



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Luke Hall MP**

Minister for Local Government and Homelessness

***Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local  
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18 September 2019

Dear Leaders,

## **ESTABLISHING UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

We were grateful for your representations on the transitional electoral arrangements that we propose to put in place as part of the implementation of the new unitary councils for Northamptonshire. Having carefully considered your comments on these proposed arrangements and on certain other implementation issues, I am now writing to let you know how we intend to proceed.

First, I can confirm that subject to Parliamentary approval, the May 2020 elections in Northamptonshire will be elections to the shadow unitary authorities and will be held on the basis of three-member wards resulting in the North Northamptonshire Council having 78 members and the West Northamptonshire Council having 93 members. Those so elected will from 1 April 2021 be members of the new unitary councils with their term ending in May 2025. From then there will be whole council elections every four years. The district council elections currently due on May 2020 will be cancelled with the term of existing councillors extended until the abolition of those councils. The May 2020 elections to parish councils will proceed as planned with those elected serving to May 2025; parish council elections will then be aligned with the unitary councils' elections.

Secondly, we have carefully considered how casual vacancies arising in councils to be abolished might best be handled. A number of you commented on this and there are a range of views, all of which we have carefully considered. We have concluded that the best approach, balancing the practicalities and the need to ensure appropriate representation, is to provide that if a casual vacancy occurs within six months before abolition, then a by-election is not required unless unfilled vacancies exceed one-third of the council.

Thirdly, we are now finalising the drafting of the structural change order which will include provision for the electoral arrangements I have outlined above and reflect the detailed comments your officers have given my officials on the earlier draft that we shared. In particular we are proposing to provide that:

- the returning officer for the May 2020 elections is to be the person who is returning officer for the Police and Crime Commissioner election which will be combined with the unitary council elections; we are clear that having the same person holding both these returning officer roles represents best practice in electoral administration;

- the joint committees overseeing implementation until the shadow authorities are established are to be appropriately empowered, including a duty to prepare an implementation plan, and are to be supported by an implementation team of officers led by the current Chief Executive of the County Council;
- each shadow authority is required to adopt the leader and cabinet governance model and its executive will exercise all functions of the shadow authority, other than agreeing the 2021/2022 budget and council tax and the adoption of a scheme of allowances;
- whilst the shadow authorities will be able to pay travelling and subsistence and carers allowance to all members, payment of basic and special responsibility allowances can be made only to members who are not in receipt of such allowances from another Northamptonshire council.

We will now share a near final draft of the structural change order with your chief executives and will be grateful for any comments. Once the order has been through its pre-laying checks it is intended to lay the draft order before Parliament as soon as practicable in the autumn.



**LUKE HALL MP**