

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Opportunity for Cornwall

Cornwall County Council welcomes the invitation in the Local Government White Paper to develop a new system of local governance for Cornwall, fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

Our strategic aim is to transform local government for Cornwall and to achieve a strong sustainable community for one and all by providing:

- stronger leadership,
- greater local responsiveness, and
- improved value for money

We propose to unify the existing structure of six districts and county council into a new single authority for Cornwall. This new council will provide stronger leadership, empower our citizens and help communities to work together to realise economic, social and environmental objectives. In particular, we will build on the success of the European funded Objective One Programme and deliver its successor, the Convergence Programme (2007-2013), transforming Cornwall into a region of innovation and prosperity. At the same time we will strengthen our local communities, capitalise upon Cornwall's reputation as a 'green peninsula' and meet the challenge of climate change.

We will negotiate that powers and responsibilities are drawn down from regional and central government, so that decisions about Cornwall are made in Cornwall. These include a greater say in strategic planning, economic development, transport infrastructure and housing. In particular the formation of a Cornwall Development Agency to help transform the economy.



The creation of a single council for Cornwall will be a significant step towards meeting our aspiration for a more radical and ambitious model of governance, with closer integration of all public services at strategic and local level; a shift from a model of local government to one of local governance.

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1.1 The Case for Change

Cornwall's peninsula location in the extreme southwest makes it one of the most remote, peripheral and isolated parts of Britain. It has a resident population of 520,000, with a keen sense of local identity, independence and pride built around small communities. Cornwall has a rich industrial and cultural heritage and an outstanding natural environment. However, the picturesque landscape masks high levels of deprivation, a low value added economy and poor levels of productivity.

At present, local governance comprises one county, six districts and 209 town and parish councils. There are 331 county and district councillors and over 2300 parish and town councillors: a total of over 2600 elected representatives.

A strong voice for Cornwall

The current two-tier system hinders Cornwall's capacity to act strategically and to respond quickly and decisively to changing circumstances and new opportunities.

The new Authority will:

- provide a single, strong voice for Cornwall with an increased capacity to operate at regional, national and trans-national levels and be a more effective advocate for Cornwall, and
- be in a stronger position to successfully negotiate and deliver the devolved responsibilities we seek from regional and national government.

A strong voice for local communities

The new Council will:

- address the real confusion experienced by our partners and the people of Cornwall,

- increase the accountability and effectiveness of representation by having a smaller number of better supported frontline councillors with greater ability to affect change in their area,
- have a greater customer focus, with an enhanced capacity to deploy resources and specialists more effectively to meet the needs of Cornwall's people, and
- devolve powers to local communities via local councillors

Efficiency, effectiveness and value for money

The current system of local government in Cornwall is inefficient. With six councils delivering parallel statutory and non-statutory services there is considerable duplication of effort. This is inefficient and costly. There are also inconsistencies in the quality of service delivery across the county.

The new council for Cornwall will:

- benefit from economies of scale, making significant efficiency savings by bringing together public services in Cornwall in a more coordinated and focussed way,
- be more effective, able to focus resources, meet new challenges and deliver Local Area Agreement outcomes, and
- have greater purchasing power and deliver value for money by reducing transaction costs and duplication and by adopting standard accounting, IT and performance monitoring systems.

Public consultation

The recently commissioned MORI survey has demonstrated public support for the creation of a single local authority in Cornwall.

68% of people surveyed would support the creation of one council for Cornwall if it provides long term

savings which more than cover the one off costs of making the change

66% of people agree that we need a single council to provide a strong voice for Cornwall and to represent us nationally

Stakeholder support

The County Council has engaged with its partners and stakeholders and has sought to accommodate their views in this proposal. They have told us they welcome the potential changes to the structure of local government in Cornwall and that they will support the move to a single local authority in the county.

1.2 A New Framework of Governance

We propose that the county and district councils are replaced by a single elected body, complemented by enhanced arrangements at local community level. During the transition period it is proposed that the Council will consist of 82 members representing the current county council divisions. However, these divisions do not reflect local communities and there are concerns that this number will be insufficient to meet the increased demands on the work of councillors. We believe that approximately 100 members would be more appropriate, reflecting the dispersed rural nature of Cornwall. The new authority will work with the Boundary Commission to carry out a review of the county's electoral divisions, number of members and method of election. This work will incorporate provision to establish single member divisions across Cornwall.



Political structure and member roles

A Leader and Executive will be indirectly elected and serve a four-year term. This system will enable Cornwall to build upon its strong tradition of independent local politics and facilitate the representation of all councillors. The Executive

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members will be responsible for strategic leadership, monitoring the performance of the authority, and representing Cornwall to the outside world.

