
BEST4NORFOLK

South Norfolk Council Response to Boundary Committee for England Request for Further Information

South Norfolk Council recognises that the dilemma facing the Boundary Committee and all proponents of unitary options is how to resolve the tension between

- having councils big enough to provide area wide strategic leadership and cost-effectiveness
- whilst being local enough to recognise local priorities and customise delivery at neighbourhood level and for residents, business & visitors.

In our opinion, a four-unitary model for Norfolk, extended in some circumstances into cross-border arrangements with Suffolk, is right. The councils will be the right size to optimise the tension between strategic direction and local focus & accountability, and our answers to the questions asked will demonstrate how robust arrangements will apply at all levels.

Regional	Where a properly constituted Norfolk & Suffolk Local Government Association will provide a counterpart to EEDA and a strong regional voice on a national stage	
Two-county	With a strong Norfolk & Suffolk Association of Local Government, where those services which require scale could be operated [e.g. Fire, Highways, Waste Disposal, Payroll]	1,600,000
County, or two or more authorities	For services where scale and some local distinctiveness is required and the optimum delivery size is greater than 250,000 [see table later]	500,000 - 1,000,000
Unitary	For services such as recycling efficiency, social housing, planning], where authority size of 250,000 or less gives the best performance.	220,000 - 240,000
Super neighbourhood	Within the rural authorities, a system of three super neighbourhoods, ten throughout Norfolk, to deliver quasi-judicial functions like planning & licensing, where local democratic decision making and accountability is critical, as well as partner-delivery, for example health-improvement.	75,000
Neighbourhood	Within each authority, nine or ten neighbourhoods [35 in total] building on the well-established principle established by the Police, Health Service and our own experience that populations of 20-25,000 based upon market-towns and their hinterland/urban neighbourhoods are the optimum size to deliver neighbourhood services	20,000 – 25,000
Parish & Town Councils	Devolving, where appropriate, very local services like car-parking to parish or town councils	1,000 - 5,000

We have spent the last two weeks engaging with partners to examine the effect of our proposal and this has confirmed our belief that that a four council structure for Norfolk remains the best option because

- For practical and operational reasons, the Chair of Norfolk PCT explained that the Norfolk Health Service works on clusters of 25,000 population based on market towns and their hinterland, exactly the size of our own neighbourhood building blocks
- There are 9-10 larger 'provider clusters' to deliver GP health services in Norfolk, exactly the number of super-neighbourhoods that we have proposed.
- The Chief Constable explained that the safer neighbourhood arrangements were evolving into 32 Inspector-led areas, extraordinarily close to our proposal for 35 neighbourhoods, recognising that the 52 safer neighbourhood areas are realistically not large enough.
- He went on to say that there are four crime hot-spots in Norfolk - Great Yarmouth, Norwich, Thetford and, to a much lesser extent, Kings Lynn - again the same as our own proposed numbers for authorities in Norfolk.

We have been struck by the correspondence between the practical organisation of some of the large statutory services operate at local level and our proposal for four unitary councils. *The numbers work*, and are consistent with existing units and principles already in place, such as in the Health Service and the Police. Taking our assertion that 20,000 to 25,000 population is the right size for a neighbourhood this leads to 9 or 10 neighbourhoods per council with about 60 councillors in total.

The fact that, completely independently, both NHS Norfolk and The Police have come to the same conclusion in their own neighbourhood working arrangements gives us confidence that *the numbers for our proposal are not only right, they are proven in practice.*

As we will now show, taking the Association of London Government model, where 32 London Councils co-operate within a robust democratically accountable framework to provide the strategic direction where it's needed, the Four Council model

- Is the least disruptive for the statutory partners
- Gives the best change for really effective local delivery with focus and accountability in the four areas of deprivation in Norfolk
- Is close enough to residents & business

Strategic leadership in practice

We expect the new councils to operate under Cabinet style government, with a Leader and nine member Executive. We have studied the models suggested by Norwich and Breckland in terms of the underlying principles of good governance, and we accept that the concepts espoused in those submissions are sound and sensible. There is good correspondence with our own proposals for portfolio responsibilities, and the main differences are around the *practical and social geography* and *local accountability*.

We based our model on the division of responsibilities successfully adopted by the Association of London Government but adjusted to take account of the rural nature of Norfolk. We recognise that there will be different priorities within each area, and particularly for a concentrated focus on the urban area of Greater Norwich, but in general terms we anticipate that portfolio responsibilities would cover:

- Children and young people
- Crime, public protection and trading standards
- Culture heritage and tourism
- Health and social services
- Housing and sustainability
- Partnerships

- Planning and economic development
- Resources and performance
- Transport and environment

The Council would have meetings of Cabinet on a 4 weekly cycle. There would be 9 Scrutiny committees, meeting every six weeks mirroring the portfolios, allowing for a succession planning process for the Scrutiny chairs to move into Cabinet.

There will be 9/10 Neighbourhood Boards in each council, each with four frontline councillors. In that way, all councillors will have a strong role to play at different levels, helping to improve involvement beyond the traditional backbencher role. The Boards would meet every 6 weeks, ensuring that local actions can be taken quickly under delegated powers.

At the higher level, we expect a properly constituted Association of Norfolk Councils to meet quarterly to make decisions on the more strategic countywide policies and services. This body will provide the strategic leadership at county level to provide input and advice on regional and national issues.

Member Roles and responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities will differ, corresponding with the different levels of government.

