

COMMITTEE: EXECUTIVE **REF NO:** E/24/58
DATE: 8 APRIL 2025
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT
CONSULTATION ON NORFOLK
AND SUFFOLK DEVOLUTION
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: NEIL MACDONALD
SENIOR OFFICER: HELEN PLUCK

Short description of report content and the decision requested:

The Government began a consultation on establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Norfolk and Suffolk on 17th February 2025. The deadline for consultation responses is 13th April 2025.

This report provides a draft consultation response for Executive to consider prior to sign off and authorises the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to finalise and submit the response.

Ward(s) affected:

All

List of Appendices included in this report:

a) Appendix 1 Draft Consultation Response

*This report has been prepared by Helen Pluck, Tel: 01473 432002,
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This report was prepared after consultation with:

Internal consultees:

Leader of the Council

Deputy Leader of the Council

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Working Group

External consultees:

N/A

The following policies form a context to this report:

(all relevant policies must also be referred to in the body of the report)

*Corporate Strategy – Proud of Ipswich: Championing our Community and
Revitalising our Town*

English Devolution White Paper

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

*(papers relied on to write the report but which are not published and do not
contain exempt information)*

1. **None**

OTHER HELPFUL PAPERS

*(papers which the report author considers might be helpful – this might
include published material)*

1. **English Devolution White Paper -** [English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](#)
2. **Consultation – Norfolk and Suffolk -** [Norfolk and Suffolk devolution - GOV.UK](#)

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The English Devolution White Paper was published in December 2024 and was followed by an invitation to unitary and upper tier councils to join a Devolution Priority Programme which would lead to the introduction of Directly Elected Mayors and Mayoral Authorities for regions not currently covered by such arrangements.
- 1.2 In January 2025, Suffolk County Council, with the support of the Suffolk District and Borough Councils, expressed an interest in the Devolution Priority Programme and, alongside Norfolk was confirmed onto the programme, known as the DPP, in February. As part of the process for forming a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk the government is required to run a public consultation.
- 1.3 This consultation started on 17th February and runs to 13th April 2025. Full details of the proposal and the consultation questions can be found at [Norfolk and Suffolk devolution - GOV.UK](#).
- 1.4 The Council wishes to respond to the consultation as the proposals will have a significant effect on the governance of Suffolk and Ipswich. A draft response to each question can be found in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 Overall, the council is supportive of the introduction of a Mayoral Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk but is concerned to ensure that the implementation of such an arrangement benefits Ipswich rather than taking investment and resources away from it. It is particularly concerned to ensure that Ipswich can play its part in the governance arrangements with a seat at the new authority's Board.
- 1.6 Entry onto the Devolution Priority Programme also serves to trigger a need for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk and Suffolk, and this has been the subject of other papers to Executive (E/24/55). Therefore, this paper is largely restricted to the matter of consultation on the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority, save for the fact that new unitary councils will replace the two county councils on the Mayoral Authority once Local Government Reorganisation is complete.

2. Background

- 2.1 The English Devolution White Paper was published in December 2024 and was followed by an invitation to unitary and upper tier councils to join a Devolution Priority Programme which would lead to the introduction of Directly Elected Mayors and Mayoral Authorities for regions not currently covered by such arrangements.
- 2.2 In January 2025, Suffolk County Council, with the support of the Suffolk District and Borough Councils, expressed an interest in the Devolution

Priority Programme and, alongside Norfolk was confirmed onto the programme, known as the DPP, in February. As part of the process for forming a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk the government is required to run a public consultation.

- 2.3 This consultation started on 17th February and runs to 13th April 2025. Full details of the proposal and the consultation questions can be found at [Norfolk and Suffolk devolution - GOV.UK](#).
- 2.4 The Council wishes to respond to the consultation as the proposals will have a significant effect on the governance of Suffolk and Ipswich. A draft response to each question can be found in Appendix 1.
- 2.5 Overall, the Council is supportive of the introduction of a Mayoral Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk but is concerned to ensure that the implementation of such an arrangement benefits Ipswich rather than taking investment and resources away from it. It is particularly concerned to ensure that Ipswich can play its part in the governance arrangements with a seat at the new authority's Board.

3. Relevant Policies

- 3.1 Corporate Strategy – Proud of Ipswich: Championing our Community and Revitalising our Town.
- 3.2 It is expected that a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk will support the Council in delivering the Proud of Ipswich Strategy through the prioritisation of resources, strategic planning, investment and by using their convening power to support public sector reform.

4. Options Considered / Under Consideration

- 4.1 The Council is not obliged to respond to the consultation being held by government on the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority, but Executive has the ability to choose to do so.

5. Consultations

- 5.1 Members of the cross party Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Working Group have been consulted on the draft consultation response.

6. Risk Management

Risk Description	Consequence of risk	Risk Controls	Probability of risk occurring taking account of controls (scale 1-6) 1 – almost impossible 6 – very high	Impact of risk, if it occurred taking account of actions (scale 1 – negligible; 4 – catastrophic)	Actions to mitigate risk
Council does not respond to consultation	Council's views don't influence direction of travel on Mayoral arrangements for Norfolk and Suffolk	Develop a consultation response	1	3	Draft response considered by Working Group and Executive and submitted.

