

Our prospectus for a new relationship with town and parish councils

The creation of a new unitary council for Norfolk presents a unique opportunity to reshape the relationship with town and parish councils, empowering local communities and strengthening local democracy. With over 550 town and parish councils across the county, these bodies are deeply embedded in their communities, trusted by residents, and vital to local democracy.

Our recent engagement with town and parish councils shows they have a clear appetite for:

- Greater local influence
- More collaborative working
- The ability to take on local assets and services where it suits local needs and capacity

This prospectus describes what's on offer for town and parish councils, what support the new unitary council will offer and how the council and town and parish councils can work together.

Local choices on offer

The new unitary council will give town and parish councils a clear and consistent list of options for taking on more local powers. These options have been shaped together with local councils and include:

- **Assets** – like community centres, allotments, public toilets, parks, play areas, sports grounds, car parks, and memorials.
- **Services** – such as small road and footpath repairs, grass cutting, street cleaning, recycling, community transport, local tourism, environmental health checks, and climate projects.

Any handover of services or assets will be based on clear rules, proper checks, and a shared commitment to making sure the arrangements are financially sound, for both the new council and the town or parish council. Transfers won't be rushed; they'll be well planned and built to last.

These local choices on offer represent opportunities for those councils who wish to explore them. Arrangements will not be forced on any councils who do not want them and it's about working together to pursue the opportunities that are right for each local area.

Working together - clustering and collaboration

The new unitary council will help town and parish councils work together in groups, called clusters, to share ideas, manage services, and speak with a stronger voice. Clustering means councils team up based on location or shared interests, while keeping their own local identity.

Clustering can help with:

- Sharing learning and good practice
- Managing assets and services together
- Speaking up as a group to the new council
- Helping smaller parishes get involved

The new unitary council will support this by:

- Connecting councils with similar needs or nearby locations
- Offering practical help, like templates, governance models, and facilitation
- Supporting Neighbourhood Area Committees or similar groups to lead collaboration, share resources, and get officer support
- Keeping things flexible so clusters reflect local identity and don't follow a one-size-fits-all approach

A framework for working together - guiding principles

This table sets out key principles for how the new unitary council and town and parish councils will work together, especially when local councils take on new powers.

Principle	What this means in practice
Co-designed and voluntary	The unitary council will work with town and parish councils to shape all frameworks and processes, and taking part is always up to them. Town and parish councils don't have to take on any assets or services unless they choose to; and only when the time is right for them.
Right council, right job, right time	Each council takes on community responsibilities that match its strengths, resources, and local knowledge. The council best placed to deal with an issue takes the lead, making sure decisions and actions reflect local needs and what the council can do. Assets or services should only be handed over when the receiving council is ready, and the plans are solid and long-lasting. Transfers shouldn't be rushed or changed often; they need to be carefully planned and based on what the council can manage.
Flexible and protects identity	Working together or passing on community assets supports and builds local identity it doesn't weaken it. Every process can be adapted to suit local needs.
Communication channels are open and up to date	Councils have clear points of contact with each other, with clear routes to information, updates, and support.
Councils support one another to build capacity	Town and parish councils will get practical help, training, and advice, thanks to joint work between the unitary council, partners like NALC and peer support.
Processes and arrangements are transparent	When taking on extra powers, there will be clear processes, criteria, and hands-on support every step of the way.
Financial sustainability comes first	Any services or assets passed on should not cost more than they bring in. The aim is to balance responsibilities with things that help cover the costs.
Clear and straightforward governance	There are clear steps to follow, and everyone understands their roles, responsibilities, financial matters, and how to sort out any disagreements.

This diagram brings the local choices on offer, together with the guiding principles, to show how the new unitary and town and parish councils will work together.



Conclusion

This prospectus sets out a shared ambition for a stronger, more collaborative relationship between the new council and town and parish councils. Built on framework of clear principles and backed by practical support, it recognises the vital role of local councils in shaping and delivering for their communities. By working together at the right time, in the right way, and with mutual respect, we can build a more responsive, resilient, and locally empowered Norfolk.