

FULL COUNCIL - WEDNESDAY, 20 JULY 2016

Written question from Diana Conyers to Councillor Jonathan Bacon, Leader and Executive Member for Resources, Organisational Change and Children's Services

I support the Executive's decision to proceed with public consultation on the documents provided. I do so for the following reasons:

1. It is necessary to explore all possible ways of addressing the Council's current problems and, at present, this appears to be the only option on the table.
2. In order to explore this option further, the Council is legally required to conduct a public consultation.
3. The consultation will not commit the Council to a decision for or against the MCA.
4. Public consultation at all stages of the process is necessary in order to ensure that, if or when there is an actual deal on offer and a referendum is held, the public is able to make an informed decision.

However, I am concerned that the lack of detail in the current documents will make it difficult for the public to assess the positive and negative impacts for the Island. I am particularly concerned about the lack of information on the way in which the MCA's financial resources (including business rates and the £900m investment funding) will be distributed between the constituent local authorities. The original Hampshire and Isle of Wight proposal included a guarantee that no local authority would be worse off than it is at present. The Council has agreed that any deal must ensure the Island's financial security, but it is not clear from these documents how this proposal would achieve this.

In the light of the above, I would like to ask the Leader if it is possible to:

1. Include in the consultation documents additional information on the likely financial and other implications of the proposal; and
2. Use the consultation as a means of promoting a constructive debate, in which the public is able to suggest modifications to the proposal, conditions for its acceptance and possibly even alternative ways forward.

Response

The three authorities will undertake a joint consultation on the proposed draft scheme of governance for a possible combined authority based on all of the current information which will be made available to the public as part of the process. The purpose of the consultation is to inform the constructive debate to which you refer and to help inform the final detailed scheme for the creation of a combined authority should we get that far.

It is a little like the chicken and egg; we cannot finalise the scheme of governance until we have completed the consultation but I appreciate that consultees would like to see a detailed scheme to feel better informed in making any comments.

In terms of an alternative way forward, my understanding is that government is unlikely to offer or announce a devolution deal unless and until it has absolute assurances that there is a commitment from across all of the authorities to create the combined authority necessary to deliver any deal.