

Transforming Public Services in Devon – a submission on behalf of the local authorities in the Devon two-tier (county) area

Closer, Better Services in Devon

1. Introduction

The October 2006 Local Government White Paper, “Strong and Prosperous Communities”, provides a platform to reform local government and challenges local councils to make significant transformational change. This submission has been prepared by the local authorities in the Devon two-tier (county) area in response to Government’s invitation to come forward with innovative proposals for improved ways of working. Sections 3 and 4 set out our vision, ambitions and guiding principles.

For some time now all tiers of local government in Devon have been working effectively together for the benefit of the community. The Local Strategic Partnerships and other local partnership arrangements have brought about real, tangible change and improvement. Section 5 provides evidence of successful partnership working.

The range and extent of improvements which have been achieved are a reflection of a range of historical, geographical and political differences between authorities. In the last year a mutual understanding of the need for more significant and accelerated change has emerged. The Leaders of Devon’s district and county authorities are committed to a collaborative approach to transform services and improve quality of life for Devon’s communities. They have also committed themselves to involving our unitary neighbours, parish and town councils, national park authorities and other partners in that work, so bringing together the Devon family of authorities. This will be a long term programme. Leaders recognise the need to create capacity and trust and to motivate and empower Members and staff to deliver.

There is a now real opportunity for a step change in Devon and a commitment to achieve it. This submission is the springboard for change.

We have already started work on developing the detail but wish to prepare a realistic and achievable proposal for further discussion. Section 6 sets out our next steps for focussed work to:

- Understand local needs and priorities
- Provide clear leadership through place-shaping
- Transform and integrate local services
- Deliver efficiencies

2. Geography

Devon is a large county – the third largest in the country, and one of the most sparsely populated. The three principal urban areas within the historic county are Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay which, in addition to the north Devon arc, shape the

economy of the county. The county's main sub regional centres are Barnstaple and Newton Abbot. However, a distinctive feature of Devon is the large number of market and coastal towns spread across the county and its districts. These towns can act as focal points for many of the surrounding villages and rural communities and in areas of greatest sparsity smaller settlements also provide local focus.

Devon is also a changing county. The population of Devon is growing at over twice the national average and the county is becoming more diverse. The county's size and diversity mean that the solutions to problems and challenges will reflect local circumstances and context. The variations in our demographic, economic and social geography will inevitably shape the way in which the innovations to which we are committed are implemented.

Exeter City Council has put forward its case for a unitary structure for Exeter. The City Council is continuing to work in partnership with the other local authorities, building on its successful experience of partnership working in the county and region.

3. Vision and Ambition

Our shared Vision for public services in Devon is that *through a new and innovative model, we will provide cost-effective services which are designed around the needs of the people who use them and address the priorities of local communities.* We are committed to working across organisational and administrative boundaries in order to improve outcomes and pursue efficiency through a unified approach.

Our shared ambitions are to

- Support, empower and respond to the aspirations and needs of the people and communities of Devon
- Strengthen communities through closer engagement with local people
- Work together to rationalise functions; remove duplication of effort; simplify systems and processes and maximise economies of scale and flow
- Seek to integrate related services and simplify access to them
- Work in partnership with other public, private, voluntary and community sector agencies and organisations
- Deliver quality and value for money services to all Devon's communities and, to address the particular difficulties facing some communities, work to focus additional resources.

The benefits that will be seen from working together with our communities will be improved outcomes in quality of life and service delivery across the whole of the county. People in Devon will notice a difference, and experience the cost and quality improvements from our joint working. They will find their access to and understanding of our services easier. They will be able to identify and influence their local democratic leaders more effectively so improving accountability.

The district and county councils in Devon collectively spend over £1.3billion per year. We recognise that the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007, due later this year, will increase the pressure to deliver efficiency savings. The CSR 2007 targets for cashable efficiency savings are likely to at least double from current levels for the period 2008/9 to 2010/11. By working together on the development of the proposals in this submission we will be able, collectively, to make a substantial contribution to towards those targets.

Case study: Efficiency Savings

A scoping study for the provision of shared services, commissioned in 2006 by South Hams District Council and Teignbridge District Council, which considered the potential benefits to be realised from delivering services jointly, found that approximately £1.2m savings could be realised per year. However, the benefits need to be set against shared services implementation costs, which were estimated to be in the region of £1.0m, with a payback period of between three and five years¹.

