

On 9 Jul 2020, at 22:23, Cllr.Steve Siddons <Cllr.Steve.Siddons@scarborough.gov.uk>

Dear councillor

In recent months I have been keeping you up to date on discussions we have been having with the government regarding devolution for York and North Yorkshire. We have also had an all members presentation on the topic.

This week I was invited to a meeting with Simon Clarke MP, Minister of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government with all council leaders and chief executives across York and North Yorkshire. This was following on from his online speech earlier this week regarding the government's desire to link Devolution deals with local government reorganisation.

At that meeting the Minister made clear that the government is giving serious consideration to change the structure of local authorities and align devolution to the implementation of new unitary council structures.

This has become a government priority over recent months, it is linked to our national recovery from Covid-19 but it was also emerging in other two-tier areas around the country before Covid-19.

The minister has made clear that he sees a devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire resulting in a Combined Authority with a Mayor and new unitary structures, although no decision has been taken yet about how those new unitary structures should look.

Whilst we expect a formal letter from the Minister in due course, we have been informed that government will be inviting us to submit a proposal for reorganisation by September. The area to be covered by the proposals are across both North Yorkshire County and the City of York, and government are open minded about receiving a single bid or multiple bids.

In the discussion the minister made clear that any proposal for unitary councils must demonstrate 'close links to communities' and must be of a sustainable scale. He indicated that populations of c300,000 would be the 'floor' whilst 400,000 would be the 'optimal' size.

The government's intention is to put in place these changes from April 2022, with Mayoral elections taking place in May 2022 alongside elections to the new unitary authority or authorities.

If the government decides to support reorganisation in 2022 it intends cancelling the county council elections in 2021 and the elections for the Police, Crime and Fire Commissioner would also not go ahead as it is likely that those responsibilities would rest with the new elected Mayor.

There is the possibility that 2022 may be too tight for the government to achieve, in which case the elections would be in 2023, but the government have indicated that their clear preference is for 2022.

We now need to work quickly with our colleagues across district and borough councils in North Yorkshire to put forward proposals that we think could work best for the people and businesses we serve. The immediate next steps will be for the district and borough councils to commission some work jointly to help develop options for the proposals to submit to government. There could be different options, although it is likely that this will be guided by the 'optimum' size expressed by the Minister.

Clearly this is likely to be a fast-moving picture now if we are to achieve a September deadline, but I will endeavour to keep you informed and this will start with an urgent councillor briefing that I will endeavour to organise within the next week.

The Chief Executive will be writing separately to council staff to update them and provide reassurance.

Best wishes

Steve

Cllr Steve Siddons
Leader of the Council
Councillor for Ramshill & Weaponness
Scarborough Borough Council

Sent from my iPhone