

Annual Parish Meeting

Babergh District Council Report

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Find out more about the Government's plans for devolution and local government reorganisation, and what it means for our region.

- [**Devolution**](#)
Find out more about the Government's plans to form a Mayoral Combined Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk and have your say
- [**Local Government Reorganisation**](#)
Find out more about proposals to replace Suffolk County Council and the five district and borough councils, and why we propose 2-3 unitary authorities rather than one mega-council to cover the whole of Suffolk

The UK government has launched an eight-week Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation. The consultation seeks views on a proposal to form a Mayoral Combined County Authority for the local government areas across Norfolk and Suffolk.

The consultation invites those who live and work across both counties to share their views on:

- the proposed geography
- the effect of establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority in Norfolk and Suffolk
- how the Mayoral Combined County Authority will make decisions

It is important to note that this consultation does not cover proposals for changes to our existing councils. Views on local government reorganisation will be sought as part of a separate process.

[**Have your say on the UK government's devolution consultation**](#)  click on the below link.

[Norfolk and Suffolk devolution consultation - GOV.UK](#)

The consultation opened on Monday 17 February and will run until Sunday 13 April 2025.

What is devolution?

Devolution is the transfer of powers and funding from UK government to local authority level. It is important because decisions are made closer to the local people, communities and businesses they affect.

What does devolution look like?

A devolution deal would create a new single body, known as a Strategic Authority, for Norfolk and Suffolk. It would initially take the form of a combined county authority.

These arrangements would be agreed prior to the first Mayoral election, which would take place in May 2026.

The key functions of the strategic authority would include strategic transport functions, such as support for buses, trains and concessionary fares, skills and driving economic growth.

What would devolution mean for us?

Here in Suffolk, all six of the county, district and borough councils would cease to exist, and be replaced by one or more unitary authorities. These brand-new authorities will take over all local government functions in the area they cover.

This means that, in the area where you live, you will only have one council to deal with, rather than two. For areas with town and parish councils, these will continue in their existing form and are not included in the unitary process.

What is the Devolution Priority Programme?

The Devolution Priority Programme is a fast-track process with additional support for areas wishing to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority at pace.

On 5 February 2025, the Government confirmed that Suffolk and Norfolk will be on the Devolution Priority Programme, which will see a regional Mayor elected in May 2026.

The Government also agreed to a request from Suffolk County Council for elections that were due to take place in May 2025 to be postponed.

What powers would the elected Mayor have?

The Mayor would be directly elected by the people of Norfolk and Suffolk. The elected Mayor would have the ability to speak directly to government ministers and secure funding for local projects. They would also be able to make important decisions, attract investment and improve infrastructure – taking a wider, strategic role spanning multiple councils.

When can we expect this to take place?

Now we have received confirmation that we are on the Priority Programme, the UK government is looking to create a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk by May 2026. Mayoral elections would take place in that month.

Do I have a say in this?

Yes! We are encouraging everyone to have their say in the [UK government's consultation](#), which runs from Monday 17 February until Sunday 13 April 2025.

Where can I find out more?

- [White Paper on English Devolution](#)
- [Official Government website](#)

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

The government's long-term vision is for simpler council structures, which make it clear who is responsible for services.

At present, across Suffolk, services are split between Suffolk County Council, and one of five district or borough councils in a 'two-tier' arrangement.

'Two tier' means that some local services, such as some parks, allotments, cemeteries, community centres, markets etc., may also be delivered by your local town or parish council. Town and parish councils are not directly affected by these proposals.

Depending on where you live, you currently receive services from Suffolk County Council and either Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, West Suffolk Council or Ipswich Borough Council.

The government believes reorganising and simplifying councils can drive economic growth while delivering better public services.

Reorganisation would see all six councils in Suffolk replaced with one or more all-purpose 'unitary' authorities who would be responsible for all local authority services in their area.

When can we expect this to take place?

We submitted interim plans on 21 March 2025, to be followed by full plans in September. Timelines for the remainder of the LGR process are subject to the proposals received. However, elections to shadow authorities could be expected in May 2027 following consultation, with new unitaries going live in April 2028.

What's your council's position?

Our council has joined with Suffolk's other district and borough councils to oppose Suffolk County Council's proposal for one unitary council to deliver services for the whole of the county – which will be too large to work effectively and too remote for local residents to be heard.

Our [joint interim report](#) submitted to government describes how 'a one size fits all' approach will not work for a county with such varied communities and businesses - rural, coastal, industrial, agricultural and urban.

Only by creating multiple unitary authorities for Suffolk can we achieve greater outcomes for residents, grow the economy and provide flexible solutions to meet the needs of local communities.

Two/three unitary authorities will provide:

- Cost effective and high-quality services for Suffolk residents
- Long term financial sustainability
- Economic growth and support to local industry
- Stronger democratic representation, community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment
- Governance and support systems which can adapt to future aspirations and sustainable growth
- Ambitions to drive progress, innovation, and long-term success
- Structures to support and enable thriving communities and economies

[Read the report in full](#)

What happens next?

