

Report for Nedging PC by County Councillor Robert Lindsay 11.3.25

Local Government centralisation

Suffolk's councils have now been accepted into the Government's "fast track" scheme for merging councils into "unitaries" and creating a mega Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk combined. The councils have until March 21st to come up with submissions for how many unitary councils they want in Suffolk – so the government has allowed no time for them to consult with public before submitting.

The county has said it wants one, the districts are likely to go for two or three.

The government is insisting that new councils must have a minimum of 500k people, which doesn't go into 780k Suffolk population.

Personally I believe that the financial and democratic costs of rejigging existing local government on this scale outweighs any optimistic financial savings that the Conservative county council administration and the Labour government is relying on. Increasing the size of councils and giving much of their powers to a new higher tier mayor will erode local accountability and democracy. But the Government is forcing this on to every council in the country so there is little we can do but try to get the best deal we can.

The current Government proposed time table of elections

May 2026 Postponed Suffolk County Council elections, using new divisional boundaries, county councillors will serve for only two years.

May 2026 Election for Mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk

May 2027 Elections for parish councils and for "shadow" unitary councillors.

May 2028 Suffolk County and Babergh district councils will dissolve, new unitary council(s) will commence.

The government has launched a public consultation on its proposals to create a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk, and you can give your views on the proposals by using this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/norfolk-and-suffolk-devolution>

Council Pension funds being centralised too

I sit on the Suffolk pension committee which now manages £4.5bn in investments (nearly six times the turnover of the council). The government, alongside its move to centralise local authorities into the hands of a mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk (which for some reason it calls "devolution"), is also forcing all local authority pension funds to give up most of the democratic control they exercise over investment strategy. Our funds will be pooled with other local authority funds into the hands of paid professional City managers who will have the power to select individual sub fund managers and decide on most of the details of where funds are allocated.

The pension committee of councillors at Suffolk – which has been advised by professionals - will have a mere supervisory, rather than deciding role. The government wants to encourage "local investment" by these pooled funds. What, where and how much local investment will be decided by the professional managers in consultation with the new Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk - who must produce a "growth plan" for the two counties. The problem here is that the legal responsibility for providing adequate pensions rests currently with the committee, not with the mayor or professional managers.

Suffolk Libraries to be brought in house

The Suffolk Library Service is being taken in house by Suffolk County Council after they failed to agree a renewal of the contract with the charity that has been running them since 2012. There were no other bidders.

The decision will be rubber stamped by the council's all Conservative cabinet on March 18th.

The charity insisted the terms it was offered (same budget as last year with no annual increase for inflation etc) meant opening hours would have to be cut by 30%. The council say they can run it with no hours being cut. The fear is that this will mean cuts in staff numbers and an increased reliance on volunteers. The amount the library charity was being paid has not risen significantly for more than ten years. Meanwhile, the county council itself will be abolished in May 2018 meaning that the future of an in house library service is perhaps less certain than if there was a long term contract in place with an outside provider.