



# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

## *Committee Report*

**Public**

**Date of Meetings:** 9 February 2004 - Infrastructure Overview & Scrutiny  
11 February 2004 - Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny  
12 February 2004 - Community Overview & Scrutiny  
**Title:** REGIONAL GOVERNMENT – FURTHER SUBMISSION TO THE  
BOUNDARY COMMITTEE  
**Report of:** TOWN CLERK & CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
**Report reference:** CE 06/04

### **Summary:**

This report presents for scrutiny additional work carried out by KPMG Consultants in collaboration with the District Councils of Allerdale, Copeland, Eden and Carlisle in support of the Council's preferred option of a Unitary Carlisle & Eden Council. Subject to the comments of Overview & Scrutiny and the Executive, it will be considered by the Council on 20 February 2004 prior to a submission to the Boundary Committee on 23 February 2004.

### **Recommendations:**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are recommended to comment to the Executive on the draft submission document appended.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

## **1. Introduction**

In responding to the Government's proposals for directly elected Regional Government, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have received the Boundary Committees draft recommendations and commented to the Executive.

The current position is that the Executive has worked in partnership with the four Northern Cumbrian Districts to strengthen the Council's preferred option for Unitary structures should regional government go ahead. To assist this process, KPMG have been retained by all four Districts to provide further support and evidence in support of the two North Cumbrian District pairings and to answer the challenges and questions raised by the Boundary Committee. The report is not an independent assessment of all options, but a submission intended to address the concerns and issues set out in the Boundary Committee draft report as they relate to the option for the pairing of District Councils in North Cumbria. A copy of the report from KPMG as it relates to Carlisle and Eden is attached.

Members should note that it has been produced by the Company to the tight time scale required by Regional Government Review. In producing the draft submission, KPMG have received technical input from Officers. The Leader and Deputy Leader have met with the company on behalf of the Executive to give their comments and to indicate the required style. The result is a draft document written in the form of a submission from both Carlisle and Eden Councils, to the Boundary Committee. This will assist Members in dealing with the matter and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees are requested to pass their comments to the Executive on 13 February for decision at the full Council on 20 February 2004.

## **2. The Criteria**

In commenting on the draft submission, Members are reminded that the Boundary Committee will be looking for evidence, not previously put forward, that the district councils are aware of the issues in relation to the provision of strategic services and have proposals for how these might be addressed. In addition, members will need to make a judgement of whether the evidence within the draft stage 3 submission meets the concerns identified in the Boundary Committee's draft recommendations report and the criteria explained in the Boundary Committee's Overview Report which accompanied the draft recommendations.

For ease of consideration the relevant section from the Boundary Committee Draft Recommendations Report are appended.

### **3. Recommendations**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are recommended to comment to the Executive on the draft submission document appended.

**Contact Officer:** Peter Stybelski

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kpmg

**Local Government Review in the North  
West**

**Carlisle and Eden District Councils**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Submission to the Boundary Committee**  
**9 February 2004**

KPMG

*This report contains 31 pages*

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## 1 Executive Summary

The Committee is seeking views about the draft recommendations and this submission is based on the agreement of the four districts in the north of Cumbria that the Boundary Committee's recommendations present the electors of Cumbria with no real choice. Given that the Committee has chosen to consult on a unitary county option, we regret that the alternative option for consultation has been a single northern unitary which is not based on any established infrastructure. In terms of the Committee's requirements, we believe that neither option can fully reflect the identities and interests of local communities nor be capable of securing effective and convenient local government. Both options:

- would create large and remote authorities;
- ignore the findings of both YouGov and MORI polls which show a preference for government at a district rather than county level;
- are unsupported by any of the district councils covered by the proposal;
- nullify the effort which has already been put into producing the partnerships which will provide solutions to local issues.

In addition the north Cumbria option:

- seeks to combine two areas which have little common community identity, are geographically distinct, have minimal transport links and which face hugely different problems in supporting their local economies and social infrastructure;
- may increase electoral alienation and decrease turn-out by imposing a structure which is distant and has no historical roots;
- has no current organisational infrastructure and is therefore very high risk.

