



English Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation – Update for NAVCA Members

18 February 2025

Since the publication of the Devolution White Paper in December 2024, there have been rapid developments in both proposals to create new strategic authorities and the reorganisation of the remaining 21 two tier council areas. This briefing covers the first phase of the priority devolution programme and the restructuring of districts and counties. It provides a short summary of recent announcements and links to further information.

Summary

Six areas have been chosen to join the priority programme for devolution. At the same time, five of these areas will also need to prepare to move to unitary councils from two tiers.

Local authorities in all two tier areas have been instructed to plan to move to new unitary councils with first plans to be submitted to central government by 21 March 2025.

NAVCA is concerned that these changes will significantly shift the attention of councils away from meeting the needs of communities. We are developing work to ensure that the VCSE and local infrastructure is recognised and funded as a partner to influence and inform decision making, to focus on the building and re-building of relationships, supporting members to engage at the new authority level, and build good practice around funding and commissioning.

NAVCA is in close contact with ACRE and VCSEP on this and we will be in touch shortly with more information and guidance. We are also looking to work with the Local Government Association, particularly on practical support and guidance as the impact becomes apparent.

1. **Six areas have been chosen as part of the devolution priority programme.** These are: Cumbria, Cheshire and Warrington, Norfolk and Suffolk, greater Essex, Sussex and Brighton, Hampshire and the Solent. Surrey has been prioritised for both devolution and local government reorganisation.

| Area | Local Authority 1 | LA 2 | LA 3 | LA 4 | No. NAVCA Members |
|--------------------|---|---|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Cheshire Area | Cheshire West & Chester | Cheshire East | Warrington | | 3 |
| Cumbria | Westmorland & Furness | Cumberland | | | 1 |
| Essex | Essex CC plus 12 districts | Thurrock | Southend on Sea | | 10 |
| Hampshire & Solent | Hampshire CC plus 11 districts | Isle of Wight, | Portsmouth City | Southampton City | 8 |
| Norfolk & Suffolk | Norfolk County Council plus 7 districts | Suffolk County Council plus 5 districts | | | 3 |
| Surrey | Surrey County Council plus 11 districts | | | | 5 |
| Sussex | East Sussex CC plus 5 districts | West Sussex CC plus 7 districts | Brighton & Hove City | | 9 |

2. **Immediate consultations on devolution have been announced** in six areas [not Surrey] on the proposals to establish mayoral combined or mayoral combined county authorities, which will become mayor led strategic authorities by May 2026 if they proceed through the whole process as expected. The consultations will consider questions such as:

- a. the proposed geography of the area and the potential benefits it will bring
- b. the governance and decision making arrangements
- c. the contribution of the proposals to the economy
- d. any improvements to local government services
- e. the contribution of the proposals to social outcomes
- f. how proposals will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities.

The deadline for responses is 11.59pm on 13 April. We strongly recommend you submit a response. Although the questions require an agree / disagree response, there is also the opportunity to supply additional information. This is an important opportunity to advocate for the role of local infrastructure, emphasise the importance of working with the VCFSE sector as a strategic partner for the benefit of communities and residents,

and address how the seven areas of competence that will be transferred to the new authorities may apply. Members will want to consider how best to work with partner local infrastructure organisations in the area as a whole, in order to coordinate responses.

NAVCA will share information to support the consultation process, and the experience of NAVCA members that have worked together during the creation and operation of existing Mayoral Combined Authorities.

For more information and to access the consultation for each area see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/devolution-priority-programme-consultations-launch>

3. Local Government Reorganisation: invitations issued to local authorities in two tier areas. Statutory invitations were issued to two tier councils and smaller neighbouring unitary authorities to develop proposals to move to new unitary councils. This brings larger urban areas into play with predominantly rural counties and significantly changes the likely make up of the unitary structures that will be implemented. At this stage it is likely that there will be more local authorities with large urban areas and large rural hinterlands than might have initially been expected. It is clear that part of the driver for this reorganisation is creating councils of a sufficient size to generate enough receipts from council tax and business rates to move councils to more sustainable finances, less reliant on central government funding.

The statutory nature of the invitation means that councils must bring forward initial proposals **by 21 March 2025** – with final proposals due for submission in the autumn. Counties that are also part of the priority devolution programme will need to submit plans by **26 September 2025**, the remaining counties by **28 November 2025**. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has also stated that it will only accept one plan per area for consideration, competing plans will not be considered. The pressure on district, county and unitary councils where included, will be immense in the next weeks and months. Many of you have already commented that this is having a negative effect on council staff and working relationships. There are indications of the route some areas will be taking already, and you will be aware of them; other areas are yet to issue any indication of plans or are likely to lag behind due to ideological differences. You can read the letter for each county area here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-invitation-to-local-authorities-in-two-tier-areas>

There will be a much clearer idea of the implications around 21 March when plans are likely to be made public. An initial estimate [guess] of the number of new councils that will be created is in the region of 43 ± 3 . [185 councils in total will cease to exist in their current form or be abolished completely]. NAVCA will provide further information as soon as it is available.

4. This extensive local government reorganisation will have a direct or indirect **impact on an estimated 88 NAVCA members**. The table below collates information by county area. It lists all the councils involved in reorganisation in that area, the population size and the existing NAVCA members that will be affected.

NAVCA is concerned about a wide range of challenges and problems that this will precipitate:

- the transfer and arrangement of powers between the new strategic authorities and unitary councils – this will only become clearer once the Devolution Bill has been published [likely due in June], although there is some indication of how powers will be aligned from the existing publications and experience of the existing combined authorities
- the unfunded time and effort that will be needed to make and remake relationships that enable LIOs to do their role effectively
- retaining what is good from existing relationships and practice
- taking the opportunity to avoid continuation of poor practices
- the inevitable recommissioning of contracts under the new governance arrangements, taking time and capacity as well as bringing risk their value is reduced
- funding for local infrastructure and the VCFSE sector
- the impact on strategic relationships with health systems, public health and local resilience forums
- the impact on people and communities, especially from excluded groups and those furthest from public services.

NAVCA is working closely with ACRE and VCSEP and we will be in touch shortly with more information and guidance to support your local engagement with these changes. We are also in conversation with the Local Government Association, looking to work together particularly on practical support and guidance as the impact becomes apparent.

| County | No. of District Councils | Councils invited to consider LGR to unitary council | Devolution invitation extended beyond county | Total pop. extended area | Guess at no. of 500,000 pop. units | No. of NAVCA members | LIOs in Area [NAVCA Members] | Current information on reorganisation |
|----------------|--------------------------|---|--|--------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Cambridgeshire | 5 | Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council Huntingdonshire District Council, South | Yes | 919,509 | 2 | 2 | Cambridge CVS and Hunts Forum [merged], VCA East Cambridgeshire | |

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|-----------------|----|--|-----|-----------|---|----|--|--|
| | | Cambridgeshire District Council, Peterborough City Council | | | | | | |
| Derbyshire | 8 | Amber Valley Borough Council, Bolsover District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council Derbyshire Dales District Council, Erewash Borough Council, High Peak Borough Council, North East Derbyshire District Council, South Derbyshire District Council, Derby City Council | Yes | 1,077,960 | 2 | 9 | Amber Valley, Bassetlaw, Chesterfield VC, Derbyshire Dales, Erewash, High Peak, South Derbyshire, The Bureau Glossop, Derby VA. 13 LIOs in Derbyshire in total plus Derby VA | |
| Devon | 8 | Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council, North Devon District Council, South Hams District Council Teignbridge District Council, Torridge District Council, West Devon Borough Council, Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council | Yes | 1,241,621 | 2 | 7 | DeVA, Devon Communities Together [RCC], North Devon VS, South Hams CA, Torbay Communities, Teignbridge CVS, Plymouth Octopus | |
| Essex | 12 | Basildon Borough Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council, Harlow District Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Tendring District Council Uttlesford District Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Thurrock Council | Yes | 1,897,472 | 3 | 10 | Basildon CVS, Brentwood CVS, Chelmsford, Maldon, Rainbow Services [Harlow], Tendring CVS, Uttlesford, VA Epping Forest, plus Thurrock CVS and Southend AVS | Priority area: new Mayoral Strategic Authority. May 2025 elections postponed. 17 Feb consultation announced. |
| Gloucestershire | 6 | Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester City Council Gloucestershire County Council, Stroud District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council | No | 660,000 | 1 | 2 | West of England Rural Network covers Gloucestershire – Gloucestershire RCC [new member] | Asking to become single county unitary |

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| Hampshire | 11 | Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, East Hampshire District Council, Eastleigh Borough Council, Fareham Borough Council, Gosport Borough Council, Hampshire County Council, Hart District Council, Havant Borough Council, New Forest District Council, Rushmoor Borough Council, Test Valley Borough Council, Winchester City Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council | Yes | 2,036,313 | 4 | 8 | Action Hampshire, Basingstoke VA, Community First Wessex, One Community Eastleigh, Hart VA, Rushmoor VS, Unity Online Andover, Southampton VS, | Priority area: new Mayoral Strategic Authority. May 2025 elections postponed. 17 Feb consultation announced. |
| Hertfordshire | 10 | Broxbourne Borough Council, Dacorum Borough Council, East Herts Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Hertsmere Borough Council, North Hertfordshire District Council, St Albans City and District Council, Stevenage Borough Council, Three Rivers District Council, Watford Borough Council, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, | No | 1,216,000 | 2 | 2 | Communities 1st, Dacorum VS, | |
| Kent | 12 | Ashford Borough Council, Canterbury City Council, Dartford Borough Council, Dover District Council, Folkestone and Hythe District Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Swale Borough Council, Thanet District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Medway Council | Yes | 1,896,800 | 3 | 6 | Canterbury & Herne Bay VC, CVS North West Kent, Kent Coast Volunteering, Social Enterprise Kent, Swale CVS, Medway VA | |
| Lancashire | 12 | Burnley Borough Council, Chorley Borough Council, Fylde Borough Council, Hyndburn Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, Lancaster City Council, Pendle Borough Council, Preston City Council, Ribble Valley Borough Council, Rossendale Borough Council, South Ribble Borough Council, West Lancashire Borough Council, Wyre Borough Council, Blackburn with Darwen Council, Blackpool Council | Yes | 1,570,211 | 3 | 6 | Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale CVS, Community CVS, Inclusive North, Lancaster DCVS, West Lancs CVS, Blackpool Volunteer Centre | |

