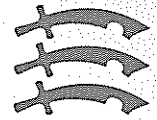


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06 OCT 2008

Mr Max Caller
Boundary Committee
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 2HW

Date: 19 September 2008
Our Ref: JK/km
Your Ref:

Dear Mr Caller

Boundary Committee's draft proposals for unitary local government

I am writing to respond to the Boundary Committee's draft proposals for unitary local government in Norfolk, Suffolk and Devon. Essex County Council remains committed to multi-tier local government, but for those areas where unitary authorities are to be introduced, I would like to express my support for county level unitary authorities.

Under the Government's initial invitation for unitary proposals, the ability to evidence affordability; a cross-section of support; strategic leadership; neighbourhood empowerment; and capacity to deliver value for money were identified as prerequisites for success. If unitary local government is to be introduced at all, and assuming these outcomes remain desirable, I would argue that a single, county-level unitary is the best governance structure for any area. It is clear to me that alternative arrangements should be considered only where substantial evidence suggests that these would deliver greater benefit across all five criteria.

With this in mind, I am pleased to note that your initial proposals support the creation of county-level unitary authorities Devon and Norfolk – the largest county level unitary authorities currently proposed for England. As Chief Executive of one of England's largest county councils, I find this particularly encouraging. I have long opposed the view that neighbourhood empowerment is best delivered by small-scale authorities. Any suggestion that smaller is either more local or more responsive is a dangerous myth that needs debunking. Norfolk and Devon have developed innovative approaches to address local empowerment issues – it good to see these recognised in the committee's proposals.

I am however concerned that the committee's draft proposals favour a two unitary structure in Suffolk. Research and experience shows that creating multiple unitary councils in an area does not deliver savings to the public purse. In an increasingly challenging financial environment, any unnecessary costs require cuts to local services. Such service cuts would be all the more damaging in a two unitary Suffolk where two small councils would struggle to deliver value for money from day one.

There are also serious concerns about the capacity of smaller councils to deliver specialist services from a small population base. There are similar concerns about the ability of smaller councils, such as the proposed rural Suffolk UA, to provide these services to



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geographically dispersed populations. Larger authorities have the scale and capacity necessary to deliver more effective services in challenging circumstances – further reflection on the Committee's draft proposals must take this into account.

At a time of increasing financial pressure on public services, government at all levels could better focus its efforts on delivering services rather than on expensive and disruptive restructure. Here in Essex, county, district and parish councils are committed to making three-tier local government work for our citizens.

We recognise, of course, that unitary local government will now become a reality for many. It is vital that, where structural changes are made, these improve the capacity of local authorities to successfully deliver services. Local government exists to serve local communities; we must therefore recognise that, where change is required, county-level unitary authorities are the only viable option.

Yours sincerely



Joanna Killian
Chief Executive

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