Local Government Association

Housing Peer Challenge

South Norfolk Council

3 – 5 June 2026

Feedback report



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Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

Chair: Councillor Louise Gittins **Chief Executive (Interim):** Jenny Rowlands **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

1. Introduction

A team of local government peers, led by the Local Government Association (LGA), undertook a Housing Peer Challenge (HPC) of South Norfolk Council (SNC) from 3 – 5 June 2026.

The HPC provides a structure for the peer team to support the host councils to:

- Reflect on and receive feedback on the housing service and related strategy to support ongoing improvement and assurance.
- Identify and share best practice

The HPC has been delivered from the position of a 'critical friend', providing robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to the council to help drive continuous improvement in the housing service for residents.

Our peer team consisted of highly experienced and knowledgeable senior local government councillor and officer peers (see section four). This report provides SNC with feedback on our findings. It provides the council with a set of a high-level recommendations under each of the agreed areas of scope.

The council is encouraged to publish this report to share their learning and good practice. The council should then consider how best to implement the recommendations. The LGA would encourage the council to develop, implement and publish an action plan which responds to the recommendations from this HPC.

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2. Executive summary

The Housing Peer Challenge of SNC highlights a service with strong values, committed leadership, and an embedded culture of early intervention and partnership working, operating within a context of increasing housing demand, affordability pressures, and rising homelessness presentations. The council has developed a proactive and compassionate approach to supporting residents, underpinned by a well-established help hub and a wide range of preventative services that are delivering positive outcomes.

This culture of support is a significant strength. Staff are highly motivated, empowered, and committed to achieving the best outcomes for residents, and the council is widely regarded as a trusted and constructive partner across the system. However, this same culture has also contributed to growing service pressures, particularly through an increasing reliance on temporary accommodation (TA) and a tendency to determine that there is a priority need and therefore TA without sufficient challenge or consistent decision-making. Strengthening oversight of homelessness practice, including introducing more consistent managerial authorisation of decisions and TA placements, will be critical to ensuring that support remains both appropriate, sustainable and in the best interests of the resident.

While the council collects a wide range of data, there is an opportunity to improve how this is used strategically. Developing a clear, simplified set of key performance indicators within an accessible dashboard, alongside a stronger, shared narrative that explains the drivers of demand and performance, will support more informed decision-making, align teams, and provide greater clarity across the organisation. This, in turn, will help address the current disconnect between different parts of the housing service, where teams are working hard but not always with a consistent understanding of the wider system or shared objectives.

Strategic clarity will also be strengthened through the finalisation and adoption of a clear, accessible housing strategy, ensuring understanding and ownership at all levels. This will provide a stronger framework for service delivery, particularly as the council navigates the significant changes associated with Local Government

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Reorganisation (LGR). Alongside this, there is a need to enhance member development, equipping councillors with the knowledge and confidence to provide effective scrutiny and constructive challenge, thereby strengthening governance and accountability.

The council's strong partnership ethos remains a key asset, but there is scope to build on this by taking a more assertive system leadership role. This includes using existing relationships to challenge partners more robustly and ensure accountability sits with the appropriate organisations, particularly in relation to out-of-area placements, care leavers, and discharge pathways. Internally, improving coordination will require a review of the customer journey and service access points, ensuring services are better integrated and that residents consistently receive the right support at the right time.

Financially, the council is currently stable but increasing demand and rising costs, particularly in TA (despite recent reductions) and housing benefit subsidy loss, present growing risks. Addressing this will require a stronger focus on financial management and planning, including establishing sinking funds for property maintenance and ensuring managers take greater ownership of budgets. At the same time, there is a clear need to demonstrate value for money, particularly in relation to early help and prevention activity. Building a robust evidence base to articulate the cost-benefit and impact of services such as the help hub will be essential, especially in the context of LGR where future investment decisions will be more constrained.

Overall, SNC's housing service is highly regarded, innovative, and driven by a strong commitment to residents, with notable strengths in prevention, partnership working, and organisational culture. To sustain this success in an increasingly challenging environment and in the lead up to LGR, the council now needs to rebalance its approach, embedding greater strategic oversight, consistency, and financial discipline alongside its strong operational ethos. By doing so, it will be well-placed to manage demand effectively, improve system-wide performance, and ensure its services remain resilient and impactful for the future.

