



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
*Secretary of State for Housing,
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To all Council Leaders in Somerset

By email

21 July 2021

Dear Leaders,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOMERSET

On 22 February 2021, I launched a consultation on eight proposals for unitary local government that councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset had submitted in response to my invitation of 9 October 2020; two proposals were received from councils in Somerset. The consultation ran for eight weeks to 19 April 2021; we received over 13,000 responses in total; for Somerset some 5,500 responses were received as well as a number of campaign leaflet “tear off slips” about the Somerset proposals.

I am now writing to let you know that I have today announced my decisions, subject to Parliamentary approval, to implement the proposal for a single unitary council for the whole of the administrative county of Somerset, and not to implement the proposal for two unitary councils for this area. I attach a copy of the Written Ministerial Statement announcing the decisions to Parliament. I will be placing a summary of the consultation responses in the libraries of Parliament and it will be available via gov.uk.

In reaching my decisions, I carefully considered each of the proposals. I assessed each proposal against the three criteria set out in the invitation sent to all the principal councils in Somerset on 9 October. These criteria provide that for a proposal to be implemented, that proposal is likely to improve local government and service delivery across its area; commands a good deal of local support as assessed in the round overall across the whole area of the proposal; and any unitary councils to be established have a credible geography. I have had regard to all the representations I received, including those received through the consultation, and to all the relevant information available to me, including the results of the local poll that the Somerset district councils held during the period from 18 May to 4 June and the representations received about the poll and its conduct. I have concluded that the proposal for a single unitary council meets all three criteria and that the proposal for two unitary councils meets only the criterion on local support, and accordingly it is appropriate to implement the former proposal.

I now intend to seek Parliamentary approval for the necessary secondary legislation to implement this single unitary proposal. I intend the draft structural changes Order to be laid in Parliament around the turn of the year and that it will include provision for appropriate transitional arrangements, including elections in May 2022 for the future unitary council and

for that council to assume the full range of local authority responsibilities on 1 April 2023, when the predecessor councils would be abolished.

We look forward to working constructively with you and your officers on the implementation of the proposal. As a first step, my officials will be discussing with your officers details to be included in the Order and subsequently we will be sharing with you detailed texts of the Order as the drafting is developed.

I now expect all the councils in Somerset to work collaboratively and constructively together. I am clear that there is now an opportunity, if Parliament approves the structural changes Order, to establish for the people of Somerset more sustainable local government which will better serve local communities and businesses across the area, delivering for them the high quality and efficient local services people and businesses need and deserve.

We are also writing on this matter to the Somerset MPs, the Lord Lieutenant, and the Chair of the Local Government Association. I am copying this letter to the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority, and the Chair of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP