

3. THE CASE FOR CHANGE

3.1 Introduction

Delivering the objectives outlined above requires a strategic approach to the governance of Cornwall. The current structure of local government in Cornwall, the foundations of which were laid many years ago, is not well suited to the demands of the 21st Century – a century in which the economic, social and environmental realities of our lives requires local government to be more accountable and more responsive to the needs of its people.

At the moment public services are provided by one county, six district and 209 town and parish councils. Democracy is served by local people elected to these three different layers of local government. The number of different councils doing similar things is costly and confusing. Local people are unclear who delivers what, where to go to raise issues or concerns, who their democratic representatives are and what council tax is spent on.

Other organisations such as health and police authorities, local businesses and community and voluntary groups can find themselves dealing with any number of councils to achieve simple goals. Cornwall's ability to fight its corner is weakened by the lack of a single clear voice to articulate the needs and concerns of the region, to promote its success and seize opportunities.

In our proposals the current structure of two tier local government will be enhanced on three levels:

- local government will be empowered at a strategic level,
- the people of Cornwall will be more effectively represented and engaged in the decision making process, and
- duplication of effort will be reduced and efficiency enhanced

3.2 A strong voice for Cornwall

A recognised weakness of local government in Cornwall is that it is disadvantaged at the strategic level. Many of the decisions which affect Cornwall are taken outside the county, both at a national and regional level. Regional institutions lack democratic accountability and resonance with community identity. Both national and regional government are too heavily engaged in micromanagement at the local level. There is a strong case for greater freedoms

and flexibilities more locally; applying the test of 'subsidiarity'. At present local government finds it difficult to engage in a coordinated and effective way at regional and local levels. This is especially difficult for district councils.

A new authority for Cornwall will seek to explore, with its partners, the negotiation of a new agreement with central government, one that sets out a clear vision and takes advantage of opportunities for the strategic coordination of public sector activity. The agreement will outline the case for the devolution of powers from central and regional government. This will include responsibilities for health, transport, housing and spatial planning, economic development and regeneration, learning and skills, environment and heritage, community safety and arts, sport and culture.

The scope and method of these proposals for devolution will vary across service areas. The new council will seek an agreement with the government and regional bodies for the establishment of a Cornwall Development Agency to have a greater say in the distribution and utilisation of economic regeneration funds within the county.

A Cornwall Development Agency

Cornwall has delivered a successful Objective One Programme through strong partnership working and is now poised to build on this through the Convergence Programme. We believe that the time is right to establish a Cornwall Development Agency taking on a range of functions from regional bodies; improving accountability and local delivery to achieve economic development and regeneration priorities in Cornwall.

Similarly, the county has a nationally recognised transport strategy – ‘Connecting Cornwall’ – and we will argue for a greater say in the use of transport funding to meet Cornwall’s needs. We will also seek to take forward existing proposals for the formation of a Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health and Wellbeing Board to fund and oversee public health projects.

City regions

We are encouraged by the government’s commitment in the white paper to continue discussions with towns and cities and to use the joint review of sub national economic development being carried forward by the Department for Communities and Local Government, Her Majesty’s Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry to establish how the government can best devolve powers and resources to regions and local authorities. We also welcome the related consultation paper, ‘The Role of City Development Companies in English Cities and City-Regions’. Cornwall has all the attributes of a dispersed city (or ‘polycentric city region’) and we believe that an approach which provides greater accountability for decisions locally, coupled with strong local leadership will enable us to deliver sustainable growth and reduce inequalities. However, we believe that unification and the increased capacity this will bring is an essential prerequisite.

A model of devolved governance for Cornwall will provide the county with the strategic capacity to deliver national and local objectives for wealth creation, sustainability and community cohesion. Devolution will give the people of Cornwall the ability to have a greater level of influence over resources that are currently directed from beyond the county.

Convergence Programme for Cornwall

By 2013, Cornwall’s economy could be transformed with new businesses, better connections to the rest of the world and should be well on the way to becoming one of the leading ‘green’ economies in Europe.

That is the exciting vision set out in the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Convergence Programme which will spend £270m over the years between 2007 and 2013. The money will come from the European Regional Development Fund and will be complemented with funding from the European Social Fund (ESF).

Cornwall is eligible for structural funds from the European Union (EU) to help develop the local economy, which currently lags behind other areas across Europe. The funding is intended to narrow the gaps in development and economic performance among the regions of Europe and EU Member States. Cornwall’s current European funding programme (Objective One) runs from 2000 until the end of March 2007.

Cornwall boasts the ambition, capacity and creativity necessary to take a leading role in driving economic development, delivering the Convergence Programme and realising the ambitions of local businesses and communities.

3.3 A strong voice for local communities

Cornwall exhibits many of the symptoms of a failing democracy. Voter turnout has been consistently low in district and county elections. The public are also confused with regard to which councils are responsible for which services, with the result that they feel unsure who to hold to account for service failings.

While this 'democratic deficit' is widely recognised, questions remain regarding how best to respond. Attention has been given to offering alternative opportunities for citizen participation, beyond traditional practices such as voting. Our proposals look beyond the simplistic notion that the effectiveness of democracy increases in line with the number of members elected in a given area. We suggest instead that a smaller number of more powerful frontline councillors will constitute a more accountable and outcome orientated model of representation.



The restructuring of local government in Cornwall offers an opportunity to bring decisions and services nearer the people they affect. We recognise that initiatives will work differently in different areas, and we will develop new and innovative ways of working beyond the 'one size fits all' approach.

A new localism agenda will offer opportunities to empower councillors in their community leadership role, have a greater influence over decisions and budgets that affect their communities and enable them to forge stronger links with partners from other agencies. We will strengthen and enhance the Cornwall Strategic Partnership (CSP) to play a key role in the future governance of Cornwall and it will be reinvigorated by the creation of a direct link with local communities through the formation of Community Networks.

Our proposals for devolution, greater community engagement and empowerment are an essential element to achieve our aim to create sustainable communities in Cornwall. By encouraging and enabling people to engage and become actively involved in shaping the areas in which they live, the needs of existing and future communities are more likely to be met

Leadership and Empowerment

Our proposals for greater community empowerment initiatives described in this proposal represent a shift away from a model of local democracy that relies almost exclusively on political representation. Instead it is suggested that the efforts of elected members should be complemented by the actions of community leaders, voluntary groups, civic associations and individual members of the public.

The configuration of the proposed Community Networks, and the constitution of the new authority, will ensure that the coordinating role of locally elected councillors is enhanced. At the same time, they will open up aspects of the policy making process to a wider group of stakeholders, thereby enhancing civic life and enabling genuinely sustainable communities to develop.

3.4 Efficiency, effectiveness and value for money

The current system of local government in Cornwall is inefficient. While the county and district councils and their partner organisations have taken advantage of some opportunities to provide services jointly and to share certain back office functions, a significant degree of institutional separation and duplication remains.

Our proposals present an opportunity to accelerate and extend a programme of joint working towards its logical conclusion. The aim must be to deliver a uniformly high level of service to all the residents of Cornwall.

Partnership working in two tier areas is notoriously complicated and unnecessarily time consuming. Every countywide and regional stakeholder has to negotiate with seven local government partners who often adopt different positions on the same subject. This not only provides a barrier to delivering partnership agendas; it invariably leads to blurred accountability, duplication of effort and confusion.

There are significant savings and efficiencies to be made by bringing together public services in a more coordinated and strategically focussed way. Larger strategic authorities can demonstrate considerable benefits in economies of scale.

