

BEECH PARISH COUNCIL

RESPONSE TO EHDC CONSULTATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION, AUGUST 2025

Question 1

We propose that Hampshire and the Solent area would have four councils.

They would be organised into the following areas:

- North and Mid (incorporating Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, Hart, Rushmoor and Winchester), with a population of around 656,000.
- The South-West (incorporating Eastleigh, New Forest, Southampton, and Test Valley), with a population of around 707,000.
- The South-East (incorporating Fareham, Gosport, Havant, and Portsmouth), with a population of around 533,000.
- The Isle of Wight, with a population of around 141,000.

1A: What, if anything, do you see as the benefits and opportunities of this approach?

It is the practical minimum number of unitary councils, potentially saving some money.

Each of the three mainland councils potentially covers three different coherent areas: Portsmouth city and its hinterland; Southampton city and its hinterland (including all of the New Forest, which clearly has no credible links to anywhere else in Hampshire); and the wider town & rural mix of North & Mid Hampshire. Towns and villages in the North & Mid Hampshire council area will not feel that their interests are being overlooked in favour of a remote & dominating major city conurbation.

The disruptive presence of the SDNP, highly protected in terms of housing development planning, will be able to be mitigated across a much wider area of the North and Mid Hampshire unitary council. The SDNP will cover only 15-20% of the new council area, and the increased housing pressures currently concentrated on non-Park areas of East Hampshire (of which the SDNP covers 56%) can be dissipated far more widely.

For those of us in the Alton area, all of our local government services will be managed by a single authority, based in Winchester and/or Basingstoke, places that are no more remote from us than EHDC currently is in Petersfield. For a small rural parish like Beech, our parish council's relationship with the new unitary need not differ much from our relationship with EHDC.

1B: What, if anything, concerns you about this approach?

The decision not to split up any of the existing districts/boroughs is shortsighted and will no doubt lead to future public discontent. This approach may be easier in the short term transition period, but (for longer term success) populations must have some sort of affinity to the authority that impacts their daily lives so much. So, for example, will the people of Andover feel they are in the right authority, which will overwhelmingly be acting in the interests of Southampton and its hinterland? No – Andover would clearly have closer geographic and economic links to the area covered by the North unitary based in Basingstoke or Winchester!

Similarly, the sparsely populated SDNP forms a natural boundary between the north and the south of the county, with the communities south of the SDNP being squarely within the economic & employment zones of Portsmouth and Southampton. So the following amendments should be made to the boundaries:

1. Move the Andover & Stockbridge areas of Test Valley district from the South West to the North & Mid, with which they will have much more affinity. The Romsey and southern areas of Test Valley are in the hinterland of Southampton and naturally stay in the South West.
2. Move the Bishops Waltham and Swanmore areas of Winchester district to the South West.
3. Move the Hambledon, Denmead and Wickham areas of Winchester district to the South East.
4. Move the Clanfield, Horndean and Rowlands Castle areas of East Hampshire (the 'southern parishes', covered by PUSH – Partnership for Urban South Hampshire) to the South East.

No parishes need to be split up. For the purposes of planning policy, no parts of the North & Mid unitary would be stranded to the south of the SDNP. And the result should be a more even distribution of population between the three mainland authorities.

A more radical suggestion is that the SDNP itself be turned into a unitary authority, so that all local services can be tailored to support its 'special' status.

Of more general concern is the future representation of our parish in the unitary authority. The concern is that, in the future, each unitary councillor may be representing four or five times the number of residents that district councillors currently represent. It may be more difficult for small rural parishes to get the ear of their unitary councillor, and small rural parishes often rely heavily on the influence that councillors can bring to bear on officers. We already see this effect in action; we can consistently get quicker and better response from officers of EHDC than from officers of HCC. So the number of councillors elected to the new unitary authority, and the average number of electors per councillor, is a key concern. We fear the potential loss of detailed local knowledge of our area on the part of future unitary councillors, irrespective of the number of mainland unitary authorities created.

A further concern is around the distribution of discretionary funding around the area of the new north Hampshire unitary authority. A temptation for the unitary authority might be to focus grant money (and similar) on large urban areas in Basingstoke, Aldershot/Farnborough & Winchester (and possibly Andover) rather than on rural areas that are often perceived as more affluent – even though they invariably benefit from fewer local services than large towns. This would be extremely detrimental for towns and parishes in East Hampshire, which is considered 'rural' in almost its entirety.

Question 2

Following the reorganisation there would be new councils covering Hampshire and the Solent which will need names.

Residents and stakeholders have told us that any new councils should reflect the local identity of their community. With this in mind...

2A: Do you feel that an area's name should reflect its... (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Prominent town or city - POSSIBLY YES (for SW & SE Hants), NO (for north Hants)
- ☐ Geography - PROBABLY YES
- ☐ Cultural identity - POSSIBLY YES
- ☐ Unique characteristics - PROBABLY NO
- ☐ History - POSSIBLY YES
- ☐ Something else not listed here

2B: If you have any suggestions for what our proposed new councils could be called then please include them below:

North and Mid Hampshire area (covering Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, Hart, Rushmoor, and Winchester)

North Hampshire – Factual geographic, historic, inclusive, unifying, concise. Keeps Hampshire name alive. Especially accurate if Andover/Stockbridge areas included and areas south of the SDNP excluded.

South-West Hampshire and Solent area (covering Eastleigh, New Forest, Southampton, and Test Valley)

Southampton & New Forest – especially after making the recommended area adjustments removing Andover/Stockbridge areas. The prefix 'Greater' would make the name too long

South-East Hampshire and Solent area (covering Fareham, Gosport, Havant, and Portsmouth)

Greater Portsmouth – Factual description of self-contained unified economic area

Question 3

Central government has provided some criteria which all proposals for Local Government Reorganisation should meet, as outlined below.

We would like to know how important each of these are to you, to inform our proposal to central Government.

On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very) how important is it that your local council:

	Score	Reason
Helps the people who need it the most	5	Criterion too subjective – how much is “the most”?
Provides high quality and sustainable public services	10	Essential goal for any council
Understands the unique identity of my local area	10	Essential for any council
Avoids breaking services apart unnecessarily	10	Essential for any council
Enables communities to shape their local area and influence decisions that affect them	10	Essential goal for any council
Uses sensible economic and geographic areas for service delivery	10	Essential for any council
Ensures council taxpayers receive good services for their money	10	Essential goal for any council
Doesn't cost too much to set up	5	More important to set up effectively than cheaply
Is financially strong and stable	10	Essential for any council
Provides an opportunity to reform public services	5	Many 'reforms' have led to worse service outcomes
Works well with other local leaders, like a regional mayor and nearby councils, to improve things like the economy, transport, and housing	10	Essential for any council
Understands and meets the needs of my local community	5	Too subjective – needs are elastic. Prioritise statutory obligations.
Has clear, recognisable boundaries that make sense	10	Essential for any council

