

Freedom of Information – Response – 26816

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please provide copies of all submissions, correspondence and communications between Suffolk County Council and government departments, ministers, or their offices relating to:

- 1. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Suffolk; and*
- 2. The holding, postponement or potential cancellation of local elections scheduled for May 2026.*

This request includes (but is not limited to) emails, letters, meeting minutes, notes of meetings, presentations, briefing papers, draft and final reports, official submissions, internal or external advice, WhatsApp messages, SMS/text messages, and any other recorded information concerning proposals, discussions, assessments or representations relating to local government reorganisation and/or the scheduling of the May 2026 local elections.

For the avoidance of doubt, this request includes communications:

- Sent to or from the Leader of Suffolk County Council*
- Sent to or from the Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council*
- Sent to or from the Chief Executive*
- Sent to or from the Monitoring Officer*

with Government ministers, special advisers, civil servants or officials, including (but not limited to) those within:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)*
- 10 Downing Street / the Prime Minister's Office*
- HM Treasury*
- The Cabinet Office*

Please limit the search scope to material created or sent between 1 June 2025 and the date of this request.

Please find attached the information held by Suffolk County Council in respect of the above request. Any personal information has been redacted under s.40 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

From: Matthew Hicks (SCC Councillor)
Sent: 05 November 2025 16:43
To: PSAlisonMcGovern@communities.gov.uk
Cc: Ministerial.Correspondence@communities.gov.uk; "PSSteveReed@communities.gov.uk"
Subject: Suffolk County Council: Suffolk's Local Government Reorganisation
Attachments: Suffolk CC to MHCLG.pdf; 2025-11-05 Suffolk's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposals.pdf

FAO: Alison McGovern, MP - Minister of State (Housing, Communities and Local Government)

Dear Minister

Suffolk's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposals

Please see attached letter regarding Suffolk's Local Government Reorganisation proposals.

Kind regards

Matthew

Matthew Hicks

Leader of Suffolk County Council
County Councillor for the Thredling Division
Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824 474741
E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk
Twitter: @HicksCllr

Our Ref: NB/ZC
Date: 4 Nov 2025
Tel: 01473 264002
Email: nicola.beach@suffolk.gov.uk

To:
Dame Sarah Healey; permanent.secretary@communities.gov.uk
Will Garton; will.garton@communities.gov.uk
Sophie Langdale; Sophie.Langdale@communities.gov.uk
Fran Oram; Frances.Oram@communities.gov.uk

Dear Sarah, Will, Sophie and Fran,

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Suffolk: Please Stop and Scrutinise the Three UA Proposal

Further to my letter of 26 September, in which I drew your attention to Suffolk County Council's LGR proposal for a single county unitary – *One Suffolk* – I now feel compelled to write again to highlight the deep professional concerns that my leadership team and I have regarding the alternative proposal to create three new unitary authorities (3UA) within Suffolk.

We approached our analysis with the intention of understanding how these proposals might reasonably be enacted. However, it has become clear very quickly that the evidence underpinning the three-unitary proposal is unreliable, not Suffolk-specific, missing key sector considerations, based on previous unitary proposals that failed to delivery on their promises, and inconsistently applied throughout the 3UA business case. This is despite extensive data sharing (qualitative and quantitative) between Suffolk councils, underpinned by a data sharing agreement.

Given the seriousness of LGR, I must highlight these concerns and urge you, in the strongest possible terms, **not to proceed to public consultation on the 3UA business case until you are absolutely satisfied that it is deliverable, credible, legal, and safe.** **Key flaws identified in the 3UA proposal include:**

- The proposal is built around unitary proposals that failed to deliver on their promises and untested new service delivery models with unclear legal foundations.
- It admits that the work necessary to ensure the safe disaggregation of critical social care, children's services, and district and borough services has been deliberately excluded and left to implementation.
- The evidence base is unreliable, not Suffolk-specific, and ignores key realities such as rurality, local market provision, increasing demand and complexity of needs.
- It lacks credible evidence to support claims about how savings and efficiencies will be realised, particularly in relation key services such as adult and children social care and SEND services.

Consulting the public on such a shaky foundation would be irresponsible and risks undermining the future of good local government in Suffolk.

Failure to meet government's basic tests for LGR

1. Legal and structural clarity

The proposal would not establish a clear, legally robust single tier of local government for Suffolk. Instead, it suggests a hybrid system that is more complex and fraught with risks—especially for children safeguarding and adult social care.

It proposes new models of service delivery where one authority leads in a particular area but gives no account of how that authority will legally act on behalf of other sovereign authorities, which must retain legal responsibility for services such as safeguarding and social care within their boundaries.

There is no statutory requirement for councils to work together in the ways suggested, nor clarity on legal responsibility if things go wrong. The proposal does not address what happens if authorities need to act differently to meet local challenges—or if one authority withdraws from the model entirely.

This is not the level of security and stability necessary to underpin the safety and wellbeing of the most vulnerable in our society. Any suggestion to the contrary must be robustly and fully evidenced.

The 3UA proposal repeatedly claims that council services can only be successfully delivered by small councils - but then commits itself to rebuilding countywide provision at a non "local" level. The government said that LGR was an opportunity to build new, simpler and efficient local councils, not deconstruct the two-tier system only to then seek to rebuild it in a more expensive, less clear, and less legally sound way.

2. Financial sustainability

The three-council proposal openly admits that it does not achieve the level of savings attributable to the *One Suffolk* proposal. It states:

“Further work will be required as part of the implementation of the new unitary councils to address the costs of disaggregating services currently provided by Suffolk County Council, and aggregating services currently provided by district and borough councils.”

