable reserves taken from the 2024/25 draft Statement of Accounts for each of the authorities in Suffolk.

For the three-unitary configuration, population is distributed on a parish level basis to reflect the proposed changes to existing district and borough boundaries.

When looking at the disaggregation of reserves, a two unitary configuration in Suffolk creates two councils that are virtually identical in terms of level of usable reserves. Therefore, an imbalance is not created in this configuration. In the three unitary model there is more of an imbalance with the South and East configurations having a similar level of reserves whilst the West configuration has c.9% less usable reserves than the other two. This creates a risk of imbalance across Suffolk and a risk to the financial resilience of the newly created councils. Our financial analysis demonstrates that One Suffolk is the most prudent choice for local government in Suffolk.

Table 3: Reserves

One council

Proposed Unitary Council	Usable Reserves (£m)	Percentage of Useable Reserves across Suffolk (%)
Single Suffolk Unitary	£667.239m	100.00%

Two councils

Proposed Unitary Council	Usable Reserves (£m)	Percentage of Useable Reserves across Suffolk (%)
Western	£333.890m	50.04%
Eastern	£333.349m	49.96%

Three councils

Proposed Unitary Council	Usable Reserves (£m)	Percentage of Useable Reserves across Suffolk (%)
Western	£186.227m	27.91%
Southern	£245.270m	36.76%
Eastern	£235.742m	35.33%

Appendix nine

Summary of assumptions used in the financial analysis




Savings from Reorganisation

Area	Assumption	1 Unitary	2 Unitary	3 Unitary
Senior Management	Number of tier 1 management staff	1	2	3
	Number of tier 2 management staff	6	12	18
	Number of tier 3 management staff	22	45	68
	Salary plus on-cost of tier 1 management staff	£279,117	£233,670	£221,986
	Salary plus on-cost of tier 2 management staff	£190,256	£165,362	£157,094
	Salary plus on-cost of tier 3 management staff	£145,022	£116,241	£110,429
General	Proposed audit fee based on benchmarks of similar size unitary councils	£0.799m per Council	£0.496m per Council	£0.476m per Council
Area	**Assumption**	**Upper Sensitivity**	**Baseline Scenario**	**Lower Sensitivity**
Democratic Services	Number of electors per Councillor	5,755	4,070	3,000

Area	Assumption	Description
Democratic Services	Member Allowances	Range of £17,203 to £19,104 with mid-point of £18,108 used for financial analysis
	Spend on Democratic Services	There is a direct correlation between the number of members and spend on democratic services For each new unitary created there is a loss of 20% of the savings from the remaining democratic support spend. For the single unitary option there will be an additional £10,664 of savings per member.

Savings from Transformation

Area	Assumption	1 Unitary	2 Unitary	3 Unitary
Service Delivery	Savings from transformation	Services can be delivered at the average unit cost of all the predecessor councils		
Service Delivery: Phasing of savings	Adult social care benefits realisation post-vesting	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Children's social care benefits realisation post-vesting	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Education benefits realisation post-vesting	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Highways and transport benefits realisation post-vesting	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day
	Public health benefits realisation post-vesting	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Housing services General Fund only benefits realisation post-vesting	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day
	Cultural and related services benefits realisation post-vesting	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day
	Environmental and regulatory services benefits realisation post-vesting	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day
	Planning and development services benefits realisation post-vesting	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day
	Central services benefits realisation post-vesting	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day
	Other services benefits realisation post-vesting	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day	Year 3 post-vesting day
Enabling Services	Internal Audit	Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period		
	Finance Team	For the two-unitary and three-unitary configurations there are a number of functions that would be duplicated (i.e. Treasury Management, Payments and Income Team, Corporate Team, Business Partnering) with a finance function c.75% the size of the single unitary baseline. Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period.		

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Enabling Services</td><td>HR and Payroll</td><td colspan="3">Based on experiences from other local authorities we have used a ratio of HR and Payroll FTE to employee numbers. The ratio for a ‘lean’ function is 1%, 1.50% for a ‘standard’ function and 2% for a ‘support heavy’ function

Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td>Procurement</td><td colspan="3">Savings have been calculated based on a percentage reduction of FTE

Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td>Legal</td><td colspan="3">No savings</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other</td><td colspan="3">Reduction in FTE of c.10%
Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="7">Enabling Services: Phasing of savings</td><td>Internal Audit</td><td colspan="3">Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td>Finance</td><td colspan="3">Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td>Human Resources and Payroll</td><td colspan="3">Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td>Procurement</td><td colspan="3">Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td>Legal</td><td colspan="3">n/a</td></tr>
<tr><td>Revenues and Benefits</td><td colspan="3">Savings delivered in full from year 3 onwards</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other</td><td colspan="3">Phased savings delivered from year 2 onwards over a two-year period</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Other</td><td rowspan="2">Customer Services</td><td>7,500 residents per customer service staff</td><td>8,250 residents per customer service staff</td><td>9,900 residents per customer service staff</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Savings delivery phased over two years from year 3 post-vesting day</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">IT</td><td rowspan="2">IT savings</td><td>15% reduction in staff and licensing spend</td><td>7.5% reduction in staff and licensing spend</td><td>7.5% reduction in staff and licensing spend</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Savings delivery from year 4 post-vesting day</td></tr>
</table>

