

Local Government Review

Zone 5/E8

Eland House

Bressenden Place

London SW1E 5DU

21st June 2007

Cornwall

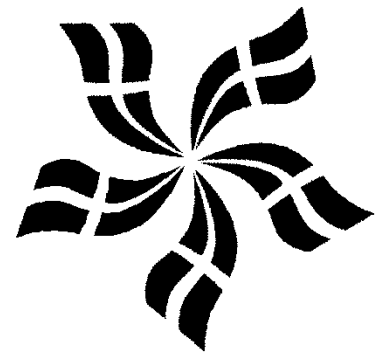
Dear Sir

I am writing on behalf of the Cornish Constitutional Convention to offer its view of the 'One Cornwall' bid and options for Cornwall. The Convention has taken a strong interest in the development of the White Paper and in the ensuing process. It is critical that both tiers of local authority in Cornwall, without consulting each other, opted to respond to the Invitation to Local authorities. The Convention would have preferred it if the two tiers had come together to discuss the White Paper and had considered not simply the Invitation but also the proposals of the Convention which draw substantially upon Chapter 4 of the White Paper.

In 2005 the Convention Chairman was part of a delegation which met John Healey MP at the Treasury to discuss future arrangements for delivering regeneration programmes. This discussion included some outline ideas about future governance, headed 'Unified Governance for a Unified Geography'. These ideas owed much to the thinking which informed the Convention's pamphlet – 'Devolution's Future', which was provided to the then Secretary of State, David Miliband MP. Indeed, Mr Miliband visited Cornwall during 2005 and encouraged us to be 'not afraid to put our heads above the parapet'!

Devolution's Future is set in the context of the emerging thinking about city-regions, or 'civic cities' as referred to recently by Angela E Smith MP at Westminster Hall (April 18th 2007). The Convention asked, if it was intended to develop 'city regions', then, in the interests of ensuring that all parts of the Country are able to experience an equal quality of governance, what might be proposed for areas or regions beyond the influence of 'core cities'. The Convention proposed a new model as a possible answer to this question, suggesting that Cornwall (& the Isles of Scilly, if it wished to participate) would offer an excellent opportunity to pilot such a structure.

The 'Cornish Governance Proposition' postulated the formation of a single organisation for the administration and delivery of all public services in Cornwall including health, education (all tiers), police, local government et al. It would separate strategy from delivery, with an elected over-arching body responsible for strategy, budget, commissioning, performance management and advocacy. Below this, a reformed structure based upon elected, amalgamated local government districts (in Cornwall, 3



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lots of 2) would manage all delivery. The formative process would include establishing a working conference with the government to consider what powers and functions should be transferred to the new organisation in order to make it work. The Proposition included the formation of a Development Company and the potential development of a Multi-Area Agreement with the Isles of Scilly. The Isles of Scilly would also be offered elected representation on the over-arching Body if it wished.

The Convention realised that such a proposal would not fit with the parameters of the Local Government 'invitation' and encouraged both tiers of local government to step away from the bid process and to seek dialogue with Ministers to understand if the development of the 'Cornish Governance Proposition' (CGP) would be helpful and conducive to assisting in developing the thinking and initiatives described in chapter 4 of the White Paper. We regret that neither tier agreed to this, although each (by now developing separate 'bids' under the 'invitation') recognised the merit of the CGP and, in different ways moved towards it as the process matured.

The Convention held talks with a number of public sector delivery bodies including FE colleges, NHS Trusts and the Police. It was encouraged by the interest shown in the ideas and encouraged both tiers to bring together all public sector service deliverers to explore them. Eventually, the 4 districts combining to produce a 'Pathfinder' bid called such a meeting, chaired by Professor Alan Livingston, Principal of University College, Falmouth. The meeting was very positive and the district councils took from this that they might develop their proposals to reflect the underlying concept of the CGP.