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3. Recommendations

The following are the peer team's key recommendations which have been prioritised on the grounds of urgency and importance.

3.1 Recommendation 1 – Oversight and decision-making

Introduce stronger oversight of homelessness practice and decision-making along with consistent manager authorisation of TA placements.

3.2 Recommendation 2 – Performance

Produce a simplified dataset of core KPIs (strategic and operational) in an accessible dashboard.

3.3 Recommendation 3 – Service narrative

Use the data to create a comprehensive shared narrative for the service to drive service design, policy and performance management and share this with all officers and members.

3.4 Recommendation 4 – Housing strategies

Finalise and adopt a housing strategy that is clear, simple and owned at all levels in the organisations.

3.5 Recommendation 5 – Scrutiny and challenge

Implement member training and development around the wider housing service to enable greater scrutiny and challenge.

3.6 Recommendation 6 – Customer journey

Review all points of entry and the inter connections to understand the customer journey thus ensuring each person receives the right outcome.

3.7 Recommendation 7 – Accountability and challenge

Use your relationships with partners to escalate issues robustly ensuring accountability sits with the appropriate organisation (county, neighbouring councils,

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NHS, ICB etc.).

3.8 Recommendation 8 – Financial management

Set up sinking funds (from reserves) for ongoing property repairs.

3.9 Recommendation 9 – Demonstrating value for money

Invest in a good quality evidence base to demonstrate the cost/benefit of preventative work such as the help hub to embed in the ethos of future organisations (LGR).

In addition to the key recommendations, section five of this report captures our detailed feedback within each of the HPC's core areas of focus.

4. Peer team

HPC is conducted by experienced LGA housing peers, including elected councillors and senior housing directors/officers. The composition of the peer team was shaped by the specific focus of the challenge agreed with SNC, with the LGA selecting peers based on their relevant housing knowledge and expertise. The peers for this HPC were:

- Lead senior officer peer - Jennifer Taylor - Director of Communities and Housing, Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils
- Member peer (Conservative) - Cllr Richard Clewer, Wiltshire Council
- Member peer (Liberal Democrat) - Cllr Swithin Long, Torbay Council
- Senior officer peer - Matt Garrett, Service Director for Community Connections, Plymouth City Council
- Senior officer peer - Isabel Blake - Head of Housing, South Hams District and West Devon Borough Councils
- Senior officer peer - Cairistine Foster-Cannan, Chief Executive Local Government East
- LGA peer challenge manager - Kirsty Human

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5. Detailed feedback and recommended actions

This section of the report provides detailed feedback along with additional recommendations related to the agreed areas of focus.

When developing the action plan (in response to the HPC's findings), the council should consider both the key recommendations presented in section three and the additional suggestions set out below.

5.1 Housing priorities and outcomes

South Norfolk Council faces a complex and evolving housing landscape, shaped by strong and growing demand, affordability pressures and changing demographics. While parts of the area are relatively affluent, pockets of deprivation persist, and an ageing population, high levels of single-person households and reliance on private transport reflect the predominantly rural character of the district.

Housing markets are dominated by owner occupation, with limited availability of affordable housing. Combined with high house price-to-earnings ratios, this creates sustained affordability challenges, particularly for younger households and those on lower incomes. Demand continues to outpace supply across all tenures, increasing pressures on homelessness services, temporary accommodation and wider financial sustainability.

Since 2020, SNC and Broadland District Council (BDC) have addressed these challenges through a shared housing service. This collaborative approach enables delivery at scale and strengthens influence across Norfolk, while maintaining the sovereignty and democratic accountability of each council.

SNC's Strategic Plan 2024 – 28 lists "Enriching our communities" as one of its four key priorities, with aims to prevent homelessness and support people into secure housing and to support the delivery of more affordable homes within the district (169 new affordable homes needed each year).

Early help and prevention services are excellent with extensive provision and a wide variety of support services available. The help hub provides a one stop shop where customers only tell their story once and can be helped by multiple agencies. Other

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early help offers include a handy person scheme, sanctuary scheme, financial upskilling, community connectors, District Direct, social prescribers, Active NoW and tenancy training for care leavers. Peers heard of real success stories as outcomes from this work such as 100 per cent of attendees to the tenant awareness workshop not returning as homeless within six months.