Procurement	Procurement savings from contracts	1% savings from year 4 post-vesting day onwards	0.5% savings from year 4 post-vesting day onwards	0.5% savings from year 4 post-vesting day onwards
Property and Asset Management	Property and Asset Management Savings	n/a	n/a	n/a

Transition Costs

Area	Assumption	1 Unitary	2 Unitary	3 Unitary
Public Engagement	Public Meetings and Consultations	The number of public meetings required both pre-vesting day and post-vesting day will be the same for all configurations		
	Media and Communications	Pre-vesting day costs will be the same for all configurations, but for every additional council we have added 10% additional costs for post-vesting day activity		
	Consulting fees	Post-vesting day we have applied an additional 10% to the strategic planning element of consultancy support for each additional council		
	Project Management	Post-vesting day we have applied an additional 10% cost per additional council		
General	Lead Director number and cost	1 x £150k	£150k	<£150k
	Project Management number and cost	7 x £60k	9 x £60k	11 x £60k
	Support Finance number and cost	3 x £50k	4 x £50k	5 x £50k
	Support HR number and cost	3 x £60k	4 x £50k	5 x £50k
	Support Legal number and cost	2 x £60k	3 x £60k	3 x £60k
	Policy Harmonisation number and cost	1 x £60k	2 x £60k	3 x £60k
	Cultural Alignment consultancy cost	£100k	£200k	£300k
	Uplift on costs to reflect potential for increased costs from external consultancy	20%	20%	20%

Transformation Support	Savings from Transformation	There will be an external transformation support required £1 of spend for between every £5 and £10 saved
IT	IT	Costs will be incurred including: software and licensing, infrastructure, data migration and cleaning, integration tools, customisation and development, consultants and vendor fees, internal staff and training, testing and security audits
	Programme Director costs	£100k per annum (plus on-costs) for a two-year period
	Technical Expertise	£1.391m per annum over a two-year period
	External Consultancy Support	£0.258m for a three-month exercise and £0.345m for a four-month exercise, for a single county unitary, this would increase for multiple new unitary authorities
	Integration of IT Systems	A 15% uplift on the baseline costs for a two unitary and three unitary model
Predecessor Councils	External audit fee	Audit fees for the final year of operation have been taken from the PSAA 2024/25 schedule of external audit fees. The cost of this will be the same across all configurations in Suffolk
New Councils	Rebranding and communications	Individual authorities will appoint external support to complete rebranding
	External audit fee	There is a correlation between the size of a newly created council and the external audit fee
Shadow Authority	Shadow Authority	Interim senior statutory roles in place for c.3 months before vesting day Recruitment costs of 5-10% of the salary costs of these roles will be incurred during the transition period
Contingency	Contingency	We have allocated a contingency of 10% of transition costs to be included to reflect the inherent uncertainties of this process
Redundancy	Redundancy	The only redundancies required prior to vesting day will relate to the senior management changes that local government reorganisation will deliver
	Years of Service	15 years as the baseline position
	Enhancement Factor	A factor of 2
	Weekly Pay	Based on average weekly pay across staff employed across the Suffolk authorities
	Pension Strain	50% of senior management made redundant will be eligible for pension strain. 15% for the other posts.
	Natural attrition	Natural attrition rate of 15% for the posts that will be made redundant

Phasing of transition costs	Public Engagement	c.75% of the costs will be incurred pre-vesting day and the remaining costs will be incurred in the first two years post-vesting day
	Programme Management	Unwind the support over a period of c.2 years post-vesting day
	Transformation	Will occur post-vesting day
	ICT	Both pre- and post-vesting day
	Predecessor Council	Will be incurred in year 1 post-vesting day
	New Council	Both pre- and post-vesting day
	Shadow Authority	Will be incurred in the final year pre-vesting day

Disaggregation Costs

Area	Assumption	1 Unitary	2 Unitary	3 Unitary
Disaggregation Costs	Adult Social Care Annual Savings	n/a	Based on duplicated and increased costs in disaggregated services, from line-by-line analysis of expenditure.	
	Children's and Young People Savings	n/a	Based on duplicated and increased costs in disaggregated services, from line-by-line analysis of expenditure.	
	Highways and Transport Savings	n/a	Based on duplicated and increased costs in disaggregated services, from line-by-line analysis of expenditure.	
	Other Services Savings	n/a	Based on duplicated and increased costs in disaggregated services, from line-by-line analysis of expenditure.	