Later, on January 23rd, Cornwall Council, in adopting a resolution to submit its 'One Cornwall' bid, also resolved that:

January 23rd 2007

Without prejudice to the submissions made by Cornwall County Council or the district councils, the Leader and CEO of Cornwall County Council convene an urgent meeting of Leaders and CEOs of all Cornish principal authorities to propose an agreement to submit a joint outline proposition for further discussion with her to the Secretary of State to include:

- 1. The formation of a single public-sector organisation for Cornwall to manage and deliver all public services, including health, education, local government, Police and other services;**
- 2. To adopt the three key principles:**
 - Separate strategy from delivery**
 - Embed democracy**
 - Promote subsidiarity**
- 3. To establish an elected, strategic, overarching body for Cornwall (and the Isles of Scilly, if it wishes to participate) responsible for strategy, commissioning, budget, performance management, promotion/advocacy.**

- 4. To invite the Government to jointly convene a ‘working conference’ of local authorities, health, education, Police and other public sector delivery bodies serving Cornwall, together with stakeholders, service users, elected members and partners, to formulate an operational, systemic and business plan to establish a number of elected, area-based, service delivery bodies within the single organisation, tailored to the geographical and social needs of Cornwall.**
- 5. To agree that elected members of the Overarching Body will be unable to seek election to the area-based delivery bodies, and vice versa.**
- 6. To form a delegation agreement with Parish and Town Councils to ensure that services are delivered as close to communities as possible, and that active and positive consultative channels are developed and maintained.**
- 7. To consider an enhanced role in governance processes for the Cornwall Strategic Partnership, which may include scrutiny of elected Bodies.**
- 8. To invite the Isles of Scilly and the Government to discuss the possible formation of a multi-area agreement with Isles of Scilly**
- 9. To jointly develop proposals to establish a Cornwall Development Company (Agency) responsible for driving sustainable and productive economic development for Cornwall (and the Isles of Scilly, if it wishes to participate).**
- 10. To submit with the proposal a request for discussions with the Secretary of State, to include a delegated review of electoral boundaries to provide suitable arrangements for democratic representation throughout the new organisation.**

In essence the Council’s resolution looks like this: ‘Here’s what we are submitting according to the rules, and here’s what we really want to do!’

Throughout the preliminary presentations and conferences leading up to the submission both districts and county were kind enough to encourage organizers and facilitators to include the Convention. This means that the Convention’s proposition has been aired before a significant audience of stakeholders. Feedback includes the view that, by undertaking a merger of all public services within a single organization, it would be possible to establish a common set of ‘back-office’ systems which would generate significant efficiencies and savings and improve quality for service users. The structural proposals would also offer the opportunity to achieve genuine cost savings in service delivery and would significantly ease confusion about how to access often complex service packages.

The proposal to invite the Government to allow a delegated review of electoral arrangements to provide a bespoke settlement appropriate to the structures and functions being put in place would clearly resolve perhaps the most difficult dilemma exposed in the present project.

The Cornish Constitutional Convention remains convinced that the CGP is the best way to develop a governance set-up which would be sustainable, could adequately meet future challenges, and would place the interests of service users and tax payers at the heart of future arrangements. The Convention also believes that the delegations required to make the proposition workable would foster a lasting new engagement with governance which would stimulate the right degree of economic performance to enable Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to consolidate its progress and to enable it to generate positive revenue to the Exchequer in years to come. The CGP would also strike a balance between localism and strategic leadership which would be appropriate for Cornwall.

The Convention also believes that this approach would provide a model capable of being tested and applied elsewhere, and that this would move forward the important development of city-regions, especially as the means of stimulating provincial economic growth, promoting social cohesion and invigorating environmental sustainability. By establishing a new form of organization, which would include democratic accountability but with a more integrated relationship with the centre which would encourage confidence in sustainable devolution, the Convention believes it is offering a proposition which offers substantial gains to both Cornwall, the country as a whole, and to the future of good governance.

The Convention takes the view that the 'One Cornwall' bid is both flawed and unsupported. It is incapable of adequately meeting the challenges of future integrated service delivery and does not offer a suitable vehicle to which new functions, duties and powers could be confidently delegated. It should be rejected. We would ask Ministers to consider that a rejection in favour of establishing a mature process for developing the Cornish Governance Proposition would be consistent with the direction of travel of the White Paper, and would enable the Government's objectives for consensually supported governance arrangements to achieve incisive and lasting efficiencies and economies to be realized in an imaginative, inspiring and sustainable way.

The Convention would be very happy to meet Ministers in order to more fully describe their thinking, if that would be helpful. It hopes to see a refreshed dialogue between the Government and Cornwall arising from a measured rejection of the One Cornwall bid. There is good reason to suggest that such a dialogue moving towards the CGP would excite a very strong consensus of support amongst stakeholders, the communities and the voluntary and private sectors. Cornwall's track record of effectively implementing complex change agendas, such as Objective 1, should offer encouragement to Ministers that this is an excellent moment to develop a new way of doing things.

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Bert Biscoe
Chairman, Cornish Constitutional Convention