

The Parish Council has answered 'don't know' to all but question 7 of this consultation as we do not feel it is a matter of whether we agree or disagree but more how confident we are with the content of the proposals. The Parish Council does not have the detail needed to know whether the financial analysis is sound and what impact any of the proposals will have on the services as experienced by residents. Each proposal sets out various different levels of savings and it is unclear exactly where these savings will be found particularly with regard to any services that will be completely lost including discretionary bus services and public toilets. As a Parish Council we have a major concern that as a result of any of these proposals being implemented some public services will disappear and it then might be down to parish and town councils to look at providing services that, whilst councils aren't legally obliged to carry out, residents rely on. Town and parish councils (particularly the small councils such as us) are unlikely to have the funding and the staff, including time and expertise, to provide these services especially without a significant amount of planning.

We have concerns about the financial analysis in all proposals because it is unclear how the proposals can vary so widely in the expected savings. We hope that the Government will conduct its own analysis of the figures to ensure that any future unitary authorities are unquestionably financially viable in the future.

In addition to concerns about the finances the Parish Council is keen that any proposals must be tailored to and work with the local area they serve. The Parish Council was pleased to read that the Minister for Local Government had declared in a written statement that neighbourhood area committees, led by ward councillors, represent the best route to a simplified and standardised system of local area-working and governance. The Parish Council welcomes proposals that include:

- Opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment;
- Neighbourhood Area Committees as a preferred model that will be co-designed with communities and partners to ensure it is inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to local needs;
- details on how the new unitary councils will enable formal collaboration with town and parish councils through charters and options for double devolution, setting out shared responsibilities and opportunities for local decision-making.

As part of keeping councils local the Parish Council is concerned at the scale and size of some of the proposed mainland unitary councils. As a relatively small, semi-rural parish but also very active, the Parish Council needs processes that guarantee direct access to the officers in the new unitary councils.

The final proposals should include unambiguous proposals to address the mechanisms required for effective communication via Neighbourhood Committees with parish and town councils.

The Parish Council has concerns that some areas that have been grouped together have very different geographical needs, and that this may result in the dominance of the urban areas over the rural areas. The Parish Council would like to see rural area needs explicitly protected in appropriate funding and governance structures as well as policy design.

The Parish Council believes that grouping Winchester and Test Valley together acknowledges the special importance of these rural, unique communities.

The Parish Council has concerns about the proposals for the IOW with regards to its size compared to the other unitary authorities and its unique situation. It is understandable that it needs its own

arrangements but will need the ability to form agreements with other unitary authorities so it can benefit from economies of scale and from staff expertise.