



Dear Colleague,

As you may be aware, there are currently two proposals for Local Government Reform in Somerset being considered by government.

I've always been clear that a single unitary council (One Somerset) working closely with town and parish councils is the best option to end confusion, remove duplication and free up funding for key services.

Our district colleagues are suggesting a more complex model. Whilst they recently changed their views on the way forward, they are now seeking to replace the **five** existing councils with **five** new organisations in a proposal known as Stronger Somerset that would create:

- Two new unitary councils
- A children's trust
- A combined authority with elected mayor
- A shareholder-owned shared service delivery organisation

I would like to invite you and your members to join me and the One Somerset team at one of four virtual meetings in October to ask any questions that you may have, hear more about the positive impact of One Somerset and our concerns regarding the district proposals.

It is our view that the "Stronger Somerset" business case has significant flaws and risks damaging effective service delivery for the people of Somerset. It introduces more complexity and additional organisations for local councils and other partners to liaise with and threatens to disrupt a great deal of improvement work that all partners – including the District Councils - have been working so hard on.

For town and parish councils it means that:

- Instead of the district or county council, you could need to work with a one of the two new unitary councils, a combined authority, a service delivery company and a children's trust, depending on the needs of your council – perhaps one for roads, another for planning and yet another for concerns around vulnerable families and children.
- For health and wellbeing, the success of bringing all partners together over the last few years will be disrupted bringing more confusion and complexity rather than the combined working and joint successes that our integrated care system is starting to deliver with our partners in the NHS.
- For community safety and supporting vulnerable adults and children, the police, schools and local government services (split across the 5 new organisations) will have to spend more time trying to liaise with one another than carrying out the essential work that they do in these areas. The Police and Crime Commissioner has even spoken out publicly to recognise the benefits of being able to work closely with one unitary council. And, with One Somerset's proposed local community networks, this engagement with police, health and education can only positively benefit all Somerset residents at truly local level.

I'm afraid that the risks to improving services and improving the lives of the people of Somerset by breaking our county in two just go on and on. I want to work with you all to build even more hyper-local provision and decision making – devolving services and assets to those who want them. Supporting the solution that is right for each Somerset community. The Stronger Somerset proposal wants to apply rigid criteria to whether a parish council 'is good enough' or fits with their vision before 'allowing' you to make those choices and seems to build in complexity at every level.

There are a wide range of factual errors and worrying omissions which lead us to believe that the Stronger Somerset bid cannot deliver because its authors do not understand how the major people or infrastructure services work in Somerset. It may cancel out the successes and improvement work already under way and could put vulnerable people at risk.

It is my desire to deliver the best future for Somerset and the work that our District colleagues does is an essential part of that future. However, I feel very strongly that the work conducted across Somerset has been severely misrepresented by the Stronger Somerset bid, and wanted to correct the record where necessary. I can assure you that we will work to be a diligent and valued partner with you, whatever the future for local government in Somerset may be.

I hope you will join me in shaping an ambitious future for Somerset and in providing the best possible local services in the most straightforward and effective way possible. Please can I ask you to bring this to the attention of your council members? I look forward to seeing you at one of the October virtual meetings to discuss these issues and answer your questions, more details of how to sign up are below.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr David Fothergill
Leader, Somerset County Council

Four virtual meetings will be held using Microsoft Teams. Please ask your members to email onesomerset@somerset.gov.uk to confirm their attendance, clearly stating which meeting they would like to attend. We will then send the link and full joining instructions to them by email in advance. The dates and times are as follows:

- Thursday 8th October 7pm
- Wednesday 14th October 7pm
- Thursday 15th October 1pm
- Thursday 15th October 7pm