You take your role as corporate parents seriously, but this can be to your detriment as you appear to be accommodating disproportionate numbers of care leavers. Peers made an approximate calculation that SNC and BDC are receiving an approach from 50 per cent of the county's care experienced young people reaching 18 in Norfolk each year. There were other examples given in several meetings where it appeared the council was going above and beyond its own duty. Peers heard:

- Incidences of accepting statutory homelessness due to unacceptable delays with other councils' lack of response to a s198 referral.
- That professionals are more reluctant to refer to other districts in Norfolk due to problems with accessing the service. Whereas at SNC or BDC you can leave it late on a Friday afternoon and still be safe in the knowledge that SNC or BDC will deal with the issue.
- People approach their council of second choice (SNC and BDC) due to challenges approaching others.
- Where Homes of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are offered to care leavers, they are advised by their support professionals they will get self-contained social housing if they present in South Norfolk.

Your partners need to be robustly challenged at officer and member level around out of area approaches, care leavers and hospital and mental health discharges. The balance of responsibility needs to be reset, and each agency needs to be held accountable for their duties. Peers recommend you use your strong working relationships with partners and escalate issues robustly, ensuring accountability sits with the appropriate organisation (county, neighbouring councils, NHS, ICB).

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The council recently adopted an approach of purchasing temporary accommodation (TA) to reduce the reliance on nightly lets (spot purchase) and reduce housing benefit (HB) subsidy loss through exempt accommodation. Peers believe this is a sensible approach, but it is not without cost, and the demand is growing due in part to a strong desire from officers to always help. The kindness and empathy shown by officers is admirable and at the heart of their roles, however, there needs to be more management oversight for the council to ensure every TA placement is the most appropriate solution for the resident.

A high proportion of care experienced young people are attending the council on or around their 18th birthday, with a lack of prior planning, despite the transitions panel working to improve this situation. Categorised as Band B within the allocations policy, peers questioned whether sufficient priority is being given to this group as, in practice, they appear to be moved on from supported accommodation into TA, where they are then classified as emergency cases and are housed. This process appears counterproductive and, with small changes, use of TA could be avoided.

It seems Housing Solutions Officers (HSOs) are also under pressure due to carrying out multiple functions. Statutory prevention work is consequently suffering, and opportunities to prevent homelessness are being missed, because of a focus on making relief and final homelessness decisions and processing Housing Register applications for homelessness applicants, which could be done by the Housing Register Team. Peers heard examples of resources being doubled up on phone duty, with the housing triage function in the help hub and an additional one or two HSOs on phone duty every morning or afternoon session to take homelessness phone calls. In theory, this is so that all calls routed through the 'homeless tonight' option go direct to an experienced HSO but, in reality, both HSOs and help hub colleagues advised that customers don't always select the right option, resulting in HSOs dealing with very basic enquiries such as resetting Housing Register applications. This takes them away from casework.

There is no backlog in triage but a 12 -16 week delay in processing housing register applications and too many pulls on HSO time is limiting prevention activity at the statutory phase. HSOs have little understanding of caseloads, the homelessness

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team are doing their own allocations, there are very few negative decisions, *"I think I've made one in two years"* and HSOs are being given total agency to agree TA placements. Greater oversight of these processes is needed and purchasing more properties is unlikely on its own to solve the demand issue which requires further interrogation of the data and operational changes potentially through the homelessness mitigations strategic workstream. Peers recommend the council introduces consistent manager authorisation of all homelessness acceptances and TA placements, so it is not the default option.

Peers heard of varied relationships with housing associations/registered providers (RPs). All those we spoke with see the council as a valued partner but there are differences in understanding on some issues including tenancy sustainment. For example, the RPs report good pre-eviction protocols, early referrals and tenancy sustainment activity but the council officers cited late referrals with high levels of rent arrears and eviction from social housing as being a significant driver of homelessness. Resurrecting and re-energising the Housing Alliance with RPs is one way the council could look to bridge this gap in understanding and bring about improvement.

SNC is currently preparing a Housing Strategy which will outline the strategic approach to housing over the next five years. Peers recommend the council finalise and adopt a housing strategy that is clear, simple and owned at all levels in the organisation to sit alongside the Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Strategy. The strategy should focus on what the data is saying about need, to set out greater clarity of direction, strengthen strategic oversight, and ensure longer term housing priorities are clearly aligned to future delivery models, including the context of Local Government Reorganisation. The strategy needs presenting and communicating to all staff and members in a way that they understand and can articulate.

