

25 June 2021

Dear Colleague,

UPDATE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN SOMERSET

I wanted to write to provide an update on local government reorganisation in the county and to set out how you and your organisation can now get involved in helping to shape the future of public services in the county.

As you may be aware, the Government held an eight-week consultation on proposals for local government reform earlier in the year. The Secretary of State for Local Government is expected to make his decision in the next few weeks based on the three tests set out in his letter inviting proposals, namely, any proposal must improve local government in the county, have a credible geography between 300–600,000 population and command a good deal of local support in the round.

His decision will also include a clear timetable for moving to the new structure(s) including:

- The process that current councils will follow to prepare for any change.
- Elections of councillors for a shadow executive(s) in May 2022.
- The new council(s) 'vesting', or starting work, in May 2023.

We are confident that our One Somerset proposal, which would create a single unitary authority for the county, fully meets these three tests.

We have been working on detailed implementation plans for several months and continue to do so. We look forward to working with our colleagues in the district councils, town and parish councils, our partners, and community and voluntary groups to deliver our One Somerset proposal should it be chosen by the Secretary of State.

Therefore, in recognition of this once in a generation opportunity that a change in local government in Somerset brings, we are creating a series of consultative groups, so that we can work in partnership with key stakeholders over the next 18 months in shaping the future of local public services in our county.

If you or your organisation would be interested in becoming involved in one of the consultative groups, then please do contact us directly at onesomerset@somerset.gov.uk or in writing to: One Somerset, County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY.

Finally, you may have seen that the district councils recently undertook their own non-binding poll on local government reorganisation. It is important to understand some of the facts and context in relation to this. Somerset County Council did not endorse or participate in this exercise given that it undermined the formally recognised process and consultation. Further, how this poll was conducted was deeply flawed and biased with a series of irregularities occurring, notably with one-sided literature directing residents to a highly defamatory website. The poll was widely condemned, including by the Government, while three-quarters of Somerset residents did not take part in this

exercise. Please bear this in mind when you see promotion of the results. The decision on local government reorganisation will be taken based on the criteria and the three tests that the Government set out at the start of this process.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information, and I do hope that you would be interested in becoming involved in helping to design the future of local services in our county.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Fothergill', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Cllr David Fothergill
Leader of Somerset County Council