

Cornish Constitutional Convention
3 Lower Rosewin Row, TRURO, TR1 1EN, Kernow
www.cornishassembly.eu



Rt Hon Mrs Ruth Kelly MP
Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
LONDON
SW1E 5DU

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Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly – a new model for the future

Dear Mrs Kelly,

Congratulations on gaining your new post. The last few months has seen the most incisive, creative debate about governance for many years. I'm sure that you will wish to see it brought to a successful conclusion and that the reforms you introduce will address the blight which has increasingly reduced effectiveness, undermined confidence and led to democratic disaffection in many places.

In Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly a debate has been running for many years, which assumed a new momentum during the initial discussions about regionalism. Mr Raynsford visited Cornwall and welcomed our engagement. The discussion has evolved quickly since the NE referendum, and was spurred by Mr Miliband's visit earlier this year. I have produced a memorandum for you which I hope is of interest.

I also enclose a bundle of publications which have been produced by the Cornish Constitutional Convention since its inception in 2000. These show both the level of engagement and the evolution of the discussion, culminating in 'Devolution's Future', which addresses a fundamental question arising from the development of city-regions.

I hope that it is generally accepted that we have engaged in the various stages of the debate about regionalism in a positive and helpful way. In 2001 we presented a petition of 50,000 names to the Prime Minister calling for the establishment of a Cornish regional assembly. Since then we have seen public support for such a development grow from an initial 46% to 55%. The last reliable survey was done in 2003, as part of the ODPM 'soundings' exercise.

Bearing in mind Mr Woollas' remarks in a recent edition of Local Government Chronicle, that a plan backed by consensus will be persuasive, I would welcome the chance to discuss this further with you, and to share the work presently under way in Cornwall, as you move towards clarifying the objectives and content of the White Paper.

If you feel that it would be helpful to visit Cornwall then we would all be delighted to welcome you and show you what has been achieved so far, what remains to be done, and what consensus there is for developing positive, devolved, democratic governance practising subsidiarity for real!

Gans gorhemmyadow a'n gwella

Bert Biscoe
Chair, Cornish Constitutional Convention

*Facing the future of Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly with
confidence*

Memorandum
Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly – a new model for the future

Since the North East referendum we have participated in the discussion about how to move forward. Our pamphlet, 'Devolution's Future', welcomes the development of city-regions and poses a clear question:

What format can be devised to ensure that areas beyond the influence of city-regions are able to enjoy equal standards of governance, and to contribute effectively to the Government's drive towards efficiency and productivity through devolved responsibility and delegation?

The weakness of the standard regions is that they will not sustain democratic regional government. The advent of City-Regions offers us the opportunity to reconsider the regional map. This is at the nub of Cornwall's position. Your predecessor wrote to me last year acknowledging that Cornwall has many of the attributes of a natural region. In addition to this we have shown that the region of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is capable of delivering one of the most effective structural funds programmes in Europe. We have just heard that the regional economy grew by 10% between 2000-03. We have also developed a bid for a Local Area Agreement which we are told is amongst the best received.

At a recent meeting (March 13th) Cornwall Council adopted the following resolution:

The Council undertakes a focused consultative exercise with District Councils, Parish Councils and all public sector service partners to consider how Cornwall as a whole can structure its future governance.

Cornwall seeks the cooperation of the Government to undertake a business-planning exercise to consider how an integrated public service delivery structure can be formed. This should consider the merit of separating strategic functions from delivery functions, and should take as founding principles that democracy should lie at the heart of future governance structures, and that delivery can be devolved to the most appropriate local level.

Discussions will be initiated with the Isles of Scilly to ascertain the potential for forming a new, strategic partnership.

This process will involve all public service delivery partners in Cornwall (and elsewhere as appropriate), and consult both the voluntary and private sectors, as well as the community of Cornwall.

As you see, we want to develop a new approach to organising public service delivery aimed at radically improving efficiency and productivity, which has at its core three key principles:

1. Separating strategy from delivery
2. Embedding democracy
3. Practising subsidiarity

The Structural Funds programme, which is now set to develop further with Convergence Funding, has established a significant capacity for regeneration. It has facilitated the Combined Universities in Cornwall, a major plank in offering young people prospects which persuade them to live, work and create in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. In addition, we have developed the Eden Project, which, as well as being an iconic construction which has helped reinforce Cornwall's international image, is developing new approaches to ethical management, environmental business and cross-sector development.

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Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly is a productive, creative and ambitious region which needs the governance toolkit to fulfil its potential. This is a key moment (somebody described it recently as 'a region halfway up the mountain!') when institutional development is vital to meet the challenge of providing intelligent future-management of this peripheral, ambitious and creative region. Interestingly, as discussions develop we find the SWRDA supportive of the establishment of a Cornish Development Agency.

The level of public support for developing this new approach to governance for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly offers the opportunity to develop a pilot which can practically inform how regionalism can work for all parts of the country. Recently, Restormel Borough council passed a resolution calling for:

- *The establishment of a directly elected Cornish Assembly with full regional and strategic powers, to set the right priorities for Cornwall and to bring public services under local democratic control.*
- *The establishment of a Cornish Development Agency to give direction to the regeneration of the local economy.*
- *The strengthening of local government in Cornwall so that it can better deliver quality local services*
- *A moratorium on the centralisation of public services out of Cornwall.*

As you can see, whilst there is a difference in language, the direction and intent of the motion strongly reflects that of the earlier one of Cornwall Council. All other district councils have passed similar resolutions during the past five years or so. Also, about 70 parish and town councils have passed similar resolutions. The leadership of the Cornwall Association of Local Councils is encouraging a significant number of parish councils to achieve Quality status. This illustrates the growing consensus around a clear model which will develop public sector efficiency and generate economic productivity. Recent experience shows that the LAA offers a good platform from which to build the wider, integrative approach.

Bert Biscoe
Chair, Cornish Constitutional Convention

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