

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 19 March 2025 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 6.00 pm

Members Present:	Cllr T Adams	Cllr P Bailey
	Cllr M Batey	Cllr K Bayes
	Cllr D Birch	Cllr H Blathwayt
	Cllr J Boyle	Cllr A Brown
	Cllr C Cushing	Cllr N Dixon
	Cllr P Fisher	Cllr A Fitch-Tillett
	Cllr T FitzPatrick	Cllr A Fletcher
	Cllr W Fredericks	Cllr M Gray
	Cllr M Hankins	Cllr P Heinrich
	Cllr V Holliday	Cllr N Housden
	Cllr K Leith	Cllr R Macdonald
	Cllr G Mancini-Boyle	Cllr P Neatherway
	Cllr L Paterson	Cllr P Porter
	Cllr J Punchard	Cllr C Ringer
	Cllr L Shires	Cllr J Toye
	Cllr K Toye	Cllr A Varley
	Cllr L Vickers	Cllr L Withington

Also in attendance:

114 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Cllrs S Butikofer, C Heinink, S Penfold, E Spagnola, M Taylor and E Vardy.

115 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th February were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

116 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

Cllr J Punchard declared an interest in Agenda items 12 and 13 –Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, as an employee of a public body.

The Monitoring Officer said that she had written to all members advising them that if they were a member of another local authority or were employed by a public body, there was a general dispensation regarding items 12 and 13.

117 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

118 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman updated members on recent civic events that she had attended:
03 March 2025 – Visit to HMP Bure

04 March 2025 – Celebrating International Women’s Day at NNDC

The Vice-Chair said that he had attended ‘Inspire North Norfolk’ at Trimmingham Leisure Centre.

119 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader began by saying that a lot of time had been taken up in recent weeks on discussions regarding devolution and local government reorganisation. He thanked officers and Cabinet members on continuing to make good progress despite considerable challenges ahead.

He said that this meeting would be one of the most historically important in the 50 years of the Council.

120 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

121 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES & OUTSIDE BODIES

None.

122 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Chair invited Cllr C Ringer, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and IT to provide an update.

Cllr Ringer said that in addition to his written report he wanted to provide an update on the presence of ‘nurdles’ or plastic pellets on the beaches which had been washed up following the collision of a cargo ship with an oil tanker off the coast of East Yorkshire on 10th March. He said that a small amount had been reported and the public had been advised not to touch them whilst they were being dealt with by a multi-agency team. Any sightings of nurdles should be reported as soon as possible. Currently sightings had been limited to the Holkham and Wells area. HM Coastguard was monitoring the situation and keeping it under review.

The Chair then invited members to ask questions:

Cllr G Mancini-Boyle asked Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, about the issuing of electronic council tax bills. He said that there was a reminder at the bottom of the email prompting recipients to think before printing any documents. He then also received a paper bill in the post and queried why residents were not being encouraged to opt into electronic bills. Cllr Shires said that this was a good question and she would provide a written response.

Cllr K Bayes asked Cllr C Ringer, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, for an update on the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme. Cllr Ringer replied that the scheme was introduced by the previous Government as a simpler recycling programme and it included the introduction of food waste collection. He added that the EPR had not commenced yet but he understood that there would be a financial benefit to the Council and was happy to update Cllr Bayes on any specific issues.

Cllr J Boyle asked Cllr A Varley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, about the

implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for the Council's Net Zero targets. Cllr Varley replied that the pressing need to address the climate emergency continued, regardless of LGR and the Council would still strive to reach its Net Zero targets, as well as supporting communities to live a greener, more sustainable future. He added that the Environmental Charter & Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan document would be reviewed in the coming months to take into account the challenges faced by LGR.

Cllr C Cushing asked Cllr J Toye, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth, how many planned registered businesses were started in 2023/2024 and what was the survival rate. He also asked if similar figures were available for 2024/2025. Cllr Toye replied that he did not have the figures to hand but would provide a written response.

Cllr J Punchard asked the Leader, Cllr T Adams, for a response to his question at the previous Full Council meeting regarding an update on 9 Norwich Street, Fakenham. Cllr Adams replied that he was unable to provide an update publicly at the current time but discussions were ongoing.

