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Norfolk and Suffolk Reviews  
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25 September 2008

Dear Sirs

**Draft Proposals for Unitary Local Government in Norfolk and Suffolk –  
Response to Consultation from South Norfolk Council**

I am pleased to provide this letter and accompanying material as our formal response to your consultation.

You will see that the attached response document has been prepared by five of the Norfolk district councils working together. It sets out quite clearly and concisely why the case for change has not been made and reiterates that the existing arrangements for county and district councils working together, through improved shared services, should be retained and considered by your review, a contention that will be examined by the Judicial Review process.

The Council met on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> September to debate fully the options before us, and concluded that none of the three would best serve the people and communities of South Norfolk.

The Council resolution passed is as follows:

- 1. This Council strongly opposes the need for the Boundary Committee review of arrangements in Norfolk and the procedure adopted by the Committee. The existing two-tier structure works well for the task of responding to the needs of Norfolk residents. Retaining the enhanced two tier structure should have been included as an option.*
- 2. Any further efficiencies would be better achieved and local democracy and accountability better secured by enhanced joint working between existing authorities*
- 3. The territorial integrity of the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk should be preserved.*
- 4. Any final proposal, which involves a structural change to the existing arrangements, should not be implemented without first being put, by the Government, to a vote of the people of Norfolk.*

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5. *Given the absence of sufficient detail for realistic consideration of the proposals for the systems and structures beneath the proposed unitary authorities and for the devolution of functions within those structures, even within the Boundary Committee's own parameters, the opportunities for meaningful consultation have been insufficient. Accordingly, the Council calls for an extension to the consultation period to make good this shortfall in the Boundary Committee's arrangements.*

We see no merit in any of the three options presented when compared with the enhanced two tier arrangements that we are working on anyway. It is interesting for us to note that your own review team felt likewise.

I hope you will note particularly our demand for further time for consultation until such time as details of the neighbourhood arrangements are known. The Council believes that the public and local agencies have not had sufficient information, to make informed judgements on what local governance will look like and where, how and by whom local people will be governed. And of course without knowing how we might be governed how can anyone have any assurance on the costs and savings?

Frankly, until this is known, the consultation process thus far can be only described as incomplete at best and in any event should not be completed until residents and business have had a chance to comment on exactly what is proposed in respect of at least the neighbourhood arrangements and the consequent additional costs.

South Norfolk is a CPA Excellent authority, and only in the last week was awarded a top ten place in The Times list of Best Councils to work for. It is difficult to see how any benefit might be accrued by any local resident or business from a change. The creation of large monolithic suppliers of local council services in Norfolk can hardly be the step change in local governance envisaged in the White Paper, where extending democracy is a key principle. And without providing the evidential base for your decision, notwithstanding that you demanded it from those submitting concepts, the proposals before us lack credibility and rigour, which is unacceptable for a constitutional change such as that proposed.

We will be writing in similar terms to the Secretary of State during the next round of consultation, to make her aware of the strong views held by the people of South Norfolk. Of course, in the meantime the Judicial Review will test the correctness of the Committee's deliberations and the basis upon which you were invited to give advice, advice, I note, you are not bound to give.

I am sure you will consider carefully the views expressed in this letter and in the reports attached, and I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely



**John Fuller**  
**Leader of the Council**



**Andy Radford**  
**Acting Chief Executive**