

Devolution outcomes to be considered by Norfolk and Suffolk leaders

The outcomes of the Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution consultation will be considered by council leaders on Wednesday 7 September, 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, 6080, were received via a telephone survey carried out by Ipsos-Mori. The survey gained 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 for the Combined Authority 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 together 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.

Andy Wood, said: "Devolution is about improving people's lives and the places they live. It's great that those responding to the consultation recognise that and support more decisions being taken locally. Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond".

"Leaders are committed to building on all the success and positives of the two counties to make Norfolk and Suffolk as successful as possible for the future. Devolution will help to achieve this commitment by delivering some 95,000 new jobs, 200,000 new homes and 10,000 new businesses by 2036."

A summary of all responses will be reported to the Secretary of State later this week once it has been considered signed off by Leaders on Wednesday. If the Secretary of State thinks that the necessary statutory tests have been met, he will lay a draft order before Parliament. However, only if all the local councils and the LEP that endorsed the proposed deal in June approve the order will plans progress.