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# Ringwood Town Council

Ringwood Gateway  
The Furlong  
Ringwood  
BH24 1AT

Telephone: 01425 473883  
Town Clerk: Charmaine Bennett

19 December 2025

## Consultation Response – Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton Local Government Reorganisation

Dear Consultation Team,

Ringwood Town Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Government's consultation on proposed local government reorganisation across Hampshire and the Solent. This response reflects the Council's formally agreed position following discussion at a properly convened meeting.

Ringwood is a rural market town of around 14,000 residents, situated on the western edge of the New Forest. The Town Council employs 14 full time equivalent staff delivering services including grounds maintenance, community facilities and youth provision, a town information office, cemeteries and allotments, and a full programme of community events. Fourteen elected town councillors provide the closest level of local democratic representation, working directly with residents and in regular partnership with police, statutory agencies, and voluntary organisations.

After reviewing the options, Ringwood Town Council supports Option 1 – the formation of five unitary councils, including a Mid-Hampshire unitary that keeps the New Forest whole and reflects the rural character and shared identity of our area.

### 1. Local identity, sensible geography and community coherence

Ringwood's identity is bound to the New Forest: its rural landscape, its network of villages and small towns, its travel-to-work patterns, and its shared environmental, planning and service needs. The proposal for a Mid-Hampshire unitary council respects these ties and keeps the Forest together as a coherent community of place.

By contrast, several alternative options place rural New Forest communities within large, urban-led unitaries whose size and shape are driven primarily by population or financial considerations. Such structures do not reflect historical or present-day community identity, nor do they support ease or practicality of local service provision or decision-making. They risk creating a democratic deficit and reducing public engagement unless town and parish councils are explicitly empowered to bridge the gap.

### 2. Representation, local democracy and the role of town and parish councils

Town and parish councils are essential to local governance. They are directly accessible, embedded in their communities, and able to articulate local needs in a way larger authorities cannot replicate.

01425 473883

[town.council@ringwood.gov.uk](mailto:town.council@ringwood.gov.uk)

[www.ringwood.gov.uk](http://www.ringwood.gov.uk)

VAT Reg No 185 6318 39

**Fairtrade Town**

THE LOCAL BURIAL AUTHORITY



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Feedback from parish councils across Hampshire has shown widespread concern that large unitaries, particularly those incorporating major cities, could marginalise rural voices and weaken long-standing local relationships. This aligns with our own concerns.

Any reorganisation must therefore formally embed town and parish councils within governance arrangements, including any proposed Local Area Committees. Without clear structures, defined responsibilities, and genuine authority, there is a risk such committees become parallel or “talking shop” structures - an outcome repeatedly cautioned against in parish engagement sessions across the county.

Neighbourhood governance must build on the existing statutory tier of town and parish councils, not bypass it.

### **3. Delivering high-quality public services aligned to rural needs**

Ringwood Town Council delivers a substantial range of local services that respond to rural priorities: management of green spaces, community facilities, public events, youth support, allotments and cemeteries, and close operational relationships with police and other partners.

A Mid-Hampshire unitary council, encompassing the New Forest, Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire, is the most proportionate structure for supporting these services. It reflects rural service patterns and maintains accessibility and responsiveness. A large city-centric unitary is less likely to preserve this alignment and may struggle to recognise rurality as a defining service driver.

### **4. Financial resilience, sustainability and strategic alignment**

Evidence supporting the five-unitary model indicates that it offers a financially sustainable balance of scale, service delivery and identity. Splitting rural and urban pressures into separate unitaries reduces the risk that the priorities of major cities- housing density, regeneration, transport corridors- dominate budgets and strategic decision-making.

A Mid-Hampshire rural unitary is therefore better positioned to sustain financially resilient services that reflect local need.

### **5. Community engagement, empowerment and neighbourhood governance**

The Government’s intention to “rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal authorities” and to strengthen community voice is a welcome principle.

However, detailed proposals for neighbourhood empowerment have not yet been articulated. Town and parish councils should therefore be central to early design work on these arrangements. They offer clear democratic mandate, established community networks, and



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proven capability in delivering tangible local improvements. This should form the building block of any neighbourhood model.

Ringwood Town Council would welcome meaningful involvement in shaping these structures from the outset.

## 6. Boundary changes (Option 1A)

Ringwood Town Council does not support Option 1A. This option fragments the New Forest, separating several parishes into a Southampton/Eastleigh unitary and undermining the coherence of the Forest as a whole. It introduces boundary changes without a compelling public-service or community-identity justification and risks weakening rural representation in both resulting authorities.

## Conclusion

For the reasons above, Ringwood Town Council supports Option 1 as the option that best reflects our identity, geography, and service needs; strengthens local democracy; and maintains the integrity of the New Forest. We would welcome continued engagement with MHCLG as the proposals develop, particularly in relation to neighbourhood governance and the role of town and parish councils.

Yours faithfully,

Town Clerk & Proper Officer

For and on behalf of Ringwood Town Council