Cllr K Leith asked the Leader whether the Devolution/LGR plans for the region were likely to be put to a referendum. Cllr Adams said that he had been asked this by residents on several occasions. He acknowledged that it was an important issue and there was no other avenue for residents to voice their views on this. Clarity was also needed on local government elections as the Government had not been clear on this. In conclusion, he said that he was supportive of giving consideration as to whether North Norfolk should consider a referendum on devolution and LGR proposals.

Cllr L Paterson asked Cllr A Varley the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change for the percentage of energy at the Council Offices was supplied by solar photo voltaic panels. Cllr Varley replied that he would provide a written response.

Cllr P Neatherway asked the Leader, Cllr T Adams, about the increase in workstreams at Eastlaw (the Council's in-house Legal team) and asked if more information could be provided on how this had come about. Cllr Adams said that he would provide a written reply so that the detail could be set out. He said that Eastlaw had been a real success – both internally and externally. The Council aimed to be a leader in the area of coastal change and Eastlaw would be providing legal advice and support as this workstream progressed.

Cllr T FitzPatrick asked Cllr J Toye, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth, for information on hotels. He said that as County Cllr for Fakenham, he was regularly asked for an update on the construction of the roundabout on the A148 which was being built to facilitate on new housing and businesses in the town. He said that there was a portion of the land allocated to a new hotel and he asked what work was being done to encourage the hotel chains to invest the Fakenham area. Cllr Toye replied that there had been challenges about a building a hotel in Sheringham and this was still to come forward. He went on to say that the Council regularly engaged with companies and although nothing had come forward for the Fakenham site yet, work would continue to encourage potential providers to come forward. He committed to updating members if anything came forward. Cllr FitzPatrick thanked him for his reply and said that currently, business visitors to the area often stayed in Kings Lynn or Norwich and that meant that they spent their money out of the district. He added that it was a very different market to the tourist market.

123 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET 03 MARCH 2025

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr L Shires, said that the latest budget monitoring report showed that the budget deficit had been considerably reduced and she thanked officers for their hard work in closing the gap.

The changes proposed to the Capital Programme, were mainly due to grant income, with the exception of section 5.5.7 which was the removal of a budget line due to project completion.

Cllr N Housden referred to page 72, section 4.3 and the reference to a delay in receipt of a grant from the Environment Agency (EA). He asked whether this indicated that the EA grant added to the capital programme would also be susceptible to delays. Cllr Shires replied that in 4.3 it referred to the scheme being put on hold and this was the case with other projects where funding was delayed.

The Chief Executive confirmed that there were staged payments on receipt of invoices.

It was RESOLVED to

Approve the changes to the Capital Programme as laid out in paragraph 5.5 of the report.

Three members voted against the proposals.

124 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 12 MARCH 2025

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cllr N Dixon, said that there had been one recommendation from the meeting on 12th March and that related to the Budget Monitoring report, which had been covered at Agenda Item 10.

125 DEVOLUTION - GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO ESTABLISH A MAYORAL COMBINED COUNTY AUTHORITY FOR NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK - RESPONSE BY NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Chair proposed that standing orders were suspended for agenda items 11 and 12 due to the importance of both topics and she wanted to ensure that there was an opportunity for a full debate. Under the Constitution, Chapter 2, section 18.10, members could only speak once during the debate and for no more than five minutes.

IT was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED to

Suspend the following Standing Order – Chapter 2, section 18.10

‘A Member who has spoken on a motion may not speak again whilst it is the subject of debate’

The Chair then invited Cllr Adams to introduce this item.

Cllr Adams began by saying that this was the first part of significant changes to the

landscape of Local Government. He explained that, through conversations with the Leaders of Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, the Government had advised that it wanted to see proposals developed for a Mayoral Combined County Authority covering the geography of the two counties. This position had then been agreed, in principle, by the Government which had included Norfolk and Suffolk in its Devolution Priority Programme, where proposals for new combined authorities would be developed and implemented in the coming months, with an election for a Norfolk and Suffolk Mayor to be held in May 2026. Before taking a decision on whether to proceed with the making of the necessary legislation, the Government was seeking views from interested parties, including those who lived and worked in the area. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had therefore recently announced a public consultation with residents, community organisations, businesses and other stakeholders inviting comments on these proposals.

Seven questions had been set out and the Council was proposing a written response to each of these and members were invited to comment on each. He then outlined the questions in turn and the proposed response from the District Council (as set out in the appendix to the report).

In conclusion, Cllr Adams said that he was increasingly concerned about the benefits of introducing a combined authority and what it could deliver for residents.

The Chair invited members to speak:

Cllr C Cushing said that the Conservative Group would abstain from this voting on this agenda item as it was felt that it was too early in the process to fully understand the details and the implications of the formation of a new mayoral combined authority.

Cllr J Toye referred to question 3 – ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the economy of the area?’ He said that he believed it was a positive proposal that would benefit the local economy. However, he had concerns about representations locally and whether the pot of funding would effectively ‘thin out’.

Cllr L Shires referred to the recent engagement sessions held with town and parish councils. She said that attendance had been high and she was encouraged to see positive engagement on the subject as well as key questions being raised.

Cllr T FitzPatrick commented that England was one of the most centralised parts of the UK and the UK as a whole one of the most centralised countries in the English speaking world. Devolution was a step by step process that could be built on. He referred to Manchester which had managed to leverage huge amounts of funding and opportunity into the area. It was an opportunity to take on powers currently held by Westminster and for an elected official to take decisions currently carried out by the Civil Service. Central Government would consult and work with elected mayors and this was worthwhile. It was coming regardless and it was best to embrace it and work with it.

Cllr L Withington said that overall, there was a positive feeling to this aspect of devolution but it was important to get it right. Regarding tourism, as Portfolio Holder she said that the proposals were beneficial as they would give a strategic approach to tourism across both counties. She said that she did have concerns about the governance within this and she hoped that local areas would have input and representation and they had a role to play in decision-making.

Cllr N Dixon said that the big issue was a lack of relevant information and it was important to keep an open mind as the process evolved. He believed it was too early to form strong views.

Cllr Adams said that he agreed with the comments so far. One of his main concerns was that as more of these combined authorities were rolled out across England that the benefits would reduce. There was only so much funding to be allocated. He also questioned whether the powers went far enough and felt that more could be done in terms of decision making and input into infrastructure projects. He thanked members for having conversations with residents and their parish councils around this subject.

The Chair, Cllr Dr V Holliday, echoed the comments made about there being insufficient detail at the current time to make a decision. She said that she heard a lot of concern about the local voice being lost. Regarding question 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?'*, the Chair said that she did not agree with the proposed response as she had concerns about the benefits of aggregating environmental mitigation and felt it was not advantageous to the district.

Cllr Adams replied that this demonstrated clearly the issues around the lack of detail. He agreed that it was hard to understand how an elected mayor could achieve positive outcomes on an environmental level. He agreed that a local solution was needed in such cases and it was hard to compare issues across a wider area.

Cllr A Varley said that it was a very astute point raised by the Chair and the lack of detail was quite concerning. It would allow for overall strategic analysis but there would be a loss of local plans.

Cllr H Blathwayt reminded members that they could complete the questionnaire as an individual too.

Cllr N Housden said that he agreed with the Chair's comments on environmental issues. He added that the district was a very rural, agricultural area and the coast was recognised as a Ramsar site and had global significance. This rurality was a fundamental point that needed to be emphasised but it was hard to see how the district could state its case strongly.

The Chief Executive explained that members were being asked whether the Council should respond to the Government consultation and the suggested responses reflected the engagement work with, key stakeholders town and parish councils and the views of officers and lead members. He added that the Council already worked with strategic partners on environmental issues but consideration should be given as to whether enough benefit would be achieved via the proposals for a mayoral combined authority. The response sought to answer this type of question and was limited by the wording and the suggested format for comments.

Cllr L Withington said that she would like to change 'agree' to 'neither agree nor disagree' for question 6 and that the local aspect was strengthened to ensure the globally unique landscape was highlighted and protected. Cllr J Punchard seconded Cllr Withington's proposal.

Cllr W Fredericks then spoke as seconder of the substantive motion. She said that it was important that the Council needed to be robust and make a decision to fight for

North Norfolk. She asked all members to support the proposed responses so that the government did not impose something on the district. There was not a choice to opt out, it was happening regardless and it was better to be involved and take part.

Cllr M Hankins said that, given the lack of information, the document was very balanced. So much was still unknown.

The Chair asked Cllr Withington for clarification to change the wording for the response to question 6. It was agreed that the final wording would be agreed subsequently to reflect members' concerns.

It was proposed by Cllr L Withington, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED to

Change the response to question 6 from 'agree to neither agree nor disagree'.

11 members abstained.