Area	Assumption	Description
Disaggregation Costs	Phasing of Disaggregation Costs	Incurred on an annual basis from vesting day

Appendix ten

Socio-economic measures: sources and methodologies

Due to the geographic level of data available best fit matches and modelling assumptions have been used to calculate socio-economic measures for the three unitary option.

Best fit lookup Civil parishes to LSOAs: The configuration for the proposed three unitary authority option is partly based on civil parishes, which do not align perfectly to standard geographies such as lower super output areas (LSOA). This misalignment required the use of modelling assumptions to allocate LSOAs that span multiple parish areas and vice versa. Each LSOA was assigned to one of the proposed three unitaries based on the location of its population-weighted centroid. This method provides a straightforward allocation but may be less accurate for larger LSOAs where the centroid does not reflect the full spatial distribution.

Please see the table below for more details on the sources and methodologies used in calculating the socioeconomic measures across each of the options.

Table 1: Sources and methodology for calculating socioeconomic measures

Socio-economic measure		1 unitary option	2 unitary option	3 unitary option
Population	Population (2024)	2024 mid-year population estimates, ONS.		Population proportions of each new unitary calculated from parish population estimates and 2021 mid-year population estimates (for non parishes and LADs which all fall entirely into a new unitary). Proportions for each new unitary applied to 2024 mid-year population estimates.
	Population (2040)[1]	2022-based population projections (migration category), ONS.		Proportions of each of the five LADs in each of the new unitaries were calculated based on 2021 parish population estimates and 2021 LAD mid-year population estimates (for Ipswich and West Suffolk). This gives percentages e.g. 100% of Ipswich LAD is in the new South unitary. These percentages were applied to 2022-based population projections for LADs in 2040.
	Total Dependency Ratio (2024)	2024 mid-year population estimates. The number aged 0-14 and 65+ divided by the number aged 15-64.		As with Population (2024) methodology on each age split 0-14, 65+ and 15-64. Then calculated as for 1 & 2 unitary option.
	Deprivation (% LSOAs in most deprived decile)	2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) in England, MHCLG The proportion of LSOAs in the new unitary area that fall within the top 10% of deprived LSOAs nationally.		Best fit lookup of Civil Parishes against LSOAs (methodology above), then as for 1 & 2 unitary option.

1 For an explanation on the rationale for using these population figures please see appendix two.

	Socio-economic measure	1 unitary option	2 unitary option	3 unitary option
Geography	**Area (HA)**	Area in hectares of the land count (clipped to coastline minus the inland water), ONS: Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2022) in the UK.		Best fit lookup of Civil Parishes against LSOAs (methodology above), to ONS Standard Area Measurements for Census Areas including LSOAs (December 2011). Proportions for each new unitary applied to 2022 Suffolk total as calculated in 1 unitary option.
	Rurality (% LSAOs rural)	Defra, 2021 census rural urban classification. The proportion of LSOAs in the new unitary area that are classified as rural.		Best fit lookup of Civil Parishes against LSOAs (methodology above), then as for 1 & 2 unitary option.
Economic scale	**Employee numbers**	Total number of employees (workplace based), Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) 2023.		Total employees, BRES 2023 available at LSOA level. Best fit lookup of LSOAs to civil parishes to new unitary areas.
	GVA (£ million) 2024	Total Gross Value Added in current prices, pound millions (balanced approach), ONS: Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: local authorities by ITL1 region.		Lower layer super output areas (LSOA), England, gross value added, pounds million. Best fit lookup of LSOAs to civil parishes to new unitary areas. Proportions applied to Suffolk total as calculated in 1 unitary option.
	Number of businesses	ONS Business Counts 2024.		Total Businesses at MSOA level, apportioned to LSOAs based on % population. Best fit lookup of LSOAs to civil parishes to new unitary areas.
	Business / 10,000 pop	Total number of businesses per 10,000 resident population, ONS Business Counts and Mid-Year Population Estimates, 2024.		Number of businesses (as methodology in this table) / population 2024 (as methodology in this table).

Socio-economic measure		1 unitary option	2 unitary option	3 unitary option
Housing	Housing target	Annual local authority housing target, Autumn 2024.		Housing targets apportioned to LSOA based on proportion of dwellings 2021 (Table 1c: Dwelling occupancy by dwelling type, by lower layer super output area, England and Wales, 2021). Best fit lookup of LSOAs to civil parishes to new unitary areas.
	Housing target as a % of 2024 dwellings	Total annual housing target as percentage of 2024 total dwellings, MHCLG Table 100: Number of Dwellings by Tenure and district, 2024.		Housing targets per LSOA (as above). 2024 dwellings apportioned from LAD to LSOA based on 2021 data. Best fit lookup of LSOAs to civil parishes to new unitary areas.