It is therefore impossible for the 3UA proposal to make any serious claim that it meets the government's requirements around efficiencies, or to assess whether the three new councils could withstand any financial shocks, as little has been done within the proposal to evidence it.

Professionally, I found this admission both shocking and dangerous. It risks the financial sustainability of the three councils before they are even created and could fundamentally weaken critical services supporting the most vulnerable people and families in Suffolk.

Independent financial analysis within the *One Suffolk* business case clearly showed disaggregation could cost Suffolk £135.2 million over five years, with ongoing annual costs of £13.1 million. The 3UA proposal does not contain equivalent detailed analysis nor the appraisal of different unitary models.

3. Unevidenced savings and risks to adult and children services

The 3UA proposal represents a real threat to the ongoing development and operation of good-quality services in Suffolk, particularly in adult social care.

It suggests savings of £44.5 million per year over current costs across Suffolk, yet openly admits these figures are not based on Suffolk-specific data, but on the experience of other unitary councils of similar size. This ignores the unique challenges and costs of rurality and makes no reference to critical factors such as the “fair cost of care”, essential for sustaining the adult social care market.

Far from advancing the sector, the 3UA proposals would lead to cuts and reduced investment year on year, which will likely decimate an already fragile sector.

The assessment makes no reference to the increasing costs of home care, the costs of creating new services in three separate authorities, or evidence how “local” services can meet complex needs or indeed make the savings suggested. The entire basis of the proposed £45 million annual savings from adult social care is not adequately explained or evidenced—simply stating that services will be delivered locally is a strapline, not a savings plan. The vast majority of residents already have their needs met locally, so in essence they are planning to change nothing, yet still make considerable savings from the sector.

I’d also like to call out the SEND proposals outlined within the 3UA. As seems to be the pattern, the SEND case is built on shaky assumptions and ignores the serious risks of fragmentation. It assumes that smaller or cheaper providers will be in place to deliver services at a lower cost than larger or existing providers. However, it does not reflect or comment on whether these providers exist in Suffolk. The reality is that the 3UA assumes that a new market will miraculously emerge, which will drive costs down. SEND provision within Suffolk and across the country is extremely complex, nationally under-funded and facing exceptional demand. However, following a period of financial investment, the scale of which is only possible for a countywide authority on a sensible and sustainable financial footing, and robust practice reform, we are seeing real improvement, which is evidenced by scrutiny from Ofsted and the Department for Education. To put this improvement at risk from unnecessary fragmentation of Children’s Services, with a proposal this light on evidence, is highly dangerous in my view.

If these plans are to be put to public consultation, I urge officials to demand answers to these critical questions first:

Whilst fully accepting that it is for government to decide which proposals proceed to public consultation, we all share an interest in seeing LGR succeed. The future of local public services in Suffolk must be built on solid, safe, and legally sound foundations.

I therefore suggest the following questions must be answered before any such decision is made:

1. Does the 3UA proposal establish a clear and legally robust single tier of local government for Suffolk?

- Where hybrid and untested delivery methods are proposed—such as lead authorities for certain areas—what measures will compel sovereign councils to maintain this new way of working in the face of local pressures, new political leadership, regulators’ views and ongoing financial challenges?

- Accepting there is no legal responsibility for authorities to work in the ways outlined within the 3UA proposal, what assessment has been done to understand the risk to service delivery should a new delivery model fail post-vesting day?
 - Have the proponents of the 3UA model accepted that Government has already stated Local Government Reorganisation is primarily to drive stronger, more accountable and sustainable authorities, and that new unitary authorities must remain responsible for delivering high-quality social care services? How can this be achieved under the suggested hybrid or “Lead Authority” model?
2. Given proposals “should be supported by robust evidence and analysis”,
- Is the financial modelling transparent and Suffolk-specific? Are projected efficiencies and savings achievable? Where savings have been calculated using aggregated data rather than Suffolk-specific data (such as the 3UA proposed savings from adult social care), what evidence exists to identify where these savings will come from within the existing Suffolk sector?
 - Will the proponents of the 3UA proposal confirm that they fully support Suffolk County Council’s aspiration and current efforts to pay the “Fair Cost of Care” as assessed through detailed co-assessment between Suffolk County Council and social care providers?
 - Can the 3UA proposal offer any verifiable evidence of the anticipated costs relating to disaggregating services currently operated by Suffolk County Council and those delivered by district and borough councils, particularly where proposed boundary changes cut across existing boundaries?
3. Can the new structures withstand financial shocks and deliver sustainable public services? What contingency plans exist for managing risks and service fragmentation?
- Does the government recognise and accept that critical data within the 3UA proposal is missing? For example, the proposal states what the Council Tax income will be for each unitary but provides no detail on what proportion of total expenditure this income will cover—it simply states there is an “appropriate tax base”.
 - Does the government accept that without evidence to understand the costs of disaggregating services currently provided by Suffolk County Council and the district and borough councils under the 3UA proposals, it is impossible to ascertain whether the new councils would be financially stable or deliver value for money? On that basis alone, this proposal fails the government’s basic requirement.
4. Is the evidence base locally relevant, consistent, and supported by robust evidence and analysis? Have the unique challenges of Suffolk been considered?
- Can the proponents of the 3UA explain why data sets are not consistently applied throughout their proposal? For example, the 3UA proposal switches between housing-led projections (for maximum overall population in 2045) and Office for National Statistics (ONS) projections (e.g., for demand in social care) depending on

which best supports the argument. This approach risks over inflating population sizes therefore, further questioning the financial sustainability of several smaller unitary councils within Suffolk. When evidence from organisations like PeopleToo is used, can they explain how these figures relate to Suffolk? The analysis undertaken by PeopleToo is driven solely by population size and does not reflect local circumstances such as geography, deprivation levels, and market conditions. This is particularly important for Suffolk given its rural nature and ageing population.