The Chair then asked members to vote on the substantive motion.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED

To approve the Council's response to the Government consultation on proposals to establish a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk as amended at Appendix 1 of this report and agree its submission to Government, such submission to be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

11 members abstained.

126 PROPOSED LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN NORFOLK

The Chair invited the Leader, Cllr Adams, to introduce this item. He set out the background to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) explaining that On 16th December 2024, the Government published its English Devolution White Paper which stated that in areas of the country with a two-tier local government structure of county and district, borough and city councils there would be a move towards establishing a unitary structure of local government for the future. The Government confirmed that it would facilitate a programme of LGR for the 21 remaining two-tier county areas, creating larger unitary authorities. The expectation was that all areas should develop locally-led proposals for reorganisation with existing councils working together to identify the best option for their area. These plans should complement devolution, rather than delay it, whilst avoiding scenarios where competing proposals are developed within a given geography.

On 5th February it was announced that Norfolk and Suffolk were to be included on the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) and an initial deadline of 21st March was set as the deadline for submission of interim proposals. Consequently, the seven districts had commissioned Deloitte, to prepare an evidence-based report evaluating possible unitary council models for Norfolk which was used to inform the development of the interim plan to be submitted to Government. The Councils had

all convened meetings to support an agreed response in time for the deadline.

Cllr Adams said that he had concerns about the LGR agenda. He did support the creation of a greater Norwich Unitary. It would support the housing growth agenda and enable the rest of the County to benefit from that growth and accompanying public transport infrastructure. However, for North Norfolk in particular, he said that he saw more risk than reward in the LGR proposals. North Norfolk and the Broads were attractive to tourists and there was 'brand recognition' associated with both – nationally and even globally. NNDC played a significant role in the local economy through an extensive public realm portfolio – including the pier, country parks and public toilets. There was also a lot of additional support for local businesses, leisure facilities and arts and culture. The Government's position towards such assets was at best vague and potentially ruinous. Consequently, he could not support their agenda as it currently stood. He acknowledged that, in reality, there was not alternative to the unitary route but said that a three unitary model would be preferable to a single one. The geographic area of a single authority would cover an area equivalent to 20 times that of Birmingham and the cost of implementing LGR would be substantial and the ongoing costs would also be significant.

In conclusion, he said that he reluctantly supported the three unitary model as it offered the best possible arrangement. It would be the solution best able to represent large geographic areas. He referred members to the Deloitte report which had considered a one, two or three unitary council structure for Norfolk against the key criteria laid out by the Government and concluded that a three unitary model scored most strongly across all six criteria.

He acknowledged that there would be concerns about proposals to 'split' North Norfolk but the District Council would not exist after LGR was completed but members should also bear in mind that there was a long way to go regarding discussions and he was hopeful that the bulk of the district would be included in one of the unitary authorities.

The seconder of the motion, Cllr W Fredericks reserved her right to speak.

The Chair opened the debate:

Cllr C Cushing said that as for the previous agenda item, the Conservative group would abstain from voting on this. He said that the timeframe of 4 weeks imposed by the Government was just too tight for such a complex issue. He acknowledged that it would be happening regardless. Cllr Cushing said that he did believe that there could be some rationalisation of the existing seven district councils but did not necessarily agree that the unitary model was the best structure going forward. He added that he did have some concerns about the Deloitte report and felt that there were some gaps – such as a proposal for a model that didn't include consultation with the County Council (NCC). He felt that this wasn't practical and it was imperative to have ongoing discussions with NCC to ensure full engagement. He also had some concerns about the scoring applied to the six criteria set out by the Government. It was clear that some had considerable more weight than others – such as driving efficiencies in local government and financial sustainability for councils. Members could not support a three unitary model if this was considered to be a crucial aspect of any future model. There was little doubt that a single unitary council would be more financially sustainable and this was imperative if key services were to be delivered for residents. The report did not set out the benefits of each model either.

Cllr Cushing said that consideration must be given to the resourcing requirements of three unitaries. Finding good, qualified staff would be a challenge. In conclusion, he said that the proposals for both the two and three unitary models, the western side would effectively be the 'poor relation' with the East being the financial 'powerhouse' and again, he questioned the financial sustainability of these proposals. He reiterated Cllr Withington's earlier comments that it was crucial to get it right and as things currently stood, he felt he could not support any of the options that were being proposed.

