

## **Summary of our position on the bid for Unitary status by Norwich City Council**

### **The principle of Unitary councils**

We are not opposed to Unitary councils in principle. But any proposed change to the pattern of local government in Norfolk must consider the needs of the whole county.

Neither City Council proposal - whether its on existing Norwich City Council boundaries or 'expanded boundaries' (including some South Norfolk parishes) - does that.

### **What Norwich City Council says**

- "Too much effort is wasted on overlapping partnerships and meetings."
- "Norwich is a distinct, important and growing city and **deserves** the specific and targeted attention that a unitary council would bring."

(Source: "One City, One Council", Norwich City Council 2006)

### **A Unitary Norwich City Council would NOT be self-sufficient**

- They would still need other partners, such as Health services and the Police, to deliver services.
- Norwich used to have a Primary Care Trust, but the Health Service has just been reorganised without one.
- Norwich used to have its own police force but it merged with Norfolk Constabulary in the 1960s, and lost its own Division in 2001.
- Even if Norwich gets Unitary status it will still need to run its fire service jointly with the rest of the county.

### **One City One Council?**

- The idea of 'one city One Council' is naïve;
- The rural areas and towns around Norwich depend on the city for jobs, shopping and leisure;
- And the city's economy depends on the people from the rural areas and towns;
- The road and rail network and much of the bus network focuses on Norwich, which is where the interchanges are;
- The rest of Norfolk cannot be planned in isolation.

### **Unitary bid and the Local Development Framework (LDF)**

- Central Government required South Norfolk, Broadland and Norwich to work together to produce a Local Development Framework for the Norwich Policy Area;
- Norwich's "Greater Norwich" unitary bid merely moves the boundaries – it doesn't solve the problem;
- Norwich would still have to work closely with us but would it still be a partnership of equals?

### **We are concerned about the impact on people**

- School catchment areas (the new Unitary Norwich would look after schools in Norwich, not Norfolk County Council);
- people with needs for special help;
- taxation - will council tax go up?

### **Council tax and the cost of services**

- The costs of duplicating management structures and systems for 'County services' in the City (i.e. the services Norwich City Council would take over from Norfolk County Council) will put up their council tax, without reducing the county council's costs in proportion;
- But the county council will lose significant grant and council tax;
- So the costs of county council services will increase - and the cost can only be met from council tax.

### **The 'expanded boundaries' bid**

- The transfer of six parishes from South Norfolk to Norwich (Bawburgh, Easton, Colney, Cringleford, Costessey & Trowse) will increase their council tax;
- South Norfolk Council will lose 13% of its grant and council tax;
- But our fixed costs (buildings, IT systems and management) will not go down;
- So the cost of South Norfolk services will go up - and this can only be met by council tax.

### **The cost to South Norfolk of Unitary status for Norwich**

- South Norfolk residents could lose access to 370 new affordable homes in Costessey and Cringleford;
- South Norfolk loses a new purpose-built homeless hostel;
- South Norfolk loses its only registered and fully complaint multi-traveller site;
- South Norfolk Council may have to pay more for recycling if the new centre in Costessey transfers to Norwich;
- Transitional costs for transferring cases between £500,000 and £1 million;

- Recovering money from debtors 'outside our area' will be difficult;
- **BUT** £1.2 million ongoing costs would transfer as well, including 26 members of staff and their pension liabilities.

### What South Norfolk residents think

Results of a home interview of 600 residents in January 2007 by SMRC.

#### 1. If the existing system was replaced, which in your view would be best?

Stay the same, keep South Norfolk Council and Norfolk County Council.	44%
South Norfolk Council delivers all services in the area.	18%
South Norfolk Council and Norfolk County Council continue delivering services to most of South Norfolk, but Norwich City Council cover those living in the southern fringe (e.g. Colney, Costessey etc.).	12%
South Norfolk Council, Norwich City Council and Broadland Council merge to deliver all services in the area.	8%
South Norfolk Council and Breckland Council merge to deliver all the services in their area.	6%
Norfolk County Council deliver all services in the area.	6%
Anything else.	4%
No reply.	4%

#### 2. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement that "the potential benefits of re-structuring local government would outweigh the costs"?

Agree strongly	2%
Tend to agree	23%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%
Tend to disagree	23%
Disagree strongly	20%
Don't know	12%

#### Even in Norwich only a minority agree with the Unitary bid

Residents	Agree	Disagree	Number surveyed
Norwich City residents	44%	20%	846
Hellsedon, Drayton & Thorpe residents	36%	36%	343
Costessey residents	33%	30%	162
Overall	41%	25%	1351

(Source: Ipsos MORI)

## **Summary**

- The Norwich bid is the worst of all worlds;
- We need a comprehensive plan for all Norfolk;
- Until that can be achieved, we need to work together to make the existing system work better.

John Fuller, Leader of South Norfolk Council, July 2007.