

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Chief Executive

REPORT NUMBER: **H74**

TO: STRATEGY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 31 JULY 2008

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW – THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE’S DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR SUFFOLK

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report deals with the draft proposals of the Boundary Committee in respect of possible future unitary structures for local government in Suffolk and Norfolk. The public consultation period on these draft proposals began with their publication on 7 July 2008 and will end on 26 September 2008.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee considers these draft proposals, and provides a preliminary steer to Officers in preparing a consultation response for endorsement by full Council and/or makes any appropriate recommendations for consideration by full Council on 2 September.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications arising directly out of this report.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council’s Significant Business Risk No.1. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Local Government Review Failure to engage in the review process Lack of influence on future local government arrangements	Low	Critical	Strong political and managerial leadership to secure effective engagement with the process Engagement with stakeholders during consultation period Submission of consultation response by deadline

5. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 5.1 On 7 July 2008, the Boundary Committee published its draft proposals for unitary local government structures in Suffolk and Norfolk. These are now the subject of public consultation, which ends on 26 September 2008. The details of these proposals can be found in a 74 page document on the Boundary Committee's website (www.boundarycommittee.org). Hard copies will be circulated to Members separately and are also available in the Members' Room.
- 5.2 A summary of the proposals and relevant maps are provided at Appendices (a) – (f).
- 5.3 The Boundary Committee's draft proposal for Suffolk involves the creation of two unitary councils for the county, excluding Lowestoft. The key elements of this proposal are set out in paras.5.4 – 5.6 below and shown on the map at Appendix (b).
- 5.4 An "Ipswich/Felixstowe" unitary council, also referred to in the Boundary Committee's report as "North Haven" would be created. This proposed unitary area would take in all of the Ipswich BC area, Felixstowe and a number of surrounding parishes from the Suffolk Coastal, Mid Suffolk and Babergh districts. For Babergh, this would involve all 19 parishes around and to the east of the A12. All affected parishes are listed on page 59 of the Boundary Committee's report and this page of the report is shown as an extract at Appendix (c). A map showing the proposed boundary as it would affect Babergh is shown at Appendix (d).
- 5.5 Under the Boundary Committee's proposals, Lowestoft and a number of its immediately adjoining parishes would come within the administrative remit of a Norfolk unitary council.
- 5.6 A proposed rural Suffolk unitary council would cover all of the remaining county not covered by the proposals set out in paras 5.4 and 5.5 above, and would include all of the county's market towns, including Hadleigh and Sudbury.
- 5.7 Whilst the unitary arrangements described above represent the Boundary Committee's draft proposal for Suffolk, it has commented in its report that the option of a single unitary council for all of the county (again, with the exception of Lowestoft, as described in para 5.5 above) also "has merit", and has therefore invited comments on that option as well as on its draft proposal. This option is shown on the map at Appendix (e).
- 5.8 For Norfolk, the Boundary Committee's draft proposal is for a single unitary council covering all of Norfolk plus Lowestoft and its immediately adjoining parishes, as described in para 5.5 above. The Boundary Committee considers that two alternative options for Norfolk also "have merit" and has invited comments on these. These would both create a two-unitary arrangement for Norfolk, together with Lowestoft. The first of these is for a Greater Norwich unitary council and a unitary for the remainder of the county plus Lowestoft. The second would involve a unitary council covering Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft and a separate unitary council for the remainder of Norfolk.

- 5.9 The proposals for Suffolk have been discussed informally by the Political Leaders' Group (PLG), and have also been explained to Town and Parish Councils in Babergh at meetings on 14 and 17 July.
- 5.10 PLG compared the Boundary Committee's proposals with Babergh's own stated preference for a two-unitary county based on an east-west split, with Ipswich at the heart of a strong East Suffolk unitary and a West Suffolk unitary with Bury St Edmunds as its administrative headquarters. In that model, Babergh district would have been divided between the east and west unitary council areas. We had suggested in our initial submission to the Boundary Committee at the "concept formulation" stage of the process (April 2008) that the current boundary between the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Babergh East LSP would be a good starting point for discussion on an East-West Suffolk unitary boundary as it ran through the Babergh district.
- 5.11 We had further suggested in our submission to the Boundary Committee that an east-west two-unitary solution should be worked up in greater detail for comparative analysis against this Council's second preference of a single unitary solution for the county.
- 5.12 We had expressed our concern to avoid an artificial and unhelpful separation between urban Ipswich and its rural hinterland, as proposed in Ipswich Borough Council's initial unitary bid. This was a significant influence on the Council's view that neither a two-unitary Greater (urban) Ipswich plus the rural remainder of the county nor a three unitary East plus West plus Greater (urban) Ipswich was in the best interests either of Suffolk residents in general or Babergh residents in particular. The Council also considered that a three-unitary solution would begin to lose too many of the economies of scale that could be achieved by a one or two unitary solution.
- 5.13 Finally, PLG noted that Babergh had joined all Suffolk councils in rejecting the concept of a separate new unitary council for Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.
- 5.14 Having regard to the previous views of Council, as set out in paragraphs 5.10 – 5.13 above, PLG considered that, whilst not overtly similar, the Boundary Committee's draft proposal nonetheless had considerable synergy with our own preferences from a Babergh district perspective and that this synergy should be examined and amplified during the period of public consultation.
- 5.15 Elements of the Boundary Committee's proposals welcomed in principle by PLG in terms of their synergy with our own preferences included
- the proposal for a two-unitary rather than a one or three unitary solution for Suffolk, albeit not on an east-west split for the county as a whole
 - the creation of a unitary council for Ipswich that includes a significant number of rural parishes within Ipswich's hinterland (including 19 in Babergh) as well as the town of Felixstowe to create a balanced urban/rural community of interest in that proposed unitary area
 - a form of unitary east-west split for the Babergh area, albeit on a boundary further east than Babergh would perhaps argue for, but in any event with an invitation from the Boundary Committee (page 58, para 6.38 of its report) to comment on the specific boundary that might be applied to this model

