

Local Government Reorganisation

Q&A Highlights Report Summary of Mid Suffolk Parishes Meeting 03/11/25

Presenters:

- Cllr Richard Rout (Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform, and NSIP)
- Mark Ash (Executive Director for Organisational Change and Local Government Reorganisation)
- Matt Woor (Communications Manager Suffolk County Council)

Participants:

- 32 Parish Council representatives

Key Themes and Discussion Points

Structure and Accountability of Area Committees

Concern: Parish representatives expressed uncertainty about the composition, accountability, and governance of the proposed 16 area committees. Questions were raised about who would sit on them, how they would be chosen, and to whom they would report.

Response: It was clarified that area committees would include representatives from parish and town councils, local councillors, business, voluntary organisations, health, and police. Chairs and vice-chairs would be elected internally. Governance details are still being developed, with input expected from government over the coming years.

Cost and Efficiency of Reorganisation

Concern: There were concerns about the financial implications of creating new committees and restructuring services, especially regarding adult social care and children's services.

Response: It was acknowledged that there would be setup costs but emphasized that these are minor compared to the cost of fragmenting major services. Consolidation is expected to reduce duplication and improve efficiency, particularly by eliminating multiple HR, legal, and executive teams.

Representation and Selection of Committee Members

Concern: Questions were raised about how representatives from business and other sectors would be selected—whether elected, appointed, or seconded—and whether they would serve fixed terms.

Response: The governance model is still under development. Options include representatives from organisations or volunteers selected by elected members. This will be refined before the proposed vesting day in April 2028.

City Status for Ipswich

Concern: Some attendees questioned the rationale for pursuing city status for Ipswich, citing limited amenities and lack of appeal compared to nearby cities like Norwich.

Response: The bid was defended, stating it could boost investment, civic pride, and national visibility. He emphasized that the County Council supports the bid but is not leading it, and costs are expected to be minimal.

Healthcare Integration and Boundaries

Concern: Concerns were raised about the impact of reorganisation on healthcare, especially given recent mergers like Ipswich and Colchester hospital trusts.

Response: Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) are being aligned to county boundaries, which supports a unified Suffolk model. Fragmentation could complicate healthcare delivery and coordination.

Continuity and Disruption of Services

Concern: Attendees worried about service disruption during the transition, especially in critical areas like highways, payroll, and IT systems.

Response: It was explained that lessons from other reorganisations are being applied. Planning is underway to ensure continuity, with particular focus on IT, staffing, and contract management. A single unitary model would simplify the transition.

Parish Council Capacity and Resourcing

Concern: Parish leaders expressed concern about their ability to take on additional responsibilities without increasing councillor numbers or staff, which could raise local precepts.

Response: It was confirmed that no changes are being imposed on parish structures. Additional support staff may be provided, and powers will be optional. Parishes can choose what functions to adopt based on local capacity and community support.

Highway Services and Outsourcing

Concern: Questions were raised about whether highways services might be brought back in-house under a unitary model.

Response: It was explained that outsourcing remains more cost-effective due to national contractors' purchasing power. The current contract with Milestone will continue for now.

Speed Limits and Road Safety

Concern: Parishes asked about the ability to influence speed limits on minor roads and install monitoring equipment like ANPR and SIDs.

Response: Speed limit reductions (e.g., 30 to 20 mph) are being considered. ANPR is governed nationally and unlikely to be devolved, but parishes may have more flexibility in installing speed indicator devices (SIDs), pending further review.

Opposition to Unitary Model

Concern: Some district councillors and councils oppose the single unitary proposal, raising concerns about representation and governance.

Response: Richard Rout stated that Suffolk County Council has engaged with opposing views and incorporated feedback into the business case. The final decision rests with the Secretary of State.