

Appendix P

A Community Researcher report

Background

The Government is planning to change how councils operate across the country, including in Hampshire. Their plan is known as Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

Currently, Hampshire and the Solent includes 15 district, county and unitary councils:

- Some areas have **‘two tier’ councils** – which means they have Hampshire County Council delivering essential services such as education; roads, social care for older people and safeguarding vulnerable children and adults, and district or borough councils delivering other key services including planning, housing and waste collection.
- The Solent area – Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight – has **single-tier councils** that deliver all services

The Government now plans for these 15 councils to be reorganised into a smaller number.

LGR would not change parish and town councils in Hampshire and the Solent.

Councils in Hampshire and the Solent area have been invited to submit their ideas for their preferred restructure of local government, and the Government will make the final decision.

A number of options of what LGR could look like in Hampshire and the Solent have been considered based on:

- The requirements set out by Government
- Looking at how options would work financially
- Looking at opportunities to transform services for the better
- Speaking to local people and organisations in Hampshire

Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire are proposing that Hampshire and the Solent has four councils: three councils on the Hampshire and Solent area mainland, and a standalone Isle of Wight council.

More information can be found at: www.hants.gov.uk/LGR

Background

Why

Research was required to understand what residents think about the idea that is being proposed, to be considered alongside other information to help shape Hampshire County Council's final proposal to Government this autumn.

What

Qualitative interviews

Hampshire County Council's Ethnic Minority Community Researcher Network spoke to people from ethnic minority communities including people from the following ethnic backgrounds: Caribbean, Asian, South African mixed race, Bengali, Pakistani, Indian, Nigerian, Hong Kong Chinese, Nepalese, Ukrainian, Russian, British African, British Caribbean.

Who

We spoke to respondents from across Hampshire and the cities of Portsmouth and Southampton.

29 respondents in total, ranging in age from 21-72 with more female than male participants (see table below):

	Female	Male	18-30	31-45	46-60	61+
No of respondents	19	10	4	8	13	4

Headline findings

Community Research: Respondents from ethnic minority communities hope for efficient, joined up and improved services and fear disrupted services or their needs being overlooked

Approximately half of respondents aware of LGR

Awareness was largely linked to working in or with the public sector

Potential benefits of the proposed LGR structure focus on improved or more equal provision of services

More efficient, joined up and improved services with equal provision are what respondents hope for from LGR

Concerns about the proposed LGR structure focus around accurately assessing need and providing for it

Understanding needs and providing services for communities is key with respondents concerned about short term disruption and being overlooked in new councils

Notable differences for specific communities

Nepalese respondents were concerned about being overlooked in a larger council. Hong Kong arrivals on British National Overseas were concerned about disrupted democratic representation

Responses were broadly similar to the public engagement survey

Concerns identified by the community researchers broadly matched the consultation survey, with only smaller differences often linked to specific community circumstances

Awareness of LGR was mixed and came largely through employment in the public or charitable sector as well as some public communications

Approximately half of the respondents had prior knowledge of LGR

Approximately half of the respondents had heard of LGR, mostly due to working in the public sector or connected organisations e.g. charities.

A small number of respondents had heard of LGR via news sources, email or public engagement events with local politicians.

This partly reflects confusion by some respondents over existing LG structures

Some respondents, notably in district councils within Hampshire, showed some confusion about which council provided services. This was not seen in the unitary authorities, where respondents were clearer who the provider is.

“It can sometimes be a bit confusing knowing who to go to for what. It is sometimes a bit of a labyrinth to figure out which council is responsible for what.”

“As Southampton is a unitary authority, it's primarily Southampton City Council that provides these services directly”

Respondents valued the council services they used and did not want to see LGR disrupt them. Libraries and household waste and recycling centres were the most recalled services

Recycling centres and libraries were the most frequently mentioned services used by respondents

These appear to be the services top of mind with the most emotional connection for respondents

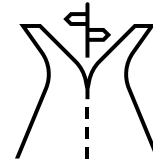
“Hong Kong Connections [happen in libraries]”

“I found the Household Waste Recycling Centre to be a very good service”

“I hope LGR will not affect the [library] service”



Parks, roads, schools and refuse collection were also frequently used services



Potential benefits of LGR focused on efficiency and cost savings as well as creating a more joined up and skilled workforce. Some hope for improved or more equal provision of services