Appendix eleven

Photo descriptions and credits

Photo descriptions and credits

Where there is more than one image per page, images are described left to right and top to bottom.

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Inset: Image of Councillor Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council

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Bottom right: An aerial shot of the Suffolk countryside with ploughed fields and small woodland

Page 14: An aerial shot of Ipswich Waterfront showing boats in the harbour and a busy street

Page 15: A photo taken through the portcullis gate in Abbey Gardens looking towards the shops on Abbey Hill

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Bottom right: The Latitude sign reflected in a lake

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Page 58: A couple of shoppers looking at a variety of antiques and other items outside a shop in Bury St Edmunds

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Page 65: The entrance to Beccles Library

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Page 70: A row of shops in Felixstowe leading down to the seafront

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Bottom left: A beach track with purple heather either side

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Appendix twelve

Letters of support

VISIT EAST OF ENGLAND
SUFFOLK & NORFOLK LVEP
Local Visitor Economy Partnership
Recognised by VisitEngland

Bankside 300
Peachman Way
Broadland Business Park
Norwich
NR7 0LB

E: info@visiteastofengland.com
W: www.visiteastofengland.com

Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk

To whom it may concern

Visit East of England (VEE) manages the two-county VisitEngland-accredited Suffolk and Norfolk Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) as well as the two county visitor economy organisations, Visit Suffolk and Visit Norfolk.

We are aware of current proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk (LGR), and wish to provide feedback on the opportunities, issues, and risks from Visit East of England's perspective.

From an economic point of view, we are keen to see sustainability of council services and reduced duplication and complication across the county. Savings of £30m+ a year for a single unitary have been identified by another county council in the region and it's likely Suffolk will also see significant savings with a single unitary that can be reinvested in services.

Under a single unitary in Suffolk, and without knowing detailed implementation plans, I would imagine offices and officers would remain in many current district destinations to ensure services and local democracy are maintained, if not improved.

From a visitor economy point of view, visitors do not recognise current district authority geographies, they go where they want in Suffolk. Visitors do recognise counties. It has been an impediment for Visit Suffolk activities to recognise those district authorities when it is not the Customer Experience (CX).

The Suffolk and Norfolk LVEP is currently developing a digital infrastructure including a new Visit Suffolk website on which the geography for Suffolk will be Brecks and Broads (shared with Norfolk), Suffolk Coast, Wool Towns, Constable Country and Heart of Suffolk, which will include Ipswich. This makes CX sense. LGR offers the opportunity for VEE to market locations based on their draw for visitors, rather than arbitrary council boundaries.

Working with one unitary county would also help our organisation fulfil the objectives and ambitions in our new Destination Management Plan, not least spreading demand seasonally and geographically and developing a year-round visitor economy – clearly linked to economic growth objectives within Suffolk and Norfolk's economic strategy.

Working with one county unitary would give VEE the opportunity to contribute to the bigger strategic picture for Suffolk's visitor economy, rather than focus on arbitrary boundaries.

The narrative around the visitor economy, despite it being worth more than £2.1bn pa, employing almost 45,000 people and being more than 13% of all employment in Suffolk, is too often that 'tourism is seasonal, low skilled and low paid'. Only by developing a year-round visitor economy will we put more money in businesses' pockets and allow them to create more FTEs, upskill them and pay them more. Working with a single county unitary would give us the best opportunity to do this.

A single unitary for Suffolk would also better facilitate the development of our "Naturally" placemaking brand, which is about using our natural capital, our environment and wildlife as the county's unique selling point to drive year-round tourism. We see an opportunity to join up with county-wide structures in the nature protection and recovery space, with a single county unitary better able to spearhead this work. Additionally, it will allow VEE to focus on specific parts of the county such as regenerative tourism in the Brecks, where current district boundaries have meant that it has been difficult to attract widespread support.

Whatever the outcome of LGR, we are prepared to work with any future structures of local government, but it is our view that a single county unitary will make this process significantly easier, while aligning with the strong identity which draws residents and visitors to Suffolk.

This is coming in a very challenging time for the sector, with rising costs and taxes, not least NICs, but we believe that with a single unitary in Suffolk, with a single vision for the benefit of the whole county, we can create the conditions to grow the visitor economy significantly.

Yours sincerely

Pete Waters
Executive Director

East Suffolk and North Essex
NHS Foundation Trust

Nick Hulme
Trust Headquarters
Colchester General Hospital
Turner Road
Colchester
Essex
CO4 5JL

3rd September 2025

Dear Councillor Hicks,

Re: Support for a Single Unitary Council Model to Improve Health and Social Care Integration

As Chief Executive of an acute and community NHS trust serving the population of Ipswich and East Suffolk but treating patients from all the county, I am writing to express my strong preference for the proposed single unitary council model over the alternative proposal to establish three separate unitary councils in Suffolk.

