



Parish Bulletin

Winter 2007 **extra**



Local Government reorganisation update

The Government announcement on December 5 that they were referring the local government structure in Suffolk to the Boundary Committee was certainly unexpected.

This announcement came after Parish Bulletin had gone to print - but we have produced a one page summary of the current position, with an article by the Chief Executive and comments from the Council's Leader.

The Government has decided that the financial case for a unitary Ipswich council on its existing boundary has not been made, but it is still committed to a unitary structure, and so it has asked the Boundary Committee to review the local authority structure in the county to assess whether that can still be achieved in a different way.

This mirrors what is being implemented in Norfolk, where the Boundary Committee has been asked to review the local government structure in response to a proposed unitary council for Norwich.

I understand that the formal review in Norfolk begins early 2008 and recommendations are expected to be made to Ministers in December 2008, with the new authorities expected to be in place from April 2010.

As yet we do not know what timescale will apply to the Suffolk review. It may follow Norfolk, particularly as there is some opinion being expressed about a

cross border arrangement involving Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. However, this will depend on the resources available to the Boundary Committee.

The Government will be assessing future options using the five criteria specified in the original guidance, i.e.:

- Affordability
- Support from partners and stakeholders
- Provision of strong, effective and accountable strategic leadership
- Opportunities for Neighbourhood empowerment
- Delivers value for money and equity on public services

Clearly each authority in Suffolk will now need to assess what, in its view, is the best option for the communities that it represents taking these criteria into account. Despite the speculation in the local press, there are no official options yet. The wider repercussions are also still being assessed. It is likely that the 'dis-aggregation' work between Ipswich BC and Suffolk CC will be affected, particularly as the original timescales will now be changed. The Pathfinder project will be severely affected, indeed it may stop altogether, although work should continue on shared services as they are a key opportunity to reduce costs and improve efficiency.

As soon as I hear any more information I will let you know.

Stephen Baker, Chief Executive



The Council's Leader, Cllr Ray Herring, has warned that Suffolk could be paralysed by the announcement.

"It was made clear months ago that Ipswich's case did not add up on financial terms, and I cannot understand why it has taken so long for that fact to be recognised. At no stage in their bid did Ipswich ever say that they wanted to extend their boundaries, and the communities of this district also made it very clear that they did not want to be swallowed up by Ipswich.

"However, we now have the threat of a costly and lengthy review of councils, less than 15 years since the last one, and all because the Government will not make a decision. This is meant to be a listening Government but it is time it listened to the facts - this Council has the highest satisfaction rating in Suffolk, and 91 per cent of its residents are happy with their district.

"What our residents want and what we are working hard to deliver are better services and even better value for money. This announcement will not help that goal and in fact will just divert all our time and resources on yet another Government review," said Cllr Herring, Leader of Suffolk Coastal.