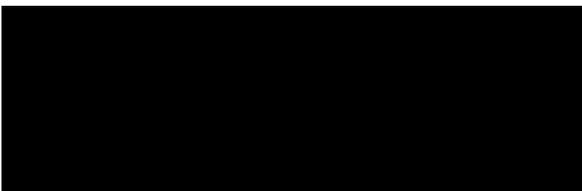
In summary

LGR represents an enormous opportunity for the future of local government, but there are huge risks associated with change of this size and complexity. Throughout this process, my team and I have ensured that we have produced a robust, evidence-based, and safe business case for Suffolk's future and the people we serve. It is clear that others have not. In my view, as it stands, the 3UA proposal is not a fully formed, costed, or evidenced business case. In fact, the district and borough councils themselves no longer call it a business case but rather describe it only as a "proof of concept". This is not what Government asked us to do, and it is certainly not a serious foundation upon which to base the future of local government in Suffolk.

It is my considered professional opinion, for the reasons stated above, that the 3UA proof of concept should not proceed to public consultation—at least not in its current unfinished form.

I would be very pleased if we could meet, along with members of my leadership team, to discuss these serious concerns and provide clarity on how the *One Suffolk* proposal not only meets the basic requirements set out by Government, but is the only properly developed proposal which can deliver truly smarter, simpler, and better local government in Suffolk.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Beach
Chief Executive

Date: 05 November 2025
Enquiries to: Matthew Hicks
Tel: 01473 260535
Email: Matthew.Hicks@suffolk.gov.uk



Alison McGovern, MP
Minister of State (Housing, Communities and Local Government)
Via Email: PSAlisonMcgovern@communities.gov.uk
Ministerial.Correspondence@communities.gov.uk

Dear Minister of State

Suffolk's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposals

Further to my letter of 26 September highlighting Suffolk County Council's LGR proposal for a single unitary council for Suffolk – One Suffolk, I write to highlight a letter from my Chief Executive to your LGR official team which was sent yesterday.

My Chief Executive's letter contains more details of the comprehensive analysis that has been undertaken; however, I should draw your attention to the following key concerns with the three-unitary councils' case. These are:

- The proposal is built around unitary proposals that failed to deliver on their promises and untested new service delivery models with unclear legal foundations.
- It admits that the work necessary to ensure the safe disaggregation of critical social care, children's services, and district and borough services has been deliberately excluded and left to implementation.
- The evidence base is unreliable, not Suffolk-specific, and ignores key realities such as rurality, local market provision, increasing demand and complexity of needs.
- It lacks credible evidence to support claims about how savings and efficiencies will be realised, particularly in relation to key services such as adult and children's social care and SEND services.

As we move forward with the LGR process, I must agree with the professional conclusions of my Chief Executive and her leadership team – **the three-unitary council proposal for Suffolk is not a fully formed, costed, or evidenced business case**. It fails to meet the basic criteria set out by the government in its offer of Local Government Reorganisation in February.

There are real dangers in their plans for disaggregating large and complex people services, and huge risks to established sectors such as adult social care, where severe cuts are being proposed without any evidence drawn from the Suffolk system. This will likely force many care providers out of business, decimating the sector and resulting in less provision not more.

There is no real Suffolk based evidence of how families and children with SEND would be better supported under three councils, particularly against the backdrop of national

financial challenges, rising demand and increasing case complexity. Nor is there any indication of where specialist support and provision would come from under their proposals. Considering the significant investment Suffolk County Council continues to make in this area, these plans put current progress at risk under a simplistic strapline of “more local services” without explaining where that provision exists now or where it will come from. This is unsafe and does a huge disservice to families and young people who deserve so much more.

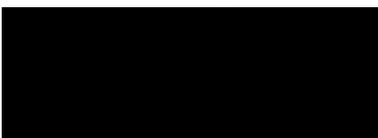
Their proposal to use new and untested models of governance to support vulnerable people is equally dangerous. The gaps that disaggregation will undoubtedly create in areas such as safeguarding are barely addressed in their plan. In fact, they dedicate only 108 words to this risk, describing it as short-term and mitigated by “good planning”. That is not a plan to disaggregate vital services for vulnerable people – it is merely an aspiration. The gaps that will emerge if these plans proceed are precisely where vulnerable people will fall through. We cannot allow that to happen. We cannot allow vulnerable people to be treated in this way while new authorities hope they have adequate plans to protect them.

This surely isn't what Government wants the LGR legacy to be?

For the reasons outlined above, **I do not believe the three-unitary council proposal should proceed to public consultation.** Doing so would present the three-council proof of concept as if it were a fully considered, evidence-based business case – it is none of those things. Proceeding on this basis risks causing terminal damage to the future of local government in Suffolk and undermining the wider principles of LGR.

I do not take writing this letter lightly, and I hope you understand the real serious concerns we are raising. I would be happy to share the detailed analysis behind these key points and discuss them further with you, together with my Chief Executive and senior leadership team.

Kind regards,



Cllr Matthew Hicks
Leader of Suffolk County Council

Cc: Rt Hon. Steve Reed, MP – Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (PSSteveReed@communities.gov.uk)



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Alison McGovern MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
Homelessness*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: MC2025/31417

Cllr Matthew Hicks
Leader
Suffolk Country Council

25 November 2025

Dear Cllr Hicks,

Thank you for your letter of 5 November regarding Suffolk's local government reorganisation proposals.

