

Torbay Council's Concept for Unitary Councils in Devon

1. Our Concept for Unitary Governance in Devon:

In developing our proposal for unitary governance in Devon we have given careful consideration to what would best serve its population against a background of the geographic scale of the county, the third largest in England. This has led us to favour a City and Region approach based on the only three sustainable centres, giving:

- o A **three unitary model** for Devon recognising the strategic role played regionally and sub-regionally by Plymouth, Torbay and Exeter and the interrelationships with their rural hinterlands. This would create three new councils: an **expanded Plymouth** (reflecting its 'city region' influence); a **South Devon Unitary** (with Torbay and the market towns e.g. Newton Abbot and Totnes with their rural hinterlands and could extend to include Dartmoor); and a unitary covering the rest of **Devon with Exeter** at its core. This model would build on the experience and infrastructures of the existing providers of the big service blocks, eg for children and adults, provide the greatest potential for significant economies of scale across the county and deliver the strongest strategic leadership, both within each authority and across the region. In addition, the proposed model will facilitate the delivery of effective, value for money services that meet the needs of the residents and visitors and address inequalities and deprivation.

2. What this means for South Devon in more detail.

This outline concept sets out our proposal for unitary governance across Torbay and South Devon through:

A single South Devon Unitary Authority (see map on page 5).

Torbay as part of a South Devon authority utilising the benefits of the legal provisions which allow for Torbay to be identified as a continuing authority, thus minimising the disruption and cost of change on its residents.

The boundaries of the new Unitary would need to be carefully defined, but are likely to be based on the economic sub-region and the natural geographic boundaries, such as the Haldon Hills towards Exeter, the western boundary being the watershed of the River Avon within the South Hams and potentially encompassing Dartmoor. Such a Unitary authority, whilst being a mix of rural areas, market towns and cosmopolitan Torbay, would nevertheless be united by being the focus of a major holiday destination, with a natural hinterland from Torbay, along the coast and towards the moor, meeting the needs of residents and visitors within the area.

The strengths of this arrangement are that it:

- I. Recognises the strength of the Torbay / Totnes / Newton Abbot social & economic sub-region.
- II. Reflects the current boundary of the acute sector for health services and the travel to learn areas for secondary and selective schools, Special schools and South Devon College based at Paignton.
- III. Creates an authority with a population base and, consequentially, a financial base with the capacity to meet the needs of its citizens.

- IV. Facilitates the advantages in terms of economies of scale and efficiency of operation of delivering universal services across a wider area, building on some existing joint arrangements.
- V. Would sit well alongside a City and Region concept for unitary governance in Devon based on Plymouth, Torbay / Totnes / Newton Abbot, and Exeter / North Devon, with respective populations in the region of 320,000, 300,000 and 520,000.
- VI. Builds on existing and developing neighbourhood empowerment models.

This concept also recognises the enlargement of a Plymouth Unitary Authority in accordance with the City – Region concept.

3. Our Vision for South Devon:

Our vision is that the new local authority should represent its people and provide them with a strong voice - locally, regionally and nationally. Our proposal will ensure South Devon has a strong voice within Devon and the region, a region increasingly made up of unitary authorities.

In submitting this proposal the Council aims to achieve the following:

- I. A strong focus for the South Devon **economy**, strengthening and building upon existing bodies, providing a strong collective voice with regional and national bodies and be a focus on certain priority employer and priority learner groups.
- II. A higher **regional and national profile** for the South Devon area.
- III. **Promotion** of South Devon, with its coastline, historic market towns, villages and the Dartmoor National Park, on an international scale as one of England's most popular holiday destinations.
- IV. Reducing **deprivation and isolation** in urban and rural areas.
- V. Effective and responsive **joined up services for vulnerable young people** through improved coterminous boundaries between the Council, Health and Police to meet the expectations of the Children's Plan.
- VI. An improved 14 – 19 curriculum offer to students of **all 14 Diploma lines** in one Consortium for the whole new Authority area.
- VII. Better **choice and diversity** of secondary school provision and even **higher standards**.
- VIII. Strong and effective **partnership working** including **coterminous boundaries**.
- IX. A strong voice for **citizens** in their neighbourhoods whilst at the same time giving a clear, **focused strategic lead** to the vision for the sub-region.
- X. Fair and easy **access** to high **quality** public **services**.
- XI. Best possible **value for money** for council tax payers.
- XII. **Smoother transition** building on the existing three top tier service providers.
- XIII. The opportunity to accommodate **growth** within the existing settlements of South Devon in accordance with the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy.

