

Update on Local Government Reorganisation – 25 November 2025

Local Government Reorganisation [LGR] is progressing with significant milestones being reached.

Six devolution priority areas: submission of proposals for LGR	26 September 2025
All other areas: submission of proposals for LGR	28 November 2025
For Surrey ONLY decision on final proposal for LGR	28 October 2025
Six devolution priority areas: consultations on proposal starts	19 November 2025
All other areas: consultations on proposal starts	January 2026
Six devolution priority areas: decision on final proposal for LGR announced	March 2026
For Surrey ONLY likely elections to new unitary authorities	7 May 2026
All other areas: decision on final proposal for LGR announced	Summer 2026
For Surrey ONLY vesting day [new authorities come into force]	1 April 2027
Six devolution priority areas: elections to new unitary authorities	6 May 2027
All other areas: elections to new unitary authorities	6 May 2027
Six devolution priority areas: vesting day	1 April 2028
All other areas: vesting day	1 April 2028

Legislation for Parliamentary approval of the split of Surrey into two unitary authorities: East Surrey Council and West Surrey Council will be introduced in early January 2026. MHCLG had consulted on two proposals: one for three councils and one for two. Although both proposals met the criteria, the proposal for two unitaries better met the criteria in relation to future financial sustainability which is perhaps indicative of the likely approach that will be taken in future decisions [although MHCLG deny this].

Consultation on Six County Areas

Six two tier areas had plans for LGR put out to consultation on 19 November 2025.

- East Sussex with Brighton and Hove
- Essex with Southend and Thurrock
- Hampshire with Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight
- Norfolk
- Suffolk
- West Sussex

Government are consulting on all the competing proposals submitted, we think to avoid any possibility of future judicial review. Officials have carried out a preliminary review of the submissions to ensure that they address statutory requirements and that there is sufficient

evidence provided to make a decision against each criterion. No formal assessment has been made against the invitation criteria, which will happen after the consultation closes.

The remaining 14 two tier areas have to submit proposals for LGR by Friday 28 November. We will not know which proposals will be consulted on until an unspecified time that is Winter 2025 / Spring 2026.

Decision making criteria

Criteria for assessment of LGR proposals are:

- whether the proposal achieves for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government
- whether the councils are the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
- whether the unitary structures prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens
- whether councils in the area have sought to work together to come to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views
- whether new unitary structures support devolution arrangements
- whether new unitary structures enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

In taking a decision the Secretary of State has to take into consideration how well the proposals meet these criteria and the results of the consultation process.

Lots of Options

	Number of Proposals
East Sussex with Brighton and Hove	2 – one whole county unitary on the East Sussex county footprint, five unitary councils
Essex with Southend and Thurrock	4 – three unitary councils, two different proposals for four unitaries, and five unitary councils
Hampshire with Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight	4 – four unitary councils, and three different proposals for five unitary councils [Isle of Wight will remain a unitary]
Norfolk	3 – one whole county unitary, two unitaries, and three unitary councils
Suffolk	2 – one whole county unitary and three unitary councils
West Sussex	2 – one whole county unitary and two unitary councils

Note that the consultations for East Sussex and West Sussex are being run together as a single consultation.

Interestingly, and unsurprisingly, it is the existing county councils that tend to advocate for a single unitary based on the existing county footprint. Once the consultations have concluded, the Government will assess the proposals against the criteria in the invitation

and decide, subject to parliamentary approval, which, if any, proposals are to be implemented, with or without modification.

How to respond to the consultation

For the first time the list of statutory consultees includes the voluntary and community sector and specifically lists many local infrastructure organisations. It is therefore very important that LIOs and the wider VCSE sector respond, no matter how briefly.

- In East and West Sussex and Brighton this is the Sussex VCSE Alliance and the East Sussex VCSE Alliance which all have involvement in by area LIOs.
- In Essex statutory consultees from the VCSE sector include Southend AVS, Thurrock CVS, Essex VCSE Alliance and Essex Community Foundation which is acting as convenor for all the infrastructure bodies in greater Essex including the district based LIOs.
- In Hampshire and the Solent: all LIOs are listed as statutory consultees [and the VCSE Alliance is not].
- In Norfolk and Suffolk: LIOs and VCSE Alliances are statutory consultees.

