

## **GOVERNMENT CANNOT IGNORE OPINION**

April 7 2009

**Suffolk councils will be taking their case for three unitary authorities straight to the Government, galvanised by the backing of a huge majority in the county who say they want to be consulted on the option.**

With nine out of ten people saying they want the chance to comment on East Suffolk, West Suffolk and Ipswich, including those in the centre of the county<sup>1</sup>, Suffolk council Leaders are demanding that Hazel Blears MP intervenes in the Committee's deliberations because, in their view, they are "wilfully ignoring the obvious unitary solution."

The Leaders of three councils Cllrs Mark Bee (Waveney), Geoffrey Jaggard (Forest Heath) and John Griffiths (St Edmundsbury) have delivered a full report from leading research company ORB to the Secretary of State, following a survey which provides the clearest evidence yet of the county-wide approval for three unitaries. The report (attached, with a summary) concludes that:

- the majority of local people (60%<sup>2</sup>) prefer the "Ipswich, East and West" structure in Suffolk, compared to just 25% for 'one Suffolk'.
- reasons for preferring "Ipswich, East and West" surround concerns about the size of the county – that a Suffolk unitary responsible for 700,000 people is too big to efficiently manage local services.
- the majority (58%<sup>3</sup>) agree that an "Ipswich, East and West" structure would provide the best value for money in terms of service delivery (compared to 28% for one Suffolk) and would be most successful in improving deprived areas through regeneration and employment creation (61%<sup>4</sup>, compared to 25% for one Suffolk).
- Opinion in favour of three unitaries is spread across all seven district council areas and is always significantly stronger than support for any other option.

In a letter to the Secretary of State, Cllrs Mark Bee (Waveney), Geoffrey Jaggard (Forest Heath) and John Griffiths (St Edmundsbury) said: "We have written to ask the Boundary Committee why it has not considered the three unitary solution for Suffolk, which, as demonstrated by an independent opinion poll, commands majority support in Suffolk. We know that this option would meet the criteria that you have set out, and we are perplexed that the Boundary Committee appears not to take any interest in this option at all."

The Leaders added that the Boundary Committee have "shown no interest whatsoever" in the findings of the survey and are furious that it "still refuses to consider further possible alternative proposals with proper consultation."

The Leaders continued: "It would, of course, be preferable that the Boundary Committee considered our proposal, but they are determined to not even present it as an alternative for consultation."

"Many people across Suffolk are extremely upset with the high-handed and cavalier approach that the Boundary Committee continues to display. We would be failing in our duty if we did not examine all the options available to us to support people's right to have their views taken on board."