4. Principles

In delivering our shared Vision, we will have regard to the following guiding principles:

- Improvements to the customer – all joint working initiatives will be considered in terms of the benefit to customers both in terms of improved access to services and the quality of those services measured in terms of outcomes.
- Evidence based – all joint working decisions will be supported by a sound evidence base with respect to the needs of local communities.
- Improving Value for Money – all partners are committed to improving the Value for Money arising from transforming local services. Initiatives will be measured in terms of cost effectiveness.
- Local accountability and involvement – arrangements will place a heavy emphasis on community involvement and engagement and solutions will be sought which promote local accountability and support local democracy
- Diversity – Devon and its districts are very diverse and any future arrangements will respect this diversity and seek to build upon existing successful local arrangements such as recognised economic zones.
- Inclusiveness – all arrangements will include all relevant interested parties including Plymouth and Torbay Unitary authorities and all authorities are committed to joint working and will respond to the consequences of Exeter City Council's unitary bid when the outcome is known. All initiatives will seek active engagement with other public bodies as well as organisations from the private, voluntary and charitable sectors.
- Flexibility – it is accepted that one size does not fit all in Devon and therefore initiatives will be considered in respect of the most appropriate scale. This means that whilst some projects will be carried out across the whole of Devon, there will be others focussed on one particular area or sector.
- Governance – all partners are committed equally to effective governance and the avoidance of unnecessary bureaucracy and will work to ensure that appropriate frameworks for governance are developed that strike the optimum balance, and deliver a stronger connection between local action and strategic decision making.

¹ Scoping Study for Provision of Shared Services, Cornwell Management Consultants Plc., July 2006.

5. Evidence of Existing Partnership Working

The Devon local authorities are already working together to improve the experience of accessing local services for the customer, to make things better for communities than is presently the case and to ensure that internal practices are effective and efficient. The following case studies give an overview of some of the partnership working currently taking place.

The successful delivery of the Devon Improvement Programme laid the foundations for even stronger partnership working across the tiers of local government and shows that the Devon authorities have the commitment to work together and can deliver.

Case study: The Devon Improvement Programme

The Devon Improvement Programme was established in 2004 to strengthen the collective capacity of local organisations to respond to the needs of Devon's communities. It was one of the first improvement partnerships in the country and all local authorities in Devon including our unitary neighbours, Dartmoor National Park Authority and Devon Fire and Rescue have been involved from the outset. Robust and effective governance structures were established and £1.13m capacity-building funding was secured to deliver the programme. The programme has been successfully delivered through a wide range of projects. Outcomes include improved arrangements for publicising and sharing the results of consultation activity; joint leadership and management development programmes for senior staff; and strengthened strategic planning and performance management through better sharing of data.

The Devon Portal Partnership demonstrates the authorities' willingness to make use of technology to provide joined-up service delivery and comprehensive information.

Case study: Devon Portal Partnership

The Devon Portal Partnership promotes joined-up partnership working and provides an opportunity to combine resources to deliver greater value. The website www.devonline.gov.uk provides access to a wide range of information and services from the Devon local authorities and other public sector partners. The website supports a Devon-wide search and A-Z facility, integrated into partner websites, and common content relating to Land Charges and Environmental Health. A Devon-wide Community Directory, linking to nearly 10,000 community and voluntary organisations, is being developed and the portal hosts various partner websites.

The Devon Procurement Partnership is an example of successful joint working that has resulted in increased efficiency and capacity building.

Case study: Devon Procurement Partnership

The Devon Procurement Partnership includes all 11 local authorities in Devon and wider public sector organisations including Devon and Cornwall Police, Devon Fire and Rescue, Exeter University, Dartmoor National Park and Plymouth Land Registry. The aim of the partnership is joint working, capacity building, creating efficiencies and procurement excellence. Collaborative exercises include procurement of gas and electricity, building and plumbing materials, telecoms and desktop computers. The partnership creates common procurement frameworks and tools, such as Equality Monitoring in Supply Chains and Terms and Conditions of contract, for use by all partners. Examples of projects undertaken include measuring procurement impact on the local economy and supporting professional development in procurement training.

Authorities are already working to identify areas where improved service delivery could be achieved, particularly in relation to District and County Council functions.

Case study: North Devon Economic Partnership

The North Devon Economic Partnership brings the public and private sector together to agree what is needed to develop the economy of the north of the County. It includes representatives from North Devon, Torrington and West Somerset District Councils, Devon County Council and Exmoor National Park. Over the last twelve years the Partnership has overseen the preparation of three successive economic strategies. During that period it has also seen the creation of the North Devon Chamber of Commerce and Industry the North Devon Marketing Bureau and the North Devon and Exmoor Regeneration Company. These have delivered substantial improvement but much remains to be done. The delivery of economic and community development in the area is to be further strengthened by bringing agencies together under one roof to form North Devon+. The Board of the new company will be private sector led but with substantial local government presence and funding. The challenges remain but the opportunities are considerable. Working in partnership remains the key to fulfilling them.

Case Study: Three tier working in action

A true partnership approach is securing innovative customer service centres for two of North Devon's major towns. The new centres will bring a number of essential service providers under one roof, making it easier for customers to access services in a seamless way.