The Leader and members of Cabinet will have specific responsibilities to:

- lead the policy making and strategic planning process;
- lead on budget setting, resource planning and financial governance
- produce a Corporate Plan
- lead on the Local Area Agreement
- lead on partnership working
- review and monitor performance
- consider and respond to Government legislation
- take account of community needs

Scrutiny Chairs will have responsibility to:

- scrutinise and challenge decisions taken by Cabinet and other decision making bodies
- receive and consider evidence and information from outside bodies
- recommend to Council changes to decisions or on policy matters

Ward councillors

Ward councillors are representatives of the local community, and will act as champions and advocates for their area within the Council. They will be expected to:

- ensure they consult with, and are available to, members of the community to consider local issues
- attend relevant meetings in the local area – e.g. parish councils, residents associations
- bring concerns and matters raised at those meetings to the attention of the Council
- provide information and advice to the Executive on local issues
- act as a representative for the community on the local Neighbourhood Board
- advise Council on the effects of policy decisions in their area

Best4Norfolk

Indicative boundaries of 4 councils,
with neighbourhoods shown in colour.

7 councils in Norfolk
and Suffolk.
Joint arrangements
dealing with highways and
waste disposal.

Association of Norfolk
Councils
Properly constituted
meets at least quarterly
4 Councils in partnership
Dealing with Transport;
Child Protection;
Museums.

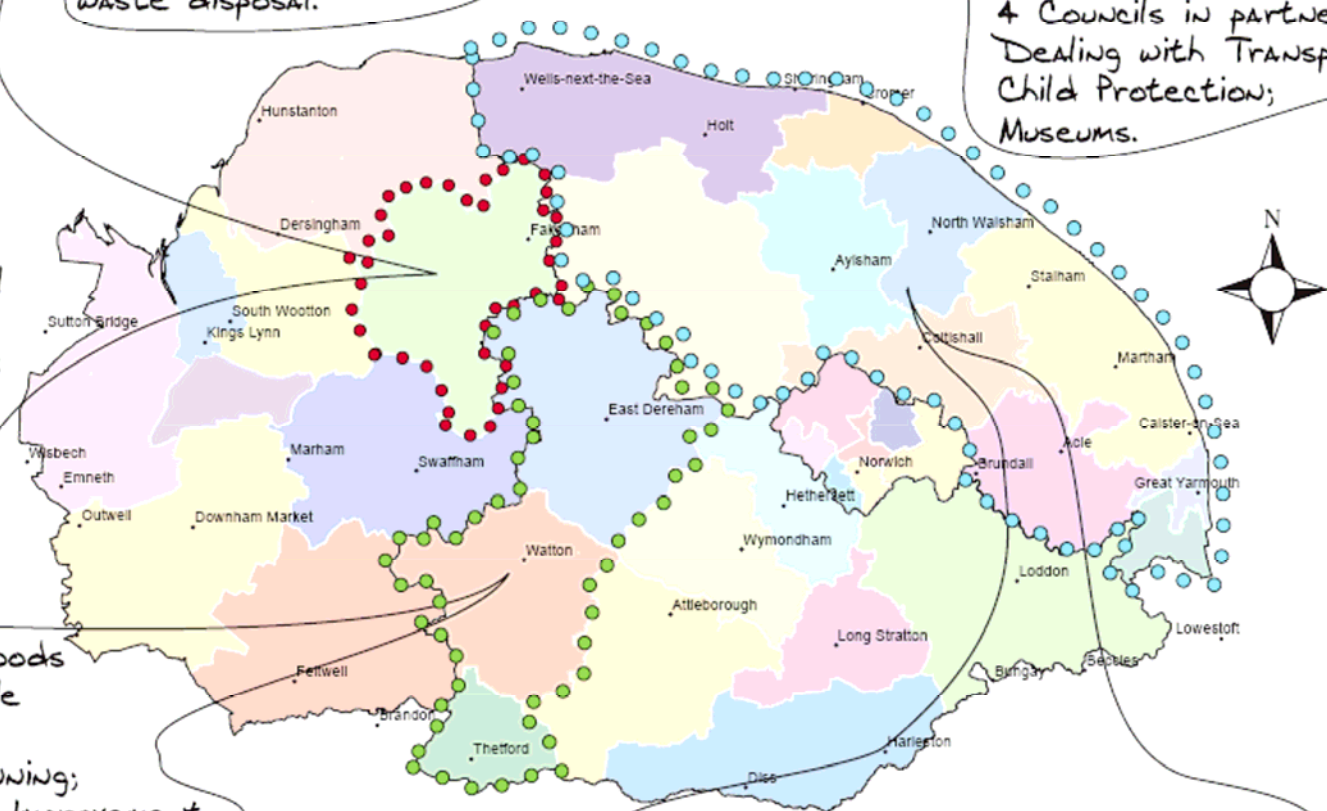
Neighbourhoods
20/25,000 people
7 councillors
15/20 parishes
32 local Police
Inspectors

Dealing with
street cleaning;
car parking;
community safety;
and environmental
crime.

35 across Norfolk
3 combine into
one Super
Neighbourhood

Super Neighbourhoods
70/75,000 people
21 Councillors
Dealing with Planning;
Licensing; Health Improvement.
No more than 30 minutes to
attend a planning committee
10 across Norfolk
3 combine into one council

4 councils of equals.
Around 200,000 population and
60 councillors.
No more than one hour to drive across.
4 combine into one County Association.



2. RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FOR ALL PROPONENTS

Why would your proposed model best address the social and economic challenges of the Norfolk county area?

In our November submission “A Vision for Norfolk”, and our April submission “Best4Norfolk”, we believe that we have shown how the model for four unitary councils best addresses the challenges for Norfolk.

We set out in detail the challenges facing the county – socio-economic issues, demographic change, the growth agenda, deprivation, peripherality and rurality for example.

We believe that the same approach on co-ordination and service delivery applies to Norwich, King’s Lynn and Great Yarmouth & Thetford as the pockets of most obvious deprivation. Unitary councils based on the four-unitary model will have the scale and scope to address the challenges faced by the urban concentrations in Norfolk, but without any one council having to tackle any more than one significant concentration of multiple deprivation.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES OF NORWICH URBAN AREA

The social and economic challenges of Greater Norwich would be tackled effectively by a Greater Norwich unitary.

