Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government, Devolution and Regional Growth
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Leaders in Suffolk
By email

7 September 2026

Dear Leader,

I am writing to update you on the Local Government Reorganisation programme following the comments by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons last week that the government was prepared to look at decisions.

We set out in the Cabinet Statement on Rewiring the State that local government structures are key to our devolution ambitions and filling the map. Effective and sustainable local government is vital to meeting our ambitions.

However, the government has also listened to representations about the approach and pace of reorganisation. Those relate both to the specific decisions announced in March and July and to the scale and pace of the programme more broadly. While we recognise there will always be a wide range of divergent views on the structure of councils, and so achieving perfect consensus will never be possible, now is the time to pause and reflect. It is important that this is done right.

The Secretary of State will announce later today that we are undertaking a review of the Local Government Reorganisation programme and following updated legal advice (for the avoidance of doubt no privilege is waived) that she has withdrawn the decisions made in March this year for four areas: Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock; Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton; Norfolk; and Suffolk.

The review, which I will lead, will look at the programme as a whole and this will include reviewing the 14 decisions made in July. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and West Sussex, where decisions have not yet been taken, will be considered as part of the review. The new councils for East Surrey and West Surrey are unaffected and outside of this process because they are already established in law.

Until this review has concluded, I am asking you, together with your partners, to cease work on implementing the decisions that were announced in July. I want to acknowledge the work that your teams have undertaken on local government reorganisation. This decision in no way reflects the work done locally in developing plans, building consensus where it can be found, and marshalling your organisation and partners for the change ahead. But I do believe this reduces the risk of nugatory work if, after further review, we decide to change course.

While the current timetable for reorganisation envisages local elections scheduled for May 2027 being replaced by elections to the new councils, this review means elections scheduled to take place in May 2027 will go ahead to existing council boundaries.

I appreciate that this position will feel uncomfortable, but I believe it is right to consider these matters seriously and deeply given the significance of the decisions. I want to assure myself that this process is being done correctly and robustly. It will also afford the opportunity for the Devolution White Paper, which will set out our plans to rewire the state, to address the question of the role of local government in a devolved country.

I know you will be pressing for certainty as quickly as possible, so you have clarity over the future and to allow the work required to implement reorganisation. I am committing to you that I will ensure that next steps are communicated early and clearly to the sector.

I do not take this lightly and recognise the huge amount of work that has already gone into progressing reorganisation, for which I am very grateful. My officials will contact your officials shortly to discuss next steps, and I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives and MPs.

Yours sincerely,



JIM MCMAHON OBE MP
Minister for Local Government, Devolution and Regional Growth