

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local
Government

Please ask for: Pat Flaherty

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Date: 17th September 2021

Dear Secretary of State

Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset: Governance Review

Firstly, I would like to congratulate you on your new appointment. I and my colleagues look forward to working with you on this exciting and important project which will have strong and lasting positive impact on the people and economy of Somerset.

As you are aware, the business case for a single unitary authority in Somerset was approved in June this year. Proposals included consolidation of all current County and District elected members into 100 elected members across 100 single member divisions. This structure was to be implemented following a boundary review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, before Vesting Day of the new authority. We remain of the view that this proposal is still valid and should not be disregarded without due consideration and dialogue.

As requested, the five local authority chief executives within Somerset are able to offer an evidence-based assessment of a range of options, including where we see potential risks. We hope will be useful to you in reaching a decision on which option to progress. However, we would point out that many of the options include considerable risk and to varying degrees stray away from Local Government Boundary Commission for England advice.

Alongside this you will find enclosed a letter from Leaders of the five Councils outlining shared concerns that the current boundary review risks electoral inequality, could adversely impact delivery of the approved business case, and possible challenge if those affected feel they have not been properly consulted.

Please be assured we are committed to creating a unitary authority that is a strong and capable as possible from the outset and our work to do so is progressing at pace and with a good degree of collaboration between all authorities. As our Leaders say in their letter: we want to get this right. For example, Local Community Networks will be aligned to electoral divisions which are therefore critical to delivering the promised benefits of the new unitary authority.

Therefore, we trust you will find our options paper, maps and appendices useful in your deliberations and would welcome the opportunity meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. S. Flaherty'.

Pat Flaherty
Chief Executive

Cc:

Bob Brown – Chief Executive, Sedgemoor District Council

Stuart Brown – Chief Executive, Mendip District Council

James Hassett – Chief Executive, Somerset West and Taunton Council

Jane Portman – Chief Executive, South Somerset District Council

Paul Rowsell – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government