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Dear Ms Rayner,

Resolving the uncertainty around Local Plans and LGR

Welcome back. I imagine your return to the Department will be rather like arriving at Brighton beach after a storm: plenty of debris to clear before anyone can start building again.

I hope you have returned refreshed by the sea air, because your department appears to have spent your absence proving that confusion can, remarkably, become a policy objective.

Your first task should be simple: bring clarity to the chaos surrounding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Local Plans.

At present, councils are being asked to prepare long-term plans while the ground beneath them is constantly shifting. It is rather like someone building a house on moving sand and then questioning why the foundations are unstable.

The Government is asking councils to spend millions of pounds of taxpayers' money preparing plans for authorities that may soon no longer exist. Few accountants would approve a business case where the organisation changes halfway through the investment, yet that is effectively what councils are being asked to do.

We are still waiting for the transitional arrangements promised by MHCLG and for a revised National Planning Policy Framework. Meanwhile, councils are expected to press ahead without knowing the rules of the game.

Local Plans should be shaped by communities, evidence and infrastructure needs. Instead, councils are being forced to navigate a maze of uncertainty while residents quite reasonably ask whether roads, schools, healthcare, water and wastewater capacity will keep pace with development.

East Hampshire District Council supports the delivery of new homes, but sustainable growth cannot be achieved by simply doubling housing numbers overnight and expecting communities to absorb the consequences or the infrastructure to cope. Growth requires more than targets written on a spreadsheet; it requires the infrastructure, certainty and a planning framework to create places where people can thrive.

Government cannot demand a plan-led planning system while making long-term planning increasingly impossible.

The answer is not another layer of complexity. Councils need clarity and consistency. That must include a fundamental rethink of housing numbers that are unrealistic, disconnected from local capacity and impossible to deliver sustainably.

So, welcome back. Your in-tray may already be full, but resolving the uncertainty around Local Plans and LGR would be an excellent place to start. Clear transitional arrangements, a stable planning framework and certainty over future plan-making responsibilities would enable councils to focus on what Government is rightly seeking to achieve: the delivery of sustainable growth, new homes and supporting infrastructure.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Millard', with a stylized, flowing script.

Councillor Richard Millard
Leader of East Hampshire District Council