

District Councillor Report August 2025

On the 25th of July an MSDC was held where the different proposals for Unitaries were debated and voted on. The proposal for three Unitaries got 25 votes, three were against and 2 abstentions were noted. This means that all Districts Councils and Ipswich Borough are in favour of the 3 Unitary solution.

The map outlining the boundaries has now reached the media, for instance the Diss Express. The Unitaries will have roughly the same populations and effort has been made to draw up the areas in line with culture, history and patterns of business and employment. Western Suffolk will be one, the main hub being Bury St Edmunds, Central and Eastern Suffolk is designated to be another Unitary, the main population centre being Lowestoft. Finally, the third one is proposed to be Southern Suffolk and Ipswich. Our area would belong to Central and Eastern Suffolk. When looking at the map it is, I find, easy to see how difficult it must be to make decisions around the fringes of each one Unitary.

The final proposal to be put to the Government is still a work in progress and the result will be presented, debated and voted on at the MSDC on September the 25th. The Suffolk County Council will propose one Unitary for the entirety of Suffolk. The population of such a Unitary would amount to around 760 000 people, at present. Thus the Government, Mr McMahon, will have two very clear alternatives.

After that the Government has evaluated the proposals against the defined criteria a Statutory Consultation will follow in November and December. Any person or body is welcome to contribute. Further assessments and deliberations will ensue and the plan is for the Minister to reach a decision by the end of March. It is advisable this be done well before the Mayoral Elections take place in May 2026.

The Secondary Legislation, 'the Structural Changes Order' to be presented to Parliament before the summer recess and to be voted on in the early autumn. This piece of legislation will require a lot of work and actions before these profound changes can materialize.

The Unitary elections are planned for the 6th of May 2027. That is also when the mandate formally expires for the present District Councillors. This is also when the so called Transition Period commences. Existing District Councils are to carry on their normal day to day duties as well as facilitating for the newly founded Unitaries. Preparing for aggregation of existing services, the transfer of assets and council tax harmonisation to mention but a few. Some 'mop up' legislation is expected, for instance re how to deal with new Housing revenue Account.

The Unitaries are hoped for to go 'live' on the 1st of April 2028. At least one year is needed between legislation and the date when functioning assemblies can be realistic. The government is strongly encouraging partnerships between Unitaries covering a vast array of remits, like SEND. A partnership does not have to mean physical sharing of service deliveries or leadership. To preserve continuity for people benefitting from services is key word.

The distribution of assets, like Community Centres, will be an important part of the work. It is highlighted that decisions by existing Councils could fetter future decisions by Unitaries. The Government is allocating £76 million to be distributed over 21 areas for 'development work'. During the transition period it can be assumed that certain financial decisions will need consent from the successor council.

For the matters as per above the government has issued guidelines, I have tried to extract important points.

Finally, 'Suffolk's Big Weekend will take place the 18th to 19th of October.

Best Wishes,

Anders Linder