

North Somerset Council

Report to the Executive

Date of Meeting: 21 October 2020

Subject of Report: Somerset - invitation for single tier proposals

Town or Parish: N/A

Officer/Member Presenting: Leader of Council

Key Decision: No

Reason:

The report does not directly impact two or more wards or have significant financial impacts.

Recommendations

1. That the invitation from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government be acknowledged and a response issued advising that this Council does not seek to be included in any proposal for change within the Somerset area.

1. Summary of Report

To note that the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has issued an invitation in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to any principal council in Somerset, North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset to submit a proposal for unitary local government for the area, and to recommend that this Council does not submit any proposal and advises that it does not wish to be considered in any proposal submitted by any other council.

2. Policy

There is no relevant policy on seeking changes to local government structure in Somerset or for this council to be involved in any such changes.

3. Details

On 9th October 2020 (by emailed letter received by the CEO at 5.08pm) the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government issued an invitation in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 inviting any of the principal councils in Somerset, North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset to submit a proposal for unitary local government for the area.

In response any of the invited councils may submit alone or with other invited councils proposals for single tier local government in the whole or part of the areas covered by the invitation. If any proposal(s) are submitted the Secretary of State he may seek advice from the Local Government Boundary Commission and/or may by order implement any proposal with or without modification or decide to take no action. Before making any order the

Secretary of State must consult every authority affected by the proposal (except the authority or authorities which made it).

The invitation requires that if a council decides to make a proposal, it must submit by 9 November 2020 at least an outline proposal, and if a full proposal has not been submitted by that date, the full proposal must be submitted as soon as practicable thereafter and by no later than 9 December 2020.

Members will be aware that this council has been exploring with WECA and its constituent councils the option of North Somerset Council joining WECA. This is based on that being the more appropriate economic area for this council to consider. It also aligns with health partnerships including integrated care systems, and other regional focus such as the LEP and fire authority. Joint working with WECA and its constituent authorities already operates through a joint committee. The discussions to build on the joint committee and possibly join WECA have been ongoing for some time and are based on considered business cases and available data. Any change in North Somerset Council's approach would need detailed consideration of alternate business case(s) which would not be possible in the timescale indicated above.

In a parallel communication Luke Hall, Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, has confirmed his support for the ongoing discussions regarding the North Somerset Council / WECA option.

It is therefore recommended that a response is sent to the Secretary of State advising that this Council does not seek to be included in any proposal for change within the Somerset area

4. Consultation

None on the recommended response but consultation might be expected on any proposal to change and the Secretary of State's obligation to consult affected authorities is detailed above.

5. Financial Implications

None flowing directly from this report and recommendation.

6. Legal Powers and Implications

The invitation has been issued in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which also sets out the process for responses and determination of any proposals.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

There are no implications arising from this report.

8. Risk Management

None.

9. Equality Implications

N/A.

10. Corporate Implications

Any other response would represent a change to the council's current approach to WECA and regional development.

11. Options Considered

As indicated above any consideration of alternate options would require detailed work on data analysis and consideration on business case(s) which are not possible given the required timescale and available resources. Options such as submitting a proposal in the absence of that consideration would arguably be an uninformed decision.

Author: Nicholas Brain – Head of Legal & Democratic Services

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

Invitation received from the Secretary of State.