

Summary

Advice to the Secretary of State on unitary local government in Suffolk

On 6 February 2008 we were requested to advise the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on unitary structures of local government in Suffolk.

Specifically, we were asked to provide advice on whether there could be an alternative proposal, or proposals, of unitary local government – i.e. one or more councils providing all of the services currently provided by the county and district councils – that might be recommended for the county area as a whole. We were also asked to consider whether there could be an alternative proposal, or proposals, that might involve all or part of the borough of Great Yarmouth in Norfolk.

The Secretary of State asked whether there could be an alternative proposal, or proposals, that would, in aggregate, have the capacity to deliver the following outcomes: be affordable; be supported by a broad cross-section of partners and stakeholders; provide strong, effective and accountable strategic leadership; deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood flexibility and empowerment; and deliver value-for-money and equity in public services.

Before providing our advice we invited representations on two specific draft proposals:

- a county unitary authority
- a two-unitary pattern comprising Ipswich & Felixstowe and Rural Suffolk

We took into account all of the representations that we received on these draft proposals before providing advice to the Secretary of State.

We have now published our report *Advice to the Secretary of State on unitary local government in Suffolk*. The report outlines our alternative proposals to the Secretary of State which we consider have the capacity to deliver the outcomes referred to above. The report is available on our website, at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk

Our alternative proposals for Suffolk are:

- a unitary county comprising the whole of the existing two-tier area of Suffolk (this is our preferred alternative proposal for Suffolk) on the basis of the arrangements set out in our report
- a two-unitary pattern comprising an Ipswich & Felixstowe authority and a Rural Suffolk authority comprising the remainder of the county, on the basis of the arrangements set out in our report

In our opinion, a county unitary authority performs more strongly against each of the five criteria and, for that reason, would deliver the outcomes specified by the Secretary of State more effectively than the two-unitary pattern. The county unitary authority is, therefore, our preferred alternative proposal, on the basis of the arrangements set out in this report.

The original proposal

As part of our advice to the Secretary of State, we have recommended that the original proposal for unitary status from Ipswich Borough Council should not be implemented. This recommendation is made on the basis of the Secretary of State's previous concerns about such an authority's ability to meet the affordability criterion, which was not displaced by any evidence received by us during this review, all of which we took into account.

What happens next?

The Committee has now provided advice to the Secretary of State on unitary local government in Suffolk. It is now for the Secretary of State to take a decision on whether:

- to implement the original (i.e. Ipswich Borough Council's) proposal, with or without modification
- to implement either of our alternative proposals, with or without modification, or
- to take no action

It is also open to the Secretary of State to request further information or advice from us.

Before taking his statutory decisions there will be a period for representations to be made to the Secretary of State about either of our alternative proposals, or the original Ipswich proposal. This period will run from 8 December 2009 until 19 January 2010. You can make representations on these proposals by emailing SuffolkStructures@communities.gsi.gov.uk or by writing to:

Unitary Structures Team
Department for Communities
and Local Government
Zone 3/J1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Further information

More information on the review process in general, including the Secretary of State's intended approach to taking his statutory decisions, can be found on the Department for Communities and Local Government's website, at www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/restructuring/boundarycommittee

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by the Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.