7. Environment and Climate Change

- 7.1 The Council has declared a climate change emergency and has resolved to start working towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030. All Council decisions should take into account and respond to the potential impact that they will have on the climate and wider environment.
- 7.2 The Devolution White Paper sets out the role that Mayors are expected to have in relation to the Environment and Climate Change. It is anticipated that the Council will need to work with any Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk on a cohesive approach to decarbonising the economy, and to environmental and climate leadership.

8. Equalities, Diversity and Community Implications

- 8.1 Under the general equality duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010, public authorities are required to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation as well as advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 8.2 The protected grounds covered by the equality duty are: age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. The equality duty also covers marriage and civil partnership, but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination.
- 8.3 The law requires that this duty to have due regard be demonstrated in decision making processes. Assessing the potential impact on equality

of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is one of the key ways in which public authorities can demonstrate that they have had due regard to the aims of the equality duty.

- 8.4 There are no equality and diversity impacts to responding to the Government's consultation. It will be important that the Mayoral Authority sets out how it will achieve its equality and diversity responsibilities and support communities across the region in due course.

9. Crime and Disorder Impact

- 9.1 There are no direct crime and disorder impacts on the submission of a consultation response to government. In due course the Mayor is expected to play a key role in ensuring Public Safety as set out in the Devolution White Paper. This is likely to include taking responsibility for the current Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire & Rescue Authority functions.

10. Financial Considerations

- 10.1 There are no financial implications to the submission of the consultation response.

11. Legal Considerations

- 11.1 The proposal to introduce a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk falls under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.
- 11.2 An English Devolution Bill is expected at some time in 2025 to legislate against the English Devolution White Paper.

12. Performance Monitoring

- 12.1 The consultation response must be submitted before midnight on 13th April 2025.

13. Conclusions

- 13.1 The Council supports the introduction of a Mayoral Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk but is concerned to ensure that the implementation of such an arrangement benefits Ipswich rather than taking investment and resources away from it. It is particularly concerned to ensure that Ipswich can play its part in the governance arrangements with a seat at the new authority's Board.

14. Recommendations

- 14.1 That Executive authorise the Chief Executive to finalise the consultation response set out in Appendix 1, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, and for it to be submitted ahead of the deadline.**

Reason: So that the Council participates in this important consultation.

Appendix 1

	Question	strongly agree / agree / neither agree nor disagree / disagree / strongly disagree / don't know / prefer not to say	Comments
1	To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the areas?	Strongly Agree	<p>A Mayoral Combined Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk will provide a much-needed voice for the sub-region, nationally and globally representing over 1.5 million people who live in 3500 square miles of rural, urban and coastal East Anglia.</p> <p>This voice, combined with the powers outlined in the English Devolution White Paper and the convening ability of an East Anglian Mayor will deliver benefits to Suffolk and Norfolk.</p> <p>However, it will be essential that the Mayor and the MCCA considers the needs of both counties and that neither perceives themselves to be the “poor relation” to the other.</p>
2	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined County Authority?	Agree	<p>The Council recognises the limitations of the current legislation enacted by the previous government. It is concerned that at its inception the only full constituent members of the MCCA will be the two County Councils and that as such the major urban centres of Ipswich and Norwich have no direct representation within this Authority.</p> <p>It is recognised that District Councils may be “non-constituent members” but to date, Suffolk County Council has not discussed potential non-constituent membership with Ipswich Borough Council and this raises concern that Ipswich, the economic powerhouse of the county, will not have a voice in this important setting.</p> <p>Suffolk and Norfolk should be equal partners on the MCA, so it is vital that there is equal representation of the two counties.</p>
3	To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County	Strongly Agree	<p>A coordinated approach across a wider geography has the potential to enhance investment, infrastructure development and business growth including strategic infrastructure projects such as the Ely and Haughley rail junctions, Copdock road</p>

	Authority will support the economy of the area?		interchange and the Ipswich Northern Bypass. It is crucial that economic strategies address the distinct needs of urban centres such as Ipswich, as well as rural and coastal communities.
4	To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?	Agree	There is concern that a one-size-fits-all approach may not sufficiently address localised challenges. Increased collaboration can contribute to improvements in areas such as housing, skills development, and public health.
5	To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve local government services in the area?	Agree	<p>The link between the Devolution Priority Programme and the requirement for Local Government Reorganisation is helpful, providing that the outcome includes a “greater” Ipswich Council responsible for local government services across a wider area than the current Ipswich boundary which is little changed since 1835.</p> <p>An urban unitary council, centred on the greater Ipswich conurbation, with a seat on the Mayoral Strategic Authority will ensure a strong relationship between the council and the Mayor.</p> <p>The Mayor will play a key role in convening partnerships which will drive public sector reform and deliver improvements in public services across the region, resulting in better outcomes for residents and communities.</p>
6	To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?	Agree	<p>Environmental policies and investment in green infrastructure could benefit from a coordinated regional approach, particularly in relation to climate resilience, transport decarbonisation, and biodiversity initiatives. However, specific urban environmental challenges, such as air quality, green space provision, and sustainable urban planning, must be prioritised alongside wider rural concerns.</p>
7	To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?	Agree	Ipswich has a vibrant local identity and a distinct urban character within the wider county geography. While regional collaboration is valuable, there should be no loss of focus on the specific needs of diverse communities.