Cllr T FitzPatrick said that this was the start of the biggest shake-up of local government for 50 years and although he personally felt that the elected leader model would have been the best, that opportunity had now passed and the current model had gone past its 'sell by date' and change was needed. He agreed that egos should be set aside and members should ask themselves what was best for their local area and for Norfolk as a whole. Everyone should focus on working together and do their best for residents and most people didn't fully understand which council ran which service – they just wanted a good service. He added that devolution offered the chance for local areas to take over the responsibilities of some of the 'quangos' that the government was seeking to abolish. He wasn't convinced that a three unitary model was the best solution as it would result in three disparate and unequal areas, with Norwich being separated from its natural hinterland and each area would have different 'clout' in terms of finance. It was possible that those areas outside of Norwich would be seen as too rural and could fall behind. In conclusion, he said that he did not feel that the Deloitte report had clearly set out the benefits of a three unitary model.

Cllr C Ringer began by saying that he was proud to be member of North Norfolk District Council and he was reluctant to see that change and the impact of removing this would be negative on residents. Ultimately, the end result would still be three tiers of local government – instead of parish, district and county it would be parish, unitary and elected mayor. He was disappointed to hear that the opposition were planning to abstain. By not taking part in the discussions, they would be passengers on a government journey. He agreed that there was not enough information available but the report stated that and it was important that all members were fully engaged and that the Council spoke with one voice on such a key issue.

Cllr L Shires commented on the perversity of the LGR proposals compared with the devolution report. On the one hand, additional power was being given to the county and on the other, local residents were going to lose local power in the removal of district councils. She believed that members all agreed that this was not the right solution at the current time. Her focus however, was on local residents who were confused between devolution and LGR and who just wanted to know if they would save money on their council tax bill. This was not a cost saving exercise and was not putting residents first. That said, the Council had to submit a proposal and she therefore reluctantly supported a three unitary model.

Cllr J Punchard said that he had a balanced view on this issue. His main concern was the speed at which decisions were being taken. He said that he had been involved in planning applications that had taken longer. He respected the standpoint of the Greater Norwich area but from a personal perspective he was concerned about smaller villages and how their needs would be met by a large, single unitary.

Cllr P Heinrich said that change would come regardless and it needed to be embraced and made to work for local people. He had worked for a unitary authority previously but not on the scale of these proposals. He accepted the argument for a

greater Norwich unitary but saw no sense in creating a 'do-nut' around Norwich. Those in coastal areas would not have their needs serviced. Two unitaries, plus one for Norwich made more sense. It allowed for commonality between existing areas. That said, concerns remained about the ability to respond to the concerns and needs of local residents – even a three unitary model would remove the local connections and awareness that the District Councils currently provided. In conclusion, he said that the basic three unitary model was the most logical in keeping some semblance of local government as a local service provider.

Cllr L Vickers said that she supported the sentiments expressed by Cllr Ringer but recognised that change was inevitable. There was no doubt that the process was being rushed and Deloitte had done its best in the short timescale provided. She believed in evidence-based policy and she just couldn't see the evidence to support the proposals. Cllr Vickers said that members should push back hard against the tight deadlines set by the Government and say that more information was needed to come to a decision.

Cllr N Dixon referred to Cllr Ringer's comments. He said that all members aimed to do a good job but they should also be asking if they could do better. This meant that the way services were designed and delivered must be looked at and the way elected members represented their communities. As he saw it, there were currently 8 councils which had taken an indulgent approach in proposing a range of proposals, all of which were based on scant evidence. He accepted that a response was required but his main focus was on what happened next. Central government's response to the proposals would be crucial. It was likely that they had a preferred model in mind and one way or another that direction would be the one that was pursued. He agreed that it was important that all members worked together and this was particularly important once the government had responded to the interim proposals. In conclusion, he said that he wasn't prepared to back any one of the proposals due to the lack of evidence underpinning them.

Cllr L Withington commented that a single unitary was so detrimental that she could not consider it. This was demonstrated by the impact on the tourism sector in North Norfolk which was currently worth £427m to the area. This would become lost to the pressures of social care under a single unitary. North Norfolk was currently a thriving local economy with its tourism and a large unitary authority would put all of this at risk. NNDC was also a very asset-rich authority and it was likely that the revenue would not be used to provide services that residents currently relied on. She accepted that this was the initial stage but the Council needed to show that it was prepared to fight for North Norfolk.