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| Leicestershire | 7 | Blaby District Council, Charnwood Borough Council, Harborough District Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, Leicestershire County Council, Melton Borough Council, North West Leicestershire District Council, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council | Yes | 1,154,423 | 2 | 1 | VA LeicesterShire | |
| Lincolnshire | 7 | Boston Borough Council, City of Lincoln Council, East Lindsey District Council, Lincolnshire County Council, North Kesteven District Council, South Holland District Council, South Kesteven District Council, West Lindsey District Council, North East Lincolnshire Council, North Lincolnshire Council | Yes | 1,111,422 | 2 | 4 | Community Vision, Lincolnshire CVS, VANEL, Voluntary Centre Services / Urban Challenge Ltd | Proposing the creation of two unitary authorities from Lincs CC, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire councils. |
| Norfolk | 7 | Breckland District Council, Broadland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, Norfolk County Council, North Norfolk District Council, Norwich City Council, South Norfolk District Council | No | 932,000 | 2 | 2 | Community Action Norfolk, Voluntary Norfolk | Priority area: new Mayoral Strategic Authority. May 2025 elections postponed. 17 Feb consultation announced. |
| Nottinghamshire | 7 | Ashfield District Council, Bassetlaw District Council, Broxtowe Borough Council, Gedling Borough Council, Mansfield District Council, Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Rushcliffe Borough Council, Nottingham City Council | Yes | 1,174,276 | 2 | 2 | Bassetlaw and Bolsover CVS, Nottingham CVS | |
| Oxfordshire | 5 | Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council | No | 751,000 | 1 | 3 | Community First Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire CVA, Volunteer Link Up [West Oxfordshire] | Asking to become single county unitary |
| Staffordshire | 8 | Cannock Chase District Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council, South Staffordshire District Council, Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Tamworth Borough Council, Stoke City Council | Yes | 1,162,157 | 2 | 2 | Support Staffordshire, VAST | |

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|----------------|----|---|-----|-----------|---|---|--|--|
| Suffolk | 5 | Babergh District Council, East Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk District Council | No | 776,500 | 2 | 1 | CA Suffolk | Priority area: new Mayoral Strategic Authority. May 2025 elections postponed. 17 Feb consultation announced. |
| Surrey | 11 | Elmbridge Borough Council, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, Guildford Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Runnymede Borough Council, Spelthorne Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Surrey Heath Borough Council, Tandridge District Council, Waverley Borough Council, Woking Borough Council | No | 1,229,000 | 3 | 5 | Central Surrey VA, Surrey CA, VA Reigate & Banstead, VA South West Surrey, VA Surrey East [was Tandridge] | Priority area: new Mayoral Strategic Authority. 17 Feb consultation announced. May 2025 elections postponed. As of 12 Feb proposing to move to three unitary councils. |
| East Sussex | 5 | East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council, Wealden District Council, Brighton and Hove City Council* | Yes | 555,500 | 1 | 5 | 3VA Eastbourne, Hastings VA, Rother VA, Community Works, Action in Rural Sussex | Priority area: new Mayoral Strategic Authority. May 2025 elections postponed. 17 Feb consultation announced. |
| West Sussex | 7 | Adur District Council, Arun District Council, Chichester District Council, Crawley Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Mid Sussex District Council, West Sussex County Council, Worthing Borough Council, Brighton and Hove City Council* | No | 1,180,637 | 2 | 6 | Adur VA, Arun and Chichester, Community People [Mid-Sussex VA], Community Works Brighton, Crawley CA, Action in Rural Sussex | Priority area: new Mayoral Strategic Authority. May 2025 elections postponed. 17 Feb consultation announced. |
| Warwickshire | 5 | North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Rugby Borough Council, Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Warwick District Council, Warwickshire County Council | No | 618,000 | 1 | 2 | Warwickshire CAVA, VA Stratford on Avon District | Asking to become single unitary across the county |
| Worcestershire | 6 | Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council, Worcestershire County Council, Wychavon District Council, Wyre Forest District Council | No | 614,000 | 1 | 5 | Bromsgrove & Redditch, CA Malvern & District, Droitwich Spa, Evesham VC, Worcester CA | Asking to become single unitary across the county |