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All Town and Parish Councils within Hart District  
By Email

Dear Clerks and Members of our Town and Parish Councils

You are being invited to take part in a County Council led consultation about local government structures in Hampshire. We do not feel that in itself the consultation gives the full picture. With that in mind we are launching a programme of communication to rebalance the information you have. We ask you to bear our views in mind when responding to the consultation exercise.

It is impossible to separate this consultation from the immediately preceding report commissioned by the County Council from Deloitte's, which recommended firmly on solely financial grounds, and substantially ignoring service quality or accountability, that the best option was a single "super-sized" countywide Unitary Authority. We cannot see any advantages arising from such an arrangement when compared with possible alternatives. The obvious comparison is with the Heart of Hampshire Combined Authority proposal which Hart, working with Hampshire County Council, endorsed for submission to the Government earlier this year.

### **Local Democracy**

The County Council's proposals would sweep away all local District councils in Hampshire. The experience in Cornwall, the largest Unitary Council, is that these councils were replaced by consolidated groups of Town and Parish Councils that came together to deliver many of the services previously provided by the Districts. So in fact the probable outcome is that it is the individual Town and Parish Councils that we understand today that will be swept away and in effect "upgraded" to become "Districts". This would cause immense harm to localism, to local democracy and to the increasing need to engage fully and effectively with the local communities we all represent.



## **The Best Financial Deal for Our Community**

Deloitte's estimate that to change things in this way will inflict a one-off cost on Hampshire taxpayers of £184m for an annual benefit of £26 per person, (£39m pa). Our view is that to spend so much on a re-organisation with such small benefits is not good use of taxpayers' money.

The Deloitte's report failed to recognise the ongoing work already in place by Districts to cut their cost base. In Hart we have already reduced our costs in real terms by 20% since 2009. This already equates to £26.32 per person. More importantly, whilst protecting the services most important to our residents we continue to challenge ourselves to be value for money and have already published reports to confirm that by 2019 will have reduced our costs by a further £15.57 per person.

So there are no cost advantages to Hart's communities from the County Council's preferred approach to Unitarisation, in fact there is a small disadvantage on the basis of these figures.

Another option, apart from stay as you are, is the possibility of creating a Combined Authority. This enables councils to work more closely in some areas, but keeps the current structures unchanged and also avoids the £184m re-organisation cost.

With a Combined Authority comes more benefits including more devolved powers locally and special government investment of up to £30m per year. Hart and our communities would get its fair share of these benefits, as well as the cost savings already identified.

In fact, the worst possible financial solution would be the Unitary proposed by the County Council's Deloitte's report. Better would be to stay as we are. Even better would be to pursue the Heart of Hampshire Combined Authority bid.

## **Splitting the County**

The County Council itself is not under threat because "stay as you are" or a Combined Authority approach ensures that the County Council continues to exist. In fact, the only approach that removes the County Council is the one proposed by its own consultants; Unitarisation.

## **What is Hart's view?**

In our view the consultation is premature and would result in a watering down of local representation. By creating a huge "super-sized" Council based in Winchester, areas such as Hart will become far less important. There would be significantly fewer local Councillors to represent Hart residents (1 per 18,600 people compared to 1 per 2,800 people at present). This would mean that you would have less influence over decisions on your local services, such as planning, where new homes are built, economic development of the area, or where roads are provided, and even less of a voice if decisions are made centrally to cut services.

**What are we doing?**

To help give all of us a more broader and in-depth assessment we have commissioned with our partners further research work which will be ready for the end of September. Hampshire County Council has had an input into this work. This additional piece of work will give you much more information about the choices that are available to you and will explain more clearly how you could be affected.

We will publish our work in the autumn and ask you to tell us what you think.

To make sure that our residents understand what is going on we have prepared the attached leaflet which is being sent to all properties within the District. We hope you will find it of use.

More information can be found on our website at [www.hart.gov.uk/devolution](http://www.hart.gov.uk/devolution).

If you have any questions then please let me know.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen Parker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Councillor Stephen Parker  
Leader of the Council