Efficiency / Cost saving / Streamlining	Many respondents felt that LGR “Could be a cost saving exercise in the long run” and that services could be streamlined or made more efficient. They also see the potential for better value for money through economies of scale. “In my opinion, it is an opportunity to think outside the box and initiate new ideas”
Stronger, more joined up approach	Some respondents believed that services could be improved through joining up or using the skills of a combined workforce. “Could mean more services and less confusion about which council does what”. Some also saw opportunities for stronger regional planning, especially in transport and economic development
Improved services	Many hoped that the new organisations could do more for residents or improve local services “Larger councils might mean having more funds for community projects”
More equal provision of services / resources	Some respondents had concerns around fair distribution and funding, particularly for vulnerable groups such as young people, families and minority communities. They expressed the importance of providing the same services in all areas the new councils cover
None/not certain	A significant minority of respondents could not see any benefits from the proposed changes or were not certain what the potential benefits would be. This was a similar theme to the main LGR survey

Concerns focused on not being able to assess or meet local needs, smaller communities being overlooked or quality and availability of services being reduced

Not accurately assessing needs	Some respondents feared merging councils could dilute the distinct character of cities and reduce community voice - "We need a council that genuinely understands the diverse needs". Respondents also saw challenges in gathering and representing the views of both rural and urban communities in one new council
Service quality or availability would reduce	Most respondents expressed concern that the changes would result in lower quality services or even their removal. "Service could be compromised e.g. become like the Dr surgeries where you can't get to see the GP"
Smaller areas or communities will be overlooked	There were significant concerns that larger, newly formed councils could overlook the needs of smaller communities or towns - "I worry about what it means for local services, especially if decisions are made far away." This was notably mentioned by all four Nepalese respondents from Rushmoor, but was also voiced about specific locations too - "How can a big council know what we need here in Fareham?"
Disruption and confusion in the short term	Concern was expressed that the changes would be confusing or poorly understood by communities, especially for those with limited literacy in English. "Big changes could disrupt services, especially for vulnerable families or people with language barriers"
Loss of jobs in the restructure	A few respondents expressed concern that it could mean a loss of jobs - "If they merge councils, who knows how many positions will go?". This may reflect that a significant proportion of respondents worked in or for the public sector.
None/not certain	A few respondents said that they did not have concerns over the changes

N.B – Respondents who had arrived recently from Hong Kong, as part of the British Nationals (Overseas) scheme, expressed concerns about political representation being disrupted e.g. losing contact with elected representatives. This may reflect a concern that is prominent for this community.

Providing high quality and sustainable public services was consistently important for deciding boundaries

Values more important to respondents

- Provides high quality and sustainable public services.
- Ensures council taxpayers receive good services for their money
- Avoids breaking services apart unnecessarily
- Helps the people who need it the most.
- Is financially strong and stable.
- Understands and meets the needs of my local community.
- Doesn't cost too much to set up

Value, quality and sustainability of services dominated the values seen as important for deciding new council boundaries

"The Council needs to be self-funding and can't rely on central government"

"While there might be an initial cost, it is important that in the long run savings are made"

N.B - This order of values is broadly similar to those expressed in the LGR survey with the same top two values – 'Provides high quality and sustainable public services' and 'Ensures council taxpayers receive good services for their money'

Respondents were divided over how to name the new councils

Some felt that naming councils after the key city was a good approach

"Naming it under after the biggest City is the best way – makes it easier to locate"

"I think using the name of a famous city will make an impression on people; they are familiar with the location."

Others felt that was too much like a takeover by the cities

"In general it would feel like a takeover rather than a reorganisation or merger"

"Best to have a completely new name, residents will accept that more than being put under an existing one"

Some respondents felt that simple geography e.g. South, North, East and West was too simple

"South East Council – not truly reflective of the area and location"

Many were keen on including an element of the local geography e.g. Solent, Itchen etc.

"Portchester linked to Portchester Castle – that's a good approach"

Region	Suggested Names
North & Mid Hampshire	Hampshire North Council, Hampshire Downs Council, King Alfred's Way Council
South-West Hampshire	Solent Coast Council, Solent Gateway Council, Itchen & Test Valley Council
South-East Hampshire	Portsmouth and Solent Council, South Coast Council, Spinnaker Council
Other suggestions	Acronym from district names (e.g. South-West, "NEST" - New Forest, Eastleigh, Southampton and Test Valley), South Downs Council