From a healthcare delivery perspective, the fragmentation that would result from dividing governance and service provision across three councils poses potential risks to patient care continuity and system efficiency. A multi-council model would likely perpetuate the postcode lottery we already contend with—where patients face unequal access to services depending on their location. This leads to delays in referrals, assessments, and care provision, driven by differing referral criteria, assessment processes, and commissioning priorities.

Our trust already straddles multiple councils in Essex, and we regularly experience the challenges that come with navigating different local authority systems. These include inconsistent eligibility criteria, varied funding arrangements, and divergent approaches to social care assessments. Introducing a similar level of complexity within Suffolk would only compound these issues and make it even more difficult to deliver joined-up care across the region.

Such fragmentation would also hinder the implementation of the NHS Long Term Plan, which relies on integrated care systems and seamless collaboration between health and social care. A single unitary council would provide a unified governance structure, enabling consistent policy, streamlined decision-making, and more effective joint planning across the region.

In contrast, a three-council model risks duplicating administrative functions, complicating workforce coordination, and slowing down data sharing and service integration. These are critical areas where alignment is essential to meet the evolving needs of our population and deliver equitable, high-quality care.

I urge you to consider the long-term benefits of a single unitary authority—not only for administrative efficiency but for the tangible improvements it could bring to patient outcomes, health equity, and the sustainability of our local health and care system.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and explore how we can work collaboratively to support a transition that aligns with both local needs and national health priorities.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Hulme, CBE
Chief Executive

26th August 2025

Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership
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8 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2BX
Telephone: 01473 265500
Email: enquiries@suffolksp.org.uk
Website: www.suffolksp.org.uk

Dear Matthew, Beccy, Nicola and Gareth

Re: options for LGR

I write this letter in my role as the independent Chair of the Suffolk Safeguarding Adults Board. My current work roles include being a Government Commissioner for children's services in two local authorities and as an Improvement Adviser in a third. I also work for NHS England as a system intervenor and for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to support the strengthening of child and adult protection abroad in diverse jurisdictions.

I have lived in Suffolk for 23 years since I worked in the statutory roles as Director of Children's and Adult Services for Suffolk County Council between 2002 and 2004.

In this letter, I am focussing on the two alternative models for LGR proposed for Suffolk and how these options would most likely impact on the important safeguarding responsibilities Suffolk will continue to face for the foreseeable future. Safeguarding functions carry with them intrinsic risks which no form of government can eliminate so the focus has to be on which form of government can most successfully mitigate those risks.

In my professional judgment, the single unitary model for Suffolk is preferable to the 3-unitary model for four reasons:

1) Experienced safeguarding workforces are hard to recruit and retain in any local authority but especially in local authorities which are geographically less accessible to safeguarding professionals than clusters of local authorities in urban areas. This means it will be much harder to recruit and retain the necessary critical mass of safeguarding professionals in the 3-unitary model for Suffolk. Whilst this can be mitigated by sharing some functions across borders, each local authority must still retain its own minimum infrastructure, capacity and capability to be compliant with the relevant statute. This will be much harder in the 3-unitary model.

2) Life is complex and organisations are complex. In safeguarding practice, it is crucial to drive a straight line through complexity to understand what is happening for a person at risk. In this

regard, a single unitary model is the least complex, complicated and fragmented model of local government for Suffolk. Internal boundaries within an organisation are easier to navigate than numerous boundaries across smaller organisations.

3) Specialist safeguarding services are best commissioned for relatively large populations, hence the importance of a Suffolk-wide commissioning and planning function, even if delivery is local. A single unitary model of local government for Suffolk makes it easier to co-ordinate and commission a mix of regional, sub-regional and local services which best meet the needs of local people.

4) Structural change and reorganisations will impact all local organisations in Suffolk over the next 5-10 years, including the key statutory safeguarding partners – health and the police. Suffolk has benefited from strong partnership working between agencies for many years. This has allowed us to focus down on the needs of any single child or adult at risk across all communities in Suffolk where this has been needed. To replicate the current county-wide safeguarding apparatus three times over will stretch multi-agency resources to breaking point and will mean – certainly for the first few years - an emphasis on making new structures and governance arrangements work. Whilst new arrangements will be needed whichever model is chosen, this will be harder in the 3-unitary model and will be more of a distraction from the core business of devoting the maximum quantum of professional time to front-line services rather than to corporate noise.

To conclude, my view is that Suffolk needs a single unitary council with a continuation of strong local place-based arrangements in the west, Ipswich and the East and in Waveney. A strong Suffolk-wide unitary will also be in the best position to co-ordinate services with local government in the surrounding areas of Essex, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, whichever form local government takes across the region and sub-regions.

