

National first for east Suffolk

7 November 2017

The plan to create a brand new 'super district council' for east Suffolk has achieved a national first – by being given the seal of approval by the Rt Hon Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils are leading the way by being amongst the first councils in the country to proceed with creating a new 'super district council' to deliver vital services to their communities.

And the proposal moved an important step closer today (Tuesday, 7 November, 2017) by gaining the formal backing of the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government.

In a written statement to the House of Commons, the Secretary of State confirmed that he is 'minded to' support the proposals of Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils to create a new single authority for the area.

"Having carefully considered all the material and representations I have received, I am 'minded to' implement the locally-led proposal I received from Suffolk Coastal and Waveney district councils in February 2017 to merge their two respective councils to become a single, new district council," he said in the statement.

The Secretary of State explained he had made this decision because he considers that:

- ✓ The proposal is likely to improve local government in the area (by improving service delivery, giving greater value for money, yielding cost savings, providing stronger strategic and local leadership, and/or delivering more sustainable structures);
- ✓ The proposal commands local support, in particular that the merger is proposed by all councils which are to be merged and there is evidence of a good deal of local support; and,
- ✓ The proposed merged area is a credible geography, consisting of two or more existing local government areas that are adjacent, and which, if established, would not pose an obstacle to locally-led proposals for authorities to combine to serve their communities better and would facilitate joint working between local authorities.

He also confirmed that the east Suffolk proposal was breaking new ground, saying: "I intend to assess any further locally-led merger proposals that I receive against these criteria."

It is believed this is the first time that the Secretary of State has given his backing to such a plan.

Before he takes his final decision, the Secretary of State has announced there will be a period of time, until 8 January 2018, during which those interested can make further representation to him, including making any suggested modifications to the proposals.

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News release

He will then make his final decision, which will be subject to Parliamentary approval.

The 'minded to' decision gives the councils the go ahead to proceed with getting everything in place to make the creation of a new council in May 2019 a reality. This is a significant achievement in its own right and is testament to the forward thinking approach the councils have taken in terms of ensuring our residents are served in the years to come.

Welcoming the news, the Leaders of Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Council, Cllrs Ray Herring and Mark Bee, said in a joint statement:

"This is great news for us and the people of east Suffolk. By creating a new, larger and more influential council, we will be able to continue to drive costs down, which maintaining services and investing in our local communities.

"We have a proud record of achieving success through innovative partnership working between Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Council. We are glad that the Secretary of State has recognised that the creation of this new 'super district' is the next logical step for us to take, if we are to keep on reducing costs while protecting frontline services.

"We need to evolve, if we are to successfully address the shared opportunities and challenges that both councils face, such as the significant reductions in Central Government funding for councils and the need for investment in growth and infrastructure projects, as well as providing more much-needed housing."

In January 2017, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils both voted to approve the proposals to create a brand new 'super district' council, delivering services to communities in the east of the county.

It is believed this is the first time two councils have voted to formally join together to create a single entity since the local government reorganisation in 1974.

A business case was then submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government in February 2017.

With the Secretary of State's agreement, the new Council would come into being, and begin operations, following the local council elections in May 2019. The two existing councils will then be formally dissolved with elections to the new authority.

ENDS

See separate sheet for background information.....

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Background – The Story So Far!

Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils (SCDC & WDC) have been jointly streamlining operations and reducing costs, while providing high quality frontline services since 2008, when they were among the first councils in the country to appoint a joint Chief Executive.

Over £16million efficiency savings followed – an amazing achievement when each council only has a £12million annual budget (2017/18 figures).

The councils have also nearly halved their joint workforce, from 1,353 on 1 April 2008 to 733 on 1 April 2017.

Yet the councils continue to invest, developing partnerships to provide improved services and even both moving to new headquarters.

The councils now have a shared workforce, joint website and work to a single East Suffolk Business Plan.

This successful partnership is now moving towards its logical conclusion with SCDC & WDC seeking to create a new district council for east Suffolk.

The two councils have been working on the Business Case for creating the new council since a simultaneous Cabinet meeting in March 2016 first examined the proposals drawn up by the joint Senior Management Team (SMT).

As well as developing the concept further internally, detailed public engagement also took place through telephone polling of a representative sample of 1000 residents from across east Suffolk.

An independent telephone survey by leading research consultancy ComRes was conducted in October 2016.

ComRes contacted a representative sample of 1,000 local people (500 from each district council area), who live in east Suffolk and asked them a number of questions about the proposals.

Of these, a majority of respondents (57%) expressed a favourable view about the proposals, with 22% giving an unfavourable view and 20% saying 'don't know'.

However, this favourable figure increased when respondents were provided with more information about the plans, with seven out of ten then expressing a favourable view (72%).

Based on this work and the public support, the full Business case for the new council was submitted to the DCLG in February 2017.

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This will create the largest district council in the country, allowing the councils to bring in extra savings and improvements across its 487.2 sq mile (1,261.9 km²) area.

The new council will serve a quarter of a million residents; have nearly 50 miles of coastline; deliver over 80 different services; contain 164 town and parish councils; and, will include the most easterly point in the UK – Ness Point in Lowestoft!

Current situation:

- Both councils voted to create a new, single council for east Suffolk in January 2017
- Business case submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government on 2 February 2017
- We are using the provision made in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 (section 15)
- Wednesday, 7 November, 2017 - the Secretary of State gives his backing, saying he is 'minded to' support the historic move to create East Suffolk District Council.

Case For Change (Summarised):

- ✓ Both councils have a shared ambition to innovate and challenge the status quo.
- ✓ Financial pressures need to be addressed
- ✓ A single district council for East Suffolk will provide capacity and resilience
- ✓ A single district council for East Suffolk will provide a stronger voice for communities
- ✓ The councils now occupy modern, purpose built, offices in Lowestoft and Melton - it has been agreed that there is no need to change premises
- ✓ A Member Programme Board is in place, and an officer project team is meeting weekly to progress all issues. Work-streams are now underway
- ✓ The Member Programme Board has agreed to recommend 55 councillors (+/- 2) for the new single district council for East Suffolk
- ✓ The proposal to merge is included within the Local Government Boundary Commission's work programme, and meetings have been held with them
- ✓ Agreed the proposed new name will be 'East Suffolk District Council' for formal/legal reasons, and 'East Suffolk Council' for branding and communications.

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