Those challenges include

- Deprivation – second most deprived district in region, with over 30% of working age people in receipt of benefits in worst areas
- Education and skills – below average levels of qualifications and aspirations with schools in special measures
- Housing – high proportion of council housing, much of it not meeting the decent homes standard, and high rates of homelessness
- Growth agenda – on a sub-regional basis, an additional 30,000 houses and 35,000 jobs are to be provided by 2021, the bulk of which will be in Greater Norwich without the physical infrastructure to support it.

But balanced by

- A strong core of finance, insurance, media and light industry businesses
- Strong cultural and historical centre,
- Strongest creative and media sector in East of England
- Thriving retail sector amongst the top-ten in UK.

We consider that the best way to cut through what would be a structurally hung Norwich City Unitary Council would be for the creation of a directly elected Mayor/Leader model.

Since we submitted our Best4Norfolk proposal, the London Mayoral elections have raised the profile of elected Mayors, and the Institute for Public Policy Research (“*Mayors Rule*”, article by Kenny & Lodge in *ppr* 23rd April 2008) concludes that the experience of elected mayors shows improvement in the performance of their councils and the development of innovative policies. They also argue that more towns and cities with elected mayors would have the potential to reinvigorate local politics.

The Government’s own view in the White Paper on Local Government is that elected mayors seem to be the most effective form of political leadership.

We suggest that an elected Mayor or Leader for Norwich would help to provide strong leadership for the area, and we believe it would provide an impetus for all concerned to work together to tackle the challenges facing the city and to help address its poor performance as a council over the last few years. By this measure above all others, we consider that a Norwich City Unitary on tight boundaries with a highly visible and accountable Mayor gives the best chance to address the structural problems in the City.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FACED BY GREAT YARMOUTH AND KING'S LYNN

Both areas suffer from peripherality, with particularly poor access by road or rail. There is significant deprivation in both Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn, including low education standards and low skill levels, although progress in Education in West Norfolk since 2004 has been significant.

GREAT YARMOUTH

Key challenges include:

- Deprivation – high levels of unemployment and benefit claimants
- Housing below decent homes standard
- Peripherality – poor access to services and markets
- Reliance on seasonal employment
- Community cohesion – influx of migrant labour from A8 countries
- Environmental factors including climate change

Balanced by

- Great Yarmouth has a strong connection with the offshore oil and gas industry.
- The construction of the new Outer Harbour,
- through a regeneration company, 1st East, will have a positive impact on a town with major unemployment and deprivation.
- Better connections with mainland Europe will open up new and extended markets and bring economic opportunities to the area.

KING'S LYNN

Key challenges include:

- Education and skills – historic but improving low levels of attainment
- Community cohesion – influx of migrant labour from A8 countries
- Regeneration
- Peripherality - poor access to services and markets
- Growth agenda

King's Lynn is at the centre of an economic sub-region with a large catchment area extending into Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. It has problems of skills and aspirations, in common with most of Norfolk, but a particular challenge is the changing face of agriculture and food processing.

Like Norwich, King's Lynn has growth point agenda to meet, with 12,000 houses needed by 2021. There are multi-agency arrangements in partnership to deliver on this, with major investment programmes through the Nar-Ouse Regeneration Company, and recent large inward investments such as the Palm paper production facility

Good progress on educational achievements have been made also, with two high schools recently improved to “Good” rating by Ofsted and the FE College of West Anglia assessed as outstanding. A new unitary council with a strong partnership ethos would be well placed to continue that work.

RURAL AREAS AND SMALLER MARKET TOWNS

We recognise the diverse nature of the county and the particular difficulties faced in rural communities, and our principles, laid out on p3 of the November *Vision* show that our structure is local, cost effective and will deliver high quality services consistently across the county.

The issues for rural areas and market towns have been addressed in our submissions, where we have demonstrated the role our neighbourhood structures would play in local service delivery and community empowerment. Rural areas play an active role in the Norfolk economy, much wider than the traditional view of agriculture and food processing. The diverse attractive environment provides many opportunities for rural businesses, tourism and quality of life but with differing priorities within the four unitary areas we have identified.

A major issue in most of the rural areas is affordability of housing, not necessarily housing supply. There are many areas where second generation families are unable to stay in the same village as their parents, because they are unable to get on to the housing ladder. Councils like South Norfolk are trying to address that issue, by providing, directly or in partnership, low cost housing projects. Unitary status may well enable that issue to be tackled more effectively and with better resources, particularly in North Norfolk, where the problem is acute.

Deprivation in Norfolk is relatively low but there are pockets of severe deprivation. One of the four major concentrations of multiple deprivation in the county is in Thetford, one of the market towns. In fact, in terms of crime, the police consider Thetford to be more of a problem than King’s Lynn. By having a four council structure, the Central/South Norfolk council would be able to concentrate specifically on that area, as well as tackling rural deprivation. In fact it gives obvious and structurally-enforced focus and accountability that could not be deprioritised by a future much larger authority.

There is much hidden deprivation in the county, as it is spread across the rural areas. OCSI research (*Deprivation in Rural Norfolk: Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2006*) concluded that “substantial numbers of deprived people live in rural areas.” The majority of people in Norfolk on incapacity benefits or claiming pension credits are in rural areas. Just under half of all lone parent households, jobseeker allowance claimants and, perhaps most significantly, half of those with no car live outside the urban areas.

This means that, while the major urban concentrations of deprivation are correctly focussed on, there is a clear need to develop solutions to tackle those diffuse problems in the rural areas also. We believe that a four unitary structure would enable each council to have the capacity to look at both urban and rural deprivation, at strategic and local level with sufficient resources to make a difference.

PRESENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES OF COASTAL EROSION AND FLOODING

Norfolk faces great challenges from climate change, not least rising sea levels, coastal erosion and flooding. The county and district councils have a strong, proud tradition of tackling problems such as flooding quickly, efficiently and effectively, with great support from the public for that work. As an example, where flooding occurred in a small village in

South Norfolk some years ago, the district and county councils worked very well, together with the village and parish involved, to carry out remedial and preventative work.

Back in November 2007 we worked with Kings Lynn on quantifying the coastal erosion issue to the west of Wells. Whilst it was accepted that sea defences were of critical importance to the east of Wells, this was not the case to the west and a single officer spent no more than one day per week on coastal erosion issues within the KLWN boundary. We would contend that coastal erosion in the west is not quite the critical issue it is in the east, where the interaction with the Broads is an aggravating factor.

Where there are areas such as North Norfolk that have major problems with coastal erosion, those problems could be dealt with more easily under a unitary structure, where most of the agencies involved would operate under the same organisation. The local community would still be involved, naturally, but the efforts of the local authority would be better resourced and better co-ordinated. There is commonality on this around the coast of Norfolk, with the King's Lynn area around The Wash suffering regular and disastrous flooding, with little co-ordinated effort to prevent this.

It seems likely that in the future there will be more problems than solutions, if climate change does continue at current levels. Under a unitary structure, the council will have a stronger, unifying voice in the community, better able to exercise community leadership on climate change issues. This could include, for example, persuading local businesses to reduce carbon emissions and recycle more, aiming to become carbon neutral. We consider that any change to a unitary structure would be beneficial in this connection.

In fact, it is the coastal flooding issue that above all demonstrates the need for new authorities based around communities of interest. Other areas do not have flooding as such a critical need and our proposal allows the communities most at risk to focus their attention completely.

THE ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF NORWICH

You ask how our proposal would reflect the economic significance of Norwich. Our four council model assumes a Greater Norwich City Council, and the economic significance of Norwich is recognised in our submission. The city is a regional centre, with over 35% of the jobs in the county. It is in the top ten retail centres in the country, and is a strong focus for the financial sector. There are major areas of development in the city centre and in the western fringe, for example, which includes Norwich Research Park; John Innes Centre, UEA and the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KING'S LYNN AS A CENTRE FOR THE WEST OF THE COUNTY

As stated above, and in our submission, King's Lynn is an important centre for the west of the county, and acts as the hub of a larger economic sub-region, extending further west. Kings Lynn is part of the Cambridge ambit, with direct road and rail links to that city. Kings Lynn residents would more likely shop in Peterborough than Norwich along the A47 and the A17 is a link to the Midlands via Newark.

Culturally Kings Lynn looks to its neighbours across the Wash and down through the Fens and levels to Bedfordshire & Northants. The land type and tenure in the West, historically built upon the large country estates to the west of the Norfolk watershed, has given distinctive broadacre agriculture and its buildings a certain architectural style.

Kings Lynn also draws residents from Fakenham & Swaffham, whereas Thetford has more in common with Norwich and the A11 Corridor. Local residents would identify more with “West Norfolk” than with Norwich. There is a clear and distinct community of interest to the West of the County but we would dispute that this extends far beyond the Swaffham to Fakenham road, where the concept of “Mid Norfolk” within the ambit of Norwich to the east of the watershed becomes more dominant.

The model we propose acknowledges that, by having a council based on King’s Lynn, but with the boundary extended from the existing borough to include Swaffham & Fakenham, reflecting the role King’s Lynn plays in travel to work, retailing patterns and community involvement and gives a council in the west that residents can recognise and relate to.

HOW WOULD YOUR PROPOSED MODEL REFLECT THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE URBAN AND RURAL AREAS OF THE COUNTY?

Our model uses the way people live their lives to give a structure that communities can relate to. It recognises travel to work patterns, shopping and leisure activities and local accountability. The main issue for rural areas is access to services, and the main road and rail connections are based, understandably, on the urban centres. People in more remote rural areas often have long distances to travel to obtain services or to access education, training or leisure activities, for example, and our four council model strikes a balance between access to local facilities and services, and economies of scale, where we have suggested that an authority should be no more than an hour to drive across and well-relate to public transport networks.

YARTOFT IMPLICATIONS

We set out in our *Best4Norfolk* submission our strong view that the Yartoft proposal has little or no merit, and in fact would face considerable community opposition, as demonstrated recently by the failure of the Leader of Great Yarmouth Labour Group and visible ‘architect’ of the Yartoft plans to be re-elected in the May Elections amplified by the loss of the Labour deputy leader on the same day, another person closely associated with the Yartoft proposal.

We have noted also that the Chief Constable is equally opposed to that merger, noting in his submission that “...for either Suffolk or Norfolk to lose a major town would call into question the viability of that Constabulary, which loses a major contributor to its policing area. This would raise again the question of force merger...”

The Great Yarmouth/Waveney PCT covers the proposed joint Yartoft area currently, but we understand that, while it is the optimum size for service delivery, it is actually too small for strategic commissioning. We suggest that would call into question the scale and size of the proposed council for that area also, on the basis that it is likely to be too small to handle the strategic issues it would have to deal with.

If Yartoft were to be considered, notwithstanding that the Banham Commission from 1994 supported a four-and-a-half unitary model, we concede the Best4Norfolk model would fall. But then so would the concept of the Greater Norwich Unitary and much of the ability to deliver a coherent Unitary Authority in East Norfolk, bisected as it is by the River Yare, with its principal crossing points in Great Yarmouth. We contend that the adverse knock-on effects from creating a Yartoft to the rest of the county would outweigh any benefits from creating a Yarmouth/Waveney authority.