My officials and I have noted your concerns and will consider the material you have shared in their ongoing assessment of the Suffolk proposals.

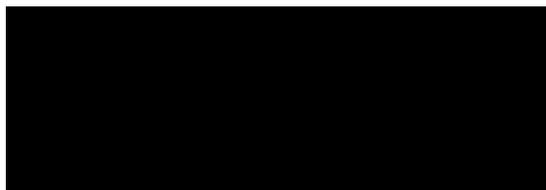
As I hope you will understand, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this stage or give a view on specific unitary proposals. I am also unable to pre-empt future decisions under the statutory process for unitarisation, although I expect to communicate a decision shortly on the final proposals for unitary local government in Suffolk upon which the Government will consult.

While I note that you do not believe the three unitary proposal should progress to consultation, you and colleagues at Suffolk County Council will have the opportunity to formally respond to any final proposals for Suffolk and neighbouring areas that go forward for consultation.

I would hope to meet you soon via my regular engagement with LGA groups and bodies.

Thank you again for writing on this important matter and for your work in developing proposals for local government reorganisation in Suffolk.

Yours sincerely,



ALISON MCGOVERN MP

Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness

From: Tim Bowden <TIM.BOWDEN@COMMUNITIES.GOV.UK>
Sent: 18 December 2025 15:59
Cc: Jules Guinier; Val Samuel; Joshua Walker; Isla Stevens
Subject: RE: Local Government elections - 2026
Attachments: 181225 - Letters to Leaders.pdf

 **EXTERNAL EMAIL: Don't click any links or open attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe. [Read more information](#) for help from Suffolk IT**

OFFICIAL

Dear Chief Executives

I appreciate you will have already received a copy of this letter regarding local elections in May 2026. I wanted to share as I know it was a question raised during the recent meetings between your Council Leaders and the Minister for Devolution, Faith and Communities.

Kind regards
Tim

Tim Bowden | Deputy Director, English Devolution – governance, structures and oversight | E:
tim.bowden@communities.gov.uk

I work flexibly and may send emails outside of normal working hours. Please be assured that I do not expect a response outside of your own working hours.

OFFICIAL



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Alison McGovern MP
*Minister of State for Local Government
and Homelessness*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

To: Leaders of councils with elections
in May 2026 where proposals for
reorganisation have been submitted
and decisions not yet taken

18 December 2025

Dear Leader,

I am writing to you regarding the elections your council is scheduled to hold on 7 May 2026.

This Government is determined to streamline local government by replacing the current two-tier system with new single-tier unitary councils, ending the wasteful two-tier premium. We are progressing this landmark reform quickly, which will be vital in delivering our vision: stronger local councils equipped to drive economic growth, improve local public services, and empower their communities. I am fully committed to ensuring councils can deliver new, sustainable structures within this Parliament.

We have now received proposals from all 20 remaining invitation areas, demonstrating strong collaboration between local partners. A consultation is open on 17 of those proposals from six invitation areas. I expect to launch a consultation in early February on proposals from the remaining 14 areas that seek to meet the terms of the 5 February statutory invitation. That consultation would be for seven weeks.

I remain committed to the indicative timetable that was published in July, that sees elections to new councils in May 2027 and those councils going live in April 2028. This is a complex process, and we will take decisions based on the evidence provided.

We have listened to councils telling us about the constraints they are operating within, and the work that reorganisation introduces on top of existing challenges. Now that we have received all proposals, it is only right that we listen to councils who are expressing concerns about their capacity to deliver a smooth and safe transition to new councils, alongside running resource-intensive elections to councils who may be shortly abolished. We have also received representations from councils concerned about the cost to taxpayers of holding elections to councils that are proposed to shortly be abolished.

Previous governments have postponed local elections in areas contemplating and undergoing local government reorganisation to allow councils to focus their time and energy on the process. We have now received requests from multiple councils to postpone their local elections in May 2026.

The Secretary of State recognises that capacity will vary between councils and that is why he has reached the position that, in his view, councils are in the best position to

judge the impact of potential postponements on your area and in the spirit of devolution and trusting local leaders, this Government will listen to you.

I am therefore inviting you, by midnight on Thursday 15 January, to set out your views on the postponement of your local election and if you consider this could release essential capacity to deliver local government reorganisation in your area and so allow reorganisation to progress effectively. For those who have already made their views known, we will be taking these into account. Views should be sent by email to LGRElections@communities.gov.uk.

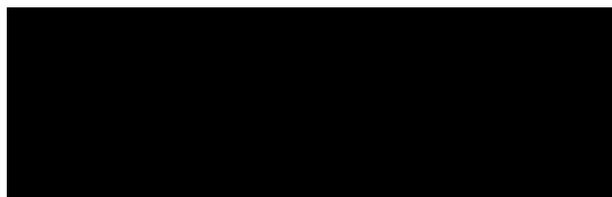
The Secretary of State has adopted a locally-led approach. He is clear that should a council say they have no reason for postponement, then we will listen. But if you voice genuine concerns about your capacity, then we will take these concerns seriously. To that end, the Secretary of State is only minded to make an Order to postpone elections for one year for those councils who raise capacity concerns. A list of the relevant elections is annexed.

For areas where there are also scheduled town or parish council elections, the Secretary of State is minded to make no provision in the Order so these elections continue as scheduled, given town and parish councils are outside of local government reorganisation.

I appreciate that preparations for elections may have started, and you will be keen to have certainty, which we will deliver as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives, the other Leaders and Chief Executives of councils in the local government reorganisation programme, and to local MPs, Combined/Combined County Authority Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and Best Value Commissioners in local government reorganisation areas.

