

Unitary Bid

To consider the following Motion to Council proposed by Councillor Meikle, seconded by Councillor Bowrah:

“That Taunton Deane Borough Council does not support the decision of the Somerset County Council to prepare a bid for submission to the Government seeking Unitary status for the whole of Somerset”

This proposal is seen as a unilateral declaration of the County Council’s wish to wipe away the complete democratic governance as it exists and replace it with a monstrous sized single authority across Somerset. It perpetuates the Government’s myth that is peddled as an excuse for launching this predatory bid, that two tier government (it does not even recognise it operates in a very successful three tier area!) are inefficient and uneconomic. It has launched this bid without any substantiation of how it will address its own shortcomings and improve services and democratic representation across the county.

- Based on factual statistics, County cannot demonstrate better value for money services than Districts
- When County and District tax charges are compared with single Unitary there is no measurable savings to the taxpayer that would justify reorganisation costs.
- When compared to customer satisfaction ratings the average Unitary (and County) is around 50% Taunton Deane’s stand at about 70%. So almost certainly enforce change and enforce a much lower standard of service based on present figures.
- By its own admission there will be a huge democratic deficit in terms of representation to what exists currently. Communities and the public will be disenfranchised from their local Councillor through sheer weight of numbers.
- We are already a country with the least democratic representation at the local government level of governance, the County proposals would inevitably worsen this situation on the likely Councillor numbers quoted..
- The County proposals will reorganise with a central body and five local area organisations. Why all this trouble to repeat the present structure?
- What they are not saying is that these “local organisations” will be emasculated of virtually all budgetary powers and lose the tremendous resources available to Districts presently that allow local choice for local communities

These proposals are being pushed forward by the County Council in the face of total opposition from each District Council and I understand, all MP’s in the County. They are based on a totally flawed misconception of how best to move forward and instead of building upon the already excellent partnership working that exists, it is destroying the very pillars this has been built upon to date. It is obvious that County has a serious budget problem and presumably it sees this as a means of addressing that problem? It could do so in a much easier way, maintain the democratic representation with the clear community

identification that exists if it were prepared to make the hard choices with clear direction that is necessary to implement efficiency savings. We can certainly speak on this subject with experience, over the last three years we have implemented efficiencies of 15% of our budget, had County Council delivered similar savings the net result on their budget would be a massive circa £40 million. I can only implore them not to waste further money and scarce resources looking for the unachievable panacea, look within their own organisation and find the efficiencies that will surely be there.

It may be timely to remind Members of the conclusion drawn following the implementation of the last reorganisation;

“Past experience has proved that local government reorganisation always takes longer, costs more and delivers less than ever envisaged.”