

Deputation to full Council: January 27th 2021

Re: Aligning governance and committee structures and harmonising the constitution with East Hampshire District Council.

I am making a deputation regarding the proposed alignment of governance and committee structures, and harmonising the constitution with East Hampshire District Council (EHDC). Already, senior officers have been appointed to serve both Councils. More recently all employees have had their terms of employment changed so that they are now employed to work for both Councils rather than one specific Council. Both these changes took place with little discussion amongst Councillors and no discussion with the Public. I am therefore asking you to vote against this proposal so that there can be more open and detailed debate about these changes. This will enable proper scrutiny and comment from a much wider range of interested parties, including Councillors and residents of the Borough.

There are a number of reasons why I am concerned about the changes and specifically the new proposed Constitution. These include:

- The quality of the service offered by our Council is already very poor when dealing with queries and complaints. I have shared several examples that have been experienced by residents in my local ward with my ward councillors. I cannot see how this will be improved by further staff cuts and issues being dealt with by staff located in East Hampshire Council offices
- There is no clear business plan explaining the cost of these changes and the proposed financial savings. The report 'Shaping our future' sets a timescale of 2024/25 before financial savings are made. In this timescale the Government have indicated their intention to bring forward plans to reorganise two tier Councils. Is it wise therefore to be making these changes, which do not have short term benefits and may well need to be unpicked in the near future?
- The changes will obviously have an impact on staff morale, particularly when it is not clear where cuts will be made and which staff are likely to face redundancy.
- EHDC serves a very different catchment area to Havant. It is mainly rural, and covers an area 9.3 times the size of Havant Borough. The residents are relatively affluent with only a small proportion of disadvantaged families compared to Havant. The issues facing the Councils are very different.
- Last but not least the recent report on governance at EHDC is highly critical of how EHDC has been run particularly on the lack of transparency in decision making and deep-rooted problems. It makes a long list of recommendations. Should we really be aligning ourselves too closely when there are public questions about the workings of the Council?

If our services and officers are going to be based mostly in Petersfield, which is 13 miles away and very different as a town from Havant, then why not in Winchester, 34 miles away? This is ultimately about protecting local democracy, and you as the elected councillors are ultimately the custodians of local democracy. I therefore ask you to vote against the proposed constitution to enable more open scrutiny, and protect the interests of Havant residents.

Mr Philip Munday

Chair and on behalf of the St Faiths & Emsworth Labour Party