

## District Councillor Report February 2025

- A MSDC Meeting took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January. A HRA (Housing Revenue Account) business plan was discussed. A stock and condition survey was presented, there is a great need to improve matters. Andy Mellen highlighted that this constitutes a big risk for the Council. Also, it was discussed if to introduce fixed term contracts to ensure that only people who actually need this kind of housing arrangement enjoy them.
- A Babergh and mid Suffolk economic strategy was presented and approved. A commendable amount of work was evidenced. There was a lack of mentioning of AI but that will figure in the continuation of this work.
- Cllr Richardson proposed a motion strongly criticising the 'farm tax and the inheritance on small businesses. This was approved cross party.
- The main event during this period of time has without a doubt been the advent of the Suffolk CC application to be in the Priority Group to carry out a Local Government Reorganisation. This also meant a, at least, a perceived necessity to cancel the Local Elections in May this year. All the involved CCs that have abolished the elections say that this was the governments decision to make. The Government states that they simply approved of an express request from the CCs to avoid these elections. Thus, no one carries the can. Also, no CC was forced to apply to be in the 'Priority'. The government intends for 'Local Elections' to happen in May 2026. It is not specified what kind of Local Elections. To have elections for the vanishing CC would be ludicrous, thus what we do know is that the plan is to have Mayoral Elections and one may guess that there is a hope of electing the Unitary Councillors as well. These would form a 'shadow' Unitary' Council for one year then to be converted into functioning Unitary one year later at which point the shrivelling CCs would be gone. The same applies to the District Councils. Parish Councils will not be directly affected by this.

16 CCs applied and 9 were approved.

When reading the messages from the Government, from Mr Jim McMahon, Minister of State for Local Government and Devolution one is struck by various dates. Timing is very tight, by the 21<sup>st</sup> of March an Interim Plan has to be submitted, jointly by all the 'Councils' in the area. What kind of 'Council' is not specified. Amongst other things it should include a summary of local engagement 'that has been undertaken' along with views expressed. This plan will have to explain how the final proposal will be developed.

One interim plan only is expected but more than one isn't expressively ruled out.

The next major date is the 26<sup>th</sup> of September. By then the Proposal must have been put on the Government's table. Four types of proposals are possible. Type A involves a Unitary (single tier) authority covering an entire county. Type B can cover an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts. In my view this this could be of interest to vast rural areas, like us.

Two more types are outlined, they could include 'adjoining' areas. Existing areas are expected to form 'the building blocks' for any proposed Unitary.

However, the Guidance states that on principle, any new council should comprise at least 500 000 people although exceptions are not impossible.

The handling of transition costs need to be suggested by the applicant. 'Opportunities from existing budgets', 'flexible use of capital receipts' are outlined as possible paths to do this.

Importantly, 'there is no proposal for Council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation'

Proposals need to provide evidence of local engagement and of how concerns may be addressed. Plans to make sure that communities are engaged have to be outlined.

When the government has opted for accepting a proposal there will be a consultation 'as per statute'.

Regarding the 'Devolution' the investiture of 'Mayoral Strategic Authorities' are outlined for May 2026. Elections are planned to be held in May that year. There may be some kind of consultation about this, unclear how and when that may happen. The preferred option on part of the government is for each Mayoralty to comprise 1,5 million people or more.

No doubt you will have seen in the media that 4 Conservative District Councillors have left the conservative group in the DC. The EADT had a somewhat ambiguous wording, 'resigning' is not correct. We are a group of Independents. The reasons were manifold for this. As for myself the deciding factor was the setting aside of democracy. Firstly, only a 3,5 week period over Christmas for any debate about the pros and cons of getting into 'Priority' and then, most importantly, the application to government to abolish the elections in May. There will be, at a minimum, a two year period served by unelected County Cllrs, during this period of immense change. I have every intention of continuing my work on your behalf in the existing DC.

As you can see I held off writing this report in order to make it relevant as possible. Things tend to happen swiftly.

Sincerely Yours,

Anders Linder