

To all Members and Friends of the Cornish Constitutional
Convention

30th January 2007

A Good Start to 2007

Dear Colleague,

I am writing following the meeting at Cornwall Council on 23rd January at which the Council decided to submit a bid to the Local Government Review being carried out by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The District Councils have submitted an alternative bid. Both have prepared their bids within the rules of the Invitation to Local Authorities, which was published at the same time as the White Paper.

Throughout the process of discussion and presentations which has been undertaken over the past few weeks I have been able to make the Convention's case for a more innovative and bold approach, founded on the objectives of the White Paper. I have been welcomed by both County and District Councils, and this is a mark of the influence and reputation of the Convention.

As you may recall, the Convention published a pamphlet – *Devolution's Future* – in 2004. This asked a question of the Government as it was developing its thinking about 'city-regions' – "*if you do city-regions then what arrangements will there be for other parts of the country?*" We offered a proposition for reforming the governance of Cornwall, suggesting that this might be a model which could be applied elsewhere.

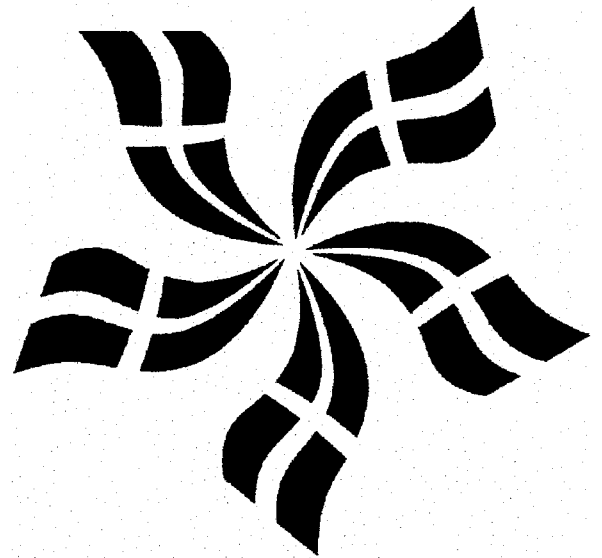
This model has matured into the '*Cornish Governance Proposition*' and has been the subject of presentations we have made recently to the Voluntary Sector Forum, Cornwall Economic Forum, Trade Unions, Parish & Town Councils, Cornwall Strategic Partnership and others.

The proposition takes the objective of a Cornish Assembly and asks: '*What would an assembly actually do?*' It then outlines a new approach to governance for Cornwall which involves establishing a single organisation for the whole public sector in Cornwall – ie: health, education, local government and other services. It proposes a strategic, elected over-arching Body with major strategic powers, including national and regional functions. It goes on to propose an area-based service delivery structure with a democratic management board, delegation to local councils, and accountability to the Overarching Body.

The Proposition includes forming an agreement with the Isles of Scilly and the establishment of a Cornish Development Agency, and proposes new, tailored electoral arrangements aimed at ensuring that the new organisation is able to be clearly and properly accountable to the community of Cornwall (and the Isles of Scilly if it wishes to participate).

At the Council Meeting the Liberal Democrats incorporated the proposal to seek agreement with the district councils to submit an outline proposition for discussion with the Secretary of State into the resolution approving the Councils bid prepared within the guidelines of the Invitation to Councils.

Work is now going on to bring together the principal authorities to discuss the matter. This is a significant development for the Convention because it brings it together with Cornwall Council (and hopefully the district councils) to approach the Secretary of State with a proposal to open a dialogue with the Government about the future governance of



Cornwall, and with an agenda set by Cornwall. In terms of the objective of the Convention, this is significant progress, which is being welcomed by Cornwall's MPs amongst others.

Some might say that it appears as though the Convention has 'gone soft' on campaigning for a Cornish Assembly by using the term 'Over Arching Body' and engaging in a process aimed at reforming local government. Your Steering Group took the view that it is what the Assembly will do, what powers it will exercise and how well it will perform in taking on such tasks that matters. It is clear that, at the moment, the Government is shy of the term 'assembly' – therefore, the Steering group has determined to campaign for the functions and responsibilities and worry about the label later. This is a pragmatic approach to ensure we achieve our goal.

The events of 23rd January have moved us closer to our goal, and the Convention has gained in stature and influence over the past year or so. It is a careful path we must tread, but it is one which will bear fruit if we are patient, committed and – as I always stress – cheerful. There is a long way to go and there will be pitfalls. We can make gestures and create clamour – or we can achieve our goal. I hope that you consider the journey worthwhile.

Of course, it is that time of year when the Membership Secretary's voice appears on the answering machine. I hope that this news, which is the product of much discussion and preparation by your Steering Group, will encourage you to renew your subscription, recruit new members and be confident that we slowly but surely march closer to our goal. We hope to mount some events during 2007 and trust that we will see each other during the next few months.

Thank you for your support.

With best wishes, as ever,



Bert Biscoe
Chair

I enclose a copy of the proposition passed by Cornwall Council on 23rd January 2007.