

24 August 2018

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter regarding possible local government reorganisation confirming in your opinion that there is no legal or legislative impediment to a wider exploration of the possibilities.

We do of course recognise the importance you raise of stakeholder engagement with the West of England Combined Authority, LEP and other interested bodies including the CCG's and Fire Authorities.

There is no universal support or single viewpoint for any particular reorganisation, so any way forward will require a measure of compromise including by the Members of Parliament who represent our areas. We recognise the criteria you suggest around size of any potential Unitaries and indeed that is important in any wider discussions. It would have to be most important that your requirement that any change will have to result in local service delivery improvement.

Any reorganisation will have a major impact and potential for disruption on services so it is our wish before committing to such a course that we should explore all options to provide a really sustainable solution and future across the areas for which we have a responsibility.

The productivity plans being produced across the South West highlight the need for the Region as a whole to recognise the particular challenges created by demography and lower productivity levels and the need for a more collaborative voice.

You highlight your concern around sustainability of "other services" and we would always need to have regard to wider impacts and recognise that those other services are having to deal with their own budget issues.

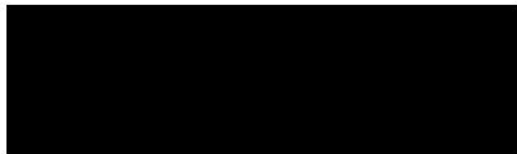
We would not presume to be suggesting to other organisations as to how they seek to tackle the challenges facing them in the future but recognise that those issues must sit high on your Ministry's agenda.

We have prepared a brief to invite consultants to undertake some of the research work we will require to take our own deliberations further and would be delighted if your Department would be willing to work with us on taking this approach to reorganisation.

Yours sincerely



Chair of Somerset Leaders Group
Councillor Harvey Siggs



Leader of Somerset County Council
Councillor David Fothergill