



South Somerset District Council

Friday 30th April 2021

Please find attached two letter received relating to Agenda item 5.

**Agenda
No**

Item

5. **Local Referendum on the Future of Local Government in Somerset
(Pages 2 - 3)**

Letters from Robert Jenrick MP and Marcus Fysh MP

Agenda Item 5



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
*Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities and Local Government*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and
Local Government**

Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Ian Liddell-Grainger MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Tel: 0303 444 3450
Email: robert.jenrick@communities.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/mhclg

Our Ref:10640377

20th April 2021

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your letter of 16 April, following our recent telephone conversation.

As you recognise, it is of the utmost importance to me that I approach my decision making about the two unitary proposals for Somerset in a manner that is unambiguously clearly in line with all legal requirements and is, and is seen to be, scrupulously fair.

It is for this reason that I responded as I have done to the letter which the district council leaders sent to me on 6 April about their proposal to hold some sort of poll. Whilst recognising that it is for the district councils to decide how to proceed, having regard to all the circumstances, including legal and propriety requirements and value for money for local tax payers, I made clear in my letter that in my view that the councils would be best advised to concentrate on further promoting the statutory consultation on which there has already been a very significant number of responses.

For these reasons, it would also not be right, as I hope you will appreciate, for me to indicate that I would consider departing from the timetable which all expect me to follow, namely to announce my decision before the summer. You refer to altering the timetable for a few short weeks but such an alteration, given the summer recess, could risk a considerable delay of months which itself could risk having elections in May 2022 to any shadow or continuing authorities.

Finally, I would mention that the consultation finishes at the close of Monday 19 April and that for Somerset we have thousands of responses which we will consider very carefully.

I understand that the district councils have yet to decide how to proceed.

Yours,
Robert

RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP
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HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Alex Parmley
Chief Executive
South Somerset District Council
Brympton Way
Yeovil
BA20 2HT

Dear Mr Parmley,

29th April 2021

I am aware that SSDC is holding a Special Meeting tomorrow (30th April) to seek approval for progressing with a local poll regarding local government reorganisation in the county.

I am opposed to this measure and strongly believe that such a step could undermine the Government's own consultation and confuse people in South Somerset as to the reason for, and application of, any results from this exercise.

However, the main reason for my objection comes as a result of our discussions and also time I am spending in and around our High Streets as we look to bounce back from the last year. Regeneration and support for our town centres has to be an overriding priority and I know from speaking to you that you are concerned that Yeovil's regeneration project will be too short of funds to proceed despite the £9.5 million central government has extended to help make it happen. At this time to divert available funding elsewhere is simply wrong. Whilst we may not agree on the best model for local Government, I hope we can agree that the people we serve would see regeneration projects as a far better use of their money. That is certainly my view and the view of everyone I have spoken to.

I also note that your own legal advice questions whether such a step represents value for money. You state that SSDC's costs would be limited to those just relating to the actual poll itself. This is of course misleading given you have already incurred significant legal costs and you will also incur further costs in publicising and communicating this exercise.

Papers for the meeting of 30th April makes clear, "To make such resources, including staff resources, as necessary to the Counting Officer to enable the referendum to be conducted." The claim, therefore, that this exercise is costing 72 pence for every eligible voter is wrong and misleading and I would ask you to formally withdraw it. Please, therefore, detail how much have you spent on this exercise to date and what additional costs you will incur, to your members as well as to me.

You have also provided no evidence or proof to substantiate your justification that large numbers of people felt excluded from the Government consultation. I am, therefore, formally requesting such supporting material. I certainly encouraged participation repeatedly and believe many people have participated.

I look forward to receiving your response as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Marcus