

Broad cross-section of support

The district council has a good track record of building consensus, and we are currently working closely with the police to merge the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panels with our Neighbourhood Forums, a good example of joined up working.

In response to local concerns over the number of meetings and a need for greater synergy between the Panels and the Forums, we have agreed that two of the existing forums will merge immediately and the other areas will follow over the next few months.

Does the proposal have support from a range of key partners/stakeholders/service users or residents?

We have carried out consultation with local people and organisations to seek their views not just on our proposals, but also on some of the other one, two and three council options for Norfolk.

We instituted a website survey, again setting out several of the options for Norfolk and the results of that were that one in three respondents (35%) was in favour of the four-council option. Asked to express a preference for one of seven options for Norfolk, 26.7% preferred four councils, and second with 13.7% was the three-council option with East/West and Greater Norwich. Respondents answered a question on whether or not Yartoft was acceptable, and the results were that 54% were not in favour of Yartoft, while 42% were.

The Consultation Process

We used independent market research consultants to run focus groups from the Norfolk Citizens Panel to do some objective qualitative research into the possible options for Norfolk.

Parishes were encouraged to complete the web survey, but we also held an event where parish and town councils were given information about LGR and were given options for Norfolk unitary structures from those submitted by others in November 2007.

Parish and Town Councils

Key Points from discussion

Unanimous acceptance that a Norwich Unitary is the keystone of any reorganisation.

Unanimous acceptance that our four-council option is the right one for Norfolk.

Unanimous opposition to a county Unitary, and agreement that two councils would also be too large to be acceptable.

Yartoft option had less opposition, most people were ambivalent, but once the change to the county boundary was explained there was more resistance. We don't want things to change, and the two counties should stay separate.

There was acceptance that there are clearly four concentrations of deep deprivation in Norfolk and a single authority should not have to concentrate on more than one or two, and certainly not Yarmouth & Kings Lynn in one authority.

However, recognition also that there is poverty in the rural areas but that it is less recognised because it is diffused.

Recognition of a distinct identity and nature of West Norfolk, and acceptance that there should be a western council based on Kings Lynn.

If the four-council option is excluded, next best preference would three councils with an east-west split, with Greater Norwich separate from the remainder of the East.

The Headline Results

The focus groups discussed a range of possibilities for Norfolk, from one to four councils, and the clear preference, if change has to happen, is the four unitary option we propose.

The value of the proposal was that the new structure was not as radical as some of the other proposals, and keeps a semblance of areas people already understand, such as South Norfolk or Norwich. [Executive summary report as Appendix 1]

The clear favourite in terms of the options presented was the four- council option, with a second preference for a single council for Norfolk. This was seen as acceptable on the basis that it would deliver perceived cost savings.

In both consultations, there was a view that services should be provided as locally as possible, but it was accepted that certain services are county based [such as museums]. Others could be provided on even a cross county joint Norfolk/Suffolk basis.

Support from residents and services users

There was overwhelming support for the four-council option, with a proviso that a second preference would be a three council option, with an east/west split, and Greater Norwich. Greater Norwich should be kept to a tight urban area, with parishes on the urban fringe very reluctant to become part of the city.

“Cringleford would be pig-sick to be put in the City”

Geoff Champion, Parish councillor.

There was agreement and recognition of a distinct identity and nature of West Norfolk, and acceptance that there should be a western council based on Kings Lynn.



In the last ten years the concept of taking second preferences into account in determining issues within English local government has begun to be accepted. It is therefore appropriate to include in this submission an indication of South Norfolk’s second preference from among the various concepts for a pattern of unitary government in the County of Norfolk.

Following from the above analysis of the results of the consultations and consistent with the principles and aspirations set out elsewhere in this document, our second preference would be a three-unitaries model which would maintain our view of the importance of the East-West divide along the Central Watershed, with a single unitary to the West and with the communities to the East of that natural boundary organised into an enlarged Norwich on tightly-drawn boundaries conforming to the size and shape of the Greater Norwich conurbation, and with the remainder constituting the third new authority.

Local Government should be **local** government, balancing the need for financial economies of scale with access to local service delivery and democratic accountability.



Picture: Fritton Common, near Long Stratton

Other Council Views...

Norwich

The City Council wants a Norwich which is a tight urban-based council, and a four-council option is acceptable.

King's Lynn

We have a degree of consensus across Norfolk that the four unitary option is acceptable. King's Lynn and West Norfolk were party to our original submission and their priority is for a West Norfolk unitary. What happens in the remainder of Norfolk is less important than that outcome for them, and so we judge a 'four' option is acceptable on principle in the west.

Broadland

The District Council reluctantly recognises that the current Broadland District will cease to exist in any re-organisation, and has not expressed a preference for any model at this stage.

Great Yarmouth

The Borough Council has indicated that it is not supportive of Yartoft, and would be prepared to support the Norfolk Coastal Authority we propose.

Breckland, Great Yarmouth & North Norfolk

These councils are working together on the "Nutcracker" three-council option, and remain unpersuaded that Kings Lynn has a separate identity. On this basis we are not in agreement.

These councils have based much of their stance on out of date research by IPF on the relative costs of unitary government, and a flawed and simplistic assumption that any more than three unitary councils in Norfolk are not economically viable.

There is a consensus that east of Wells / Thetford three is preferred.

Waveney and St Edmundsbury

There is support for the cross-county joint working arrangements from St Edmundsbury and Waveney Councils within a seven council arrangement for both counties.