Yours,

Anthony

Anthony Douglas CBE

Independent Chair of the Suffolk Safeguarding Adults Board

18 August 2025

Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2BX
Telephone: 01473 265500
Email: enquiries@suffolksp.org.uk
Website: www.suffolksp.org.uk

Dear Nicola, Sarah-Jane and Cllr Bennett,

Re - Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and potential impact on Children & Families

I write to in my roles as Independent Scrutineer for Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership. You will be aware that I have been in post since September 2024 and I hope that you will consider me to be passionate about safeguarding children and offering them the best possibility to thrive in Suffolk. Given this, I have reflected on the impact LGR may have on some of our most vulnerable children and their families and I feel compelled to write to you. I would like to make it absolutely clear that this letter has not been prompted by any political consideration, it is written purely to represent Suffolk children and their families.

I am incredibly proud of the Partnership that is being developed in Suffolk and the work it does to safeguard children. I have worked across a number of Partnerships nationally and Suffolk is fast developing into one that delivers positive impacts for children, a Partnership to be proud of and one that works tirelessly for our families. The Local Authority has established an exceptional workforce that is led by an equally outstanding leadership team. I cannot emphasise enough the positive impact this has had for children in terms of safeguarding. Your team, driven and guided by a Director of Children Service, who is incredibly dedicated and excellent in her role, has developed their practice and influenced Partners to ensure we are accountable, work together and have an ethos of continual improvement. I have witnessed the improvements in service delivery. In short, there is an absolute will to continually improve and provide the best possible outcomes for our children and families.

I feel that I am in an informed position to comment on the impact different local government 'structures' can have on safeguarding having worked in London, Sussex, Cornwall, Bath & Northeast Somerset and Norfolk. Each of these areas have structures that vary from that currently in place in Suffolk. Each comes with their distinct challenges, some far greater than others. Whilst it would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual areas, I feel it is right for me to point out that the current structure Suffolk has, without doubt, helped agencies to work efficiently as a Partnership. My opinion is that working with Partners who can concentrate their efforts and join together in one area is more efficient than diluting resources and serving a greater number of geographical areas.

I have sent this letter to make representations on behalf of the children and families we continue to safeguard and support in Suffolk. I would be grateful if you could share its content and the following messages with those who are charged with making representations and decisions regarding LGR in the county.

- Suffolk has an established, mature Partnership who work tirelessly to safeguard children. We should be proud of what they have achieved and avoid any unnecessary disruption that disaggregation could bring. We should continue to provide support so they can continue to deliver the best outcomes for our children with the positive opportunities of truly integrated services we currently have.

- The impact the Partnership has, and its development has been positively impacted by the coterminous working arrangements with its statutory partners that risks getting lost by fragmenting services introducing unnecessary risks for children to fall through the gaps.

- The way we deal with safeguarding is becoming stronger. I would implore you to ensure that whatever changes are made they have the least possible impact on the current safeguarding structures.

I hope that this letter is received as a passionate plea from an Independent professional with a wide range of experience in different systems who is seeking to represent vulnerable children and families in Suffolk. It is, as stated at the start, in no way intended to make any political point or take any political stance. If it is read as having done so, then I sincerely apologise.

Yours,

Chris Robson
Independent Chair NYJB
Independent Scrutineer NSCP

Gainsborough's House

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

29th August 2025

Dear Jim McMahon,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Executive Director of Gainsborough's House, the largest independent public art gallery in Suffolk. As the National Centre dedicated to the life and work of Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), we are also a leading regional venue for temporary exhibitions with both national and international reach.

I am writing to express our support for the proposal to establish a single unitary authority for Suffolk. We believe this is an important and timely step toward a more efficient, connected, and strategically aligned model of local governance.

There are clear opportunities through English devolution and local government reform to streamline how services are delivered and to better respond to the realities of how people live and work today. The shift from a two-tier system to a single unitary authority would remove duplication, simplify governance, and ensure more coherent decision-making across the county. For an organisation like ours—at the intersection of culture, tourism, and education—this is not only practical, but also essential.

A single Suffolk authority would allow us to work more effectively with local government in delivering services and enhancing the visitor economy. It would provide consistency in policy, planning, and investment decisions—particularly crucial for cultural organisations that often work across district boundaries. It also creates the opportunity for a stronger, unified voice to advocate for Suffolk's role in the broader regional and national economy, including any future East Anglia devolution deal.

We believe this change will better support local businesses, cultural institutions, and community organisations. A simplified system should improve financial sustainability, reduce bureaucracy, and accelerate strategic projects. Most importantly, it would help unlock Suffolk's full economic potential—from tourism and culture to agri-food, finance, and the tech sector.