We will continue to work with other authorities to develop proposals that we believe provide the best solutions for our residents and communities. We will also ensure that everyone has chance to have their say on future plans, ahead of the final business case being submitted to government in September.

Interim Director of Place appointed

Jill Korwin, formerly strategic director at West Suffolk Council, has been appointed as our Interim Director of Place while recruitment for the permanent position continues.

She started in the role yesterday, 25 March, and will be working three days a week - usually Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Jill will move forward with our 'place-based' journey and continue to increase the joint working of our communities, economy and planning teams and beyond.



The closing date for applications for the permanent Director of Place is this week, and interviews are scheduled in April.

Meanwhile, Phil Isbell will continue in his Acting Director of Planning role until after the permanent Director of Place position has been appointed.

At that point, the right structure will be considered, taking into account the Government's high focus on Planning and the considerable, nationally-driven changes in this area.

Councils working with communities in response to Government's huge housebuilding hike



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In response to the Government's recent housebuilding hike, we have been discussing the challenges of meeting the new requirements with community leaders.

In Babergh, housebuilding targets have risen from 416 to 775 new homes a year (up 86%), and in Mid Suffolk, from 535 to 734 (up 37%).

We have already agreed to review our Joint Local Plan to take into account these new figures - as failing to do so would leave the districts at risk of losing control over where new homes are built.

Last week, we held meetings with towns and parishes, advising them of these new requirements and encouraging the development of Neighbourhood Plans.

Businesses thriving thanks to flagship accelerator programme

More than 20 firms across Babergh and Mid Suffolk have teamed-up with the University of Essex to take part in a flagship accelerator programme, leading to business growth, with new products and services trialled and strategies developed.

Innovate to Elevate, jointly set up and funded by University of Essex and Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, with additional funds provided through the Governments Shared Prosperity Fund, has offered innovation support to businesses in the region across the last two years.

Nearly £200,000 has been invested in 21 different projects since the programme launched in 2022, with 23 academics from Essex Business School, School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering and School of Health and Social Care collaborating with firms to bring innovative ideas and solutions into practice, alongside 20 researchers recruited to support delivery of the projects.

Academics have supported businesses across a range of industries, including recycling, agritech, photography, health tech, law, architecture and sustainable manufacturing

More than 200 businesses expressed an interest in taking part in the programme since it launched.

Cllr Derek Davis, Babergh's Cabinet Member for Sustainable Economy, said: "It is exciting to see that so many of our businesses have embarked on a journey of growth thanks to the Innovate to Elevate programme.

"This programme has provided a unique opportunity for our businesses to gain access to extremely talented academics and research staff who in turn, have enabled them to bring their innovative ideas to life.

"The Innovate to Elevate scheme shows how serious Babergh is in encouraging growth within our economic strategy promoting the skills and training along with brilliant new ideas from our residents and business leaders."

Cllr Teresa Davis, Mid Suffolk's Cabinet Member for Thriving Communities, added: "This incubation of talent and expertise is a prime example of what we wish to support to provide a fruitful bed for business to thrive.

"We very much look forward to our Skills and Innovation Centre broadening this type of initiative."

[Holly Leonard](#), Acting Head of Business Engagement, said: "I'm proud that, working in partnership with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, The University of Essex has supported a diverse

range of businesses from across sectors to tackle challenges and take forward opportunities for growth through the Innovate to Elevate programme.

"The targeted nature of the programme, which focused on businesses from a relatively small area in Suffolk, meant we were able to be tailored with the offering, while giving the companies access to a really broad range of expertise and talent. The University plans to deliver more interventions of this type over the coming years with partners in the Eastern region, as it has proven to be such an effective way of supporting businesses with innovation."

Babergh and Mid Suffolk council homes to get £2.9m upgrade

Babergh and Mid Suffolk council homes to get £2.9m upgrade A £2.9 million funding boost has been given to make council homes warmer and reduce energy bills. The government funding will be added to the £8 million already committed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils to install energy-saving measures in social housing. The total commitment for retrofitting and decarbonising now approaches £14 million across both areas over the next four years. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have been provisionally awarded £2,959,214 by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero as part of the latest round of funding from the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund. Work has already begun on upgrading 100 council properties with the lowest EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) ratings, with improvements such as cavity and loft insulation, new windows, PV panels, and air source heat pumps.

This week's announcement paves the way for planning improvements to the next 150 homes, supporting the councils' goal of bringing all properties up to a good standard of energy efficiency by 2027. Councillor Jessie Carter, Babergh District Council cabinet member for housing, said: "This additional funding provides a welcome boost to our work to improve our council housing stock, and – more importantly – the lives of our tenants by making their homes warmer and more energy efficient. "It also helps our ambitious goals in reducing Babergh's carbon footprint and helping to tackle climate change." Councillor Richard Winch, cabinet member for housing and property in Mid Suffolk, said: "Together with the money we have previously committed to accelerate repairs and improvements to council homes across our districts, this funding helps us to further improve standards for our tenants, ensuring council homes are less expensive to heat as well as helping us to make real progress in retrofitting and decarbonising our social housing.

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