

Sir Michael

I am responding to your request for feedback from local authorities.

The issues raised by your inquiry, and those being discussed in response to David Milliband's thoughts on the future of local government, were debated by the members of Harborough District Council prior to a meeting of Full Council. People often felt a strong sense of identity with a local area and this was not always appreciated by the government when defining boundaries or ascribing a local governance. The following points were raised during discussion of these matters:

- Structure to a locality. As a result, there appeared to be little focus on providing local services for local people, although it was acknowledged that the term local could mean different things to different people.
- The different needs of urban and rural areas needed to be accounted for when considering government structures.
- A county-wide unitary authority, or ones which served, for example, the north or the south of the county, therefore would be too large and remote to be "local" government and the mix of urban and rural areas would be inappropriate.
- As the Welland Partnership area now had sub-regional status and the work of the partners had shown that shared arrangements between like-minded authorities were viable, this could be considered as the basis for amalgamating the district authorities currently participating in the Partnership.
- Members questioned whether reorganising local government would achieve more efficient government. The cost of reorganisation was likely to fall on Council Tax payers without any obvious sign of improvements to service provision, although it was recognised that some costs could reduce, for example through only having one set of "back office" costs.
- Not having any specific options to comment on meant that consultees were likely to all have different preferences, which could result in a new system of local government being imposed that satisfied no-one.

In order to put these points into context, Harborough is a rural district in Leicestershire. It is a member of the Welland Partnership comprising of five councils spanning four counties, namely East Northamptonshire, Rutland County Council, South Kesteven District Council and Melton Borough Council. We work in partnership with our Leicestershire colleagues and also with our Welland partners. Within HDC, there does not appear to be a tremendous appetite for change to the structure or form of local government. We have not been able to consult and engage with our community during the consultation phase for this particular exercise to address your particular queries but we are actively seeking ways in which we can obtain some meaningful involvement in order to inform future decision making.

I look forward to seeing the outcome of your inquiry.

Sue Smith

Chief Executive

Harborough District Council