

Hampshire County Council Report 24th August 2016

The HCC cabinet have advised councillors the following update on the devolution situation:

- 1 It is important to be aware that the first occasion the possibility of a unitary reorganisation of local government in Hampshire was raised, was in the private letter sent to the Secretary of State, Greg Clark on 18 February by the Leaders of Portsmouth, East Hampshire, Fareham, Havant and Gosport. That proposed devolution for the Solent area and included a possible unitary structure for parts of Hampshire.
- 2 The three existing unitary authorities have already commenced a consultation of their residents proposing a combined authority but with the express intention of inviting parts of Hampshire to join once they are established, thereby impacting on the smooth administration of countywide services as well as having significant financial implications. Their action effectively set the timetable for Hampshire's consultation as any delay would have only served the continuing progress of the Solent proposal and the partitioning of the County.
- 3 Discussions have been conducted with District Councils about our own County consultation, and indeed are ongoing, but it became essential for residents of the County area to have their say before the Solent authorities proceeded with any deal with the Government. It was also clear that the district representatives wished to impose conditions on our consultation which would have significantly weakened its evidence base, for example, by removing all references to the recent independent Deloitte review. Whilst taking into account some of the issues raised by District Councils - such as asking residents if they support the status quo - the County consultation exercise was commenced.
- 4 Importantly, the County consultation identifies no preferred option in line with Cabinet's formal position. It points out possible solutions and does properly indicate a significant finding of the Deloitte report that savings of £42m pa could be achieved by establishing a unitary system of local government without any reduction in level of service to the public. There would also be the potential for an enhanced role for Town and Parish Councils.

- 5 The penultimate paragraph of the District Leaders' letter is erroneous. We have commenced a consultation of Hampshire residents in which unitarisation is one option. HCC is not progressing any plans as asserted by the Leaders. It is up to Hampshire residents to say what they want. They may think the District Councils collectively deliver £40 millions of additional value. They may wish to follow the route of neighbouring Wiltshire and opt for a unitary structure.

The purpose of the consultation exercise, an essential element of which will be conducted independently by Ipsos Mori, is to seek the views of our residents. The Cabinet of the County Council remains content that their approach is the right one for the residents of the County.

Malcolm Wade