5.2 Governance and culture

The council is a well-respected partner, known to lean into issues, offer solutions and genuinely wants to help people. This is reflected in the way officers and members engage with partners and stakeholders and in how services are delivered. Peers

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were told, *"It's a model for how to run a council – way above any other council in Norfolk".* Although sovereign councils, having one team that speaks across both districts ensures the councils' voices are heard loudly in the wider system and enables you to have a greater presence. The help hub takes pride in solving problems through good multi-agency working and creative thinking - *"they are good at thinking outside the box"* - although there is scope to make better use of data to establish how effective this work is and demonstrate outcomes.

The culture within the housing service is collaborative, person-centred, trauma-informed and solutions-oriented. Staff enjoy working here and feel trusted and empowered to make decisions, *"I wouldn't want to work anywhere else".* Training and development for officers is well structured; apprentices can see a career in housing, mentoring is encouraged and there are opportunities for staff to be internally promoted, with a good 'grow your own' culture in place. The results from the staff survey generally support these views, although there are some comments which warrant further review and action. Portfolio holders are respected, passionate and engaged in their roles and peers witnessed good officer/member relationships creating a high trust and respectful working environment.

There is an impressive approach to learning and listening to customers. Peers spoke to a lived experience group who are working with the council to talk with managers about recruitment processes and how these can be improved. They spoke about co-producing a homelessness leaflet which has been passed out to all services. The group are also advocating for more trauma-informed training on the basis that it makes people more aware of what others have been through. This engagement is strengthening the council's approach to prevention whilst also providing customers with a sense of fulfilment, *"Helping with recruitment… it's rewarding to be seen and heard".*

There is, however, a disconnect between teams within the housing service due to an inconsistent understanding of the strategic approach and data. Each part of the system is focussed on delivering its part and handing off to the next without understanding the overall picture. For example, peers heard that the rough sleeping team appear to work individually, HSOs don't move cases on, HSOs don't want to do

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phone duty and don't understand why it isn't managed in triage, and the TA and move-on teams believe some placements are unnecessary (non-priority need). A better understanding of how each of these areas works, and what they are trying to achieve, would lead to a smoother, more holistic service.

The council collects and displays a lot of data, including commissioning PPL to produce future scenario plans, but more work needs to be done to interrogate this and show the cause and effect across the service. Peers found it hard to interpret the data shown, there were inconsistencies in the numbers and a lack of narrative to explain the assumptions being made. Peers heard *"data is murky"* and recommend the council produces a simplified dataset of core key performance indicators (KPIs) both strategic and operational, in an accessible dashboard. Then use the data to create a comprehensive, shared narrative for the service to drive service design, policy and performance management.

To support these recommendations, peers suggest:

- More focus is placed on comparing actual performance. Consider how many presentations there were this year compared to last year, how much prevention has increased, how much TA has reduced (or risen by less than it could have). Looking at this each quarter/year will give a better picture of how well the council is doing, what you think the data shows about the future and will enable better budgetary predictions.
- Review metrics such as number of presentations, percentage resolved at early help, prevention, relief and full duty stage, percentage of acceptances, time taken to make a decision, number of households in TA, length of time in TA, time taken to process a housing register application and subsidy loss on TA to really understand the performance trends across the service.
- Consider more benchmarking across the county and with CIPFA near neighbourhood groups using LG inform. This measure on TA shows how much higher your numbers are compared to a range of councils of similar size and demographics.

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- Determine how interventions will be measured before starting them, for example, peers were advised of new work starting in schools with sixth formers, which whilst a great project, there was no clear understanding of what outcomes should be collected from the outset, to measure the success of the project in the context of homelessness prevention.
- Data is presented in more digestible formats for all operational managers. It is imperative that everyone collectively understands and buys into this. Numbers are far easier to interrogate than complicated charts and graphs.
- HSOs know and understand data from across the service and the impact this has on their roles and vice versa.

Once you have the data, it needs to be understood to create insight and action.

Scrutiny is welcomed and seen as important, but members would benefit from a wider understanding of housing functions and demand, both statutory and discretionary. It appeared ward members had very little case work relating to housing with the portfolio holder bearing the brunt of any issues and complaints and having a more in-depth knowledge of the service day-to-day. This has led to a culture of little challenge, questioning and minimal political oversight of the service.