- The deadline for responses is **Sunday 11 January 2026** – seven weeks including Christmas.
- Read the consultation documents and complete the online survey.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-government-reorganisation-policy-and-programme-updates>
- Respondents will be invited to provide a separate response for every proposal made. You will need to refer to proposals made by the councils [linked from each consultation document].
- The questions are predominantly responses on a Likert Scale and mirror the criteria for assessment. Only question 9 gives the opportunity to explain your answers or provide additional information. See below.
- In all areas apart from Greater Essex there are boundary changes to be consulted on too, and you will be asked to respond to this separately using a Likert scale question and a free text box.

What information could be submitted in Question 9?

Here are some suggestions and pointers for each question. Questions 1 -8 are all Likert scale questions – be honest with the responses and explain responses in question 9.

Encourage local VCSE organisations to respond too. Think about holding a meeting or sharing resources with VCSE organisations to help them respond.

Question 1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?

- How does this affect your work and the work of the VCSE sector as a whole?
- How does it relate to health systems, place and neighbourhoods, integrated neighbourhood teams, neighbourhood delivery of health services?

- How does it relate to neighbourhood delivery of development or regeneration e.g. Plan for Towns, Trailblazer Neighbourhoods, Pride in Place Strategy?
- What will be the opportunities? What are the challenges?
- What are the financial issues for the area, local infrastructure and the VCSE sector?

Question 2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?

- How does local infrastructure and the VCSE contribute to these outcomes? What is the offer?
- What is the ask in order for this to happen?
- Link to any published materials e.g. a manifesto for the VCSE sector.

Question 3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks?

- Any examples of effective working practices with councils from previous relationships that can be carried on?
- What could change or be done to improve working relationships with LIOs and VCSE?

Question 4 To what extent do you agree or disagree that this proposal will put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing, particularly given that some councils in the area are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support?

- Are there any financial problems that need addressing? How do these affect the VCSE sector?
- What are the opportunities that these changes create for VCSE and LIOs to work with forming councils?
- Are there risks to funding of LIOs and VCSE that need to be stated?
- What is needed for the sector to fully contribute to the aspirations of the proposal?

Question 5 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services?

- Explore the role of the VCSE in service delivery.
- Explain how the whole of the VCSE sector contributes to and is important for public health, wellbeing, community cohesion and resilience.
- State clearly what the offer is from the VCSE into these new structures.
- What projects need to continue to be funded during the transition?

Question 6 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?

- What has been your experience of consultation and participation in discussions and decision making? How has the VCSE and communities been involved? Any core messages to emphasise?

Question 7 To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support devolution arrangements, for example, the establishment of a strategic authority?

- What are the implications of the proposals for devolution – how does the number of unitary authorities and the areas they cover, relate to the proposed area for a new strategic authority? e.g. does a single county unitary really give capacity and representation on a strategic authority?
- How should LIOs and the VCSE sector be included in devolution arrangements?

Question 8 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?

- This question includes reference to the proposals for neighbourhood governance contained within the Devolution Bill currently going through Parliament. The details of how neighbourhood governance will be implemented are not yet known and are unlikely to be published before March 2026.
- This question gives an opportunity to emphasise how communities, the VCSE sector and local infrastructure could be engaged and empowered in the new structures. How can communities and the VCSE sector be involved in neighbourhood governance as an equal participant to elected members and representatives from statutory partners. [We think it likely that government will model these proposals on existing Neighbourhood Boards used with in the Plan for Towns and now the Pride in Place Strategy, but this is NOT confirmed].

A discussion thread has been created on the NAVCA Connect forum for you to discuss responses.

<https://www.navca.org.uk/posts/local-government-reorganisation-tranche-2-out-for-consultation>