The Appendix to this submission identifies the current issues for Torbay and South Devon and outlines our vision for the future.

4. Initial assessment of the proposal against the five criteria:

Criterion 1 Be affordable (to be considered in detail as part of the consultation process)

With the three Unitary Council concept, two with populations of around 300,000 and the third having approximately 520,000, substantial savings are likely to be realised set against transition costs. These will be achieved through taking advantage of the opportunity to build on the infrastructure of the existing top tier authorities, particularly in relation to the major service areas for social care and education.

There will also be the opportunity to reduce management costs by reducing duplicate posts and to expand the existing programme of shared services, including with other public sector agencies.

Criterion 2 Broad cross section of partner and stakeholder support

The Council is submitting this outline concept in advance of the opportunity to consult in detail on the options.

*However, even at this early stage Torbay's key partner in service delivery, the Torbay Care Trust, **supports the concept of a single unitary council** serving the population broadly equivalent to the catchment area of South Devon Foundation Health Care Trust.*

In addition, we are working with the Torbay Strategic Partnership (LSP) to develop the concept of a South Devon Authority and its future working relationship with partners from all sectors. This will significantly increase the potential of developing and delivering an effective Multi Area Agreement within a three unitary authority Devon.

Criterion 3 Provides strong, effective and accountable strategic leadership

Torbay adopted the Mayoral system of governance following a referendum in the summer of 2005. This arrangement has matured with the Mayor, working with the Cabinet, providing strong strategic leadership for the area. This strong leadership is emphasised by the recent publication of the Mayoral Vision. This Vision, together with Torbay's new Sustainable Community Strategy produced by Torbay's Strategic Partnership, identifies the long term ambitions for the Bay area. (The Strategic Partnership is chaired by the Mayor and is nationally recognised as a strong and effective partnership working for the benefit of local communities). The Council is confident that, through working with the communities within the proposed new boundaries of the Unitary Authority we can build a sense of place that facilitates strategic and visionary leadership that enables inclusive and active participation by individuals, networks and other organisations.

A single unitary authority would provide a single, powerful voice for the interests of the South Devon community.

Criterion 4 Deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood flexibility and empowerment

Torbay has developed the concept of Community Partnerships across the Bay. There are currently 12 reflecting ward boundaries. Following a referendum in 2005, Brixham elected a new Town Council in May 2007. The Community Partnerships and Town Council give a clear voice on local community based issues and are starting to influence and co-ordinate the delivery of local services. Any modification to the Borough's boundaries would bring parished areas into the remit of the Borough.

In order to develop the sense of place and enable cohesive, attractive and economically vibrant communities, Torbay would be willing to undertake an early Governance Review

working with existing well established forms of community governance such as parish/town Councils, local resident/tenants associations and community forums to provide valid forms of neighbourhood democracy and management. We see this as working in spheres, not tiers.

Criterion 5 Delivering value for money and equity in public services

A single Unitary for South Devon will offer scope for significant efficiency savings, whilst building on the quality of services delivered by the constituent authorities. A particular strength of this model will be the opportunity, subject to agreement with Devon PCT, to extend the integrated Health and Social Care model which has been adopted in Torbay through Torbay Care Trust, and continue its focus on community based health and social care services. Torbay Care Trust effectively commissions and delivers evidence based services and has used the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to identify where health inequalities exist within Torbay in order to target resources to reduce current health inequalities and maximise value for money on service delivery.

