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Councils slam Hampshire County Council's 'consultation'

Five councils have slammed Hampshire County Council's proposed 'consultation' into how public services in the area could be restructured.

They claim that the consultation document will be issued to residents prematurely and without any meaningful discussion with local councils it directly impacts.

The information pack, together with the questionnaire implies that Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport and Havant Borough Councils and East Hampshire District Council, together with other local authorities in the county are working together on this consultation, which is not the case.

Havant Borough Council Leader Cllr Michael Cheshire said: "There was supposed to be some consultation between Hampshire County Council and Hampshire boroughs and districts. This consultation did not happen and Havant certainly has not signed up or agreed to the content of this public consultation document. Hampshire has gone to public consultation on its own.

"The information is presented in a long and confusing way, it has nothing to do with the 'devolution' of power from central Government to Hampshire's boroughs and districts, it's all about the 'centralising' of power to Hampshire County Council by forming a Hampshire

Unitary Council.

"Furthermore, it fails totally to reflect or emphasis the impact any outcome might have to residents if Hampshire County Council has its way. This is a very sad situation that the residents of Hampshire find ourselves in."

Cllr Ferris Cowper, Leader of East Hampshire District Council, said: "I want to be very clear that we are opposed to Hampshire County Council's plans to create a unitary authority. The county council is deliberately confusing the issue of reorganisation of public services with the Government's initiative on devolving powers to local areas.

"The Solent and South Hampshire Combined Authority plans would enable your local council to take on responsibility for services currently managed by central government and offer residents a better financial deal than the county's idea. It would give residents far more say on how things happen and there would be far more accountability."

Councillor Keith House, Leader of Eastleigh Borough Council, added: "Hampshire's consultation abolishing all borough and district

councils would create a super-powerful Hampshire Council led by a cabinet of 10 councillors responsible for all services provided by the county and 11 borough and district councils.

"Just to be clear, this is not devolution: it's reverse devolution, sucking power up to the centre, rather than dispersing it."

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