



ALLIANCE SLAMS BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR 'IGNORING PUBLIC OPINION'

MARCH 19 2009

The leaders of three Suffolk councils say the Boundary Committee have ignored the views of local people by failing to include the three-unitary East, West and Greater Ipswich option in its latest proposals for changing local government in Suffolk

Having been instructed by the Secretary of State, Hazel Blears, to review their preferred options, the Committee has today announced that it will consult on two options: a giant Suffolk unitary and a two-unitary Greater Ipswich and rural county model – neither of which have any significant public support. Previously, the 'One Suffolk' option had only been considered 'of merit' by the Committee. It is now an official draft proposal for the first time. However, on this occasion, both options would see Lowestoft remaining in Suffolk.

This is despite research which shows that nearly nine out of 10 people in Suffolk¹ believe the three-unitary option should be included in the consultation. Meanwhile almost two-thirds of those who expressed a preference² want to see the three-unitary model for Suffolk in action and are now prevented from formally expressing their views on this option to the Boundary Committee.

Cllr Mark Bee, Leader of Waveney District Council, Cllr John Griffiths, Leader of St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Cllr Geoffrey Jaggard, Leader of Forest Heath District Council said today: "It has always been clear that moving Lowestoft in to Norfolk was a ridiculous idea and the Boundary Committee have finally wised up to that.

However, we are shocked that in the face of clear public support for the inclusion of our proposals the Boundary Committee has brazenly ignored the public's desire for a proper consultation on a local government system which would be focused on areas each with their own, very different identities and economies.

More...

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“The Committee has missed the opportunity given to it by the Secretary of State to consider its position and re-think what people in Suffolk have said they want and need. Instead they have produced a fudge which still recommends giant remote councils delivering a one-size-fits-all solution for different and diverse communities across the county. Despite a lengthy and hugely expensive process we are quite simply back where we started. The dog’s dinner moves on to yet another course.”

The research undertaken shows that only 25% of people in Suffolk prefer the One Suffolk option* and a minority of 14% want the greater Ipswich/rural county version². The Leaders continued: “It just shows how flawed the process continues to be – the Boundary Committee has delivered a mess and refuses to talk to us or local people about anything other than its own proposals. We have asked to see them so we can present our detailed business case but have been rejected time and again.

“The decision only to consult on the original proposals flies in the face of public opinion. It ignores residents who overwhelmingly support the three-unitary proposal and equally reject One Suffolk. The needs of local people are not being heard or met and while they may use the slogan "Democracy Matters", the way that the Boundary Committee has ignored public opinion today reveals the reality that, for them, "Bureaucracy Matters".

The three councils will now consider their next move and are determined that the people of Suffolk will be heard, adding: “We now call on the Secretary of State to intervene and instruct the Boundary Committee to consult on all viable options including East, West and the greater Ipswich. We will, meanwhile, take all actions necessary to ensure that local people have their say on all options.”

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The consultation lasts until May 14. Responses to the draft proposals can be made by filling in an online form at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk or writing to: Review Manager (Norfolk and Suffolk Reviews), The Boundary Committee for England, Trevelyan House, Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 2HW.

ENDS

Note to Editors:

Full details of the Local Government Review in Suffolk can be found on the Boundary Committee's website:
<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/boundary-reviews/all-reviews/eastern/suffolk/suffolk-structural-review>

¹ The Opinion Research Business (ORB) completed telephone interviews with people from all age and socio-economic groups between 13 and 24th January 2009. In total 804 people aged 18+ gave their opinions with interviews spread proportionately across the seven borough/district councils of Suffolk. When questioned, 717 offered an opinion on whether the three unitaries option should be included in the Review and, of these, 86% said that they agreed that this option should be part of the consultation process. ²These figures are based on the 631 who expressed a preference for one of the three options presented to them. 173 answered "Don't Know", thought that things should remain as they are, said they needed more information or "were not interested".

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