

Local Government Reform in Northamptonshire - Town and Parish Council Bulletin No. 1

From the councils of Corby, Daventry, East Northamptonshire, Kettering, Northampton, Northamptonshire County, South Northamptonshire and Wellingborough.

We know that you all have many questions about local government reform in Northamptonshire. Naturally, you want to know how the process will work and how it will affect you and the work that you do. We don't have all the answers at this point but through this bulletin, which we aim to issue approximately every two weeks, we aim to keep you updated on the latest developments and the progress of the unitary activity.

Background

Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has significant financial challenges. In January 2018, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government at the time, Sajid Javid, appointed Max Caller to carry out a Best Value Review of NCC.

In his report, published in March 2018, Mr Caller concluded that NCC's financial, cultural and structural problems could not be solved in isolation. He recommended that plans be developed for two unitary authorities to be introduced, one covering the north (Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough) and the other covering the west (Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire) of the county. These would replace the current two-tier system consisting of NCC and the seven District and Borough Councils (the principal authorities).

The newly appointed Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, recently announced the appointment of commissioners into NCC - this was also a key recommendation of the Best Value report. They are Tony McArdle, lead commissioner, and Brian Roberts, finance lead, and both are very experienced senior local government officers. Over the coming months they will work with NCC officers and members to provide stronger leadership and improve financial stability.

The Secretary of State has invited proposals from any council or group of councils in the county, and has expressed a strong preference for one proposal that is signed up to by everyone. He has stipulated that any proposal must adhere to the following criteria:

- A single county-wide unitary is explicitly excluded as an option
- Each new proposed authority must have a population substantially in excess of 300,000
- The proposal must be based on existing council boundaries

Working with and on behalf of local people

The Leaders and Chief Executives of all eight councils have jointly procured consultants to help develop the submission, which must be on the Secretary of State's desk by 31 August 2018 – an extension to the original deadline of 27 July, which was granted following a request from Chief Executives. This is good news as it creates the opportunity for more extensive local community engagement and consultation, and the development of locally generated proposals.

Consultation with town and parish councils will take place later in June. Locations, dates and times are being finalised and you will receive an invitation to a session soon. We encourage you to attend and help shape the proposal.

Public consultation will start on 13 June 2018 and will run until 24 July 2018. This will include an online questionnaire with paper copies available on request (locations for this will be confirmed), a representative phone survey of residents, focus groups with residents and events with other stakeholders. All details will be published on each council's website and in the local press and we'd appreciate your support in encouraging people to have their say. As well as our official group consultation, other consultations may take place at the same time (for example, BBC Northamptonshire plans to host focus groups and Question Time- style public sessions). It's really important that the public understands that for their comments to be considered to shape the actual proposal we submit to government, they must take part in the official Local Government Reform Northamptonshire consultation.

We have compiled a list of FAQs, which will shortly be available on our website at www.kettering.gov.uk, to help residents understand this process, and we would appreciate your support in signposting people to this information. The list will be added to as we move through the process and more answers become available to us.

Look out for further updates in the next bulletin, due in late June 2018. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact your usual link in the council that sent you this bulletin.