- the likely location for the administrative headquarters of the proposed rural Suffolk unitary in Bury St Edmunds, thereby providing welcome proximity to the west of Babergh district
- the Boundary Committee's view that a single unitary (albeit excluding Lowestoft) also had merit, but less so than their two-unitary draft proposal
- the decision not to propose a separate unitary solution exclusively for all or parts of the Waveney and Great Yarmouth district council areas (but see also para 5.16 below)

5.16 Elements of the Boundary Committee's proposals that the PLG felt warranted further careful consideration in terms of possible adverse impacts elsewhere in the county included

- the creation of a rural unitary comprising all of the county's market towns but which potentially otherwise lacked cohesion and focus in comparison with the very clear and strong economic rationale for the North Haven proposals
- the remoteness of the likely Bury St Edmunds headquarters from significant parts of the rural unitary area e.g. coastal communities, albeit acknowledging that similar considerations would apply in a single unitary solution wherever its administrative headquarters might be based
- the proposal to sever Lowestoft from the administrative arrangements for the rest of Suffolk and place it within Norfolk's unitary arrangements. Whilst this proposal had more merit than the initial concept of a separate unitary for Waveney/Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth, PLG still felt that it had a number of potential disadvantages for the people of Lowestoft. PLG also doubted the realism of the Boundary Committee's assertion that this would not impact on the historic and ceremonial boundary of Suffolk

5.17 In summary, therefore, PLG felt that the impact of the Boundary Committee's draft proposals could in principle go a considerable way to achieving many of the objectives that the Council wished to achieve for Babergh residents (i.e. through a rural unitary council probably administered from Bury St Edmunds for residents in the west of Babergh and a balanced urban and rural unitary council administered from Ipswich for residents in the east of Babergh), whilst also recognising that these proposals may have less positive impacts elsewhere in the county that would need careful consideration.

5.18 However, PLG thought there was considerable merit in developing the case for arguing that the proposed North Haven boundary as it impacts on Babergh should move further west. This could potentially be as far west as the current LSP boundary, but more probably a lesser move to take in Hadleigh and its neighbouring parishes. *Indicative* boundaries to reflect these two options are shown on a map at Appendix (f). Bearing in mind the rationale for the Boundary Committee's draft proposal for the "North Haven" area, these arguments would centre on the boundaries of the Haven Gateway area as defined in Babergh, as well as on Hadleigh's natural linkages with Ipswich, including school catchment areas.

- 5.19 In considering the issues set out in para 5.18, PLG also acknowledged, however, that a move to include Hadleigh in the North Haven unitary would mean that this was the only market town in Suffolk to be excluded from the proposed rural Suffolk unitary. Detailed consideration would need to be given, in consultation with local residents, to the pros and cons of these two possible solutions for Hadleigh and its neighbouring parishes.
- 5.20 PLG therefore asked that this initial, informal thinking be shared with Town and Parish Councils at planned meetings on 14 and 17 July. This was done, and all attendees have been encouraged to feed back views on this issue to help inform Babergh's response to the Boundary Committee's consultation. It is too early at this stage to provide any reliable indication of local feeling on this issue.
- 5.21 Strategy Committee is asked to consider the Boundary Committee's draft proposal and the preliminary, informal views of PLG Members in providing a steer to officers in the formulation of a draft response to the Boundary Committee for endorsement by full Council on 2 September. The Committee may also wish to consider any specific recommendations to Council at this stage.

6. **APPENDICES**

- (a) Summary of the Boundary Committee's proposals
- (b) Extract from Boundary Committee's Draft Proposals Report: Map B5 – Draft Proposal for Suffolk (less Lowestoft); an Ipswich and Felixstowe unitary authority and a Suffolk unitary authority
- (c) Extract from Boundary Committee's Draft Proposals Report: page 59 – Areas to be included in the Ipswich and Felixstowe unitary authority
- (d) Map: Impact on Babergh area of Boundary Committee's Draft Proposal for Suffolk
- (e) Extract from Boundary Committee's Draft Proposals: Map B6 – Single Unitary Pattern for Suffolk (less Lowestoft); a Suffolk unitary authority
- (f) Map: possible alternative western boundaries within Babergh area for the Ipswich and Felixstowe unitary authority

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

Babergh DC Concept Submission to the Boundary Committee – April 2008

The Boundary Committee's Draft Proposals for Unitary Local Government in Norfolk and Suffolk – July 2008

CONTACT: Pat Rockall, Chief Executive

Email: pat.rockall@babergh.gov.uk