

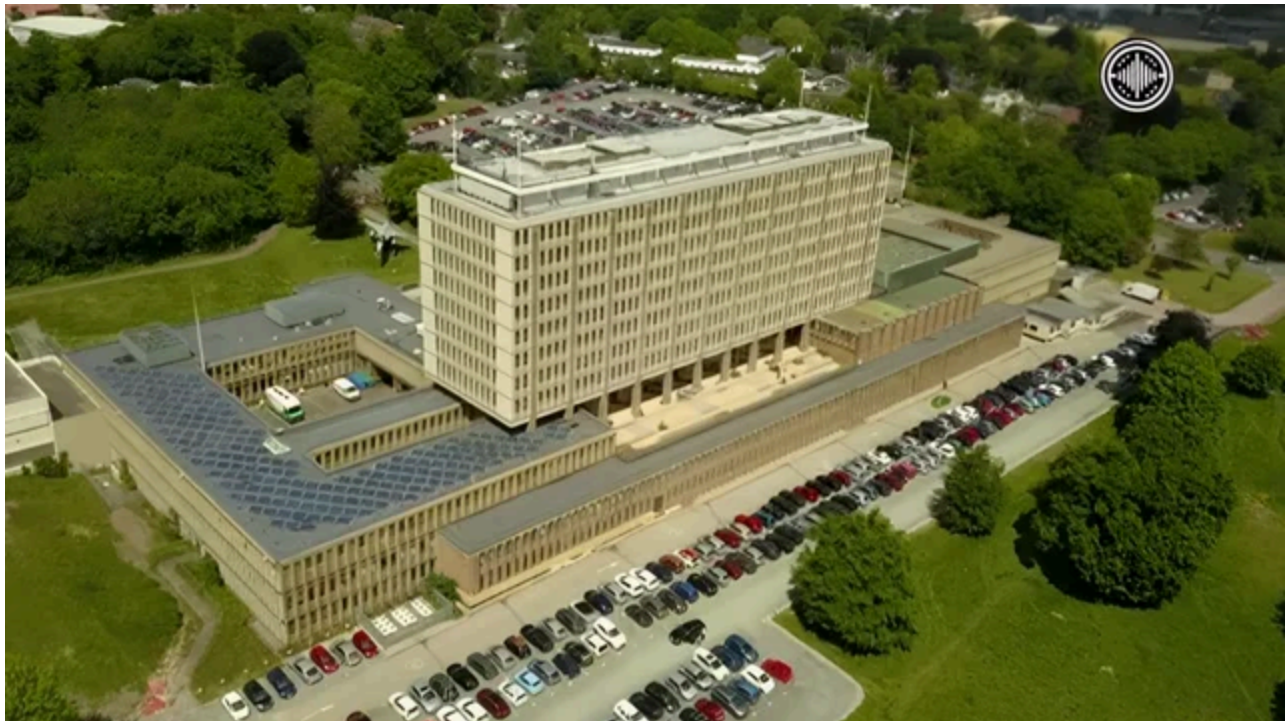
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## Norfolk Council Leader Condemns Labour's Devolution Proposals

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A senior Norfolk council leader has strongly criticised Labour's new devolution legislation, arguing that it falls short of delivering genuine local empowerment and instead consolidates control in Whitehall.

Sam Chapman-Allen, who leads the Conservative-controlled Breckland District Council and chairs the District Councillors Network (DCN), voiced serious concerns over the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. While Labour ministers claim the bill will allow communities to “take back control” by transferring more powers from Westminster, Chapman-Allen insists the proposals amount to little more than repackaging existing responsibilities.

“The District Councillors Network supports devolution in principle,” Chapman-Allen said. “District councils have long campaigned to see decision-making brought closer to the people we serve. However, this bill falls well short. Rather than empowering local leaders, it hands substantial new powers to the Secretary of State to intervene in local government.”

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill sets out plans to create a directly elected mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk, with the first election expected in May next year, depending on legislative approval. Supporters of the scheme, including Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, have claimed it represents a “new dawn of regional power” that will help rebalance regional inequalities.

Among the proposals is a so-called “community right to buy,” giving local people first refusal on pubs, shops, and other assets put up for sale. The bill also requires councils to implement neighbourhood governance structures, ostensibly to give residents a greater say over local decisions. Yet Chapman-Allen remains unconvinced that these measures will shift meaningful authority away from central government.

Critics also note that Labour plans to scrap the first-past-the-post voting system for mayoral elections and reintroduce the “preferential” system, which allows voters to rank candidates in order of choice. Many observers see this as a move designed to engineer electoral outcomes rather than respect straightforward democratic mandates.

Norfolk, like many English counties, has waited months for clarity over the shape of its devolution deal. While the government talks up the rhetoric of localism, Chapman-Allen and other council leaders are demanding evidence that genuine power will be devolved instead of simply rebranded.

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