Peers recommend implementing member training and development around the housing service to enable greater scrutiny and challenge. This could include some workshops delivered by different parts of the service on the work they do and why it is important, detailing the relevant data, what this shows and actions being taken to address issues. Armed with greater clarity on the roles of the service, training around good scrutiny, questioning and data interrogation would enable members to make improvements in scrutiny and challenge and provide better assurance. There is also a role for scrutiny in reviewing the operation of the council's company Big Sky Developments Ltd, and its relationship with subsidiaries and other companies including Big Sky Living, Big Sky Property Management and Vertical Property Services.

5.3 Capacity to deliver including financial management approaches

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SNC has a net revenue budget of £22.276m with a council tax requirement of £9.881m and a savings target of £1.291m for 2026/27. The quarter three forecast indicates an underspend of around £1.045m. The council has a five-year capital programme of which £6.6m is to be financed from loan, £26m from earmarked reserves and £10m from General reserves. The council's housing development company - Big Sky Developments Ltd has net assets of £1.874m and outstanding loans with the company of £19.260m. General reserves are healthy, standing at £14.599m with an earmarked reserve for LGR of £0.25m.

Despite what appears to be a reasonably comfortable financial position, the council faces significant homelessness pressures. As of 1st January 2026, there were 85 households being accommodated in temporary accommodation, this compares to 69 households a year ago and 52 two years ago. The 2026/27 nightly lets/spot purchase accommodation budget has been increased to £0.890m (compared to £0.781m in 2025/26) to allow for the estimated increase in need.

Exempt accommodation is causing a significant issue for Housing Benefit (HB) subsidy. There is a good understanding of the issues this causes but it is hard to manage and is resource intensive. SNC has seen large increases over the past few years with exempt accommodation subsidy loss rising from £57,273K in 2022/23 to £557,980K in 2025/26, an 874 percent increase over three years. With the increase of companies moving into the area and setting up supported accommodation provision the council needs to explore other options for reducing HB subsidy such as umbrella RP arrangements and include these in the strategy they are required to have in place by 31st March 2027 under the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act (SHROA).

The council has made the most of external funding, including the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF), used to increase provision and purchase 81 units to be used as TA with a commitment to delivering more. However, there is a lack of consideration of maintenance costs associated with TA. At present, officers are presenting case by case requests for component replacement or the ad hoc unknown large capital costs, which when needed is being taken from reserves.

Peers recommend the council set up a sinking fund (from reserves) for ongoing

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property repairs. At the same time, consideration should be given to costs associated/liabilities with purchasing properties which meet the council's climate ambitions of putting sustainability at the heart of delivery and, as a council, achieving a net zero carbon emission position by 2030. All these factors should be considered within the decision matrix that was introduced to complete before buying a property.

Improvements have recently been made to the way the budgets are presented. Given the extent of external funding making tracking difficult, the departmental headlines are now split into three distinct areas; team, benefits and accommodation. Managers review every month at departmental management team (DMT). A dedicated business partner is supporting monthly monitoring and analysis by PPL is supporting future projected cost assumptions.

However, peers heard *"the service is not cost driven"* and it was clear through our conversations that resources (particularly the availability of TA) are not viewed as finite. Despite efforts made to correct perceptions, there is a view amongst some staff that council owned TA is "free" or even "profitmaking", a myth peers hope the new budget presentation can dispel. Historically, housing has not represented a significant pressure for the council, and it has remained financially stable. Undertaking a large-scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) in 2004, it is likely that housing need was relatively low at the point of handover, and housing services overall were a lower corporate priority. The situation has now changed in a very short space of time and staff are expected to rapidly build their understanding and respond accordingly.

Managers need to take more ownership of their budgets and spend time looking at where efficiencies can be made, not only in budgets but in the processes between different parts of the service. When asking about budgets, peers heard *"oh that's my managers budget"* or *"that's not my area".* Everyone needs to understand the financial situation - financial stability is not a given and, as the council moves into a new future with unitarisation, more pressure will be put on services to drive productivity and value for money. Starting now will put the service in a much better position come vesting day.

