



Councillor David Williams
Leader of Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8DQ

30 September 2020

Dear David,

Hertfordshire County Council – Unitary Authority Proposals

At a meeting of Council, our Councillors unanimously agreed to make the following response to the consultation process:

1. While this Council is not opposed to the adoption of a Unitary structure, Council will reserve its support until there is a better understanding of the scope of a Unitary Authority's powers, the scale of the body and its democratic accountability: allied with this is the need to have assurance of sound resident-facing services in reasonable proximity to residents.
2. Residents already find it difficult to access services and individuals who work for their local District or Borough Councils. We remain unconvinced that a large single Unitary, which operates from a distance [as HCC does currently], can be responsive to the needs of a local resident who would need to be served by an officer with intimate knowledge of the locality and issues. This will remain a key determinant of success irrespective of the structure that is adopted.
3. Parish and Town Councils are statutory consultees in the planning application process. Residents and Councillors would not wish to lose their ability to comment [and oppose where necessary] on planning matters that impact their locality. We invite clarification on how this will be preserved.
4. With the promise of greater devolution of powers and services from Whitehall and the Unitary, First Tier councils should be positively encouraged and perhaps entitled to take on greater responsibilities provided they demonstrate they have the capacity so to do. Due regard should be made with adoption of 'Special Expenses' so residents are not unfairly penalised.
5. We are concerned that there will be a reduction in the numbers of Councillors who represent local interests. With the demise of the District level, residents will have lost 2 [or 3] Ward Councillors: the County is proposing to adopt 2 members as Division

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representatives changing the ratio from 1:6 in Berkhamsted to 2:0. The single Unitary would have c 142 Councillors which will make it an unwieldy body to represent the entire population of Hertfordshire.

6. Voter turnout at local elections is commonly regarded as abysmal as too often with First Past the Post elections the result is a foregone conclusion. While adopting a proposed Unitary Authority, Council would encourage government also to introduce a change, such as operating in the devolved administrations, viz. STV or Proportional Representation so that the outcome better reflects the expressed wishes of the electorate.

I look forward to continuing to be involved in this very important consultation process.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Noakes'.

Tony Noakes
Town Clerk
Berkhamsted Town Council

Copy to:

Councillor Andrew Williams – Leader of Dacorum Borough Council

Carina Helmn – HAPTC County Officer

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