

Report for Information

Report to Executive
9 July 2008
Report of Director of Transformation
Subject Unitary status – Boundary Committee announcement

Purpose

To report the recent announcement by the Boundary Committee, and consider next steps.

Recommendations

To note the report.

Financial Consequences

There are no financial consequences to this report.

Strategic Objective/Service Priorities

The report particularly helps the following corporate objectives to be met:

- To provide strong and ambitious leadership to make the City proud of its Council;
- To build a successful economic future for Norwich and secure sustainable growth.

Contact Officers

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Background Documents

Boundary Committee announcement 7 July 2008

Report

Unitary status – announcement by Boundary Committee

Introduction

1. On Monday 7 July the Boundary Committee for England announced a single unitary authority for the whole of Norfolk, and including Lowestoft, as its preferred option for local government in the county.
2. It has also put forward two other options which it sees merits in exploring. These are the 'doughnut' – a two-unitary option representing greater Norwich and the rest of the county plus Lowestoft – and the 'wedge' which would bring together greater Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft into one unitary, and create another unitary for the rest of the county. (NB maps will be made available at the Executive meeting).
3. In Suffolk, the boundary committee's preferred option is for a unitary covering Ipswich and Felixstowe and another for the rest of the county, minus Lowestoft. They have also said that a county unitary (minus Lowestoft) would merit consideration.

Status of the announcement

4. It is important to stress that the options announced by the boundary committee are proposals, and between now and 26 September there will be a period of stakeholder consultation during which we will have the opportunity to seek support for a greater Norwich.
5. The boundary committee will be looking for responses from local authorities and for evidence supporting any proposals and will consider these before making its final recommendations to the secretary of state by the end of December 2008.

Our response to the announcement

6. Norwich City Council is surprised that a greater Norwich unitary is not included in the preferred option, as this fails to acknowledge the importance and significance of the city. We remain convinced that only a new unitary council focused on greater Norwich can truly address the city's urban needs and deliver its huge economic and growth potential. Ministers have previously said that our bid on extended boundaries would meet their 5 selection criteria.
7. Therefore we are pleased that a two-unitary option including a greater Norwich is still on the table and we will now have the opportunity of promoting it during the consultation period. Norwich is the largest city in England which currently does not have a unitary council, and many smaller towns also have one.
8. There has been widespread surprise at the boundary committee's preferred option for a single unitary covering the whole county, and including Lowestoft. This move would create one of the largest unitary councils in the country, serving more than one million people in five years' time. This would cover a population nearly as big as Birmingham, but serving both rural and urban areas over a

geographic area more than 20 times the size.

Next steps

9. This announcement is only a stage in the consultation process. The consultation period, which ends on 26 September, presents us with the chance to continue making the case to our stakeholders for a unitary council serving Norwich beyond its existing boundaries.
10. It is important to note that the “doughnut” option has been identified as having “merit” by the boundary committee, and this includes a proposal for a greater Norwich unitary council. It is also notable that this model reflects the “working model” boundary that we put forward in our conceptual business case. This provides clear evidence that the boundary committee recognise the potential strengths of the “doughnut” model.
11. Therefore, the boundary committee is now expecting Norwich City Council to take a lead in developing a full financial case for this model, and to work with Norfolk County Council which will be responsible for developing the financial case for the corresponding part of the “doughnut” model.
12. In addition, the City Council will need to continue to promote the greater Norwich unitary case, and will seek to consult with key stakeholders and encourage them to contribute to the consultation exercise.