With the sharp increase in demand for housing, the council has rightly prioritised work in this area and there is clear evidence of a strong organisational culture

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focused on achieving positive outcomes for residents. This has led to a broad and ambitious approach to prevention, with services operating extensively in the pre-statutory space. While much of this activity continues to attract external funding, particularly from health and social care partners, it has inadvertently diverted focus from core statutory prevention duties. As a result, there is a discernible gap between early intervention which is seen as dynamic and innovation-led verses business as usual homelessness prevention functions.

Service delivery is currently fragmented and lacks co-ordination, with numerous officers providing support in different areas: *"there is a role for that".* Multiple, unintegrated IT systems are in use across different service areas, with no overarching customer relationship management (CRM) system. Consequently, there is no single, consistent view of the customer, even within individual service domains. For example, housing standards, housing needs, and rough sleeping are recorded on separate platforms (Uniform, Abritas, and Salesforce respectively), limiting the ability to track outcomes effectively. This fragmentation undermines demand management and restricts strategic oversight.

Peers recommend you review all points of entry and the interconnections to understand the customer journey thus ensuring each person receives the right outcome. This will also resolve friction between internal teams, many of whom felt they were often working at cross purposes, *"we are not always working hand in glove".* Other staff commented *"when we do work together and communicate, we are brilliant".* Your staff are willing and adaptable, engage them in this work and you will see instant benefits.

The delivery of affordable housing in the district is good considering the difficult market, nutrient neutrality issues and current financial climate. In SNC the target for 2025 was 169 and 307 were delivered, mostly through additionality. Taking land instead of commuted sums for offsite provision is a creative way of supporting delivery and remaining in control of where development takes place. The council is also preventing RP disposals by providing funding for repairs to bring properties up to standard.

There is, however, an opportunity to use the housing register as evidence to inform

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development. You have a high need for one bed properties (approximately 205 compared to approximately 55 for two beds, 5 for three bed and 10 for four bed) but the planning requirement across bedroom types is 30/30/30/10 per cent across one, two, three and four beds respectively. Utilising the evidence could allow you to be more robust in your negotiations with developers and may in turn influence your ability to move people out of TA and into housing.

Using council held data and statistics from other partners, you could generate parish profiles (example from South Hams) so that members and developers have a clear understanding of need across the district. This will support both planning and housing requirements and needs.

The Housing Programme Board created a new workstream to deliver renters rights which through a good project structure delivered a series of actions to ensure the council was well prepared for the new Renters Rights Act (RRA) when it came into force on 1st May 2026:

- A landlord event was held in September 2025 to begin engagement on the implications.
- Expert specialists supported training for all staff with further training for enforcement officers being planned.
- Staff are clear on the main issues covered by the act.

Despite initial engagement issues with Norfolk County Council Trading Standards, this is now improving and underway. Sensibly, the team are awaiting further evidence of the pressure points the RRA might highlight before fully resourcing through new burdens funding. Peers were impressed with the work in this area and witnessed the collaborative way housing options and standards teams work together.

5.4 Local Government Reorganisation

Peers heard that officers are engaging well across Norfolk on LGR workstreams although this is still at an early stage with the statutory change order (SCO) expected within the next few months. Whilst delivering the HPC, SNC announced its intention to challenge the Government on the three unitary model proposed for Norfolk,

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arguing the decision was based on flawed and misleading principles, failed to consider the district's rural nature, and undermines the Government's original criteria for new authorities to service populations of at least 500,000 people. The impact of the challenge on staff and partnership working is not yet being felt, but peers advise the council to keep communication channels open and be clear with staff about what they are expected to be doing.

Under the current plans, it is proposed SNC is split three ways with some of the district forming part of the Greater Norwich unitary, some forming part of the East Norfolk unitary and some forming part of the West Norfolk unitary. Greater Norwich and East Norfolk will have housing stock and a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) providing potential benefits to current South Norfolk residents in the form of affordable local authority owned housing and increased move on options from TA. West Norfolk, however, will not be formed from any councils with housing stock and the council will need to work with partner RPs to find move on accommodation for those in TA and to plan strategically how to meet the housing needs of the new council on its different geographical footprint.