Gainsborough's House

At Gainsborough's House, we believe passionately in the role of the arts not only in enriching people's lives and communities, but also in driving regeneration and economic growth. Culture and heritage are central to Suffolk's identity and appeal as a destination, and their strategic development must be embedded in a joined-up, forward-looking approach to governance.

If you would like to discuss any of the points raised or learn more about our work, I would be pleased to speak with you directly.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Calvin Winner

Gainsborough's House | 46 Gainsborough Street | Sudbury | Suffolk | CO10 2EU
National Centre for Thomas Gainsborough

WESTHORPE LODGE
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22.08.2025

Dear Nicola and Richard,
I have been following the debate about local government reorganisation, I remember the last reorganisation when East and West Suffolk were merged I think back in 1974. In my view having one unity council is the best option rather than the suggested three councils.
Suffolk County Council in my view has worked well and there is no reason within one central body there could be sub sections to deal with planning and other more local issues.
My own farming operation would suffer as we have land in Westhorpe and Great Ashfield which would mean having two different councils to deal with which is not good. From a wider farming point of view you will appreciate I am writing as an individual but I have been a working member of the NFU for 55 years and closely involved with the Suffolk Agricultural Association for over 40 years as Show Director and President, it makes sense for one council to deal directly with the farming industry in order to have a unified and consistent approach, having three different councils with possibly different views and policies would make the present very difficult situation with farming even more problematic.
I was the independent chairman of `Creating the Greenest County` from 2007 to 2017 this project I believe being non party political was successful in furthering the interests of the county. It was working across all of Suffolk county wide that helped in the project in the acclaim it received.
You will be aware I was also a member of the Suffolk Local Access Forum for 20 years from its formation in 2003, the forum worked with Suffolk County Council on Public Rights of Way and this has worked well, it would be crazy to divide the remit in three ways.

Yours Sincerely

David Barker

David E Barker MBE

Tel: 01449 781078 ** Mob: 07876 496064 ** Email: david@ejbarker.co.uk

22nd August 2025

Cllr Matthew Hicks
Leader
Suffolk County Council
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2BX

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

Dear Cllr Hicks,

Support for the 'One Suffolk' Proposal

On behalf of the County Councils Network (CCN), I am writing to express our strong support for Suffolk County Council's *One Suffolk* local government reorganisation proposal. CCN represents England's County and non-metropolitan unitary authorities, including all of those councils that have recently transitioned to unitary status. Building on this experience, we welcome ambitious, evidence-led proposals put forward by Suffolk County Council, which will maximise efficiency savings, ensure sustainable services, strengthen local leadership, and drive growth.

Your proposal is consistent with the evidence base CCN has built up over recent years on the future of local government reform. Most importantly, it best meets the statutory criteria for new unitary councils set out in the Secretary of State's invitation. In particular, we note:

Financial Resilience and Scale
The long-term direction of public service funding, with constrained local government finance and greater emphasis on councils becoming self-sustaining, requires authorities of sufficient scale and resilience. This particularly important within the context of the on-going Fair Funding Review, where areas such as Suffolk will be highly reliant on council tax to fund services in the future.

Within this context of the financial challenges facing the Suffolk area, research by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC, 2025) for CCN has demonstrated that unitary structures covering whole county geographies are best placed to secure financial sustainability and provide significant efficiency opportunities — up to £2.9bn nationally— while avoiding the fragmentation of critical services. Furthermore, the detailed financial analysis carried out by Suffolk County Council for its *One Suffolk* final business case further strengthens this position, ensuring a council of scale, financial strength, and efficiency.

Safeguarding and Integrated Care
We remain deeply concerned by proposals elsewhere in the country which risk disaggregating children's services and adult social care across multiple smaller authorities. Both are high-cost, high-risk services requiring resilience, specialist expertise, and effective safeguarding.

While previous work by PwC and the CCN has estimated the one-off and recurring costs of splitting up and duplicating county-wide social care services in different reorganisation scenarios, the challenges associated with disaggregation stretch well beyond the direct financial impact on the potential savings profile from LGR. These include the potential upward pressure on unit costs due to reductions in purchasing power; workforce deployment and the recruitment and retention of staff; reductions in provider capacity and placement sufficiency; and risks to the continuing quality of services.

A single unitary council for Suffolk would avoid these risks by maintaining integrated services across the entire county footprint, ensuring joined-up delivery with health, education, and safeguarding partners.

Performance of county- wide Unitary Councils
Evidence from existing large unitary councils—such as North Yorkshire, Durham, Cornwall, Wiltshire, and Buckinghamshire—demonstrates that authorities covering both rural and urban areas can provide high-quality, responsive local services. These councils have been recognised as strong strategic leaders, working effectively with government departments and combined authority mayors (where they exist), while retaining mechanisms to empower local communities through area boards, town and parish partnerships, and devolved decision-making. The *One Suffolk* proposal builds on this proven model, enabling Suffolk to speak with one voice nationally while remaining close to its communities.

