



Dr Phyllis Starkey MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

19th June 2006

Dear Dr Starkey,

Following the recent hearing of the ODPM Select Committee at Bristol I thought I would write and offer a couple of further thoughts about what I presumed you were interested in hearing regarding the Cornish position.

Firstly, I hope you and your colleagues will have received a copy of the resolution of Cornwall County Council which I asked the Clerk to circulate. I enclose a further copy in case it hasn't reached you.

The resolution sets out a programme of work which is now under way to consider a practicable proposition for bringing together the whole public sector service delivery community for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly within a single delivery organisation. The outcome would see the county council replaced by a new, overarching body responsible for strategy, commissioning, bidding/revenue collection, promotion and performance monitoring.

The resolution includes working with the Government to form a clear understanding of any powers, functions or duties which could be devolved to maximise the effectiveness of this new approach. Service delivery leaders from health, education, local government (including parish councils) and other services (including LSPs) will be brought together around a 'blank sheet of paper' embossed with three key principles:

- Separate strategy from delivery
- Embed democracy
- Achieve subsidiarity

It is intended to consult the community on the eventual proposition prior to presenting it to the Government.

The process which has given rise to this initiative has its foundations in a meeting held by John Healey MP at the Treasury in April 2005. This was partly in response to the need to consider future regeneration concepts in preparation for Convergence funding, which Cornwall was awarded following the European Budget settlement. It recognises the success of the Objective 1 programme, both in demonstrating that Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly is a vibrant, distinct and sustainable regional unit, and that the delivery and monitoring structures are of a high standard.

Recently, Cornwall has submitted a bid for its LAA which is widely acknowledged as of a high quality, and which forms a very useful platform from which to launch the wider and more fundamental reform of public service delivery which we believe will demonstrate significant efficiency improvements, cost effectiveness and improvements in productivity.

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Just before the Committee Hearing it was announced that, whilst starting from a very low base (64% of UK average GVA), Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly is the fastest growing region in Europe. This is an exceptional turnaround, and infers that, if we are to sustain this progress then we need the right administrative/leadership 'toolkit' to do so. This is the key moment for changes which can offer the government the opportunity to develop a new model which can be seen as a counter-balance to City Regions.

I think that some of your members are interested in the notion of the 'distributed city'. Cornwall is a peripheral region which has a dispersed settlement pattern. There is no central conurbation, but rather a number of areas in which there are different economic drivers – the sum of the parts is a place which displays many of the characteristics of a city – a complex economic base; low incomes, high house prices; a strong brand. It is difficult when observing Cornwall to simply classify it as rural – there is certainly a strong rural element, but there is also manufacturing (surprisingly quite significant and relatively stable), tourism, a strong service sector, mineral extraction (china clay), higher education, a strong creative sector and a distinctive cultural profile.

In many ways the geography and socio-economic profile of Cornwall is one which lends itself to the development of a knowledge-based economy in which transfer is effective and market penetration is surprisingly more global than local.

There is a growing consensus for changes in governance which enable Cornwall to build upon its success, and which offer efficiency and productivity benefits as well as an example for others to observe. As Mr Miliband pointed out, Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly has many of the key attributes of a natural region. To which I would add that it must be more sustainable to work with nature than not.

Beyond Devon, life's full of surprises!

Gans gorhemmynadow a'n gwella
(Best wishes)

Bert Biscoe
Chair, Cornish Constitutional Convention.

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