



Calls for new regional mayor to kill off plans to abolish Leicestershire's district councils

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The row over the county's political map has flared up again

Council leaders John Boyce, Jonathan Morgan, Terry Richardson, Nick Rushton, Richard Blunt, Phil King, Stuart Bray and Joe Orson

A new East Midlands Mayor role is being called for as an alternative to scrapping Leicestershire's district councils.

Leaders across the county's middle tier of authorities have tried to kill off a plan to abolish them by approaching the Government to ask for a new political set up with a regionally elected mayor.

The leaders of the seven district councils in the county have written to Local Government minister Robert Jenrick saying they back plans to form an East Midlands Combined Authority rather than Leicestershire County Council's plans for a stand alone unitary authority.

The district leaders say their vision would allow greater devolution of power from Whitehall and help them 'match the impact seen within the West Midlands' which already has a combined authority with 12 councils and a directly elected mayor.

The move has been revealed in a private letter sent by the district leaders to [Leicestershire County Council](#) leader Nick Rushton but seen by LeicestershireLive.

Coun Rushton backs a plan to dissolve the seven districts and County Hall and start again with an entirely new authority which has responsibility for all the services currently split between the two layers of local government.

He says the new structure could potentially save £30 million a year, in part by reducing the duplication of roles across the councils.

However district leaders have been fighting the proposal.

The letter has been signed by Conservative council leaders Terry Richardson, of Blaby District Council, Jonathan Morgan, of Charnwood borough Council, Phil King, of Harborough, and Joe Orson, of Melton.

It has also been signed by Stuart Bray and John Boyce, the Liberal Democrat leaders of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council.

North West Leicestershire District Council Tory leader Richard Blunt has not signed it.

What the letter says

The letter says: “The district councils have have significant concerns regarding the business case and felt it had a number of fundamental weaknesses and fell well short of demonstrating how it would add value to Leicestershire by enhancing service outcomes and quality of life for residents.

“A single unitary authority in Leicestershire would be the third largest single unitary in England with the potential to experience many of the problems faced by large unitaries such as Birmingham.

“It would also dramatically reduce democratic accountability which would be exacerbated by the consolidation of power to a ‘single cabinet’ of only 10 elected members.”

It says the proposal is based on ‘oversimplified and financially driven assumptions’.

The district leaders add: “Districts Councils are the housing and planning authorities, we tackle homelessness, collect waste, drive growth and

regenerate town centres, we prevent ill health, we deliver cultural and community services, shape the environment and green spaces and we do all of this and more.

"So much more can be done through greater collaboration without the need to destabilise public services for a generation and for what is ultimately less than three per cent of total expenditure saved.

"The proposal lacks any local consensus and has no support from either the district councils or the MPs in Leicestershire."

The district leaders who have signed the letter have again urged Coun Rushton to drop his unitary plans.

But he told LeicestershireLive: "I'm surprised they are writing to the Government saying they are representing Leicestershire without consulting Leicestershire County Council.

"They're not actually representing Leicestershire because North West Leicestershire hasn't signed up.

"They don't agree with it and I understand some of the others are unhappy that their names have been put on the letter.

"I'll be writing back to them to ask what they mean and what they want.

"Are they talking about a combined authority including Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire?

"They don't seem to have recognised at all that we have the city of Leicester in the middle.

"The only good thing I can see is they have finally accepted the current system is broken where before they were in denial.

"Their solution appears to be another level of bureaucracy with an elected mayor at the top.

"It would be expensive and it doesn't deal with any of the problems councils are facing."

It is so far unclear how having a directly elected East Midlands Mayor could impact on the position of the region's only existing mayor - [Sir Peter Soulsby in Leicester](#).