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Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government and English Devolution
2 Marsham Street
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Via Email: PSJimMcMahon@communities.gov.uk

Dear Minister of State,

Thank you for meeting with me and our Chief Executive, Nicola Beach, on 7th October. We were grateful for the opportunity to discuss Suffolk County Council's ambition for our county following the disappointing withdrawal of our Level 3 deal by the new Government. As I made clear, the funding, powers and opportunities on offer had the potential to make a truly significant difference here in Suffolk – as recognised by our extensive public consultations which showed support for the in-principle deal. As a council that is ambitious to its core, we are determined to create for our residents and businesses the best possible opportunities to succeed.

We feel strongly that the decision by the Government to withdraw Suffolk's Level 3 deal was the wrong one for our county, but it was your decision to make, and we see no benefit in dwelling on the past. Therefore, following your request that we write confirming our desire to consider your alternative devolution proposals, please accept this letter as an indication of our willingness to enter into discussions with the Government to learn more about what is being offered, albeit in the context of the concerns we set out below.

Accelerating economic growth is one of Suffolk County Council's political priorities, so I can confirm that Suffolk County Council will work with the Government to explore and understand what benefit your devolution proposals might bring to Suffolk. We will continue to work together to explore all governance models and look to bring forward proposals by Autumn 2025. This could, if acceptable to local residents and elected representatives in the county, allow for deeper and wider devolution, recognising the new Government's preference for a larger geography.

We will work with stakeholders across the area, to ensure that district leaders, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Members of Parliament, skills providers and others are engaged throughout.

Whilst we commit to exploring the next stage of devolution, we must put in writing our serious concerns about the initial proposals the Government has mooted. We wish to discuss these more fully, but in summary, our concerns are:

1. Your devolution proposals are not sufficiently ambitious, and we consider it a huge, missed opportunity, when looking at a wider geography, not to consider proper local Government reform across Suffolk which would deliver true economies of scale and savings to the taxpayer.
2. Your proposals for cross-county combined authorities would create additional bureaucracy, another layer of local Government and another line of costs on Council Tax bills. This would increase, not decrease, the local tax burden.
3. We see great opportunities to right many historic and unjust wrongs in terms of local Government core funding, including in social care, education, special educational needs and disabilities, public transport and highways. Your proposals do not address these inequities. Suffolk is poorly funded in many areas compared to our geographical and statistical neighbours and this must be addressed.
4. Closely connected with the above point, we are concerned that a Mayor covering two or more counties may lead to geographic bias.
5. Your proposals do not, at present, offer any additional clear funding opportunities. For example Storm Babet caused significant flooding across our county and we estimate £20million is required to help with mitigation. Our previous deal would have allowed some investment in this area.

The above points are all in contrast to our prior level 3 deal which would have delivered an additional £500 million to Suffolk without an additional tier of bureaucracy or additional taxes being levied on our residents.

As part of the devolution discussions, we would expect explicit guarantees from His Majesty's Government that key schemes in and benefiting Suffolk including, but not exclusive to, the Haughley and Ely rail junctions, A14 Copdock interchange and A11 Fiveways projects would proceed at pace.

Notwithstanding our very real concerns outlined above, we agree to enter further discussions with you to explore the kind of devolution arrangements that might best serve the people of Suffolk. Our ambition for Suffolk remains unwavering and we hope that the new Government will rise to match that.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Matthew Hicks
Leader of Suffolk County Council