Instead we re-iterate our support for a two-unitary solution for North Cumbria based upon Eden/Carlisle and Allerdale/Copeland. We understand that all options have their drawbacks and risks, but believe that these can be best managed within the two unitaries for the north because:

- the two unitaries build on the partnership structures which have grown up in response to the areas' problems - they work - they are not imposed from outside or above;
- they are 'mid-range' in size compared to other recently created unitaries and can provide both the strategic capacity and 'agility' required of modern local government - this is a particular issue for Cumbria where many services require radical change and improvement;
- their greater local focus and compactness will be more conducive to joined-up multi agency working which will in turn drive efficiency through integration;
- they will draw up Local Public Service Agreements which truly focus on local priorities rather than trying to deliver across a broad range of agendas;
- they represent the best opportunity to engage people in the democratic process and community involvement; and
- they will avoid the danger of arguments about cross-subsidisation and ensure that opportunities for external funding and support are maximised.

## **2 Introduction**

### **2.1 Background**

In December the Boundary Committee published draft proposals for unitary government in Cumbria. The Committee is now seeking views about the draft recommendations and this submission is based on the agreement of the four districts in the north of Cumbria that the Boundary Committee's recommendations present the electors of Cumbria with no real choice. Given that the Committee has chosen to consult on a unitary county option, we regret that the alternative option for consultation has been a single northern unitary which is not based on any established infrastructure. In terms of the Committee's requirements, we believe that neither option can fully reflect the identities and interests of local communities nor be capable of securing effective and convenient local government.

Instead we re-iterate our support for a two-unitary solution for North Cumbria based upon Eden/Carlisle and Allerdale/Copeland. We believe that this option offers the best structure to tackle the strategic issues facing the two areas.

### **2.2 This submission**

In drawing up this submission, we have looked very carefully at the arguments mounted by the Committee. We have noted concerns and recognise that we did not always produce sufficient evidence to support our proposals in the first round of submissions. We seek to fill these gaps with this document, so it is structured to:

- re-iterate and re-inforce those aspects which the Committee has already agreed are strengths in the argument for two northern unitaries
- address specific areas of concern
  - strategic capacity and the key risks
  - Social Services
  - Education
  - regeneration
- compare the proposed unitaries with existing unitary structures elsewhere
- address transitional arrangements.

## **3 Re-inforcing the strengths**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The evaluation criteria used by the Boundary Committee were that local government must meet the following tests:

- to reflect community identity and interests
- to provide effective and convenient local government

In its report, the Boundary Committee recognised that the original district submission had some real strengths in these areas and we would argue that these particularly apply to the two northern unitaries we propose.

### **3.2 Local community identity**

The two unitary authority approach most strongly reflects the expressed community identity of the people of northern Cumbria and the consensus of existing districts. The Committee has already noted that the size of the proposed county unitary may militate against effective representation of community interests and identities and we believe the slightly smaller single unitary across the north would have similar problems. It also recognises the distinct communities with differing and separate concerns and the difficulties caused by the topography of the area with the Cumbrian Mountains running through the centre of the county. There is significant travel between Allerdale and Copeland and between Eden and Carlisle for activities such as shopping and travel to work, but it is much more difficult to travel across these boundaries. There is no affinity between, say, Millom in Copeland and Alston in Eden. In this sense, our proposal is the only one that meets the geographic realities of the area.

The County Council proposes to address the need for community engagement deficit through area committees, which in our experience have proved ineffective, and through accelerating the Quality Parish programme - an approach which the Boundary Committee has concerns 'whether this proposed strategy would be practicable in the short term.' We believe that any similar proposals from a single northern unitary would face the same problems. The pairings of the current districts are best placed to undertake this role because their roots are firmly within local communities.

This view is supported by the MORI research conducted for the Boundary Committee (which showed 54% felt they belonged to their district council area as opposed to 43% to the county) and the most recent YouGov poll of January 2004, which showed 53% of voters in the North West being comfortable in losing their county council as opposed to 11% being comfortable with losing the district council. It is also strongly supported by the CRED report, which shows how patterns of employment, commuting and leisure align significantly within an Allerdale/Copeland and Eden/Carlisle split.

Finally, we believe there is a danger that a solution imposed from outside and having minimal support within the area would serve to alienate people further from the political process. If we are to involve residents in these new structures they have to be seen to be more than lines drawn on a map in Whitehall. We are worried that an imposed solution could feel more like another remote unaccountable QUANGO than an arm of local democracy.

### 3.3 Wider patterns of community and partnerships

The Committee also noted the strong history of joint working displayed by Eden/Carlisle and Allerdale/Copeland, the latter in particular being based upon their shared industrial heritage. These joint working arrangements, now expressed in formal LSP arrangements, have emerged as the most effective way of representing local communities and tackling the real but different issues they face.