Other advantages will be economies of scale, reduced duplication, potential for rationalisation of assets and expansion of multi-agency approaches, eg our existing Children's Services Cluster Teams comprising social and welfare services, schools, Connexions, health services and working with the police. These clusters can merge with the local South Devon Learning Communities.

Existing areas of nationally recognised good practice, eg Early Years and Foundation Stage, Regional Champion status for the Supporting People service, can be extended across the proposed new authority area.

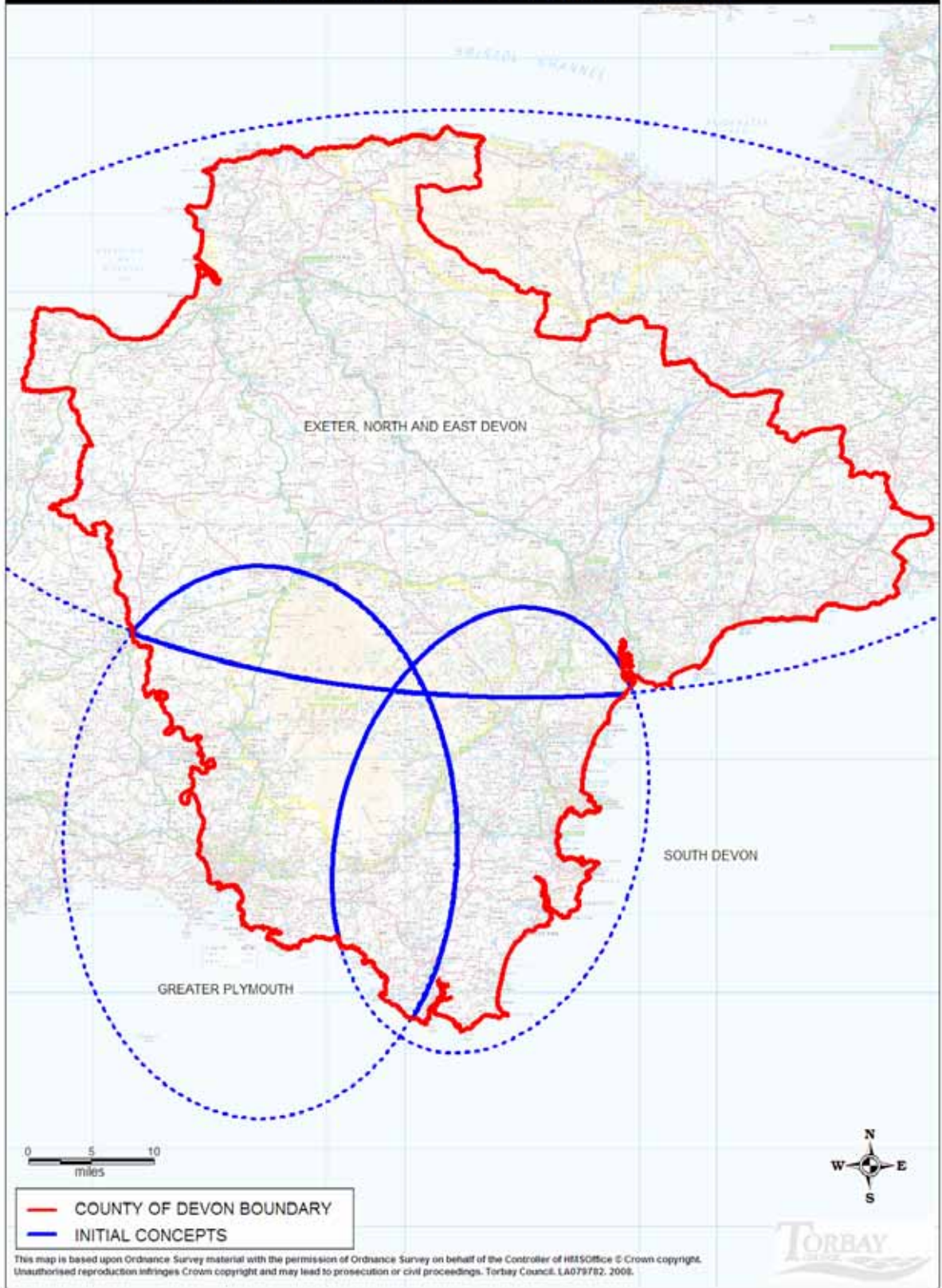
The enhanced capacity of a new single unitary authority will facilitate the delivery of shared strategic objectives – waste management, climate change, safer communities, the achievement and welfare of young people, affordable housing and environmental issues, including building on Torbay's international Geopark status.