Non-executive members will provide the pivotal link between the new authority and the people of Cornwall. Local members will have enhanced powers, an increased delegated budget and access to resources, to deliver the local agenda in their areas. They will have dedicated professional and administrative support in their area. Although members will be asked to take on a greater role than is currently the case for county and district councillors, it is envisaged that the way in which they perform their duties will evolve.

We will also develop an enhanced role for the 2000 plus town and parish councillors, to strengthen democracy at a local level.

1.3 Serving the Citizen

Access to services

Improving the accessibility of local government and the services it provides is a key part of this proposal for our rural area. We believe people should be able to access services in ways that are convenient for them and utilising up to date technology where they choose to do so.

To achieve this aim the Cornwall Council will:

- establish a single, user friendly telephone contact centre to handle front line interactions with service users, with back office specialists free to concentrate on more complex issues,
- establish a network of 'one stop shops' across the county, where people can meet face to face with councillors and officers, and

- develop new interactive services based on digital television, the Internet and related multi-media platforms.

An organisational structure to support enhance service delivery

The new organisation will be structured on the principles of decentralisation and commitment to strong strategic working. Powers will be devolved to as local a level as possible, and with greater links to the community via local councillors.

1.4 Delivering Local Accountability and Responsiveness

Community Networks

Community Networks will be created, based around the main towns and their hinterlands. The Networks will facilitate public engagement in the decision making process, more effectively connecting communities with local government. The Networks will play a key role in encouraging public participation in shaping their local communities, through the development of 'community action plans' to integrate existing statutory and voluntary community planning functions.

This Community Network model draws upon successful 'localism' practice from elsewhere in the UK and Cornwall's experience of the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative.

An enhanced role for town and parish councils

Cornwall's first tier local councils have a vital role to play in delivering the localism agenda, but vary significantly in size and capacity. Their capability for taking on extra responsibilities varies and careful consideration will be given to the types of service and level of responsibility that will be delegated.

The proposed changes to the structure of the principal authorities will seek, as a priority, agreement of new charters with town and parish councils, to enhance their capacity and strengthen their role.

1.5 The Role of Partnerships in the New Structure

Cornwall Strategic Partnership

The new authority will play a central role in building on Cornwall's successful record of partnership working, by providing leadership and support to the Cornwall Strategic Partnership.

Developing the Local Area Agreement

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is at the heart of public sector delivery, reflecting the need for joint actions to meet present and future challenges. Our proposal to unify the seven local authorities will make a significant difference to the effectiveness of LAA arrangements by streamlining engagement and facilitating greater involvement at a local level, working with partners and the Voluntary and Community Sector. We want to use the effectiveness that a single council will deliver to improve outcomes for the people of Cornwall and undertake to 'stretch' our targets for LAA outcomes.

1.6 Cost Effective, High Quality Services

Real and ongoing savings

Our proposal will create ongoing savings of over £17m after unification. Taking into account the additional costs of localism (£2.3m), this will leave £15.4m net savings for reinvestment in services or for



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limiting increases in council tax. Savings will result from rationalisation of support services, reducing the number of management posts, improving commissioning and procurement practices, removing duplication of effort and increasing capacity to generate income through investment and debt restructuring.

Transition costs

There has been a robust and realistic assessment of transition costs which includes redundancy and early retirement payments, unifying IT systems, providing a sound IT infrastructure, audit and finance costs. We estimate that this will cost some £19m and are confident that the reorganisation will pay for itself within two years.

A key commitment in our proposal is to follow best practice to ensure that all staff who currently work for the seven local authorities are treated fairly and equitably.

Use of savings

The savings delivered by restructuring will be reinvested in frontline services or used to keep council tax rises to a minimum. Currently, council tax paid by householders varies between the districts. Under the new arrangements there will be a requirement to move to a uniform level of council tax across the county with the rate capped by the increase of the lowest existing council tax level.

1.7 Transition Arrangements

The Government has indicated that the full transfer of functions to a single authority in Cornwall would take place in April 2009. The democratic and corporate core of the new organisation would be operational from that date. Members would be elected in May 2008 with the powers of a shadow authority to oversee preparations for implementation.

The transition process will be managed by a dedicated team who would prepare and work to a robust and agreed management plan. The team would report to the shadow authority. Wherever possible, service delivery models and organisational structures would be prepared before April 2009. This would enable integration of some functions from the 1st April 2009. Phased integration of other services would take place after 1st May 2009, in a timeframe consistent with the payback period for transition costs. This managed approach to service redesign and integration would secure maximum benefit for the people of Cornwall whilst ensuring the ongoing delivery of services

1.8 Conclusion

Our proposal to meet the challenges of the Government White Paper is realistic, cost effective and sensible. It offers Cornwall the prospect of better local services, improved transparent local governance arrangements and a stronger, strategic voice. The proposal also holds out the prospect of promoting Cornwall's long held ambition to draw down many of those decision making processes that are presently undertaken by regional and national government. It is the best deal for Cornwall.