Cllr N Housden said that Options 2 and 3 both referred to the 'remainder of North Norfolk' and boundaries which were yet to be defined and this caused him huge concern as it was not clear what any decision should be based on. The lack of detail and information really concerned him.

Cllr M Hankins echoed comments made earlier that England operated the most centralised system of government in Europe and there was an opportunity to respond in a way that expressed the view clearly about what was needed from a devolved authority in terms of additional power and money.

Cllr J Toye said that he understood the argument that a single unitary would save money but he shared concerns about the lack of local representation and so suitable options to address both needed to be explored. He said that concerns about inequalities across three unitaries should be balanced out by having an elected

mayor in place. It was important that members had faith in themselves as the process unfolded and remained engaged and involved throughout.

Cllr A Brown said that he had looked back over the history unitary proposals in Norfolk, specifically 2009 and said that there was much to learn. He said he knew what he didn't want and that was a single unitary. It was too large and each councillor would have 8-9k residents to represent. He believed that it was important to submit the Deloitte proposals to government to force their hand and ensure that they took a more granular approach.

Cllr J Punchard requested that the four recommendations were split and voted on separately.

Cllr T Adams responded to some of the points raised. He acknowledged that the timescales were extremely tight and there was a lack of detail.

He said that district councils had tried to engage with the County Council but they had been reluctant. Ultimately, his fear was that the Government was trying to deal with the challenges of local government funding without putting any more money into the system. He accepted that the lack of information around proposed boundaries was causing anxiety but felt that these would become clearer soon.

In response to Cllr Dixon's comment that the Government already had a preferred model in mind, Cllr Adam's said that he also held this view and that he believed they wanted a Norwich unitary and that the rest of the County was being left to get on with things. He added that one positive outcome from all of this was that the district councils had been collaborating on responding to the proposals. He thanked all members for their input.

The Chair commented that she struggled with the loss of local voices and locality in a single unitary but also the disaggregation of statutory services across three unitaries. She felt that more consideration should be given to parish councils and their role as local representatives.

Cllr W Fredericks then spoke as seconder of the motion. She said that when she was elected as a councillor she believed that she was working with residents and creating something special at District Council level. She struggled with proposals that were not in the best interests of residents. She did not want a single unitary as it would not support residents and it would erase the identity of North Norfolk. She felt the three unitary model was the best that could be offered at the current time. The Government would not talk to NNDC unless serious proposals were put forward. Silence would give the Government carte blanche to impose what they wanted.

Cllr P Neatherway referred to the timeline set out in the report and asked if there was flexibility for the Council to change its submission ahead of the final deadline in September. Cllr Adams replied that a lot could happen in the next few months and it was possible that as more information came through that the narrative would change. It was also possible that the deadline would be extended.

The Chief Executive explained that the invitation from the Government to engage with the process was included in the agenda pack and it had since been clarified that the final submission point would be in September. It was anticipated that some feedback would be provided following the submission of the interim plan and this would then form the basis for refining the final submission.

The Chair then moved to the vote, with each recommendation being taken separately.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED

Recommendation 1:

To express the view that the Council disagrees with the Government's proposals to introduce a unitary local government structure in Norfolk; as it is not convinced that such an arrangement will best meet the needs of the district's rural communities and residents or deliver the savings and efficiencies anticipated.

11 members abstained.

Recommendation 2:

Accepting, however, that this is the position of Government as detailed in the English Devolution White Paper, the Council strongly objects to proposals being suggested for a single unitary authority covering the whole of Norfolk in that it will be of a very large scale in terms of area and population served, will not be able to reflect the distinct communities of place and interest which exist across the county, and not meet the definition of "local" government in understanding local places or in providing services tailored to meet local needs.

11 members abstained.

Recommendation 3:

To strongly support proposals for a three unitary council model for Norfolk in the future as the basis of the interim plan to be submitted to Government. The Council believes that such an arrangement would best meet the six key criteria laid out by Government and would see one authority based on the urban area of Norwich; an authority covering the West of the county with a strong agricultural and agri-tech economy and an East authority with a key focus on clean energy and tourism.

13 members abstained.

Recommendation 4:

To agree that the Council's response to Government regarding local government reorganisation in Norfolk to be submitted by 21st March 2025 makes reference to an Interim Plan proposing three unitary councils in Norfolk as detailed at Appendix 3 with the submission of the response to be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

13 members abstained.

127 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

128 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

129 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

130 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

131 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 8.32 pm.

Chairman