

Briefing on the English Devolution White Paper for Town and Parish Councils in Suffolk, following Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary statements to UK Parliament on 5 February 2025

Useful links

[Devolution revolution: six areas to elect Mayors for first time - GOV.UK](#)
[Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

Introduction

This briefing updates the previous note (shared on 20 January 2025) on two key central government policies in relation to local government in Suffolk: devolution and local government reorganisation (referred to together in this briefing as 'D&LGR').

On 5 February 2025, the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Communities, Housing and Local Government made a verbal statement to the House of Commons announcing Suffolk as one of the areas to be fast-tracked for D&LGR and outlining the next steps in implementing the government's ambitions.

As one of six areas across England included in the government's Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), Suffolk is on course to implement the biggest change to local government arrangements for over 50 years.

What is the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and what does inclusion on it mean for Suffolk?

Many areas expressed interest in being included on the DPP. The Deputy Prime Minister announced that six were successful. These are:

- Cumbria (Cumberland Council, Westmorland and Furness Council)
- Cheshire and Warrington (Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Warrington Borough Council)
- Greater Essex (Essex County Council, Thurrock Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council)
- Hampshire and Solent (Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council, Southampton City Council)
- **Suffolk and Norfolk (Suffolk County Council, Norfolk County Council)**
- Sussex and Brighton (East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council).

Being part of the DPP means that Suffolk is on a fast-track timeline to securing D&LGR. This means preparing for inaugural elections for a mayor (covering Suffolk and Norfolk) in May 2026 and submission of business cases for LGR to the minister by 26 September 2025.

How will devolution happen in Suffolk?

The White Paper was clear on the government's preference for devolution to mayors and the written ministerial statement reiterated that:

"The government sees devolution as a new way of governing, rooted in the principle that people who have a stake in a place should be the ones shaping it. It will be crucial to delivering our commitment to bring growth and opportunity to communities across the country. This is the first step on delivering on our promise to move power out of Westminster and putting power where it belongs – into the hands of local people.

Every place has something to benefit from devolution, whether it is more regular bus services, more affordable housing, or the simple fact that local people will have a local champion with regional influence. Mayors, regardless of political stripe, have a proven track record of delivering growth.”

The first step in the devolution process is the [government launching a consultation across Suffolk and Norfolk](#) to enable local residents, businesses and partners to have their say on the government’s approach to devolution and its proposed benefits.

Why is the government pursuing LGR?

The Deputy Prime Minister addressed the government’s reasoning for LGR in her statement to the House of Commons:

“The government is also focused on fixing the foundations of local government, with simpler and more effective structures and a reduction in unnecessary layers of bureaucracy. Through a national programme of ambitious local government reform, the government will cut waste and improve accountability, ensuring taxpayers get value for money from their services.”

Where county and district/borough councils provide local government functions between them, unitary councils remove that arrangement and create a single council that provides all local government functions in an area. Sometimes this is a single council across a county area (e.g., North Yorkshire), sometimes this is more than one council within a county area (e.g., Cheshire). At this stage, no decision has been made about whether Suffolk would have one, two or even three unitary councils. There is no change to existing parish and town councils’ boundaries or structures.

What changes are proposed for local government in Suffolk?

The proposals are in two parts. The first is devolution, where a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk would be directly elected in May 2026 and have powers and funding given to them by the government to improve lives in the two counties. They would head up what is called a Mayoral Combined County Authority. They would only be responsible for strategic policy areas like transport infrastructure, economic development, health improvement and blue light services – along with devolved government funding to deliver positive change. This would be separate from any unitary council(s) and the mayor would not be in charge of delivering public services that are the responsibility of local authorities – like waste collection, repairing potholes and care services.

The second change is the complete reorganisation of Suffolk’s 50-year-old two-tier council structure into a more streamlined system with one, two or maybe even three unitary councils which deliver all public services in their defined areas.

What does the announcement mean for the elections scheduled for Suffolk County Council in May 2025?

The Deputy Prime Minister and minister stated that for some areas, scheduled elections would be postponed. The minister’s written statement highlights:

“The government agrees that for eight council areas, postponement is essential for the delivery of the Devolution Priority Programme and complementary reorganisation

(Norfolk and Suffolk; Essex and Thurrock; Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; East Sussex and West Sussex).

The Minister wrote to all of Suffolk's council leaders, stating:

“As your area has been successful in joining the Devolution Priority Programme, we will be working with you toward an election for the Mayor of the Strategic Authority in May 2026. To help manage these demands, I have decided to make legislation to postpone the local elections in your area from May 2025 to May 2026. My department will work with your area to take forward both devolution and reorganisation to the most ambitious timeline possible.”

This follows long standing precedent in areas that have transitioned from ‘two tier’ to unitary local government where elections have been postponed to facilitate that transition, for example, North Yorkshire, Cumbria and Somerset.

How might Town and Parish Councils be affected?

The structural changes arising from LGR will change county and district/borough councils; however, they will not impact town and parish councils.

Town and parish councils will be important stakeholders, particularly as a voice for local communities. Although the government will lead on consultation for the devolution and LGR processes, there will be engagement with town and parish councils to help develop councils' LGR proposals.

What happens next?

[The government has now launched a consultation on the potential benefits of devolution and a mayor in Suffolk and Norfolk.](#) This consultation will last until 13 April 2025 at 23:59.

At the same time, the county, districts and borough councils in Suffolk will begin preparing proposals for LGR that will also include engagement with town and parish councils and other key local partners.

Interim plans for LGR must be submitted to government by 21 March 2025. Final LGR business cases by 26 September 2025.