

October 2016 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

Devolution outcomes considered by Norfolk and Suffolk leaders

The outcomes of the Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution consultation have been considered by council ahead of submission to the Secretary of State. Throughout the consultation period, councils and the New Anglia LEP engaged with a wide range of people including town and parish councils, councillors, businesses, members of the public and partner organisations, such as health and higher education. More than 10,000 responses were received via a range of channels. The majority of responses, 6,080, were received via a telephone survey carried out by Ipsos-Mori, gaining views from a cross section of people, reflecting the population of the two counties.

- 53% supported the principle of devolution
- There was strong support for more decisions to be taken locally across a range of issues with decisions relating road maintenance funding coming out on top
- There was 52% support for a Mayor and 58% support for councils to come together as a Combined Authority. 29% Opposed election of a Mayor and 25% opposed establishing a Combined Authority
- Job creation and young people either earning or learning came out as top priorities to invest in

250 businesses of various sizes across the two counties were also surveyed by Mori:

- 54% supported the principle of devolution
- Strong support for more decisions to be taken locally across a range of issues with decisions relating road maintenance funding coming out on top
- 59% supported councils joining as a Combined Authority and 47% supportive of a mayor, with 27% opposed
- Young people earning or learning was businesses top priority for the Combined Authority to invest in

In addition, the New Anglia LEP in conjunction with the Norfolk and Suffolk Chambers of Commerce held a series of breakfast briefings during July and the Chambers of Commerce also produced their own e-newsletters. This activity has resulted in a number of business leaders sending letters to government supporting devolution. The survey was also available via the East Anglia Devolution website and council websites and more than 2900 people responded. The survey was open to everyone but the results show that certain groups and geographical areas were better represented than others. For example, less than 5% of responses came from under 24's when in reality they make up more than 25% of the two counties' population. Response levels were also not evenly spread across the various borough and district areas. Whilst there was less support for a mayor or combined authority through the self-service survey, more than 50% of people responding supported the principle of devolution. Again, strong support for more decisions to be taken locally with road maintenance coming out top and investment by the Combined Authority in transport and broadband infrastructure ranked highest. It is important to be clear that a Norfolk and Suffolk mayor would not be an 'all powerful' figure, making decisions without regard to the views of others. The Mayor would need support from other members of the Combined Authority for plans to progress. A summary of all responses will be reported to the Secretary of State once it has been considered signed off by Leaders. If the Secretary of State thinks that the necessary statutory tests have been met, he will lay a draft order before Parliament.

Blue Light Property Sharing in Suffolk

Plans for blue light property sharing based around Felixstowe and Saxmundham fire stations have now been agreed by the Blue Light Executive Board, which is overseeing plans for increased collaboration between our emergency services in Suffolk. Building work, subject to planning consent, should start in September and October 2016 respectively, to accommodate local Police teams at the fire stations. The facilities will also be available, where desired, as 'drop-in' bases for ambulance crews. Feasibility studies are also being undertaken to determine whether sharing is advantageous in Beccles, Leiston, Stowmarket, Mildenhall, Newmarket and Sudbury. These projects, where supported, are likely to be taken forward from 2017. A feasibility study is now well underway to establish the best location, in the centre of Ipswich, for a blue light response base for Fire, Police and Ambulance. Other partners' requirements are also being sought with a view to optimising the use of the property. Options include redeveloping the current Princes Street fire station site or, instead, constructing a new building at an alternative location close to the town centre. The above works are substantially funded by the £4.93m DCLG transformation grant, received by the Council in 2014-15, and Home Office funding provided to Suffolk Constabulary.

Matthew Hicks - County Councillor for the Thredling Division

Tel : 01728 628176 Mob : 07824474741 E-mail : matthew.hicks@suffolk.gov.uk