

Unitary Authority Update – Councillor Carl Les, 5 October 2021

- The proposal submitted by NYCC for a single unitary based on the County boundaries, all 300+ pages of it, has been accepted by the Secretary of State (SoS) without modification, and he expects it to be implemented in full.
- That said, we cannot bind a new council, it will decide what it wants to do, and how it wants to work, but it would be foolish in my opinion if it ignored the proposal that sets it up.
- The SoS expects all councils in the area to work together to create as smooth a transition as possible. I have given the SoS that assurance as importantly I believe our residents, communities and businesses expect no less.
- We must create a formal Implementation Board in January. We have formed an informal one already made up of all DC leaders (7) and the County Council's Executive Committee (10). We have also set up an Implementation Team of senior officers.
- Government have to prepare a Structural Change Order for Parliament. We have responded to their request for what we believe should be in it, in particular the name – we propose North Yorkshire Council; the number of Members – we propose 90 in 89 wards for the first term of the Council, the Boundary Commission will then be invited to do a full review of wards; election cycle – we have suggested aligning parish and the unitary elections, ie first election next May then 5 years later, then every 4 years after that (we propose that no contributions will be sought from PC's for election expenses)
- Work streams are being established for the smooth transition. One which will be of interest to PC's will be the one about double devolution – we are asking for powers to be passed from Whitehall to County Hall, then we want to pass powers (only where wanted!) from County Hall to Town / Village Halls. I understand over 50 PC's have signed up to make this work stream work well.
- Key decision making will also be given to our Area Constituency Committees, made up of the 15 or so councillors elected for that area. This should include planning, licencing and traffic issues.
- 25 neighbourhood forums were proposed, mainly based on market towns and their hinterlands, bringing together local PC's, public services, business groups and elected members to act as a sounding board for priorities and local delivery – "Your Place, Your Say".
- Moving to a unitary council was a government requirement to allow discussions about the multi-million £ devolution requests to start.
- A Unitary council removes confusion about who does what, duplication of roles, inefficiencies and therefore costs.