

# 30.07.20 Joint Statement from the leaders of Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West & Taunton Council and South Somerset District Council

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Yesterday, as expected, Somerset County Council agreed and submitted its business case to Government for a single county unitary council. However, no invitation has yet been issued by the Secretary of State and so no change to council structures can be considered until then. It is unclear why the county council's leader, David Fothergill, is in such a panic to submit its case before an invitation has been received and people in Somerset have had a chance to debate it.



Somerset's district councils remain disappointed that the county council walked away from the shared work to create a better, more integrated system of local government in Somerset that will improve quality of life for communities and make the system more efficient. We are committed as four districts to continuing to work together and with others to improve the system of local government for the benefit of everyone in Somerset. To point out the obvious, four of the five councils in Somerset do not think a single unitary is the right solution for our residents and the county council's isolated position on this remains the odd one out in this debate.

We have written to the Secretary of State to inform him that a business case for change that will serve the people and communities of Somerset better is being developed but we will not be submitting our plans until we have fully engaged with the people of Somerset who must be at the centre of any future proposal.

## Background Information:

Local government has seen big reductions in funding from central government and that means challenges for everyone.

At the same time, the challenges our communities face require urgent attention which cannot wait.

The key challenges for Somerset communities, alongside recovering from the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, are:

- High rates of children growing up in poverty and poor social mobility
- Large numbers of struggling families
- Growing numbers of older people who are increasingly living in poor health
- The climate emergency
- Homelessness and the lack of genuinely affordable housing
- The economy including productivity, skills and wage levels

District Councils in Somerset have already undertaken radical change and as a result are financially sustainable, and able to protect services to communities without making cuts. However, we recognise that further reform is required in the future.

A team drawn from the five councils of Somerset, including the county council, undertook further work on the options, and we agreed the well-trodden path of a single unitary model was not the right choice for Somerset.

Our invitation to Somerset County Council to rejoin this joint work remains open.

We will focus on a plan for widespread joint reform that focuses on the needs of our communities.

Our aim is not to simply cut costs. Our intention is to find a way, to improve life for all residents in Somerset now and for the future.

Our communities do not deserve the cheapest local government. They deserve the best local government which will drive improvement in quality of life.

Ours will be a plan developed with our communities to create a better future for everyone in Somerset.

***This statement has been released by South Somerset District Council on behalf of***

***Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council and Somerset West & Taunton Council.***