

TOWN & PARISH LIAISON MEETING

5th March 2025

Briefing on Devolution / Local Government Review

A public consultation has been launched on the effects of Devolution not whether it should happen. Consultation closes 13th April 2025. After the consultation, Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils will be asked to give their consent to the proposal, even though they have already both requested to be included in the programme.

Both Counties will form part of the Combined County Authority led by the Mayor. The authority will be given powers from Central Government and will only take on a handful of areas already covered by Suffolk County Council. The Mayor will become the Police & Crime Commissioner and be responsible for fire services – but white paper allows for the appointment of separate commissioners if needed. In addition, the Mayor can appoint a political advisor.

Initially, the Combined County Authority will be made up of the Mayor, plus 2 County Councillors from each County Council – giving a total of 5 constituent members. The Authority can appoint 4 non constituent members; these could be from the current District & Borough Councils or other associate members. The authority will require staff – this could number 100s. There will be some central government funding which will be devolved down to the Strategic Authority; the Mayor will also have precept raising powers, plus they could request additional CIL.

A simple majority will be needed for a decision to be reached, however the Mayor must be in the majority vote (ie the Mayor has a negative veto).

When the local government review comes into force in April 2028 – the authority will become a Strategic Authority and membership will be from the Unitary Councils.

21st March is the deadline for initial business cases to be submitted by Councils. Suffolk County Council prefers the One Suffolk unitary model, whilst Districts and Boroughs are working together to produce an alternative way forward. No decision will be reached by Government until the final business cases are submitted on 26th September 2025 – at this point the public will be consulted on which ever business case the Government are “minded to” take forward.

The work to dissolve the 6 councils in Suffolk and merge them into however many unitary authorities there will be, will be complex and will need to progress at speed given the timescale that requires the Unitary Authorities to shadow from May 2027, and take full control in April 2028.

The work required to unpick the current Local Government systems is complicated, as some areas are already being shared; ie Babergh and Mid Suffolk share officers etc, Ipswich Borough Council collect the Council Tax and Business Rates for Ipswich, Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

Important Dates:

- May 2026: Elections for Mayor and possible elections for Suffolk County Council
- May 2027: Elections for Unitary Councils and Town & Parish Councils
- May 2027 to April 2028: Unitary Council shadows existing councils
- April 2028: District & County Councils cease to exist and Unitary Councils take over