

PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY GOVERNMENT IN DEVON:

Submission by Cllr David Nation, Crediton Town and Mid Devon District Councillor:

I served on Exeter City Council from 1980 to 1984. I have been a member of Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) since 1995 and a member of Crediton Town Council since 1999. I have been leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on MDDC since 2005 and was Deputy Leader for some years before that. For two years in Mid Devon I chaired one of the Council's policy committees. In addition, my wife was a member of West Devon Borough Council from 1991 to 1995.

Throughout my local government career I have been appalled at its inefficiencies, often due to confusion about responsibilities, duplication of effort and lack of capacity.

Although I recognise economies of scale, I have always been concerned about the enlargement of organisations. For some years I have been attracted to a Unitary solution but, especially in a geographically large and sparsely populated area like Devon, my preference has been for areas involving populations that would make the authorities financially unviable.

A major consideration for me in considering the merits of local government restructuring is the ability of individuals and local communities to be heard. It is the concept of **Community Boards** in the County Council model that persuades me that a Devon Unitary would address the inadequacies of the present two-tier system and achieve significant long-term financial savings. I am satisfied that this would enhance, rather than reduce, the influence of Town and Parish Councils and it would not in any way threaten their existing role.

Concern has been expressed about the practicality of a reduced number of councillors properly representing their communities (the democratic deficit). The average population per division will not be significantly greater than for County Councillors under the present two-tier system and, **provided the Community Boards are effective**, I am sure that they will more than compensate for that. The opposition of many District Councils particularly is predictable, since they fear loss of jobs and empires.

In conclusion, I whole-heartedly support the introduction of a single rest-of-Devon Unitary authority and it can't come too soon.

Cllr. David Nation
14.09.08

**To Mr Max Caller CBE
The Review Manager (Devon)**

**Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 2HW**

3rd September 2008

Dear Sir

Structural Review of Devon

I'm not sure whether being a relative newcomer entitles me to any hard view on the matter but members of my family have lived in Devon for most, if not all, of their lives and in composing my views I have taken into account their comments and those initial observations of colleague councillors at our last meeting.

Is there a case for change?

Let me say at the outset that in my experience in these matters the option (or near option) for no change is not an option. In short, I believe that tinkering around the edges is merely an attempt to preserve an outdated and inefficient status quo.

Having read through the full Boundary Committee's Report I was struck by what I consider to be a reasonably fair reflection of the situation here in Devon. There is no doubt in my mind that to meet the huge challenges facing local government in the next few years, local authorities will need to be effectively managed and structurally sound.

I do not wish to wax overlong on this issue because, I'm not sure whether my view would have any real standing in the face of the negative onslaught by East Devon DC. Without the benefit of structured, unemotional and unbiased research, I doubt anyone could arrive at an outcome on which they could all agree anyway.

As a generality I note that in economic terms the positive picture appears to be that centred on Exeter with the rest, including Plymouth and Torbay, struggling somewhat. This underlines to me there is a need for fundamental change if Devon as a whole is to become a viable and successful entity.

I have been somewhat disappointed in the negative stance taken by East Devon District Council which, I have found over defensive and in my view, self serving.

Their comments in various papers and their publication, A Vision for Devon, which attacks Exeter City Council's Unitary bid and makes sweeping negative statements about aggregation, yet doesn't balance this with arguments regarding the benefits of about economies of scale, is disingenuous in my view. I also found their 'The Occupier' letter, which seeks support for no change, signed by Council Leader Sara Randall Johnson, to be crude in concept and at best, a misguided use of public funds

Having also considered the 'Vision' Document from East Devon DC, I'm afraid I consider this fell into the bracket of tinkering around the edges and unrealistic in the circumstances of the Boundary Committee Report which considers one substantive and one possible option.

Which change is best?

In my view the substantive proposal by the Boundary Committee appears to have the most benefit in that it has been reached unemotionally and follows what appears to have been arrived at through proper consultation, investigation, research and consideration. It offers the opportunity for economies of scale balanced against the need for the maintenance of reasonable standards of service. Together with the Devon County Council proposal for Community Boards, augmented by Town and Parish Councils, I believe this should reasonably safeguard the local perspective.

The arguments about rebadging and size comparisons with the highly populated Home Counties etc by East Devon DC are not only selective but puerile and add nothing sensible to the debate.

There is always a danger of course that instead of realising the economies of scale and achieving better management, we could see new empires and highly paid officials with no attendant improvement in standards, springing from the so called effects of the transition. Providing Parish and Town Councils, as part of the DCC proposed Community Board structure, are switched on, active and above all, credibly authoritative, that should not prove to be the case.

In closing I entirely support the Boundary Committee's rationale and recommendations for a single Devon Unitary Authority together with those of Torbay and Plymouth.

I hope this helps your consideration.

Councillor Keith T Phillips OBE



Councillor Tudor Evans
Ham Ward
The Council House
PLYMOUTH
PL1 2AA



Tel: 01752 304136
Email: tudor.evans@plymouth.gov.uk

This letter is from an individual member of the Council and is not written on behalf of the Plymouth City Council

Boundary Committee for England,
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 2HW

16 SEP 2008

14th September 2008

To whom it may concern:

Response to the Committee's proposals for the structure of local government in Devon

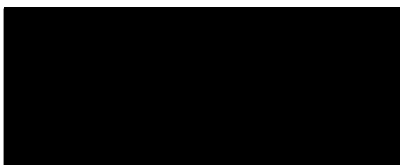
Having carefully considered the Committee's proposals for a Unitary Council covering the whole of Devon, abolishing the existing district councils, including Exeter City Council, I believe the proposals would be detrimental to the local population and more importantly do not meet the 5 criteria set out by the Committee at the start of this exercise.

Furthermore, as a resident of Plymouth, the proposals as they stand pose a threat of detriment to the economic and social well-being of Plymouth, and its 250,000 citizens.

The second proposal, for a unitary council for Devon with a unitary council based on Exeter and its hinterland could be seen as a more attractive option. But there must be a question over the viability of a local authority that is so obviously engineered with no thought of its community cohesion. It will surely fail as a council and fail its citizens and taxpayers.

My preference is for a Unitary Council based on the existing district boundary of Exeter City Council, and a unitary Devon for the rest. Plymouth and Torbay to remain unchanged.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Tudor Evans
Leader of the Labour Group