



Review Manager (Devon Review),
The Boundary Committee for England,
Trevelyan House,
Great Peter Street,
London SW1P 2HW.

2nd September 2008

Dear Sirs,

DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN DEVON

I am writing in response to your request for comments on the Boundary Committee's draft proposals for unitary local government published on the 7th July 2008.

At a meeting of Torrige District Council held on the 1st September 2008 members of the Council carefully considered the published draft proposals and adopted the following resolution:

"Torrige District Council has yet to be convinced that the Boundary Committee's proposal will address the Council's concerns of democratic deficit, local engagement, and the delivery of demonstrable efficiency gains in service provision.

Merely bolting existing District services onto the existing County Council will not secure the enhancement of local democratic power which we believe is essential.

Until we are convinced that the proposal will secure the essentials of efficiency gains and the enhancement of democratic power, we cannot support the draft proposal."

Our Council is passionately committed to securing improvements which offer real benefit to local citizens, businesses and communities. When the Boundary Committee commenced its work in Devon we recognised that a move to a unitary pattern of local government could have potential benefits for the people of Torrige. Recognising that the current two tier system is not perfect we offered provisional support for creation of a County unitary including Exeter so long as local democratic power was enhanced and real efficiency savings delivered.

In our concept submission we emphasised that the County unitary arrangement could only be seen as an improvement on the current two tier system if local governance arrangements are established to give a true voice to everyone in our communities and ensure that resource capacity is targeted to translate local ambitions into real tangible benefits.

Currently at Torrington, on average a councillor represents 1395 electors. A rural councillor can represent 6 parish councils and an area of over 37 square miles. In a single Devon Unitary Council with say 124 councillors (double the number of existing county councillors) then each councillor would have to represent 6137 electors. This could mean in Torrington a unitary councillor representing **24 Parish Councils** covering an area of **over 133 square miles**. This shows the importance of an empowered and properly constituted Community Board. This is essential if the requirements of the Government's White Paper are to be delivered.

Unfortunately the Boundary Committee's draft proposal remains essentially a concept document. If we are to be convinced that the proposed unitary arrangements represent an improvement we need to move beyond concepts and receive details of exactly how the Community Boards will be constituted and resourced. Details are also needed on the proposed role of Town and Parish Councils and many other aspects of the proposed arrangements including, for example, how Development Control decisions will be made.

The Council has serious concerns about the current review process. These concerns relate to both the timescale for the review and the way in which the review is being carried out.

There is a strong feeling that the tight timescales are evidence of a rushed process which is inappropriate given the importance of the issues being considered for the communities involved.

A fundamental flaw with the review process is that the consultation asks people to comment on alternatives which have not yet been fully defined. Stakeholders are being asked to express opinions on the merit of the concept of a County unitary, they are not being given the opportunity to express an opinion on the detailed arrangements that will be put in place. It is this detail that will determine whether a change to unitary government delivers real improvement for the people of Torrington. For example, a Community Board which is merely a talking shop, dominated by a couple of unitary members, without full Parish/Town representation, and without adequate resources to make things happen in the locality would represent a clear dilution of local democratic power compared with the current system of local government. On the other hand a Community Board which gives a full voice to all its members, includes representatives of each Parish/Town, and is properly resourced could enhance local democratic power.

We remain hopeful that the Boundary Committee's final proposal will contain sufficient detail to convince us that a move to unitary local government would be an improvement on the current two tier system.

Yours faithfully,



Councillor James Morrish
Leader, Torrington District Council