



21 July 2021

Dear Colleagues

UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN SOMERSET

We wanted to let you know that the Secretary of State for Local Government has today announced that the proposal for a single unitary authority, One Somerset, has been chosen as the future structure for local government in the county. The decision means that all five councils in Somerset – the County Council and the four district councils – will be abolished and a new single unitary authority created and in place by 2023.

Somerset County Council is delighted that the Secretary of State has backed its ambitious plans to give Somerset the resilient, unified, and dynamic system of local government it deserves. The success of partnership work throughout the pandemic to support our most vulnerable and roll-out the vaccination programme has clearly demonstrated what we can achieve in Somerset when we work together.

In reaching its decision, the Government carried out extensive consultation, open to all Somerset residents, businesses, and stakeholders, including town and parish councils, the NHS, police, fire and public service organisations. The Government based its decision against three key tests – that any proposal should improve the area's local government, command a good deal of local support across the area, and have a credible geography between 300-600,000 in population.

One Somerset is simple, it is clear, and it delivers what our residents want – better services, better value for money, decisions made locally, and an end to the confusion and bureaucracy of having multiple overlapping councils.

The One Somerset business case sets out how a single council for Somerset will benefit everyone, with:

- One council listening to the needs and concerns of residents, businesses, and communities, providing clear accountability.
- One point of contact for all local services, ending confusion and frustration for the public.

- One strong voice to champion Somerset on a regional, national and international level and secure funding to help the county recovery from coronavirus.
- One council but with 15 to 20 new Local Community Networks (LCNs) established reaching every corner of Somerset to give local people the chance to shape their own communities. These will have real constitutional powers to scrutinise, impact and take decisions
- One plan to free up £18.5 million of funding every year which can be reinvested in improving public services and lives across Somerset. With one-off implementation costs of £16.5m, this means a unitary bonus of £52.6m in the first five years.

It is important that everyone now gets behind One Somerset, and we recognise that working with the 278 town, parish and city councils across the county is going to be incredibly important. Establishing the new unitary authority would, we believe, be a huge opportunity to look at this relationship and to seek to devolve decision making, services and assets in a way that benefits our communities and both the unitary and local parish, town and city councils.

This devolution of power and resources to the councils and organisations that are at the real heart of our communities, will provide a focus for local engagement and become the channel for local views, feedback, consultation, and communication. Importantly this will have a huge value, not just within the unitary council, but it will also create the opportunity to link up more closely with other local public services, notably the NHS, police, education, and the voluntary sector.

This is an exciting time for the future of local government and public services in the county and we look forward to working with you in the months ahead. We already have a working group of Town & Parish Council clerks who meet on a fortnightly basis to discuss LGR, Devolution and more. If anyone would like to join this group they can contact OneSomerset@somerset.gov.uk

Yours sincerely



CLr David Fothergill
Leader of Somerset County Council