Yours sincerely,



ALISON MCGOVERN MP

Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness

**Annex – 63 councils with elections under consideration for postponement
(there are 64 elections including that for the Mayor of Watford)**

1. Adur District Council
2. Basildon Borough Council
3. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
4. Blackburn with Darwen Council
5. Brentwood Borough Council
6. Broxbourne Borough Council
7. Burnley Borough Council
8. Cambridge City Council
9. Cannock Chase District Council
10. Cheltenham Borough Council
11. Cherwell District Council
12. Chorley Borough Council
13. City of Lincoln Council
14. Colchester City Council
15. Crawley Borough Council
16. East Sussex County Council
17. Eastleigh Borough Council
18. Epping Forest District Council
19. Essex County Council
20. Exeter City Council
21. Fareham Borough Council
22. Gosport Borough Council
23. Hampshire County Council
24. Harlow District Council
25. Hart District Council
26. Hastings Borough Council
27. Havant Borough Council
28. Huntingdonshire District Council
29. Hyndburn Borough Council
30. Ipswich Borough Council
31. Isle of Wight Council
32. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
33. Norfolk County Council
34. North East Lincolnshire Council
35. Norwich City Council
36. Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
37. Oxford City Council
38. Pendle Borough Council
39. Peterborough City Council
40. Plymouth City Council
41. Portsmouth City Council
42. Preston City Council
43. Redditch Borough Council
44. Rochford District Council

45. Rugby Borough Council
46. Rushmoor Borough Council
47. South Cambridgeshire District Council
48. Southampton City Council
49. Southend-on-Sea City Council
50. St Albans City and District Council
51. Stevenage Borough Council
52. Suffolk County Council
53. Tamworth Borough Council
54. Three Rivers District Council
55. Thurrock Council
56. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
57. Watford Borough Council
58. Watford Borough Council Mayor
59. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
60. West Lancashire Borough Council
61. West Oxfordshire District Council
62. West Sussex County Council
63. Winchester City Council
64. Worthing Borough Council

From: Nicola Beach
Sent: 15 January 2026 16:30
To: Will Garton
Cc: Mark Ash; Caroline Davison; Tim Bowden; Andrew Cook
Subject: Fw: Suffolk County Council response to the Minister's letter of 18/12/2025
Attachments: 2026-01-15 McGovern A MP SCC .pdf

Dear Will

I hope you are well and happy belated New Year. Please see attached my Leader's response to the Minister's letter of 18 December. I'm happy to meet and discuss any aspect of this response or our wider LGR and devolution programme as needed.

I also appreciate the early conversation that Tim Bowden had with me today regarding devolution.

Kind regards
Nicola

Nicola Beach
Chief Executive
Suffolk County Council

My pronouns are: she/her

Zöe Crosby
Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive
zoe.crosby@suffolk.gov.uk

Please note: if I email you outside of normal working hours, I do not expect you to reply outside of your working hours; *work - life balance is important*

From: Matthew Hicks (SCC Councillor) <Matthew.Hicks@suffolk.gov.uk>
Sent: Thursday, January 15, 2026 4:03:57 PM
To: LGRElections@communities.gov.uk <LGRElections@communities.gov.uk>
Cc: PSAlisonMcGovern@communities.gov.uk <psalisonmcgovern@communities.gov.uk>; Nicola Beach <Nicola.Beach@suffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Suffolk County Council response to the Minister's letter of 18/12/2025

Please find attached the Leader of Suffolk County Council's response to the Minister's letter of 18 December 2025.

Kind regards

Matthew

Matthew Hicks

Leader of Suffolk County Council
County Councillor for the Thredling Division
Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824 474741
E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk
Twitter: @HicksCllr

Date: 15th January 2026
Enquiries to: Matthew Hicks
Tel: 01473 260535
Email: Matthew.Hicks@suffolk.gov.uk



Alison McGovern MP
Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness
Via Email: LGRElections@communities.gov.uk

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 18 December 2025 inviting Suffolk County Council's views (by midnight on 15 January) on whether postponing the May 2026 local elections would release the essential capacity required to deliver Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) effectively.

This matter was formally considered by both Full Council and Cabinet on 12 January 2026. The agenda papers can be found here: [Meeting Documents - Committee Minutes](#).

Cabinet was specifically asked to note the feedback and votes of Full Council and agree whether the Leader should submit a letter responding to your invitation within the required deadline. At that meeting, Cabinet recognised that the legal power to delay elections rests with government and agreed that a response should be submitted from the Leader reflecting the Council's evidence-based assessment of capacity pressures and associated risks.

Context of Your Request

Your letter and accompanying Written Ministerial Statement invited councils to provide their views on the postponement of local elections and to confirm whether such postponement could release the essential capacity needed to deliver LGR effectively. This response is structured directly around that request.

What "Capacity" Means for LGR

Capacity for LGR encompasses the ability to maintain safe and stable delivery of services while simultaneously supporting complex organisational change. Cabinet highlighted that there are already significant demands on workforce capacity across critical functions including IT and digital systems, HR, contracts and pensions, legal services, and finance — all of which are essential to the design and delivery of the LGR programme.

Cabinet also noted the importance of enabling existing staff to play a meaningful role in the LGR process. Many employees will need to contribute directly to implementation and transition work, and any temporary resource brought in would need to backfill their day-to-day responsibilities or provide technical support to them. This existing pressure further constrains the Council's ability to absorb the additional demands associated with an election cycle.

