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25 September 2008

Max Caller OBE  
Chairman  
Boundary Committee for England  
Trevelyan House  
Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW

Dear Mr Caller

## **Response to the Boundary Committee's draft proposal for unitary local government arrangements in Devon**

Teignbridge District Council debated its response at Full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2008. This debate followed consultation with public, partners, stakeholders and staff, the feedback from which informed a series of Member workshops which encompassed participation from Devon County Council Members and officers.

The Council's Executive met at the conclusion of the Full Council debate and resolved to respond as set out below on behalf of the Council.

In the context of the limited choice presented by the Boundary Committee's draft proposal, Teignbridge's preferred option is for one Devon unitary, on the current Devon County Council boundary and excluding Plymouth and Torbay.

However, Teignbridge Council does have serious reservations concerning the draft proposal. Public consultation<sup>1</sup> on the draft proposal established that 26% of Teignbridge residents favoured the idea of a new Devon unitary authority, with 71% saying they did not support the draft proposal. (The remaining 3% required further information in order to be able to reach an informed view).

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<sup>1</sup> 408 local residents commented as a result of 9 public consultation days, 5 static displays and individual views by email, post and through the council's website

Reasons for the lack of support varied from “too large an area and too diverse a community for one authority” to “very remote” and “not focused on the needs of local people”. A number of comments from residents and stakeholders requested more detail and evidence to enable them to make a firm and informed decision.

Local people were clear that they did not support a separate Exeter & Exmouth authority, with 81% of those consulted saying that Exeter should remain within a Devon council. Teignbridge Council is not persuaded on the evidence that there is a robust economic or social case to justify the creation of an Exeter & Exmouth authority.

Teignbridge Council remains committed to, and focussed on, ensuring that local people continue to have a strong voice in any new unitary or alternative local government arrangements and that the Government’s agenda of strong and prosperous communities is enshrined within any new unitary Council(s) serving Devon.

The empowerment of local people and local leadership and engagement is key. However, public consultation confirmed that the local public is struggling with the concept of how this can be achieved and progressed in a huge, diverse county, both in terms of geography and community needs. The proposed Community Boards have generated strong views. Of those who participated in the consultation run by Teignbridge Council, 19% agreed that Community Boards would be a good way forward. However, although a more local arrangement, 63% viewed them as an extra layer that is not required. Teignbridge Council has reservations that the Community Boards, as suggested, would not provide real opportunities to improve local service delivery, deliver local priorities and build capacity. Also, they would present logistical difficulties for key partner organisations such as Health and Police in the context of capacity to effectively engage at an appropriate level with so many Community Boards. Alternative options need to be identified to investigate whether better community engagement and place shaping could be supported by other means. However, should Community Boards be created, greater detail and clarity is required, linked to a sound business case, to ensure all communities have the opportunity to engage and be heard.

Teignbridge is also mindful of the difficulties of transport around Devon and the difficulties that many, especially vulnerable people, have in accessing services. It is imperative that any transition to a unitary authority has regard to these local difficulties and ensures that neither the level of service provision, nor access to any service, is reduced, nor the opportunities for continuous improvement diminished.

Teignbridge Council has significant concerns that a single Devon unitary authority would create a democratic deficit in terms of representation in the context of current proposals of 100 – 110 councillors for a new Devon unitary council. This would give a representation of between 7,501 and 6,819 per councillor. By contrast, the application of a similar ratio as in Cornwall’s 123 councillors equating to 4,323 population per councillor, would result in

173 new unitary councillors for Devon. We believe the number of Councillors in the draft proposal would limit the number of local people who would stand for election as the 'professional' full-time role required could focus on a much narrower section of the community being able to apply. The representation would also lead to a potential dilution of the Community Leadership role as Devon has smaller communities.

It is critical to take into account the future growth in population across Devon when evaluating the most effective form of local government for the County. This growth gives a projected increase for Teignbridge alone of 54,000 people by 2026<sup>2</sup>. Flexibility will need to be incorporated into any new ward structure, if RSS figures are agreed, as these indicate a potential 10,000 population per unitary councillor. The imbalance of councillor/elector ratios also needs to be evaluated against the exceptionally large and rural geographical nature of the proposed authority.

We acknowledge the potential for efficiency savings but remain unconvinced that the issues set out above fit happily with the Government's agenda of place shaping, community engagement and the creation of sustainable communities.

A majority of 83% of Teignbridge residents who took part in the consultation felt that current two tier arrangements are working well and should remain in place. We acknowledge that this is not an option you are empowered to consider or on which you are prepared to receive comments. We simply note here for information that Teignbridge will debate in the Autumn whether or not it would be in the best interests of customers in Teignbridge specifically, and Devon in general, to make representations to the Secretary of State concerning enhanced two-tier local government.

In the context of remaining local government arrangements, Teignbridge Council requests the Boundary Committee to give consideration to the inter-relationship of planning and other functions between Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks and any proposed new unitary authority(ies).

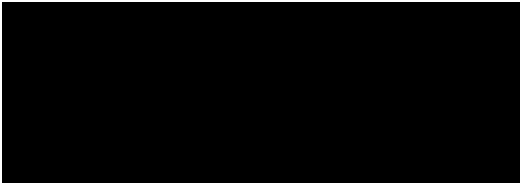
Teignbridge Council considers that there were other concepts in the original submissions which would have greater benefits for local people and which would still achieve very significant efficiencies over and above the draft proposal(s) put forward by the Boundary Committee. We recognise that this may be due to the limited brief given to the Boundary Committee which did not allow proper consideration of all the possible unitary solutions for Devon.

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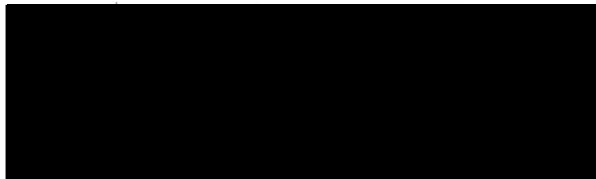
<sup>2</sup> Based on a projected population increase of 16,400 from the Registrar General and 15,900 new houses in the RSS (average 2.36 population per household)

The Boundary Committee's proposal could limit the progress in local areas and could fail to provide opportunities, especially for the smaller communities in Devon, but whatever local government arrangement is put in place in future, this Council is committed to work with all partners to ensure local people maintain a voice and their needs are met.

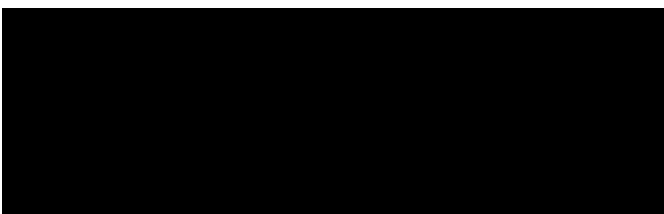
Yours sincerely



**Cllr Alan Connett**  
**Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group**  
**Leader of the Council**



**Cllr Ray Frost**  
**Leader of the Group of Independent Councillors**  
**Deputy Leader of the Council**



**Cllr Stuart Barker**  
**Leader of the Conservative Group**  
**Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee**