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Robert Jenrick

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government

Dear Secretary of State,

Even before the publication of the mis named 'Devolution' White Paper Conservative run County Councils such as Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire have been setting out their proposals to variously:

1. Abolish the County elections of May 2021
2. Abolish all District and Borough Councils
3. Elect new, massive and remote County wide Unitary Authorities of up to a million people in May 2023.

We believe that these proposals are fundamentally wrong in every respect.

They would mean that all the Councils involved would spend the next two and a half years arguing over and concentrating on, the expensive business of large-scale closure, merger, defining and reapplying for jobs, redundancy and closing down sites. This is the last thing we need when tackling COVID-19 and its economic fall out should be the number one priority.

The UK already has the lowest ratio of Councils and Cllrs per head of population of any Western European country. Abolishing all District and Borough Councils would make this democratic deficit even worse. Far from representing 'Devolution' these plans represent a huge centralising of roles and local responsibilities.

District and Borough Councils are rooted in and represent the interests of their local communities in a way which large (in population and geographic area) Unitary Authorities cannot remotely do. Most recently this has been clearly shown during the Covid outbreak when the flexible, local knowledge and expertise of District and Borough Councils has provided the cutting edge of distributing local business support grants, delivering food parcels to the local Shielded population, advising their local retail businesses on social distancing strategies and much else.

Unitary Authorities in compact, geographically small areas with a clear community identity make good sense, as seen in our Cities and in a very small County like Rutland. Huge Unitary Authorities of up to a million people spread across a wide geographic area do not. Smaller

Unitary Authorities that reflect actual communities work well across Europe and the USA but the UK Government has so far ruled this out.

The financial problems of Local Government have been caused because the Government has cut 40% of their funding. The massive problems of Adult Social Care are a result of successive Governments failing to deal with the problem. The increasing expense and complexity of parts of Local Government is due to the Governments imposition of new and costly tiers, with Police and Crime Commissioners and Directly Elected Mayors.

We call upon the Government to reverse the cuts to the funding of Local Government, withdraw their so called Devolution plans and consult on an effective form of community based Local Government. Devolution should mean moving power downwards not moving it up to large and remote bodies.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Michael Mullaney. Hinckley & Bosworth District Council & Leicestershire County Council.

Cllr Paul Holmes. Chesterfield Borough Council.