Key Risks of Proceeding with Elections in May 2026

1. Overlap Between Election Activities and LGR Milestones

Responding to the outcome of a full local election in May 2026 would directly coincide with the most capacity-intensive phase of the LGR timetable. This period of the LGR process requires Suffolk County Council to complete complex modelling, undertake negotiations on Structural Change Orders, and finalise critical dependencies across HR, digital transformation, finance, legal and service design. These tasks cannot be paused or deferred without undermining the safety and stability of the transition.

To support your consideration, I have mapped the statutory election timetable, moratorium period and the expected sequence for SCO negotiations and laying. This analysis shows a substantial overlap between the most capacity-intensive LGR milestones and the requirements of running and establishing a newly elected administration. You will find this at Appendix 1 to this letter.

Compounding this, Suffolk must plan simultaneously for two possible operating models (1 Unitary Authority or 3 Unitary Authorities). Each requires its own governance, workforce and asset transition scenarios. This dual track preparation significantly increases the underlying officer workload. Overlaying an election at this point would divert specialist teams away from work that is time critical to meeting Government requirements and maintaining continuity of service. This would all need to take place alongside, and in addition to, establishment of the Combined County Authority (CCA) – later the MCCA - to be ready to start receiving investment funding from you.

2. Increased Senior Officer and Democratic Services Workload

A newly elected administration in May 2026 would require substantial and immediate senior officer support precisely when LGR delivery demands peak strategic focus.

Induction, constitutional resets, committee establishment, and the commencement of new decision-making cycles each require intensive input from Democratic Services, Legal, HR, Finance and Senior Leadership Teams.

Recent local government experience in Suffolk and elsewhere, demonstrates the scale of effort required to properly brief new councillors, reconstitute governance structures and establish effective decision-making arrangements. Repeating this at the height of LGR mobilisation would unavoidably redirect senior professional capacity away from essential reorganisation workstreams, increasing operational and governance risk.

3. Compressed Timeframe for New Members

Introducing newly elected councillors into the LGR process in May 2026 would create a sharply compressed timeframe for members to understand, scrutinise and make informed decisions relating to one of the most significant structural changes Suffolk has undertaken in decades.

The volume and technical nature of LGR material — transition plans, business cases, financial modelling, equality impact assessments and service redesign proposals — requires time, continuity and deep engagement. Without this, new members would be placed at a disadvantage in fulfilling key statutory duties, including those relating to scrutiny, financial stewardship and equalities obligations. This would present an avoidable governance risk at a moment requiring the highest levels of clarity and informed oversight.

4. Service Continuity Risks

Suffolk continues to experience sustained workforce pressures across statutory services including adult social care, children’s services, public health and community safety. These functions are currently managing high levels of demand, vacancy rates and winter-related pressures.

The period following county-wide elections requires redeploying experienced officers from many of the same corporate and professional services needed to protect vulnerable residents and maintain regulatory compliance. HR, legal, digital, communications and operational logistics teams are already stretched and heavily involved in LGR planning. Without postponement, that required redeployment would reduce resilience in precisely those functions that must remain stable throughout the reorganisation period, increasing the likelihood of service disruption at a time when continuity is critical.

5. Non-Aligned Election Cycles

Proceeding with a May 2026 election would result in three consecutive years of major electoral activity across Suffolk, with County Council, district, shadow unitary and mayoral elections occurring in successive cycles. Each cycle entails its own induction, governance resets, committee restructuring, and periods of restricted activity due to moratorium. In the context of LGR — where clarity, pace and organisational stability are essential — this misalignment would generate unnecessary operational and governance complexity. It would also increase costs and officer workload at a time when Suffolk needs coordinated and uninterrupted focus across all tiers of local government to ensure a safe and effective transition.

Cabinet’s Decision and Conclusion

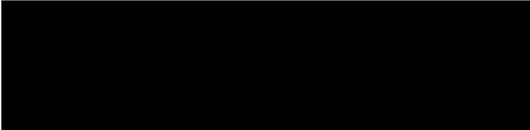
From the draft minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 12 January 2026, the Cabinet:

- a) noted the feedback and votes of the County Council meeting held on 12 January 2026; and
- b) agreed that the Leader should submit a letter in response to the Minister’s invitation contained in the Written Ministerial Statement (appendix A) and Ministerial letter (appendix B) in line with the deadline of 15 January 2026.

Therefore, in accordance with that decision, I submit this letter giving the view that postponing the May 2026 elections would release essential capacity to deliver Local Government Reorganisation effectively.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond. Suffolk County Council remains ready to work constructively with your department as the LGR process progresses and we await your decision on the elections.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Matthew Hicks
Leader of Suffolk County Council

Appendix 1

Period	LGR / SCO Milestones	Election & Moratorium Activity	Capacity Risks
Jan–Feb 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early technical engagement with MHCLG • Development of governance, HR, finance, asset and service models • Preparation for SCO drafting and Explanatory Memorandum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Democratic Services preparation • Candidate enquiries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual-track modelling (1UA/3UA) demands high specialist officer input • Competing pressures across HR, finance, legal, ICT
March 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal SCO negotiation with MHCLG • Drafting of SCO text and schedules • Agreement on workforce, finance and asset assumptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moratorium likely begins late March • Restricted member and public engagement • High governance assurance workload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moratorium limits ability to engage members • Officer time absorbed into compliance • LGR work continues without political steer
April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalising SCO drafting for MHCLG/Parliamentary Counsel • Technical work on TUPE, assets, finance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full moratorium • High-intensity election delivery • Returning Officer functions draw on ICT, HR, legal, comms, logistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election delivery competes with SCO drafting for same specialist teams • Significant risk of delay or reduced quality
May 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCO expected to be finalised for laying in Parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 May – Local Elections • Post-election induction • Committee formation • Constitutional resets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leaders diverted to new administration • New members have minimal time to understand LGR • Increased governance risk
June–July 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary scrutiny of SCO • Mobilisation for implementation planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New members still onboarding • First decision-making cycles embed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced member familiarity affects decision-making • Continued officer time needed for training/governance work

