

District and Borough Council Leaders

Our ref: LW/rs

August 2020

Dear Mark

We are writing to you, as Leaders of the seven district and borough councils in North Yorkshire, to set out our stance on local government reorganisation and affirm our commitment to getting those changes right for our local economy.

As you will be aware, the Minister for Economic Growth and Local Government, Simon Clarke, has indicated that he wishes to see local government in York and North Yorkshire reorganised on unitary lines.

There are different ways to do this, and as council Leaders we are concerned to get the size, geography and identity of any new unitary councils right for local people and local businesses.

North Yorkshire County Council is proposing to merge all North Yorkshire councils into one mega-sized council covering 615,000 residents across a geography of more than 8000 square kilometers. York would remain a separate (and very much smaller) neighbour, isolated from the wider county. Both unitaries would then come together as a combined authority under an elected mayor. The combined authority would be the vehicle for a devolution deal.

We are opposed to this “mega-sized” model, as we do not believe it will offer the best deal for businesses and our economy either now, or in future years. Indeed, many hundreds of businesses have already been in touch with us to express their concerns at what a mega-size council would mean to them.

- It would create a single massive bureaucracy (the largest unitary authority in England) remote from local businesses and the economy
- It would diminish the level of representation and influence businesses could have on key decisions affecting their future. Under the County’s model, the number of elected members would reduce by more than two thirds making businesses’ access to representation more difficult (especially given our rural geography) whilst councillors would struggle to make their voice heard in one large pool of elected members.
- It would create a huge imbalance between North Yorkshire and York in the combined authority. Either North Yorkshire would overpower its much smaller neighbour (to York’s detriment) or some artificial level of equality would have to be imposed, giving York an undue level of power over the wider geography. Both would cause difficulties for a future mayor, and risk distracting the combined authority from the vital role of driving economic growth for our region.



You will know that the district and borough councils have been at the heart of the COVID-19 response, working to support business recovery and releasing millions in business grant aid. We were only able to do this quickly and at scale because of our knowledge of our local economy, our close links with local businesses, and our long experience of delivering grass-roots services. It is essential that we do not lose these valuable qualities in the coming local government reorganisation, as we hope you agree.

As council Leaders, we are taking an evidence-led approach to local government reorganisation. So far, the evidence points to a more balanced two unitary authority model of broadly equal population sizes (as opposed to a mega/minnow model). Based on the research and the views we have received to date, we strongly believe that two balanced unitary authorities will provide a far fairer and more practical model of reform, and the best balance between economies of scale and local responsiveness.

The decisions we make now will create the structure through which we can drive economic growth, and create a sound base for future devolution, so it is vital that we get change right.

If you would like to find out more about our approach to local government reorganisation, please read the leaflet attached or visit our website: www.get-change-right.com Please also feel free to pass this communication to businesses in York and North Yorkshire that you feel may wish to engage with this important debate.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Richard Foster
Leader
Craven District Council



Cllr Richard Cooper
Leader
Harrogate Borough Council



Cllr Mark Robson
Leader
Hambleton District Council



Cllr Angie Dale
Leader
Richmondshire District Council



Cllr Keane Duncan
Leader
Ryedale District Council



Cllr Steve Siddons
Leader
Scarborough Borough Council



Cllr Mark Crane
Leader
Selby District Council

