



Committee	Full Council
Date	22/05/2024
Subject	Suffolk County Council's County Deal – East Suffolk Council Debate
Cabinet Member	Cllr Caroline Topping, Leader of the Council
Report Author(s)	Jo Jonas Executive Officer to the Chief Executive and Leader joanna.jonas@eastsoffolk.gov.uk
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Key Decision?	No
Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN

Purpose/Summary

Since 2011 with the commencement of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Government policy on devolution to local areas has continued to evolve. Devolution 'Deals,' as they have become known, are an agreement whereby the Government passes control of decisions, elements of funding and areas of policy to local councils in return for more directly elected local democratic arrangements such as a Directly Elected Mayor.

In 2016, Suffolk and Norfolk collaborated on the development of a Mayoral Combined Authority which was ultimately rejected in Norfolk.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, passed earlier this year, enables a new model of devolution to three-tier local government areas, a County Deal with a directly elected Leader of the County Council. Suffolk County Council and Suffolk's five district and borough councils expressed an interest in a Suffolk Devolution Deal and in December 2022, Suffolk County Council and the Government signed an in-principle Deal. At the time of this in-principle Deal, all the district and borough councils supported it.

If the proposed Deal is agreed, Suffolk would receive new decision-making powers and greater local control of funding in areas including adult education, regeneration and transport, as well as control of a new investment fund worth £480 million over the next thirty years. The proposed Deal would also mean that, for the first time, the Leader of Suffolk County Council would be directly elected by the people of Suffolk.

Suffolk County Council has launched a public consultation on the Suffolk Devolution Deal and this report highlights the content of the proposed Devolution Deal to enable all councillors to have an opportunity to express its views which will be collated and submitted to Suffolk County Council as part of the consultation process.

Recommendation

That Full Council:

1. Expresses its views on the Suffolk Devolution Deal and delegates authority to the Leader of the Council to collate and submit those views to Suffolk County Council as part of the public consultation process.

Strategic plan

How does this proposal support Our Direction 2028?

Environmental Impact	<p>The Deal contains a number of environmental elements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A commitment from the Government to explore the potential benefits of and design options for a place-based approach to delivering retrofit measures.• To explore how to simplify and consolidate funds which target net zero initiatives at the local level where this provides the best approach to tackling climate change.• To establish heat network zoning to decarbonise heating and hot water with Suffolk County Council acting as Zoning Coordinator.• An integrated approach to flood risk and water resources management that reduces flood risk, protects the environment and secures a sustainable water supply for all.• Suffolk County Council to act as the responsible authority for the preparation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That new environmental land management schemes are implemented in line with local needs and priorities which support the delivery of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. • To consider Suffolk as a testbed to pilot innovative climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives.
Sustainable Housing	<p>The Deal gives Suffolk County Council broad powers to acquire and dispose of land to build houses and to invest to deliver housing in collaboration with district and borough councils. They will also have land assembly and compulsory purchase powers and will be awarded £5.8 million of devolved capital funding to support the building of new homes on brownfield land in collaboration with district and borough councils.</p> <p>The Deal also states that Suffolk County Council will work with Homes England to unlock the barriers to affordable housing delivery, regeneration and wider housing growth through the development of a pipeline for the region underpinned by an action plan and will explore how wider measures, including viability assessments and the planning system, could better support Suffolk's plans to increase much needed rural affordable housing supply.</p>
Tackling Inequalities	<p>The proposed Devolution Deal will provide new powers and long-term, devolved funding to enable Suffolk to tackle its challenges, raise living standards and make a full contribution to the UK economy. There will also be new powers to better shape local skills provision to match the needs of the local economy and local people, including devolution of the core adult education budget, as well as input into the new Local Skills Improvement Plans. East Suffolk Council works in partnership with Suffolk County Council and a range of other partners through structures like the Collaborative Communities Board and Tackling Poverty Sub Group currently and these arrangements will become even more important following the devolution deal.</p>
Thriving Economy	<p>The Deal states that Government will work with the accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnership to help develop Suffolk's visitor economy including its potential to grow domestic and international visitor spend, expand business tourism by capitalising on existing gateway links with northern Europe and harnessing Suffolk's voice in delivering green tourism and its ambition to become England's first net zero visitor destination.</p> <p>There is an Investment Fund of £16 million per year for 30 years included in the proposed Deal. In addition, there is the ability to have greater local autonomy over individual policy areas, such as housing, transport and skills.</p>
Our Foundations / governance of the organisation	<p>The Devolution Deal requires Suffolk County Council to move to adopt a directly elected Leader and cabinet executive governance model which will require them adapting their Constitution. If the Deal is approved, the election for the new Leader will take place in May 2025. Whilst the Devolution Deal is between the Government and Suffolk County Council and will therefore have</p>

negligible impact on our own local governance arrangements in East Suffolk, the Deal specifically recognises that delivery must be a collaborative partnership between district and borough councils and the County Council, alongside other local partners. Suffolk has a reputation for working collaboratively as a system with a well-established Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group and various joint-working arrangements and the intention is to use these existing arrangements to exercise the powers, functions and funding devolved through the Deal. The exercise of certain functions may require the consent of this Council as the Local Planning Authority.