From: LGR Elections <LGRElections@Communities.gov.uk>
Sent: 20 January 2026 19:07
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ltaylor@winchester.gov.uk; paul.brewer@adur-worthing.gov.uk
Cc: joanna.killian@local.gov.uk; heather.wills;
simon.edwards@local.gov.uk; james.make2@local.gov.uk;
alun.hughes@local.gov.uk; James Hood; LGR Elections
Subject: LGR Election Potential Postponement: Judicial Review Hearing
today

Attachments:

AC-2026-LON-000195 Reform UK Party Ltd v Secretary of state for
Housing Communities and Local Government S O.pdf

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OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Dear Chief Executives,

We wanted to provide you with a quick update in relation to the potential postponement of elections.

No decisions have yet been taken, but as you may have seen in the press, Reform UK have filed a Judicial Review claim on the potential overall decision to postpone elections. A High Court Hearing was held today (20 January) to decide procedural matters such as timings and the granting of any interim relief. There has been inaccurate reporting in some media outlets that the High Court Order today means the government can no longer press ahead with any plans to delay local elections. This is entirely inaccurate.

The High Court judge determined a hearing would take place on 19 February and 20 February. There is no block in place in relation to the laying of the Statutory Instruments required to allow any postponement to local elections. The expedited hearing dates were agreed in recognition of the need to provide certainty for councils and voters as soon as possible.

The Court Order also stipulates that Reform UK must write to all 63 councils by 21 January to inform you of the legal proceedings underway, including disclosing their summary grounds and court bundles. This is because the Court has recognised that **you may wish to be joined as an interested party or seek to intervene in the judicial review proceedings. Any local authority wishing to do so must file an application by 4pm on 30 January 2026.** There is no expectation that you will join or intervene.

We wanted to inform you of this with as much advance warning as possible, given the expedited timetable and that you of course may wish to seek your own legal advice on this. We have attached the Court Order for completeness.

Yours sincerely,

Frances Oram & Sophie Langdale

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE



Claim No: AC-2026-LON-000195

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
KING'S BENCH DIVISION
ADMINISTRATIVE COURT**

AC-2026-LON-000195

BEFORE THE HON. MR JUSTICE CHAMBERLAIN

BETWEEN:

**THE KING
on the application of
REFORM UK PARTY LIMITED**

Claimant

-and-

**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Defendant

ORDER

UPON reading the Claimant's claim for judicial review, filed and issued on 16 January 2026;

AND UPON reading the Claimant's Application Notice, dated 16 January 2026, seeking interim relief;

AND UPON hearing leading counsel for the Claimant and counsel for the Defendant at 12 noon on 20 January 2026;

AND UPON the Claimant's counsel indicating that the application for interim relief is no longer pursued in the light of the directions set out below;

IT IS ORDERED as follows:

1. The application for permission to apply for judicial review is adjourned to be listed as a "rolled-up" hearing before a Divisional Court on 19 February 2026, with a time estimate of two days. If permission is granted, the court will proceed immediately to determine the claim.

2. The Claimant must by 4pm 21 January 2026 send by email to the 63 councils with elections under consideration for postponement (set out in the list annexed to the letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness dated 18 December 2025):
 - a. the updated claim bundle in this case; and
 - b. this Order.
3. The Secretary of State must by 4pm on 29 January 2026 serve on the Claimant the reasons for its decision in respect of any exercise of the power conferred by s. 87(1) Local Government Act 2000.
4. Any local authority seeking to be joined as an interested party or seeking permission to intervene must file an application by 4pm on 30 January 2026.
5. The Claimant must file and serve any amended Statement of Facts and Grounds by 4pm on 2 February 2026. Any such amendments are strictly confined to the existing Grounds of Review.
6. The Secretary of State must file Grounds of Defence and evidence in response to the remaining Grounds of Review by 4pm on 16 February 2026.
7. The Statement of Facts and Grounds (whether as already filed or as amended pursuant to paragraph 5) and Grounds of Defence may stand as skeleton arguments for the “rolled-up” hearing. Any separate skeleton argument must be filed by not later than 12 noon on 18 February 2026.
8. The parties are to agree a bundle of authorities which is to be filed and served by the Claimant by 4pm on 18 February 2026.
9. Costs reserved.

20 January 2026

The Honourable Mr Justice Chamberlain

BY THE COURT



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
*Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities & Local Government*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

To: Leaders of councils with elections
in May 2026 where proposals for
reorganisation have been submitted
and decisions not yet taken

22 January 2026

Dear Leader,

Re: Decision on the Postponement of Local Elections Scheduled for May 2026

I am writing to follow up on the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness' letter of 18 December 2025 regarding the potential postponement of local elections in areas undergoing local government reorganisation.

This Government remains steadfast in its commitment to streamlining local government by replacing the outdated two-tier system with single-tier unitary councils, a landmark reform essential to ending the two-tier cost for local taxpayers and creating stronger local authorities equipped to drive economic growth and provide exceptional services to the public we serve.

We are grateful to you for your quick and helpful response to the Minister's last letter, and for the hard work that went into the representations that were submitted. I appreciate that for many of you it has been a challenging process for which you, like me, had to consider a wide range of factors before sharing your representations.