ECONOMIC LINKS BETWEEN GREAT YARMOUTH AND NORWICH IN THE SUB-REGIONAL ECONOMY.

The Norwich sub-region identified by EEDA in the Regional Economic Strategy as a key “Engine for Growth” has the largest labour market in the East of England, and yet it does not include Great Yarmouth.

There are traditional business links between the two centres but as drivers for growth they are separate, in different travel to work areas. That is why we have identified separate councils to cover those areas. Where there are links, they are lop-sided. Whilst Great Yarmouth people would travel to Norwich, as you would expect to a large regional centre, there is very little counter-commuting from Norwich to Great Yarmouth.

Greater Norwich has a focus on financial and commercial business, food and life sciences, and is in the top ten retail centres in England, while Great Yarmouth has more industrial and port related activity together with coastal and beach-related tourism. There is considerable growth expected in Norwich by 2021 in terms of housing and jobs, and there is much regeneration work in progress in Great Yarmouth with the Outer Harbour developments. However, while development and regeneration activity is prevalent in both areas, they are distinct and unique settlements complete with ancient rivalries.

HOW WOULD PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS HAVE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE?

The numbers are right, in our proposals, to allow the best arrangements for governance at all levels. We believe that the neighbourhood arrangements currently in operation in South Norfolk provide a solid foundation for neighbourhood governance in the new unitary structure across Norfolk. We have been successful in combining Safer Neighbourhood teams with our Neighbourhood Forums and, while we have democratic legitimacy for those by having elected councillors on the forums, we also have good representation from local community representatives. They have delegated budgets to disburse grant aid to local groups and we are looking to extend that further, into wider more strategic projects.

Parish and town councils are represented on the forums, but we see the neighbourhood agenda as complementary to the work that parishes currently do. Parishes are a vital element of democracy at the local level, but we would expect, under the new arrangements, that neighbourhoods would have functions delegated to them for service delivery at that higher level, larger than a parish. Such services could include minor road works and waste composting for example.

Additional powers are already available to parish and town councils, especially those that have Quality status, but as yet in Norfolk little take up of those has been seen. We would hope that in the new structure parishes would be encouraged to consider taking on more service delivery.

IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY ACROSS NORFOLK (PRIORITIES; EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT; URBAN/RURAL DEPRIVATION)

While service provision in Norfolk is generally at a high level already, particularly in South Norfolk, we expect to further improve that within our proposed structure. Simply having co-terminosity of service delivery, having to deal with only one council for all local government services, will have a significant positive impact on the experience of

residents and customers and the Best4Norfolk proposal disrupts the fewest number of service delivery units, minimising the chance of transitional failure.

The councils will be closer to the customer, especially for those services currently at County level, and having a neighbourhood structure with some services delivered locally will reinforce that. Elected members covering all council services will be closely involved with their communities and will be accountable to them, thus keeping standards high. The key to success will be the closer relationship that councillors will have with residents and their communities.

PRIORITIES

We expect that the priorities for the new councils would be similar to those currently in the Norfolk LAA, but broadly would consist of these main issues:

- o Vulnerable people, particularly young and very old;
- o Environment – climate change factors; housing; waste disposal
- o Community cohesion, including gypsy and traveller and migrant agendas
- o Crime and the fear of crime
- o Education, employment and dealing with NEET young people
- o Young people
- o Transport and communications
- o Accommodating growth

There will of course be a different emphasis on those priorities between the urban and the rural areas, but we consider those would be the focus of effort over the next few years.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

A four unitary structure will provide a strong focus for improving educational achievement. Partnership working is fundamental to improving young peoples achievement. It is not simply the school and teachers who will help children to achieve better. The whole package to ensure children are ready and able to attend school needs a partnership approach, between all concerned – child, parent, school, health, police and local government. We will have more extended school provision, to facilitate that partnership working, as we know there is a direct correlation between that kind of approach and improved results. Where a child is fit and able to attend school with a support mechanism behind them, they achieve more.

In many rural areas, transport to school is a significant issue, and we expect there to be better arrangements in place for that under the four unitary model. This could be arranged at unitary, countywide or even two-county level.

The four unitary model allows the proposed councils to be close to the issues, and educational attainment and achievement will be an important driver for all of them. However it is recognised that education starts in the home, and much of what needs to be challenged and changed will start in local neighbourhoods and be developed through the concept of early years interventions. Co-terminosity largely based on existing area service boundaries between police, childrens and adult social services reduces the risk of vulnerable falling between the net.

Equally it is recognised that there are specialist skills needed. So for example the safeguarding agenda, special needs education, fostering and adoption will all need to be addressed. Some of these may be best dealt with on a county wide basis, some may be

better on a two county basis, and a detailed examination of the most appropriate model of service delivery will need to be undertaken.

URBAN AND RURAL DEPRIVATION

We have dealt earlier in this report with urban and rural deprivation, but in essence the new councils would address deprivation by co-ordinating efforts better and providing a concentrated focus on these areas. Urban and rural deprivation are no different, they are multi-faceted, but strongly linked to income, health and opportunities. Early intervention is always important, and doubly so in terms of education and health, where it impacts on an individual's ability to learn and therefore to improve their prospects in later life. It is easier to catch a problem before it starts than to have to deal later with the after effects.

By having most of the necessary services within one agency, the council, and the capacity to harness all the other partner agencies together, the causes and effects of multiple deprivation can be addressed successfully.

Co-terminosity: Fewer coordinating committees between partners means more time for action!

3. SOUTH NORFOLK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

FURTHER EVIDENCE OF COMMONALITY BETWEEN GREAT YARMOUTH AND NORTH NORFOLK

The data from the Office of National Statistics, based on super output areas, which we provided on the supporting cd with our Vision document, clearly demonstrates commonality – such as in employment, income, education, and crime - but most importantly deprivation levels are relatively high, and social problems do not stop at Hemsby.

The two areas are very similar in terms of their coastal nature, their considerable reputations as holiday destinations and a reliance on tourism industry. While North Norfolk is predominantly rural and Great Yarmouth is predominantly urban, both face similar challenges and environmental risks such as coastal erosion and flooding, which are not faced by any other area in Norfolk to the same extent.

The area of Great Yarmouth Borough is much larger than the urban core, and much of that rural area together with North Norfolk has some of the best Grade 1 arable land in the UK and there is a strong agricultural background and history to both areas, particularly around high-value vegetable production.

The Broads is common to both areas. In our *Best4Norfolk* concept, we speculated that some work needed to be done to look at the current functions, democratic accountability and responsibilities of the Broads Authority, recognising there is an absolute need for a strategic role in conservation and navigation, in itself important to flood prevention. The Broads Authority is pursuing the option of having some directly elected members, and a Bill is currently working through Parliament. The implications of that for a new unitary council will need to be considered further when consultation is carried out in the summer.

A unitary council that covers the majority of the Broads area, rightly could be considered to have some measure of credibility for carrying out the strategic, policy making and planning functions of the Broads Authority, enhancing the democratic legitimacy of that role. The existing Great Yarmouth Port Authority extended into the Broads could also carry out the river and harbour conservancy roles.

Both areas exhibit relatively high levels of unemployment and incapacity, and lower than average working population. In both council areas the average weekly pay is well below the regional and national average, albeit with different types of employment. The industrial background at first glance appears different, but both areas are steeped in marine engineering, albeit different types, and both have high levels of activity in agriculture and tourism.

Poverty and deprivation are relatively high, and in fact, while Great Yarmouth does have higher than county average crime levels, some rural areas have pockets of significant drug-related crime. A unitary council covering that wider area, responsible for all services, would be well placed to co-ordinate social, economic and development activity to address those issues.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a single Magistrates Court Bench for Great Yarmouth Borough and North Norfolk District, serviced by a single Clerk to the Justices and a single team of legal, accounting and administrative staff based at the Magistrates Courthouse in Great Yarmouth. The North Norfolk Court, which sits in Cromer, operates

as a satellite of the Great Yarmouth Court. Though the local legal profession was initially unhappy with this change, the arrangement has settled in well and is now widely accepted.

Socially, links between Great Yarmouth and Norfolk north of the River Yare are strong. The A47 Southern Bypass was only completed in the 1990's and until then it was difficult to cross the Yare, which is why even today the Norfolk Coastal Unitary as far as Wells would have a great deal of practical support.

There are strong public transport networks, including the two branded rail lines, the Bittern & Wherry lines, celebrating ten years as drivers of rail-related tourism.

IMPACT OF THE FOUR UNITARY MODEL ON KEY PARTNERS

We have described the tension between the need for effective strategic direction and local deliverability. But it is not as if these are new concepts or problems. In talking with our partners in an attempt to resolve these issues we have looked at how they have been dealt with elsewhere.

The Police and the Health Service in Norfolk both face a similar dilemma – how to achieve a balance between strategic leadership, commissioning and local delivery. Both agencies favour one council for Norfolk, on the basis of what could be termed operational convenience, but we would argue that that does not meet the Government's need for local authorities with local accountability, in which case the four model best reflects the practice of what they have already chosen as their neighbourhood arrangements.

POLICE

Understandably the Police would prefer to deal with a single co-terminous unitary authority but looking at other police authorities elsewhere in the country, Devon & Cornwall, Avon & Somerset and Greater Manchester all have police forces covering areas with many more than one local authority, yet have operational units at local level. Issues surrounding a single child protection register, for example have been satisfactorily dealt with.

In Norfolk, the police have 52 delivery units, and 32 Inspectors. The 35 neighbourhoods structure we propose enables simple transition from the existing structure if necessary.

The police safer neighbourhoods, referred to earlier, have populations of around 16,000 and there is some recognition that those may be too small. We are currently working with the police locally to aggregate their Safer Neighbourhood Action Panels with our Neighbourhood Forums, acknowledging the need to be more strategic.

Although out of the scope of this review, there could be an opportunity of joining the Norfolk police force with Suffolk, and as stated earlier, we understand the Norfolk Constabulary would welcome that. That would fit well with our model, with four authorities of equals in Norfolk and three in Suffolk providing a solid basis for a new strategic police authority covering both counties and with a board drawn from the constituent councils.

FIRE

We also suggest there could be merit in joining the Norfolk and Suffolk fire authorities to cover the strategic elements of their work. In fact, it is recognised that some merger

between the Norfolk & Suffolk Fire Authorities is economically necessary to address the wider security burdens placed upon it and this review would give that impetus.

HEALTH

The health service has expressed an overt preference for Norfolk to have one council but, in fact at the service delivery level, NHS Norfolk works in 9-10 delivery clusters for GP practices and in units of 25,000 people for community-based health [eg midwifery & district nursing]. So any structure of councils is less relevant than those operational units, where the interface between service user and provider meet. Units of 25,000 clustered around market towns tie in well with our proposed neighbourhood structure (see below).

SHARED PRIORITIES

We would expect that at county level, perhaps even at two-county or regional level, there will be some convergence on priority topics and multi-area agreements in place to deliver on those, and shared service delivery would certainly involve key partners where appropriate. Under current arrangements, the Local Area Agreement at county level is still reflected at district level, but with seven different sets of priorities at district level. Going to four councils will reduce the potential for partners to have to deal with competing priorities.