Strategic Scale and Economic Geography
Finally, sensible economic geographies are central to effective growth and devolution. A Suffolk-wide unitary authority reflects the county's labour market, transport network, and shared communities of interest, providing the scale to plan housing, infrastructure, and economic development coherently. Crucially, a unitary Suffolk would be of sufficient size to engage credibly with government on devolution and investment, whilst rooted in the distinct identity of the county.

For these reasons, CCN strongly supports the *One Suffolk* proposal. It reflects the evidence base on sustainability, service resilience, and strategic leadership, while offering a structure that will both safeguard vital services and empower Suffolk's communities. Most importantly, it is the only proposal that meets the government statutory criteria, specifically that proposals should cover a population of '500,000 or more' and avoid the 'fragmentation' of social care services.

We commend Suffolk County Council's ambition and would be pleased to support the case as it progresses with government.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Edwards
Chief Executive
County Councils Network

The Rt Hon. the Lord Deben

2 September 2025

Dear Matthew Hicks

I have looked carefully at the two propositions for the future of Suffolk.

I represented a Suffolk constituency for more than thirty years and, because of successive boundary revisions, I have served most of central and eastern Suffolk as an MP.

Three Suffolks:

The county, although geographically large, has a relatively small population. This makes the proposal that it be divided into three particularly damaging for the following reasons:

1. The resultant areas would be far too small to provide effective services. In particular adult social care, children's services, and education could not be run properly.

2. The proposed boundaries are entirely artificial. There is, for example, no more a connection between Hadleigh and Ipswich than there is between Ipswich and any other place in the county of which it is the County Town. There is certainly no indication that the people of Hadleigh wish to be specially linked to Ipswich. From personal experience, having represented Felixstowe in Parliament between 1983 and 2010, I know that the people of Felixstowe have always been overwhelmingly opposed to being linked with Ipswich and this has been a concern that has transcended party political allegiances. The artificiality of the proposed boundaries of the three Authorities is exemplified by the history of the one proposed to be based in Ipswich; the opposition

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in Woodbridge was so strong that they changed the plan and left the town out. No such release has been accorded to the villages and towns that have been left in - however much they have objected. They are there, not from their volition or special connection, but simply to make Ipswich big enough to claim it should have this status. The result is entirely artificial. Those of us who know the area can see how foolish it would be to divide Martlesham from Woodbridge or Great Bealings from Hasketon, and those are only two examples of many. As to the other two proposed areas, they are also artificial and are not based on any historic or current rationale. Towns and villages with close connections will find themselves in separate Authorities - a post code lottery with no good reason, considerable inconvenience, and significant additional cost.

3. Objectively, it is quite clear that the suggestion of three authorities is the product of the desire of current District Councils to extend their lives irrespective of their ability to provide the necessary services. Sadly, this is an attitude which previous attempts at reorganisation have always had to face as I found when, as the Secretary of State, I was responsible for the last major local government reorganisation. It is also disingenuous to suggest that the Three Suffolks' idea is somehow more local than One Suffolk when East would stretch from Bawdsey to a point well north of Lowestoft, and West from Lakenheath to Stoke-by-Nayland.

One Suffolk:

I have lived in the county for fifty years and I have always been impressed by the fact people say to outsiders that they come from Suffolk, a term with real local meaning. We don't come from "South Suffolk", or "North Suffolk", or "the Ipswich area", we come from "Suffolk". It means a great deal to us in the county, and we have always fought against attempts to take bits out of Suffolk to link them with other counties.

The Rt Hon. the Lord Deben

The fact is that there is no saving in Local Government expenditure to be found except by the creation of One Suffolk. Three Suffolks would cost much more than the present system and deliver less. It would mean higher Council Taxes and worse services.

Happily, there are county solutions like that achieved in Cornwall which have the efficiency of adequate size while still being organised to reflect the needs of locality. Suffolk is sufficiently large to provide all local services, particularly for children, old people, and education, and provide them efficiently and rationally. These can be delivered in a cost-effective way while still being close to the communities they serve.

I am entirely independent in this matter. I would support whatever solution I thought would provide best for the people of the county in which I live and for which I care. As a result of careful consideration, I wholeheartedly support One Suffolk as the most sensible unit for the county. I believe that the alternative proposal is a wholly artificial, expensive, bureaucratic construct which would be unable to attract the best Officers and fail properly to provide the services essential to so many of the most vulnerable.

Yours ever,

John Deben

Rt Hon. John Gummer, Lord Deben
Member of Parliament for Eye and then Suffolk Coastal 1979 - 2010

Cllr Matthew Hicks
Leader, Suffolk County Council

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