

## Summary

On 6 February 2008 we were requested to advise the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on unitary structures of local government in Devon.

Specifically, we were asked to provide advice on whether there could be an alternative proposal, or proposals, of unitary local government – i.e. one or more councils providing all of the services currently provided by the county and district councils – that might be recommended for the county area as a whole. We were also asked to consider whether there should be any changes to the boundaries of the existing unitary councils of Plymouth and Torbay if they were essential to determining a unitary pattern of local government for the two-tier area of the county.

Democracy matters

## Advice to the Secretary of State on unitary local government in Devon

The Secretary of State asked whether there could be an alternative proposal, or proposals, that would, in aggregate, have the capacity to deliver the following outcomes: be affordable; be supported by a broad cross-section of partners and stakeholders; provide strong, effective and accountable strategic leadership; deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood flexibility and empowerment; and deliver value-for-money and equity in public services.

Before providing our advice we invited representations on two specific draft proposals:

- a county unitary authority
- a two-unitary pattern comprising Exeter & Exmouth and Rural Devon

We took into account all of the representations that we received on these draft proposals before providing advice to the Secretary of State.

We have now published our report *Advice to the Secretary of State on unitary local government in Devon*. The report outlines our alternative proposal to the Secretary of State, which we consider has the capacity to deliver the outcomes referred to above. The report is available on our website, at [www.boundarycommittee.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommittee.org.uk)

### Our alternative proposal for Devon is:

- a unitary county comprising the whole of the existing two-tier area of Devon, on the basis of the arrangements set out in our report

We are not proposing any boundary changes to the existing councils of Plymouth and Torbay, as we do not consider they are essential to our alternative proposal.

We carefully examined whether our other draft proposal for two unitary authorities could have the capacity to deliver the outcomes specified by the Secretary of State's five criteria. We took into account views submitted to us before deciding whether to put it forward as an alternative proposal.

We considered that this pattern had some merit, specifically in relation to the Exeter & Exmouth authority. However, there was also strong opposition to removing Exeter from the rest of the county for local government purposes. In our judgement this pattern is unlikely to have the capacity to deliver all the outcomes specified by the Secretary of State's criteria. We do not believe that it is likely to be supported by a broad cross-section of partners and stakeholders in Devon.

## The original proposal

As part of our advice to the Secretary of State, we have recommended that the original proposal for unitary status from Exeter City Council should not be implemented. This recommendation is made on the basis of the Secretary of State's previous concerns about such an authority's ability to meet the affordability criterion, which was not displaced by any evidence received by us during this review, all of which we took into account.

## What happens next?

The Committee has now provided advice to the Secretary of State on unitary local government in Devon. It is now for the Secretary of State to take a decision on whether:

- to implement the original (i.e. Exeter City Council's) proposal, with or without modification
- to implement our alternative proposal, with or without modification, or
- to take no action

It is also open to the Secretary of State to request further information or advice from us.

Before taking his statutory decisions there will be a period for representations to be made to the Secretary of State about either our alternative proposal or the original Exeter proposal. This period will run from 8 December 2009 until 19 January 2010. You can make representations on these proposals by emailing [DevonStructures@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DevonStructures@communities.gsi.gov.uk) or by writing to:

Unitary Structures Team  
Department for Communities  
and Local Government  
Zone 3/J1  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU

## Further information

More information on the review process in general, including the Secretary of State's intended approach to taking his statutory decisions, can be found on the Department for Communities and Local Government's website, at [www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/restructuring/boundarycommittee](http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/restructuring/boundarycommittee)

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by the Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.