Shared service delivery across wider areas does work in practice, and looking at examples from elsewhere, there is a very successful model working in London where the 32 London Councils come together as a group, with an Executive and regular meetings, to develop policy and deliver services, such as traffic and transport management at the Greater London level. This works across the area covered by the Metropolitan Police, so an argument for one council for Norfolk on the basis of assisting with policing is not tenable.

We believe that, in fact, the unitary structure we propose would only have positive impacts on our key partners. Countywide agencies, such as Norfolk Constabulary or Voluntary Norfolk would have fewer organisations to deal with than they do currently. On that basis, it could be argued that it would be best to have only one council for Norfolk, but our position is that one, or even two councils would be too large and remote from their residents. The councils we propose would be organisations that have sufficient capacity to deal with strategic issues but are local enough to understand and address the key issues without a democratic deficit.

EVIDENCE FOR 9/10 NEIGHBOURHOODS PER AUTHORITY

We believe that the optimum size for effective neighbourhood working is around 20/25,000 population. Page 14 of our *Best4Norfolk* submission explains that this means effective democratic leadership and accountability, but in areas that make sense for local people. We tested this with parish representatives, who confirmed that going larger than 25,000 was a step too far when it was shown what it would mean practically on the ground.

We believe that this arrangement best reflects what has become known to academic political scientists as Scharpf's Law:

"As the number of affected parties increases ... negotiated solutions incur exponentially rising and eventually prohibitive transaction costs"

(Fritz Scharpf, *Games Real Actors Play: Actor-Centred Institutionalism in Policy Research*, Westview Press, 1997, p.70).

In the circumstances of Norfolk, our rule of thumb reflects, we believe, the point at which economies of scale turn to diseconomies, when the advantages of collaborative working become disadvantages and when the democratic anchorage to such local service delivery arrangements starts to weaken.

Our rule of thumb also addresses the six issues identified by a 2003 ODPM study into the successful introduction of devolved working in English local government (Steve Leach and others, Strengthening Local Democracy: Making the Most of the Constitution, ODPM, 2003, p.47) and the five key principles for effective neighbourhood governance identified in a later ODPM publication (Civic Engagement and the Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter, ODPM, 2005, p.12).

WHAT LOCAL ISSUES WOULD NEIGHBOURHOOD BOARDS BE EMPOWERED TO ADDRESS? WHAT SERVICES MIGHT THE BOARDS DELIVER?

The key to our proposals is subsidiarity – the devolving of power to the lowest, most appropriate level. There are services and decisions that need to remain at the highest level, where there would be requirements for specialist services and appropriate resources. For example we would expect Special Educational Needs, or fostering and adoption services to be dealt with at County level. On the other side, there are services currently provided at county or district level that should be delivered more locally, such as street cleaning.

Neighbourhood Boards would have a number of councillor members, and a number of community representatives, such as we have in our current neighbourhood structure (six councillors and six community reps). (see p11 of The Vision)

This successful model allows decisions to be taken on grant aid for local projects and we anticipate that in a unitary structure, more decisions could be taken at that local level, on issues of local concern. For example priorities for action on community safety matters or for improving local roads should be topics that are of less concern to the whole council but which have a significant impact locally. All of these actions would of course be taken within the overall policy framework of the council but that element of local discretion and decision-making is vital to encourage community action and involvement.

Neighbourhood boards would be an important starting point for community calls for action – the Community Reference in our terms. We expect local people to use the Neighbourhood Board members raise and discuss issues of concern at the Board, before passing them to the Scrutiny Committee for decisions on action.

Neighbourhoods will be the focal point of local action, so there are likely to be local offices, with managers with devolved budgets and power to make local improvements. For the four council structure, with 9/10 neighbourhoods per council, devolved budgets per neighbourhood of around £200,000 in the first instance, building as the concept matured would be reasonable to have under local control. Over time we would expect that to increase, as neighbourhood working became more established and successful. We have proved this type of arrangement can work at South Norfolk, by ring-fencing second homes Council Tax money and adding to it, for neighbourhood budgets allocated £200,000 in 2008/9 amongst our five neighbourhoods. A unitary authority could afford to allocate more.

Staffing in neighbourhoods would be appropriate to the services delivered, and we anticipate there will be different approaches adopted in each of the four councils. In principle we expect as a minimum, the following services to be accessible locally:

- o Street cleaning
- o Fly tipping and anti-social behaviour
- o Youth activities
- o Community cohesion
- o Street lighting
- o Road repairs (minor)
- o Housing repairs where appropriate
- o Benefits information and advice
- o Council tax collection
- o Allotments
- o Car parking
- o Trading standards
- o Food complaints
- o Maintenance of play areas, parks and open spaces
- o Community safety/ anti-social behaviour
- o Planning and building applications

We would expect the neighbourhoods to be implementing LSP priorities in their local area, acting as a delivery arm for the partnership as well as for the council. As an example, where there is a school with declining figures on attendance or attainment, the Neighbourhood Board could work with the school, relevant partners and the local community to get action taken to help improve that, without recourse to the council.

COMMENTING ON OTHER PROPOSALS

On a general point we set out in our *Best4Norfolk* addendum our views on the other proposals submitted for Norfolk. However, the Committee is seeking views on synergies, and to the extent that our proposal is the only one that has four unitary councils proposed, it is difficult to find synergy with other proposals, except on the governance arrangements where there is a high degree of agreement on the principles.

We believe that a Greater Norwich based on slightly enlarged boundaries, not on sub-regional or policy area boundaries offers the optimum balance between the communities of interest and economies of scale without trespassing too far into the rural areas. We believe that coincides with the views of Norwich City Council, who from the outset have been firmly of the opinion that a unitary council for Norwich should be on tight urban boundaries, with the existing city boundary extended to cover adjoining areas on the urban fringe.

