

25 July 2007

Chief Executive
Cumbria County Council

Our Ref:
Your Ref:

BY EMAIL

Dear Chief Executive,

PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE UNITARY STRUCTURES

In response to the Invitation to councils in England issued by the Secretary of State on 26 October 2006, your council submitted on 24 January 2007 a proposal for future unitary structures. I wrote to you on 8 February 2007 informing you that your council's proposal conformed to the terms of the Invitation and on 27 March 2007 informing you that your proposal, together with the further information that you provided to explain and clarify it, would be proceeding to stakeholder consultation.

I am now writing to inform you that, in the Secretary of State's judgement, there is not a reasonable likelihood that, if implemented, the proposal would meet the outcomes specified by all the criteria set out in the Invitation. Consequently, she is minded not to implement your proposal.

This decision was reached having regard to your council's proposal, the further information that you have submitted, the responses to the stakeholder consultation and all other relevant information available. In relation to each of the five criteria the Secretary of State reached the following views on your council's proposal.

Strong, Effective and Accountable Strategic Leadership

The Secretary of State considers the proposed streamlining and simplification of partnerships across the county area and coterminosity with key partners is likely to contribute to strong strategic leadership. However, she does not consider that a single unitary authority for Cumbria would be capable of providing effective strategic leadership given the particular circumstances of Cumbria. She notes that Cumbria is unique geographically and that East/West communication links are very poor. She recognises the significant differences in history, and economy between the coastal parts of the county (and particularly the ex-Lancashire south-east coastal strip around Morecambe Bay), the rural southern area, and the northern part of the county. On balance, she concluded that there is not a reasonable likelihood of your proposal achieving the outcomes specified by the criterion.

Neighbourhood Flexibility and Empowerment

The Secretary of State recognises that, due to the large geographic areas involved, there are concerns that a county-wide unitary authority may have difficulties effectively representing its electorate. She is also mindful that some partners are concerned that the remit of the proposed structures are unclear. However she considered that piloting of community board arrangements and the establishment of a Community Board Governance Review Board will help alleviate these issues. On balance she concluded that there is a reasonable likelihood of your proposal achieving the outcomes specified by the criterion.

Value for Money and Equity on Public Services

The Secretary of State notes that the proposal outlines opportunities for improvements in service delivery through the redesign of services, and rationalisation of management and backoffice service delivery functions mean that there is a high probability that local people will benefit from more efficient and effective services. Accordingly, she concluded that there is a reasonable likelihood of your proposal achieving the outcomes specified by the criterion.

Affordability

The Secretary of State considers that the financial case looks reasonably robust and there is little risk that the proposal would be unaffordable. Accordingly, she concluded that there is a reasonable likelihood of your proposal achieving the outcomes specified by the criterion.

Supported by a Cross Section of Partners and Stakeholders

The Secretary of State considers that there would appear to be at least a reasonable level of support across a range of sectors, including the PCT. She acknowledges that the proposal does not have the support of the districts, whilst the views of business are mixed. However, of those that responded directly to the consultation, the Secretary of State notes that there would appear to be a broad majority in favour in amongst the third sector. On balance she concluded that there is a reasonable likelihood of your proposal achieving the outcomes specified by the criterion.

Conclusion

If you have any queries about the substance of the decision you should write in the first instance to Leigh Bura at leigh.bura@communities.gsi.gov.uk .

Yours sincerely,

P Rowsell