

Local government reorganisation – why is it important?

NAVCA and ACRE have produced this resource as part of a project supporting the VCFSE sector and forming unitary and strategic authorities to work together through devolution and local government reorganisation.

Local government reorganisation (LGR) is now moving quickly. 21 two-tier council areas of county and district councils are being reorganised, along with some smaller unitary councils adjacent to them. We already know how the county of Surrey will be reorganised (into two unitary authorities East Surrey and West Surrey) and by the end of March 2026, we will know how six other areas will be reconfigured. This means that VCFSE organisations in these areas will relate to different geographies, new council structures and councillors, and need to rebuild relationships and partnerships with council staff. Even if you are a small volunteer-led organisation, these changes will have implications for you.

Read on to find out more.

What is local government reorganisation?

21 county councils and their 164 constituent district councils are being reorganised so that this is a single level of council for an area – called a unitary authority. This will mean that in many county areas two or more districts will come together to form a new unitary authority. In other places there may be some boundary changes with parts of a district joining others, and in other areas such as Essex, Sussex and Hampshire, adjacent large towns or cities that already have a unitary council will also be involved in the reorganisation.

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Local government reorganisation process:

Stage one: inviting unitary proposals	These were all submitted by 21 March 2025.
Stage two: submission of formal unitary proposals	These were all submitted by 28 November 2025.
Stage three: statutory consultation	This includes any council affected that has not submitted proposals and is open to all.
Stage four: decision to implement a proposal	Ministers take the final decision subject to parliamentary approval. In making a decision, Ministers will have regard to all the representations that were received, including the consultation responses, and any other relevant information available to Ministers. The decision taken by Ministers will be subject to collective agreement across Government.
Stage five: making secondary legislation	A Structural Change Order has to go through parliamentary approval to establish a new single tier of local government and abolish the predecessor councils. The Structural Change Orders will specify arrangements for the first elections for the new unitary councils, councillor numbers, the functions and powers the new council has in the transition period. The Order usually takes 6 to 9 months to prepare and take through Parliament.
Stage six: transition period	Once the Structural Change Order has been made, existing councils carry on delivering services and fulfilling their duties until vesting day, while preparing to transfer all assets, functions and staff to the new unitary authority. The 'transition body' – also known as a shadow council or shadow authority – will prepare an implementation plan which will enable everything to be in place to start work formally on vesting day.
Stage seven: new unitary authority goes live	This is vesting day. A minimum period of around one year is allowed to enable safe and legal transfer of key services from the point the legislation is made to when they go live.

Timetable for different areas

Surrey – LGR has been decided, with East Surrey and West Surrey councils being created.

By the end of March 2026, government will announce how the following areas will be reorganised:

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

By the end of July, government should announce changes for the remaining 14 county areas:

- Cambridgeshire
- Derbyshire
- Devon
- Gloucestershire
- Hertfordshire
- Kent
- Lancashire
- Leicestershire
- Lincolnshire
- Nottinghamshire
- Oxfordshire
- Staffordshire
- Warwickshire
- Worcestershire

Why does this matter to my organisation?

- 1.Changes in geographical boundaries and larger areas of operation. All VCFSE organisations will need to consider if they want to align with new council geographies, which may mean operating across different or larger footprints than before. This is both risk and opportunity.
- 2.New council structures, new council staff, new councillors and changes in how decisions are made. It will take time to rebuild relationships and partnerships with council staff and elected members to ensure your knowledge, expertise and work continues to be understood and supported.
- 3.Changing commissioning and funding landscapes for new councils inevitably means that commissioning and grant processes, and funding priorities will change. This poses both opportunities and risks particularly for small organisations needing to scale up operations to cover a large geographical area or county organisations.
- 4.There will be an impact even on small volunteer-led organisations as structural changes and changes to ways of working will ripple out to all voluntary and community activity.
- 5.Local government reorganisation will influence who VCSE organisations work with, where they operate, how they are funded, and how services are designed and delivered. The changes are significant and will require active engagement, relationship-building, and organisational flexibility.

Your local [NAVCA](#) and [ACRE](#) members can help you navigate these changes.

You can read more information about local government reorganisation from the [Institute for Government](#).