The strength of these partnerships is also substantiated by the support our proposals have received from community-based organisations, parishes, the Police etc

What we are now proposing is to build on the strength of these partnerships to drive forward the improvement of county services such as education, social services and transport within the framework of the LSP.

In both Allerdale/Copeland and Eden/Carlisle we have demonstrated community leadership in the development of LSPs. This is recognised by the CRED report which states that 'the relations with other organisations and partnerships supports the three unitary authority option strongly in both Allerdale-Copeland and Carlisle-Eden.' The new unitaries will give us much greater freedom to flex resources towards these locally agreed priorities and, if necessary, to be bold in re-aligning corporate structures and functions to meet LSP priorities. In particular we will be able to take forward a range of cross-cutting issues with more vigour under unitary government.

### 3.4 Effective and convenient services

While the county may hold the purse-strings for the major part of local authority expenditure - even though much of this is just passported on - the 'public face of local government' in terms of transactions is district councils. Somewhere between 80-90% of people's contacts with local authorities take place at a district level. This means that districts are at the forefront of developments such as 'one-stop public service' shops.

Eden/Carlisle and Allerdale/Copeland councils have - or are planning to provide - single points of contact to provide customers with a greater choice of service access methods. This may take the form of a customer contact centre / first stop shop - which provides information and signposts - or a one stop shop which would seek first-time resolution of most customer enquiries. Our two unitaries will be building on a good track record of customer access and joint working.

- Eden/Carlisle and Allerdale/Copeland unitary councils have plans for many more improvements for the customer contact centre - for example, Capita have been commissioned to design a customer contact centre for Carlisle, which will be operational in summer 2004.
- The two new unitary authorities will be far further down the line of satisfying the Government's requirement of ensuring that all transactions with the public are capable of being delivered electronically by 2005.
- The Audited Commission stated in Carlisle CPA inspection report, that '*the development of a customer contact centre has made the approach to transactions, more intimate, professional and customer orientated.*'

On the other hand, the Audit Commission commented that '*the (county) council has made no direct progress towards the government's targets for electronic delivery of council*

*services, despite the fact that poor ICT and communications systems are hampering improvements in service delivery across this widespread county.'*

The County has very few service access/information points and has not demonstrated the ability to develop successful innovative customer access arrangements which are critical to the improvement of transactional services such as benefits, housing services, planning, environmental health, land charges, building regulation, management of open spaces, refuse collection and street cleaning etc. The difficulties that have recently been experienced by the County in its CPA regarding the lack of focus, prioritisation and performance management mean that it would be poorly placed to take on these transactional services and there is nothing in its submission to show how it could provide effective management or drive improvement.

The MORI research identified that residents felt that the most important criteria which should be taken into account in deciding unitary boundaries were quality, responsiveness, cost and accountability. It showed that residents were more satisfied with quality, listening and access at their district council than at the County Council and satisfaction with the location of council offices was 72% for the districts and 30% for the County Council.

## **4 Addressing Boundary Committee concerns**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In its draft recommendations the Boundary Committee raised some concerns about the ability of the proposed unitaries in the north to deliver the services currently carried out by the County. In particular the Committee sought reassurance over our proposals for delivering social services and education and whether there was sufficient 'resource base capacity' in the West to tackle the significant economic restructuring needed to face the decline of the nuclear industry.

In response we have set out our proposals, in this chapter, to build the corporate centre of our new organisations to make them 'fit for purpose' in addressing these challenges. We also look at the issue of the resource base to argue that building a large and potentially remote authority in the north does nothing to help confront the restructuring of the economy in Allerdale/Copeland or to offer any advantages in the delivery of larger services such as education and social services.

In the following chapters we look at the main strategic services in turn to show how our proposals for delivering these services will maintain their strengths where these exist and tackle the weaknesses that have been identified in inspection reports and through our own community consultation processes.