There are many opportunities to further develop relationships with health, adults, children's and other partners/stakeholders given the excellent work already taking place in this space. For example, 50 per cent of general practitioners (GPs) across Norfolk are signed up to your social prescribing service. The well-established help hub (in operation for over 10 years) demonstrates how you work across multiple agencies to deliver a one stop shop to residents. There are many examples of new initiatives across County Council functions which you are delivering, such as delivering financial awareness in schools, tenancy awareness courses for care leavers and a transition panel for young people.

The new unitary authorities will face greater financial pressures and there will need to be clearer evidence of the value of prevention work. The financial constraints will be like nothing you have ever experienced as a district council, and you will need to have solid evidence of good outcomes, financial savings and efficiencies across services to keep the investment. Peers recommend the council invests in a good quality evidence base to demonstrate the cost/benefit of preventative work such as

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the help hub to embed in the ethos of future organisations (LGR). Be very clear what your costs to serve customers are through the different channels (face to face, digital, self-serve) and entry points (help hub, referral at prevention stage, homeless on the day etc). Develop consistent quantifiable measurement of outcomes from the work going through the help hub and that is delivered in partnership with others. This will provide a helpful base from which to develop your value for money assertions and work up the scalability options.

Staff at SNC have a genuine desire to help everyone, it is a great culture but in a larger organisation has the potential to be unrealistic. Members are concerned, *"LGR will be a disaster, Greater Norwich will dominate everything".* How the council prepares staff and members for the change is crucial. Work on building resilience and confidence in having difficult decisions, promote high support – high challenge. The new organisation will have a fresh culture which will be influenced by those who form it. Make sure the voice of SNC is heard loudly in these conversations at officer and political levels.

The politics will also play a large role in the strategic direction of each new unitary authority. There is a risk the priorities will be different to those of SNC but again being able to demonstrate the benefits of what you deliver and the impact this has both financially and socially will be key to securing the future you aspire to for your residents.

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6. Next Steps

The relevant senior political and managerial leadership of the council should review and reflect on the findings and recommendations from this HPC.

To promote the principle of transparency, the council is encouraged to publish this report to share their learning and good practice. The council should then consider how best to implement the recommendations. The LGA would encourage the council to develop, implement and publish an action plan which responds to the recommendations from this HPC. This action plan should provide clarity on the activity, milestones, and timelines that the council will work to in responding to the team's findings.

7. Contact details

Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser for the East of England region, is the main contact between your council and the LGA. As outlined above, Rachel is available to discuss any further support you require and can be contacted on

Rachel Litherland, LGA Principal Adviser for the East of England Region

Email – Rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk

Tel – 07795 076834

Further information, support, and resources on LGR/Devolution, can be found on the LGA's devolution and LGR Hub website.

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8. Appendix A – What is Housing Peer Challenge?

The HPC process adopts the principles of the LGA's highly regarded peer challenge approach.

The aim is to support ongoing improvement of the strategic housing function.

The scope of the HPC

At SNC the scope was agreed as:

1. **Housing priorities and outcomes**
    - Strategic housing delivery, collaborations and partnerships with landlords
    - Delivery of priorities and need to adapt to respond to future opportunities including Renters Rights Act (RRA) and LGR.
    - Homelessness prevention and temporary accommodation – Is the council adopting a Prevention first approach.
2. **Governance and Culture**
    - Strategic oversight and accountability ensuring alignment with corporate priorities and statutory obligations
    - Roles and responsibilities and effectiveness of joint working – how are they perceived by partners and neighbouring councils
    - Risk management including whether scrutiny of the service is driving improvement
3. **Capacity to deliver including financial management approaches**
    - Financial resilience and ability to deliver priorities within resources
    - Management of housing budgets, planning and risk management
    - Workforce capacity and ways of working to support competing demands
    - Reflections on the challenges and opportunities associated with scaling/adapting current service models, as well as identifying any key learning with a view to helping the councils prepare for the future.

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The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and the housing challenges faced. This included a position statement prepared by the council in advance of the peer team's time on site. This provided information on the local context at the council and what the peer team should focus on. It also included a comprehensive LGA finance briefing (prepared using public reports from the council's website) and an LGA housing performance report outlining benchmarking data for the council across a range of housing related metrics. The latter was produced using the LGA's local area benchmarking tool called LG Inform.

The peer team spent three days onsite at SNC during which they gathered evidence, information, and views from more than 30 meetings, in addition to further research and reading and spoke to over 100 council staff together with lived experience representatives, councillors and external stakeholders.

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