A new centre in Ilfracombe will house North Devon District Council, Devon County Council, Ilfracombe Town Council and the Citizens Advice Bureau. There will also be meeting rooms, training facilities and information points for voluntary agencies and community groups – all for the benefit of local residents and businesses. Funding has come from the European Regional Development Fund, South West Regional Development Agency, Ilfracombe Town Council, North Devon District Council and Devon County Council. The designs are based on principles of accessibility, sustainability and energy efficiency, combining existing, historic features of the buildings with 21st century technology.

Amory House, East Street will be the new one-stop-shop for South Molton. The new centre will provide access to South Molton Town Council, North Devon District Council and Devon County Council. There will be a library and information centre, weekly surgery from the Citizens Advice Centre and public meeting rooms. There will also be outreach facilities for other organisations, such as the Pensions Agency, Job Centre and Social Services.

We are now exploring opportunities of closer working between the District, County Council and other partners, to provide a single point of access to front line services in a central location in the main town of Barnstaple, whilst relocating the back office services as part of major plans to regenerate the town.

Innovative solutions are sought by the Devon authorities, as evidenced below.

Case study: Leading by Example to Reduce Carbon Emissions

Teignbridge District Council and Devon County Council have signed up to Phase 4 of the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme and are working in partnership to develop a programme to reduce carbon emissions from sources such as buildings, street-lighting and landfill sites. Both councils will be looking to work with local communities and businesses to achieve a joint aim of improved energy efficiency and reduced costs. The 35 local authorities taking part in Phase 4 of the programme are set to save over £8m per year on their collective energy bill. Solar power car-park pay and display machines and fuel efficient vehicles are some of the ways in which Teignbridge is already acting to cut carbon emissions.

Planning for the new communities in Devon shows a commitment to sustainability, forward planning and evidence of successful joined-up working in practice. Two new communities are planned: one in the South Hams, the other in East Devon.

Case study: New Communities in Devon – The Sherford New Community

The Sherford new community will deliver at least 4,000 new dwellings by 2016, and will be planned in such a way to allow for further development. The scale and complexity of the project necessitated a partnership approach to delivery between South Hams District Council, Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council, together with the Highways Agency and a range of other public agencies. In order to present a joined-up message a collaborative approach with landowners and representatives was agreed. In addition, the promoters of the new community have been working closely with the relevant local planning authorities and other public agencies to prepare a coherent and joint vision for Sherford. Local people, groups and business have also been involved in the development of the proposals. This has ensured that the proposals for a truly sustainable new community strike the right balance between the various social, economic and environmental needs of the area.

Case study: Steering Board for the East of Exeter Growth Area Delivery Team

A Steering Board has been formed to drive the delivery of the major schemes taking place to the east of Exeter. The Steering Board is a natural progression of the partnership work that has been seen to date from East Devon District Council, Devon County Council and Exeter City Council. The Board is made up of high-level members and officers from all of the key players in the planning and delivery process. The changes that are set to take place in Exeter and East Devon up to 2016 and beyond will need to be carefully synchronised and integrated and partners agreed that this could be achieved only by working closely as a team. The projects for the area include planning for the new community at Cranbrook, Exeter Airport improvements, an Inter-Modal Freight Depot, Skypark business park and Exeter University Science Park.

6. Next Steps

This submission demonstrates that we are well placed to transform local government in Devon and fulfil Government's expectations of local councils. Our proposals show that a step change can be achieved by tapping into the potential that already exists - we will harness existing capacity and build on our track record of achievements. Our proposals will minimise structural and organisation reform and provide a cost effective solution whilst ensuring continuity.

In the three months since the publication of the White Paper we have done a significant amount of work to establish an agreement about our shared goals and priorities. We have worked together to generate many practical options for action building on our existing good practice and responding to the White Paper's expectations. These require further development in work which we will be starting immediately. We would welcome the support and advice of the Government Office for the South West and the Department of Communities and Local Government in exploring the best ways to take these priorities forward.

This submission is a serious and long-term commitment to a programme of activity which needs further development. This submission is not a formal pathfinder bid. We will however, by the end of July 2007 have devised a comprehensive project plan which identifies actions, timescales, responsibilities, measurable outcomes and resources. As part of the process we will identify objectives, scope, expected outcomes, constraints and risks. We will do this work in consultation with the wider Devon family.

The priorities in our project management plan will relate to:

- Engagement and participation with local communities
- Voluntary and Community
- Performance management
- Leadership and place-shaping through local strategic partnerships
- Local and Multi Area Agreements
- Governance arrangements
- Joint programme of work to transform services

Where we can identify quick wins we will tackle these as soon as possible to build confidence and momentum between ourselves and demonstrate our commitment to others.

7. Our commitment

The Devon authorities will seize the opportunity to improve the way local government works and to deliver improved outcomes for the people and communities of Devon. We are committed to working together and with partners to achieve that. We will create the capacity to do so and work with openness and trust.