Justification for recommendations

1. Background

- 1.1. In July 2021, the Government wrote to councils setting out its ambition to make available to county areas the kind of devolved decision-making powers and public funding enjoyed by larger cities and urban areas.
- 1.2. In August 2021, in a joint letter to the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Leaders of Suffolk's six councils and the Police and Crime Commissioner expressed an interest in a possible devolution deal for Suffolk.
- 1.3. In February 2022, the Government published its 'Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper' setting out its twelve levelling up missions including that, by 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement. The White Paper announced nine geographic areas to start formal negotiations to agree new devolution deals and Suffolk was one of the nine areas selected.
- 1.4. In December 2022, Suffolk County Council and the Government signed an in-principle deal to transfer certain powers and funding from London to Suffolk. At the time of this in-principle deal, all the district and borough councils supported it. A copy of the Suffolk Devolution Deal can be found at Appendix A.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The proposed Suffolk Devolution Deal seeks to support Suffolk in harnessing the area's strengths to drive opportunity for all. If approved, it will provide new powers and long-term, devolved funding and will represent a step change in Suffolk's relationship with the Government.
- 2.2. The proposals in the Deal seek to focus devolution where it can deliver the greatest additional benefit to Suffolk.

3. Proposal

- 3.1. When the in-principle Deal was signed in December 2022, it was recognised that the involvement of district and borough councils would be pivotal to the successful delivery of the Devolution Deal and that the existing Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group would be an important vehicle through which delivery of the Devolution Deal could be achieved.
- 3.2. The Devolution Deal includes:
- Control of a £16 million per year allocation of investment funding over 30 years to drive growth and take forward Suffolk's priorities over the long-term.
 - An integrated transport settlement.
 - A commitment to explore a local partnership with Great British Railways to improve local rail services.
 - New powers to shape local skills provision to match the needs of the local economy and local people, including devolution of the core adult education budget, as well as input into new Local Skills Improvement Plans.
 - £5.8 million for the building of new homes on brownfield land subject to sufficient eligible projects for funding being identified and working in partnership with local planning authorities to deliver.
 - Suffolk County Council to plan and deliver the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from 2025/26 and will work in collaboration to deliver this.
 - The future integration of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure there continues to be a strong and independent local business voice.
- 3.3. If the Deal is approved, Suffolk County Council will work with the Government, the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group and local partners to develop a full implementation plan covering each policy area in the Deal. This must be completed ahead of implementation and must be approved by the Government prior to delivery.
- 3.4. A ten-week public consultation on the proposed Suffolk Devolution Deal was launched by Suffolk County Council on 18 March 2024 with an end date of 26 May 2024. The consultation document can be found at Appendix B of this report. Councillors will recall being invited to attend a pre-consultation briefing session with the County Council in early March prior to the start of the formal consultation period.
- 3.5. The purpose of this report is to give East Suffolk Councillors an opportunity to express their views on the proposed Deal so that those views can be collated and submitted to Suffolk County Council for consideration as part of the process.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. It is not anticipated that the Devolution Deal will have any financial implications for the Council. The Deal does, however, provide the potential for additional investment in the district.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1. There are no legal implications for the Council; the Deal is between Suffolk County Council and the Government.

6. Risk Implications

- 6.1. As 5.1 above. The Council will not be a signatory to the Deal and there are no direct risk implications for East Suffolk Council. The decision on whether or not to enter into the Deal is ultimately a matter for Suffolk County Council.

7. Options

- 7.1. East Suffolk Council participated in discussions with Suffolk County Council and the other Suffolk local authorities which led to the in-principle Deal being signed in December 2022. The agreement reached was for a 'Level 3' devolution deal, which involves the maximum possible devolution of powers and funding currently available alongside the introduction of a Directly Elected Council Leader. There is currently no other offer on the table.
- 7.2. As a result of the consultation feedback received, the County Council can reject the proposed Deal or it can propose amendments. If the amendments proposed are considered by the Government to significantly alter the proposed Deal, Suffolk County Council may be required to restart discussions and there is no guarantee that this would be possible.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. That Council expresses its views on the Suffolk Devolution Deal and delegates authority to the Leader of the Council to collate those views and respond to Suffolk County Council as part of the public consultation process.

9. Reasons for Recommendations

- 9.1. The Devolution Deal represents an important decision for Suffolk's future and it is therefore important that Councillors are given the opportunity to consider and debate the Deal and its potential impact on East Suffolk.

10. Conclusions/Next Steps

- 10.1. The consultation closes on 26 May 2024. All consultation responses will be considered by Suffolk County Council and Government Ministers as part of the decision-making process.

Areas of consideration comments

Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no financial impacts as a result of this report.

Monitoring Officer comments:

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no additional comments.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion/EQIA:

Suffolk County Council will be responsible for carrying out a full Equality Impact Assessment as part of their due diligence process.

Safeguarding:

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder:

Not applicable.

Corporate Services implications:

(i.e., Legal, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Digital, Customer Services, Asset Management)

Not applicable.

Residents and Businesses consultation/consideration:

This is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council who is undertaking widespread consultation in a number of different forms and in accordance with best practice.

Appendices:

Appendix A	Suffolk Devolution Deal
Appendix B	Empowering Suffolk's Future - public consultation document

Background reference papers:

None