A critical issue for Cornwall has been its capacity to deliver strong leadership in areas such as planning, housing and the provision of infrastructure. Limited success has been made in combining expertise across the district councils and although some countywide initiatives are in place, the need for seven representatives (often similar experts in their field) is hugely inefficient in the use of scarce resources. For example, an effective planning system is recognised by government as key to successful 'place shaping' and for economic progress. Yet progress in achieving the government's aims for the new system of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) introduced in 2004 has been slow and patchy. The streamlining of the planning process in Cornwall and the better deployment of skills and expertise will be a major prize in a unified system. This will enable more effective delivery of the housing required to meet community needs and supporting infrastructure.

3.5 Public consultation

The county council commissioned research to support the preparation of this bid document. The Department of Geography at the Combined University in Cornwall (CUC) was engaged to conduct a series of focus groups with local people. Subsequently Ipsos MORI was commissioned to undertake a telephone poll of 1,000 Cornish residents, representative of the population of Cornwall as a whole on the subject of local government services, structures and public engagement. Fieldwork took place in early December. The survey was conducted to Market Research Society codes of practice and is statistically reliable. Overall, there was support for the creation of a structure with one council for Cornwall.

The MORI survey highlighted the following:

- 64% of local people think that the current system of local government, with the district and county councils, is confusing and only 27% of people know that there are two councils providing the main local government services. 71% of people agreed that it would be clearer who is responsible for local services if there was a single council for Cornwall.
- 68% of people 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.



a strong sustainable community for one and all

- 88% percent of people surveyed would like a single point of contact where all their council queries can be answered and 74% said that they did not mind where in Cornwall the council's main offices are, as long as they can contact them when they need to.

There was also support for councillors and communities to have more influence and power to improve their areas. However, people did not generally associate the number of councillors with the likelihood of progress occurring.

- 52% of respondents said that it wouldn't matter to them if there were fewer councillors representing them and their area.
- 83% of people said there should be a greater role for local councillors in the delivery of some local services and 75% maintained that local councillors should have small budgets to deal with local problems.
- 84% of people would be more likely to get involved in local decision making if their local councillor had more power to get things done.

3.6 Conclusion

A unified structure of local government for Cornwall will improve:

Engagement with the other strategic players

Greater capacity to operate inter-regionally and develop and manage external relationships and partnerships; greater capacity to develop integrated services through the establishment of joint service planning and provision.

Advocacy

Representing the concerns of Cornwall's communities in joint arrangements and beyond.

Synergy

A single body will be able to provide a more consistent approach that builds upon natural synergies. Historic and natural environment services and sports, arts and culture are good examples.

Accessibility to services

Clearer access, accountability and local flexibility, responding to the individual in the local community.

Organisational capacity

To deal with new or unexpected challenges such as Convergence Funding and World Heritage Site Status. The experience of dealing with the requirements of Best Value, political modernisation, Objective 1, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process and the Gershon efficiency targets are evidence of this.

Purchasing power

Economies of scale that will give it greater purchasing power. This capability will not only enable it to secure economies and efficiency in purchasing, but will also give it the capacity to act as an effective client for contracted services.

Staff recruitment and retention

Better able to offer career paths for professional, administrative, technical, operational and managerial staff, making a stronger cumulative impact on the economy of Cornwall. Further, it will be able to invest in training and development programmes which ensure ongoing investment in staff at all levels.



Specialist Functions

A single body will be able to sustain specialist functions without the need for problematic joint arrangements and will avoid the duplication that currently exists.

Provision of specialist services

Strategic authorities are better placed to operate and maintain specialist services.

Performance monitoring and inspection

A single body will produce savings in the inspection of local government and its services through the adoption of standard accounting, IT systems and performance monitoring across the public sector. This

would improve the accountability of local government services to the council tax payers of Cornwall, as well as to central government and the regulators of local government services.

Reduction in transaction costs

Partnership working in Cornwall involves large numbers of organisations. By reducing the number of bodies involved, transaction costs will be substantially reduced.

Tackling the difficult issues

A single body makes it easier to tackle the difficult issues under the general power of well being, that in traditional two tier areas may fall between two stools.