5. Support.

This concept has been informally discussed by the elected Members in Torbay and has support on a cross party basis.

Elizabeth Raikes
Chief Executive
April 2008

**TORBAY COUNCIL'S INITIAL CONCEPT FOR CHANGES TO DEVON LOCAL AUTHORITIES
A 3 UNITARY DEVON COUNTY GOVERNANCE SOLUTION**



Torbay and South Devon Today:

The Place: Looking at South Devon as a distinct common entity, our focus is on the crescent marked by Torbay, Totnes and Newton Abbot and its hinterland, which recognises the inter-relationship between urban and rural and travel to work areas, in particular:

- Torbay's influence extends well beyond its boundaries and is seeking to work with its neighbours to develop the economic sub-region.
- Pockets of deprivation in both seemingly affluent urban and rural areas.
- Diffuse travel to work areas.
- Balance of industry and commerce – light industry, agriculture, fishing, the service sector.
- Access issues (eg the need for the South Devon Link Road and the vulnerability of the main rail link)
- Holiday destination area.
- Torbay Hospital is the focus for acute health services (South Devon Foundation Health Care Trust).
- Aims to improve health overall and narrow the health inequalities gap.
- Torbay is the focus for further education and potentially higher education (South Devon College – serves 17 local authorities).
- A common travel to learn area for secondary and Grammar schools and Special schools.
- Commissioned services for young people already in place in conjunction with South Devon providers.
- A shared spatial planning vision within the Regional Spatial Strategy with Torbay as its focus.
- Complementary landscape designations – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Area of Great Landscape Value and Coastal Preservation Area.
- Wider area – sea to moor and the geographical and topological boundaries of the coast, rivers and Dartmoor

The People

- Increasingly high aspirations especially for employment opportunities for younger adults.
- Low wages rather than high unemployment.
- Need for affordable homes.
- Increasing ageing population.
- Increasing transient population.

Please also refer to the Key Statistics for Torbay, January 2008, previously submitted to the Committee.

Our Vision

Torbay launched its Sustainable Community Strategy (Community Plan) in June 2007. Promoting economic prosperity is at the heart of the Plan, supported by four themes which are designed to make Torbay an attractive place to live, work and visit. The four themes are:

Pride in the Bay – a place people want to come to

Learning and Skills for the Future – a place to learn in

Stronger Communities – a place that people want to and can live in

The New Economy – a place to do business in.

This is best shown in the wheel below:



This vision is shared by Torbay's Local Strategic Partnership and has led to the development of a Mayoral Vision for the built environment of Torbay to regenerate 19 key locations across the Bay. This Vision reflects the fact that Torbay has been identified as a growth point as one of the 17 sub-regional centres for the South West.

The creation of a new South Devon Authority, as identified in this proposal, recognises the need to develop a shared Vision for the new authority area that identifies the key priorities of Torbay and builds upon the unique attraction of the market towns and the rural nature of the rest of South Devon. This recognises that there are synergies with the existing Visions and Strategies of our neighbouring authorities and these are transferable to the wider proposed area and urban and rural settings and will address the common issues.

The risk of not achieving our aspirations is that Torbay and South Devon will see a continuation of its current poor economic performance relative to the rest of the region. In addition, the unitary solution chosen for Devon, and its impact on Torbay, needs to have full regard to the possible marginalisation of Torbay and the resulting impact on its residents and the potential ripple effect out to a wider area.

Achieving our aspirations will facilitate the provision of a financially viable and secure local authority, able to deliver value for money public services and provide strong and accountable leadership for the whole South Devon community.