After carefully considering the representations made by councils, parliamentarians, residents and wider local government stakeholders, I have decided to bring forward legislation to **postpone the local elections scheduled for 7 May 2026 for a period of one year** for the following councils:

- Adur District Council
- Basildon Borough Council
- Blackburn with Darwen Council
- Burnley Borough Council
- Cannock Chase District Council
- Cheltenham Borough Council
- Chorley Borough Council
- City of Lincoln Council

- Crawley Borough Council
- East Sussex County Council
- Exeter City Council
- Harlow District Council
- Hastings Borough Council
- Hyndburn Borough Council
- Ipswich Borough Council
- Norfolk County Council
- Norwich City Council
- Peterborough City Council
- Preston City Council
- Redditch Borough Council
- Rugby Borough Council
- Stevenage Borough Council
- Suffolk County Council
- Tamworth Borough Council
- Thurrock Council
- Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
- West Lancashire Borough Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Worthing Borough Council

This decision follows a comprehensive consideration of all the evidence available to me. I have listened to concerns regarding the resource pressures of running intensive elections for councils proposed for abolition shortly thereafter. By delaying these elections, I am confident that we will be releasing essential capacity within councils to allow your teams to focus their full energy on the complex reorganisation process, while also addressing concerns regarding the cost of holding elections for bodies that will soon cease to exist.

This move ensures our continued delivery against an ambitious timetable that sees new councils going live in April 2028, delivering on our promise to create sustainable, effective structures within this Parliament.

For a number of councils, we received representations indicating that they had the capacity required for elections to proceed during the process of local government reorganisation; representations indicating postponement would be helpful but without sufficient evidence of the impact on capacity; or postponement was not sought. For these councils, elections will go ahead as planned. A full list of May 2026 elections in areas undergoing reorganisation and their status is attached to this letter.

Next steps

The legislative process to postpone these elections will now commence, and the necessary Statutory Instrument will be laid as soon as possible. An Explanatory Memorandum will be published alongside the Statutory Instrument, which will give more detail about the

representations received. We will write to you again to share this with you once it has been published.

Town and Parish Council elections

Please note that I am making no provision for the postponement of **town or parish council elections**. As these bodies are outside the scope of the local government reorganisation, those elections will proceed as scheduled.

I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives, the other Leaders and Chief Executives of councils in the local government reorganisation programme, and to local MPs, Combined/Combined County Authority Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and Best Value Commissioners in local government reorganisation areas.

Many thanks once again for your continued hard work in delivering this important reorganisation programme.

Yours sincerely,



RT HON STEVE REED OBE MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

LIST OF 63 COUNCILS IN REORGANISATION AREAS WITH ELECTIONS SCHEDULED IN MAY 2026

Elections where legislation will be brought forward to postpone

Adur District Council
Basildon Borough Council
Blackburn with Darwen Council
Burnley Borough Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Cheltenham Borough Council
Chorley Borough Council
City of Lincoln Council
Crawley Borough Council
East Sussex County Council
Exeter City Council
Harlow District Council
Hastings Borough Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Norfolk County Council
Norwich City Council
Peterborough City Council
Preston City Council
Redditch Borough Council
Rugby Borough Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Suffolk County Council
Tamworth Borough Council
Thurrock Council
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
West Lancashire Borough Council
West Sussex County Council
Worthing Borough Council

Elections that are going ahead

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Broxbourne Borough Council
Cambridge City Council
Cherwell District Council
Colchester City Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council

Essex County Council
Fareham Borough Council
Gosport Borough Council
Hampshire County Council
Hart District Council
Havant Borough Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
Isle of Wight Council
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
North East Lincolnshire Council
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
Oxford City Council
Pendle Borough Council
Plymouth City Council
Portsmouth City Council
Rochford District Council
Rushmoor Borough Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Southampton City Council
Southend-on-Sea City Council
St Albans City and District Council
Three Rivers District Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Watford Borough Council
West Oxfordshire District Council
Winchester City Council

From: LGR Elections <LGRElections@Communities.gov.uk>
Sent: 05 February 2026 15:35
To: LGR Elections
Subject: Local Government Reorganisation Programme - Elections

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OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Dear Chief Executives,

I am writing to confirm that an Order has been laid by the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness to provide for the postponement of 30 elections. You can see it online here: [The Local Authorities \(Changes to Years of Ordinary Elections\) \(England\) Order 2026](#)

As set out in recent communications and the Explanatory Memorandum that accompanies the Order, this measure is intended to release capacity for councils to focus on the substantial programme of work required to deliver reorganisation. The Secretary of State and Minister for Local Government invited representations from councils about your capacity to deliver local elections alongside local government reorganisation, and I would like to thank you and leadership teams for your constructive engagement on this request.

The legislation has been made and laid in Parliament today. It is subject to the negative procedure and will come into effect on 27 February 2026. The legislation will also extend the term of office of affected councillors.

We recognise that this is a significant step, and we hope that laying the legislation provides greater clarity and certainty for councils as you continue planning and delivery work on reorganisation.

We are aware that councils may receive Freedom of Information requests relating to the postponement of elections. As usual, we would welcome being sighted on these where helpful to ensure consistency, and will continue to share relevant FOIs received by the Department with councils through the usual channels.

Thank you again for your continued engagement and cooperation. We remain committed to working closely with you as the programme moves forward. I am copying this email to other Chief Executives of councils in the local government reorganisation programme, sector bodies and your sector advisors for information.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Miller



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

LGR Elections
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
Local Government, Growth and Communities Group

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE