

Update on local government reform and devolution

The way forward for local government reform is now a lot clearer though it's not exactly straightforward and no one would be shocked if further changes were still to come.

Reorganisation of Councils

From May 2028, the government is replacing our current 'two-tier' council system with new 'unitary' councils.

Three new unitary councils will be created for Suffolk:

- Ipswich and Southern Suffolk
- Eastern Suffolk
- Western Suffolk

These will replace Suffolk County Council and the five district and borough councils: Babergh, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk. This will provide a single tier of local government.

Walsham Le Willows ward will be part of the new Western Suffolk unitary council.

There will now be County Council elections in May 2026. These elections are to elect County Councillors for two years until the new unitary authorities take control.

The current District Councils will stay in place until May 2028 and there will be no further District Council elections.

Elections for the new unitary Councils will take place next year in May 2027 with a year of working alongside existing councils as a handover.

The government believes reorganising and simplifying councils can drive economic growth while delivering better public services. Clearly there may be cost and disruption associated with this reorganisation.

Devolution and an elected mayor

The second big change is devolution, which will involve the creation of a new strategic authority and the election of a mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk in 2028. This was originally intended to be in May 2026, but the government has now delayed this until May 2028.

The key role of the strategic authority will be to make decisions spanning multiple councils covering areas such as transport and driving economic growth.

The Mayor will be directly elected by the people of Norfolk and Suffolk via the supplementary voting system. This means that if a candidate hasn't got 50% of the vote in the first round then second preference votes will be taken into account. The idea is to ensure anyone elected has broader community support.