

**Chief Executive
Leader of Council**

My Ref: KR/HE/DM
Please ask for: Kerry Rickards or Cllr Duncan McGinty
Direct Line: 01278 435424 or 01278 435489
Fax: 01278 446412
E-mail: kerry.rickards@sedgemoor.gov.uk
Duncan.mcginty@sedgemoor.gov.uk
DX 80619 BRIDGWATER

Date: 10 February 2017

Councillor John Williams
Leader of Council
Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Deane House
Belvedere Road
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 8AQ

Councillor Anthony Trollope-Bellew
Leader of Council
West Somerset Council
West Somerset House
Killick Way
Williton
Somerset
TA4 4QA

Dear John and Anthony,

A proposed new District Council for Taunton Deane and West Somerset

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your proposals. We of course support your ambitions to make significant savings to Council Budgets and reduce the cost of Council Services to your citizens. It is very regrettable that you find yourselves in a position where your financial position has led members to vote for the abolition of both Councils.

It would be our preference that the financial position of the Councils could be secured and West Somerset continue to represent its communities in the excellent way it has done since 1974. However, the issue of representation and democratic accountability are at the heart of our considerations of your proposals. We particularly fear that this issue will be lost in the Ministers considerations when the financial case seems so pressing and has dominated all consideration thus far.



Sedgemoor District Council
*Bridgwater House, King Square
Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 3AR*

*Tel: 0845 4082540
DX: 80619 Bridgwater
www.sedgemoor.gov.uk*

Currently your consultation questionnaire document is silent as to the process that the “merger” will follow. We are very much of the view that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 process should be used and not the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. Before a proper consultation with communities, neighbouring authorities and stakeholders can be fully undertaken, clarifying the process the Minister is to follow is vital. We would very much encourage the Minister to use the 2007 Act process. It is certainly more appropriate to this type of local government reorganisation and would allow the Boundary Commission to consider wider issues of community relationships as well as where the current boundaries of any new authority may be drawn.

We are convinced that such issues are central to deciding what the extent of a new District Council in Somerset will be and only the 2007 Act process ensures these issues are properly considered. It is our view that the 2016 Act process was not intended for use in such a merger, but designed for the creation of new Authorities through devolution deals. As the notes to the Act clarify it is to be used “where devolution deals are agreed and where it may be appropriate for existing Councils to establish a combined authority”. That is not the case with your proposed merger.

In conclusion, we are supportive of your move to place your request before the Minister. We are very much of the view that this must follow the 2007 Act process and will be keen to put representations to the boundary commission on where any new boundaries are drawn. We feel that there are a number of communities that currently and historically relate to Sedgemoor and whose interests will be best served by being within the Sedgemoor District Council Boundary.

As a matter of urgency therefore, we would request the Minister to determine which process he intends to follow and inform interested parties as early as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Duncan McGinty
Leader of Council



Kerry Rickards
Chief Executive