

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

I am today announcing how I am minded to proceed in response to the locally-led proposals that I have received for improving local government in Buckinghamshire. Currently in the administrative county of Buckinghamshire, there is a two-tier structure of Buckinghamshire County Council and the district councils of Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, High Wycombe, and South Bucks.

There is broad local consent for change in Buckinghamshire, though there have been two alternative approaches for how precisely it should be configured. In September 2016 and January 2017, I received locally-led proposals for replacing the current structure, in one case with a single new unitary council and in the other case with two new unitary councils – one for the area of Aylesbury Vale and the other for the remainder of the current county area.

Having carefully considered all the material and representations I have received, I am minded to implement, subject to Parliamentary approval and further discussions, the locally-led proposal to replace the existing five councils across Buckinghamshire with a single council for the area.

I am satisfied that this new single council, if established, is likely to improve local government and service delivery in the county, generating savings, increasing financial resilience, facilitating a more strategic and holistic approach to planning and housing challenges, and sustaining good local services. I am also satisfied that across Buckinghamshire as a whole there is a good deal of local support for this new council, and that the area of the council represents a credible geography.

Whereas, I am equally satisfied that establishing two councils for the current county area is unlikely to improve local government in the area, generate significant savings, or provide the capacity to sustain major services or to address planning and housing challenges. I believe the areas of the two councils would not represent a credible geography or clear local identity, and that there is significantly less local support for two councils than for a single council. Accordingly, I am not minded to proceed with the proposal for establishing two councils.

Notwithstanding, I am clear that in relation to establishing a single council further steps are needed to secure local consent amongst the local partners, and I hope this ‘minded to’ announcement will facilitate the necessary discussions to deliver this local agreement.

Before I take my final decision, there is now a period until 25 May 2018 during which those interested may make further representations to me, including that if a proposal is implemented it is with suggested modifications. The final decision would also be subject to Parliamentary approval.