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Date: 8 January 2018

By post and email

Dear Secretary of State

Local Government Reorganisation in Dorset: Response from Dorset County Council - Hampshire Proposal

I have written to you to confirm the views of Dorset County Council in supporting the proposal to establish two new Local Authorities in Dorset and set out the reasons for doing so having regard to:

The strength of Case for Change
The increasing Local support and
The financial reality of providing services across our communities

In my letter I urged you to take account of these matters to assist in your final deliberations, and to make a final decision that supports change as soon as possible after the period for representations closes on 8 January 2018.

However, I have become aware that an alternative option has been muted without any reference to Dorset County Council. The option relates to the potential for Christchurch Borough Council to "transfer" to Hampshire County Council and maintain services in a two tier system.

Given that 80% of Local Government services delivered across Christchurch are the current responsibility of Dorset County Council it seems incomprehensible that any assumption is being made that this could happen without reference to this Authority or indeed be the subject of any consultation or poll with the people of Dorset.

There has been a suggestion that as the County Council has supported an approach which creates two new authorities in Dorset and sets service considerations above current Dorset boundaries, that the principle of Christchurch leaving the Dorset boundary has been made. I want to state very clearly that this is not the case.



The very careful consideration of the boundaries of the two new local authorities for the County is based on a whole area solution and takes proper account of a functioning area already well established for the County. It was arrived at following careful consideration of the Case for Change, Financial Case and Consultation Reports submitted as evidence with our Future Dorset Proposal and is based within the geography of shared governance with the police, fire, our Local Enterprise Partnership and health. All of these organisations have given you their own views in support of the Future Dorset Proposal.

None of these organisations share any governance connection to Hampshire. Christchurch does have an historic connection to Hampshire, but I understand there is no appetite from Hampshire County Council for such a move, and I also have to state that whilst the offer of discussion and consideration of options have been ongoing across the County for over 2 years at no time has such an option been the subject of any discussion with this County Council.

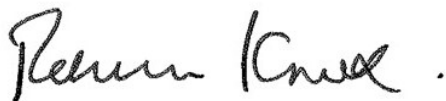
There is no demonstrated financial, service or governance basis upon which this idea may find support and of most concern it would fundamentally put at risk the excellent work being done across our health system, which relies on local authority partnership within the County boundaries. Importantly the adverse effect on residents' service would be fundamentally at risk.

In Dorset we have pioneered a single Public Health model supporting our Health and Wellbeing work, we share a boundary with a single Clinical Commissioning Group and have a thriving relationship that is making significant progress with a well supported Sustainability and Transformation Plan, and a Better Care Fund plan which is delivering improved performance. Our Clinical Service Review is well developed and our Accountable Care System work is designed to meet the needs of our communities served by the creation of two new authorities, within the County boundaries. To consider a shift of Christchurch into Hampshire would put at risk the integrity of this work and the financial stability of our health system which we are working hard to maintain.

There has been no approach to the County Council to consider the basis for a proposal of this kind and despite information being offered, shared and provided in respect of the considerations I have set out, they seem to have been ignored and unfortunately this shows the lack of consideration of the main ambition of the Future Dorset proposal, to put public service aspiration before organisational sovereignty.

I would like to urge you to make your final announcement as soon as possible to give the new authorities the best possible chance of success.

Yours sincerely



Rebecca Knox
Leader
Dorset County Council

Copies to: Richard Drax MP
Simon Hoare MP
Oliver Letwin MP
Michael Tomlinson MP