

Management Board

TO: The Town or Parish Council Clerk

Please ask for: Andrew Good
Direct line: 01449 724802
Fax number: 01449 724696
Your reference:
Our reference: APG/PB
E-Mail: andrew.good@midsuffolk.gov.uk

29 April 2009

Dear Clerk

Boundary Committee Local Government Review – Mid Suffolk District Council's Position

You will be well aware of the Boundary Committee (BC) consultation, running from 19 March to 14 May, on their proposals for local government structure in Suffolk.

Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) discussed the Local Government Review at our full Council meeting on 23 April 2009.

I am writing to you and all of the other Town and Parish Councils in Mid Suffolk District, to make you aware of what the Council agreed at that meeting, and to explain the reasoning behind the decisions.

The following were agreed:

- 1 Council confirms its support for a single unitary council for Suffolk
- 2 Council requests the Boundary Committee to include the seven affected parishes in the Rural Suffolk proposal, should that (two-unitary) proposal be decided upon by the Secretary of State.
[The seven parishes are Akenham, Barham, Bramford, Claydon, Great Blakenham, Little Blakenham and Whitton].
- 3 Council endorses the Boundary Committee's proposal that a democratic structure and make up of Community Boards should be included within any new authority's constitution.
- 4 Council endorses the Boundary Committee's proposal for a Public Service Village (PSV) in the Stowmarket/Needham Market area.

I will now give some background and an explanation of this position:

The BC proposal of 19 March is broadly similar to their previous proposals in July 2008, for which the MSDC response was strong support for a single unitary council in Suffolk. Some key points of note in the new proposal are:

- Lowestoft is retained in Suffolk under both options.
- A single unitary council is on an equal consultative basis as the two-unitary proposal.
- The BC have proposed that the structure and makeup of Community Boards (working title) be included in any new authority's constitution.

- The BC have acknowledged the need for local service access and proposed the concept of a shared 'Public Service Village' (Area Administrative Office) in the Stowmarket (or Needham Market) area to serve central Suffolk.

In addition there are some external factors which have changed since the previous BC proposal:

- The UK economy is now in recession, and as outlined in the recent Budget statement there is great pressure on the public sector to achieve efficiencies and eliminate waste and duplication, and increased need for Suffolk to be able to punch its weight with regard to strategic economic development.
- The financial position of Waveney DC has worsened, and would pose a relatively bigger risk if included in a two-unitary rather than a single-unitary structure.
- There is topical, renewed concern about the capacity to handle major health risks such as a flu pandemic, if the county emergency response services were to be split.
- The Council has written to and received a response from John Healey, Minister for Local Government regarding the impact on the Council's financial viability of the further delays that have occurred in the LGR process, and the need to bring it quickly to a satisfactory conclusion.

The basis of the Council's support for creation of a single unitary council can be summarised as:

- Mid Suffolk does not identify with an east/west orientation and strongly believes that a new single unitary council is better placed to serve its communities and all of the people of Suffolk
- A considerable majority of the Town and Parish Councils in Mid Suffolk support a single unitary council albeit that many are happy with status quo
- Major statutory stakeholders (Police and PCT) support a single unitary council in order to tackle pan Suffolk issues
- A single unitary council offers greater efficiencies than any other option and is the most cost effective proposal for Council tax payers
- The establishment of Community Boards (working title) will enable engagement at local level, will provide a framework for local people to determine local priorities and bring together agencies in a cohesive manner
- A single unitary council will have the capacity to provide better value for money and will be less disruptive in terms of implementation. A two-unitary option is higher cost and higher risk than a single unitary option when compared on a like-for-like basis.
- Ipswich and the North Haven area should be an integral element of a single unitary Suffolk. The case has not been made to separate Ipswich, Felixstowe and over 50 parishes from the rest of Suffolk.
- The make up of the proposed Ipswich/Felixstowe unitary would suggest a predominantly urban focus which may marginalise the many rural parishes and create the conditions for political instability

With regard to keeping a local focus within a single unitary council, the Council notes the concerns raised by many respondees to the Boundary Committee's previous consultation, that local services and local issues might be lost within the need for consistency of service delivery. The Council welcomes the BC's new proposal, that Community Boards (working title), as a mechanism for delivering neighbourhood empowerment and effective local engagement, should have their structure and make up included within any new authority's constitution, and hence be subject to democratic agreement by the full Council.

The Council also welcomes the BC's proposal that a Public Service Village (PSV) approach could provide an important presence in key towns, and provide shared local offices for public and voluntary sector providers, and that the Rural Suffolk unitary should have a PSV in the Stowmarket area, in addition to Bury and Lowestoft. The Council shares this view and recognises the

importance to citizens of the new unitary council having cost-effective shared public access facilities within reasonable travel distance.

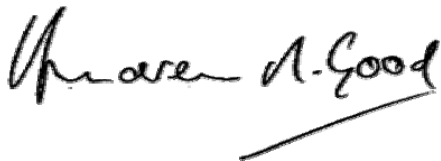
The Council is of the view that a single unitary for the whole of Suffolk will allow both the capacity, through economy of scale, and the flexibility to adapt the organisational structure within the unitary council to provide the required level of local focus and engagement. It is not necessary to consider splitting the county into separate unitaries simply to ensure local focus. By way of analogy, many people will recall how well the train service ran when it was all under single organisational control; fragmenting the service into separate local and national companies has proven to be disastrous for customers.

The Council recognises that there is a possibility that the Secretary of State will propose the Council's less-preferred option of a two-unitary structure. In the event of this, the Council will recommend to the Secretary of State that the parishes of Akenham, Barham, Bramford, Claydon, Great Blakenham, Little Blakenham and Whitton, unless they have indicated otherwise, be kept within Rural Suffolk and excluded from the Ipswich-Felixstowe unitary. The rationale for this is that the seven parishes are all predominantly rural in nature, none has expressed a desire to be part of the 'North Haven' proposal, splitting off just 8% of the District would be unnecessarily disruptive and costly, and there would be no impact on access to (shared) Waste facilities in Great Blakenham.

Whilst I acknowledge that many Parish and Town Councils value the relationship with the District Council, as we do with them, the current recession has further highlighted how financially vulnerable Districts are. If we are to keep Council Tax to acceptable levels and respond to expectations, a single unitary for Suffolk, together with a constitutional framework for local engagement, is the option most suited to achieve these objectives.

I would be happy to discuss further any questions that you might have, and would hope that your Council may be able to support the District Council's position and write to the Boundary Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven A. Good". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Chief Executive

Copy to: All MSDC Councillors