

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 no time given to consult with public.

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 increasing the size of councils 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.

It appears that the postponed May 2025 County Council elections will happen on May 2026, alongside the election for the Mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk, even though the County Council will be abolished two years after that.

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