We reject the proposed boundary in the City Council's April submission, shown on the "Proposed Working Model" map, which includes whole parishes and takes the boundary well into South Norfolk. Of course, the precise boundary would be subject to eventual discussion and agreement and it might become necessary to invite the Committee to recommend changes in parish boundaries to reflect the outcome of any such subsequent discussions.

We believe that the "Nutcracker" option is potentially and literally the most *divisive* solution for Norfolk. It does not have a strong basis on the way people live their lives nor does it reflect the reality of service delivery currently, leading to much more disruption than over transition some other solutions.

SHARED SERVICES DELIVERING IMPROVED OUTCOMES

POPULATION SIZE AND PERFORMANCE

You asked us to consider how shared services might deliver improved outcomes. Our shared services model sees the merit of *some* services being delivered at higher level than unitary council.

- But which services?
- On what basis would we make the decision to deliver at a higher level?
- And how can we be sure that service provision will be improved?

We have looked at the report by the Department for Communities and Local Government “Population Size and Local Authority Performance – final research report” published in October 2006. Our proposals are aimed at achieving the best balance of high quality service delivery and value for money. (see p25/26 of Best4Norfolk for details of services and level of provision – that is the research referred to on p27 of our proposal that you required more evidence on.)

The report makes it clear that local authority size has a direct impact on the ability to deliver services. But bigger doesn’t mean best. Some services are best delivered on a large scale, whereas others, particularly those that the public focus on at election time, are best dealt with on a smaller scale.

The research identifies whether the optimum service size is best delivered by a ‘U shaped’ graph where a ‘turning point’ of 300,000 will show optimum performance at below 200,000-250,000, or, in the case of an ‘inverted U shaped’ graph where the turning point is the exactly optimum size.

We have extracted the table from the report and identified which of the services is best delivered

- Under 250,000 people – We would envisage the service delivered by a single unitary council
- Between 250,000 and 500,000 - By within County or Bi-lateral arrangements
- Over 500,000 - On a whole County or Two-county Basis

Indicator	Type	Turning Point	Best Size
Education CPA	U-shape	327,587	Over 500k
CPA Star rating	U-shape	149,592	Over 500k
Environment CPA	U-shape	249,598	Over 500k
Service - Corporate Performance	U-shape	366,045	Over 500k
Service - Corporate improvement prospects	U-shape	226,345	Under 250k
Parks & open spaces satisfaction	U-shape	191,769	Under 250k
043b - SEN statements	U-shape	1,030,344	Over 500k
050 - Qualifications of looked after children	Inverted U-shape	271,266	250k to 500k
076b - Benefits investigators	U-shape	398,818	Under 250k
091 - Kerbside recycling	Inverted U-shape	216,636	Under 250k
VFM - Museums	U-shape	526,854	Under 250k
VFM - Adult social services	Inverted U-shape	386,652	Over 500k
VFM - Benefits	Inverted U-shape	233,649	Under 250k
VFM - Council tax collection	Inverted U-shape	502,925	Over 500k

VFM - Highways maintenance	Inverted U-shape	723,152	Over 500k
VFM - Housing	Inverted U-shape	355,538	250k to 500k
VFM - Libraries	Inverted U-shape	541,213	Over 500k
VFM - Public transport	Inverted U-shape	813,933	Over 500k
VFM - Trading standards	Inverted U-shape	568,998	Over 500k
VFM - Waste collection	Inverted U-shape	305,470	250k to 500k
VFM - Waste disposal	Inverted U-shape	257,199	250k to 500k

Our Best4Norfolk proposals optimise the size of authority in Norfolk, at 220,000 – 240,000, exactly the right size for those services that need local delivery.

The Best4Norfolk proposals with properly constituted arrangements for cross-border working within an Association of Norfolk/Suffolk Councils will allow other services, for example Trading Standards or Public Transport, to be delivered most effectively by commissioning arrangements taking advantage of services and topics where there may be specialist knowledge and activities that would only exist at the higher level.

The piecemeal approach entailed under the current structure of county and districts sometimes militates against those efficiencies, despite the best efforts of ad-hoc partnership working.

We are mindful that Norfolk County Council employs 23,000 people and we must not allow the critical services to fail during transition. Our proposals anticipate least disruption to the existing service teams that actually provide the services and, in any event services, such as Highways or Children's Services, are currently organised in four different geographic areas as described in our November 2007 *A Vision for Norfolk* (p12/13).

BUSINESS MODELS INCORPORATING COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES

You asked about business models for County Services. In proposing Best4Norfolk, *Maximum gain – minimum pain*, we wish to disrupt as few service delivery boundaries as possible whilst providing new, strong strategic direction and effective neighbourhood arrangements.

Seamless transition to the new authorities is the ultimate aim of our proposals, with minimum disruption for residents and customers. The role of Norfolk County Services [Norse] will be key to this seamless transition. It would be pointless to break-up Norfolk County Services and to deliver four separate school transport contracts or school catering services, for example.

Our proposal would see Norfolk County Services (and the equivalent body in Suffolk) retained and owned by four councils of equal size as equal shareholders & scrutineers. The four successor authorities would commission services from the trading company, which would be free to look for business in other geographic areas.

We see an expansion for this arrangement, adding-in back-office functions like payroll processing or specialist legal services, building on this emerging trend, whilst at all times allowing each authority to set the level of service they require in line with local circumstances and priority within a framework of democratic accountability. When we discussed this concept with the Chief Constable, he welcomed the opportunity to outsource payroll, for example, to a robust public owned trading company.

THE LAST WORD

By minimising disruption during the changeover, by delivering each service at the level that gives best performance and by building on the joint working arrangements currently in place, we consider that the Best4Norfolk proposal offers the most affordable concept that respects the practical geography and robust neighbourhood arrangements required by the five criteria: cost effective solutions with the best chance of excellent and accountable performance.

John Fuller
Leader of South Norfolk Council
9 May 2008