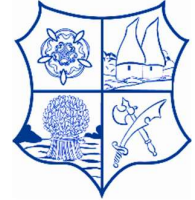


ALTON

Town Council



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Town Clerk: Tom Horwood

15 August 2025

To: The Leaders and Chief Executives of East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council

Re: Local Government Reorganisation in Hampshire

Dear Councillors, Colleagues

I write on behalf of Alton Town Council in response to the consultations underway on Local Government Reorganisation in Hampshire, following our Full Council discussion.

The parish of Alton includes the town of Alton and the village of Holybourne, which are well-connected to Basingstoke, Petersfield and Winchester. The parish is East Hampshire's largest and comprises nearly 20,000 residents with the prospect of substantial new housing growth in the coming years.

Alton TC is concerned that structural reorganisation into larger unitary councils will reduce the voice of the community in public services and make government more remote. As a council in the most local tier of government, we would ask that parish/town councils be closely involved in the preparation of your submissions to government, particularly your proposals on community engagement and empowerment. We would want to see the principles of local democratic mandate and strong community voice embedded within the policies, processes and culture of our new unitary council from the start. We welcome the government's intention that reorganisation should "rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal local authorities, [and] strengthen expectations on engagement and community voice." Parish and town councils are very well-placed to provide a strong community voice to the new unitary council.

While the draft proposals in Hampshire do not yet articulate how community empowerment will be embedded within the unitary councils, I was pleased to hear at a recent briefing for parish councils, the Leader of HCC emphasising that this is a priority. Alton TC's request and offer is to be involved in a meaningful discussion on this as soon as possible.

The government white paper refers to "Neighbourhood Area Committees", although these and their scale are not defined. Noting variable experiences of area committees in other counties, we are concerned that they could be parallel structures without clarity on responsibilities, governance and resources. If they were to become "talking shops", an

important opportunity would have been missed, resulting in a waste of public money and further public disengagement.

By contrast, local councils such as Alton TC, have a clear statutory and democratic mandate to advocate for their communities and provide services. The town/parish council structure, where it exists, should be the building block of future “neighbourhood” engagement. Our offer is to work with you and with your successor council (and other local councils and our associations) to put in place clear, efficient and non-competitive engagement structures that are locally transparent, accountable and focused on results in the community.

Alton TC would also be open to further discussions with you on which district/county services and assets could be operated at a more local level, where there is clear community benefit and a sustainable funding model.

We are aware of the different geographical proposals for new unitary councils in Hampshire. Alton TC does not take a position on these, and individual councillors may make their own comments in the consultations.

I look forward to working with you and colleagues across Hampshire on proposals that will take advantage of this rare opportunity to reconfigure local public services and place communities at their heart.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Tom Horwood
Town Clerk, Alton TC

Cc: East Hampshire Association of Parish & Town Councils,
Hampshire Association of Local Councils,
National Association of Local Councils