### **4.2 Corporate capacity and policy making**

We understand that a critical element in the construction of the new authorities will be the creation of a central policy and organisation development team which can drive the implementation of new structures, cement organisational capacity and establish systems for monitoring performance and progress against key targets. We believe the key to our success will be:

- putting the Local Strategic Partnership at the heart of our objective-setting and management systems to clarify priorities, co-ordinate the activity of all local stakeholders, identify external funding and monitor progress/performance.
- creating an organisational culture which stresses robust performance/process management, clarity of accountability, employee empowerment and innovation.
- establishing a service planning and financial management regime to ensure resources match priorities, services demonstrate value for money and that risk is routinely assessed.
- undertaking smart procurement.
- constructing an organisation and workforce development plan to get the right numbers, skills and competencies for current and future requirements.
- clarifying the roles of members in setting policy and scrutinising performance - ensuring that members have clear and regular information and support in this role and their role in championing neighbourhood issues.

We recognise that strategic capacity is an issue on which many districts have been criticised in the past, but it is precisely the issue which has been highlighted for many in their CPA and therefore forms a key part of their improvement agenda. We are already taking a more corporate approach to project management, procurement and risk management and developing longer term plans to ensure we have sufficient capacity, skills and resources to deliver priorities for local people.

We are also promoting values and a management style that encourage empowerment and learning. This extends to cross-functional and cross-organisational boundary working in the spirit of building robust partnerships and will give us a firm foundation for the new unitary.

### 4.3 Resource base

The Boundary Committee has expressed concerns that the proposed unitaries would 'have sufficiently robust resource bases to meet the needs of local communities.' In particular, the Committee expressed the view that the resource base capacity available to Allerdale/Copeland 'in confronting significant economic restructuring requirements would be severely tested.' We do not believe this to be the case, because in our view the critical element is focus as well as 'council tax base.'

The argument that the 'relative prosperity of the east' should be used to tackle the socio-economic issues of the west is hardly one that is likely to play well with the residents of Eden/Carlisle, either in supporting the proposal for a regional assembly or in engaging with any future local government structures. This is particularly the case given the different, but also important, issues that Eden/Carlisle face within their own local economy, specifically in relation to tackling low wages.

We would also argue that the aggregation of problems within a larger unitary authority would do little to help with the socio-economic issues in the west. The Government's recent announcement of a new taskforce responsible for developing an overarching regeneration plan that will oversee the social, educational, economic and infrastructure needs of the community acknowledges the important relationship between regional agencies and local partnerships. We do not believe that these existing partnerships would benefit from dilution within a larger authority, nor would the socio-economic problems receive the focus they deserve.

### 4.4 Resource management

The Committee inferred that larger authorities - either the county or the proposed single unitary in the north - might be able to achieve overall economies of scale in comparison to the two northern unitaries. We cannot see any evidence to support this.

The CRED report referred to by the Boundary Committee does **not** itself conclude that the single unitary is more likely to achieve overall economies of scale than the two unitaries, it merely reports that these are the views of some consultees. It then goes on to say that 'low population density in some areas of Cumbria is emphasised as being a problem in terms of achieving economy of scale.' We can only agree and argue that bringing the four current districts together does nothing to increase population density, it merely increases the remoteness of the authority from most of the residents. Indeed, the CRED report goes on to say that partnerships and contracting out 'may provide alternative approaches to the delivery of these services whilst maintaining as far as is

possible, the reflection of local preferences.' This is precisely what we are arguing when we say that economies are going to come not from scale, but from innovative arrangements based on local partnership working.

In the appendix to this document we bring our own analysis to support the CRED finding that there is no strong relationship between population size and performance.

#### 4.5 **Joint arrangements**

The Boundary Committee has emphasised the importance of avoiding 'joint arrangements' in new unitary structures. We do not envisage any additional statutory joint arrangements other than those already identified as necessary by the Boundary Committee but we must emphasise that the government's modernisation principles require good partnership working. There are many examples of effective partnership working on the commissioning and delivery of services between public sector organisations - this is not a weakness, indeed high performing councils under CPA in part achieve excellent scores because of their ability to work in partnership. The ODPM, through initiatives such as the Strategic Partnership Taskforce, wholly endorse the value and use of such arrangements.

The principles that we would adopt are to ensure that the policy-making function remains solely within the purview of each single unitary, so we would have for example our own Education Authority, Local Transport Plan, Social Services vision and policies etc. Indeed, we would conduct early reviews of these major areas to ensure that policy is aligned with our LSP strategic objectives.

However, in the design, commissioning and delivery of these services we would examine partnership working as a delivery option to test whether it is the right approach in terms of value for money and service quality and co-ordination. As part of this appraisal we will robustly assess risk and ensure that we have contingency plans. If we did not do this we would fail the Audit Commission's test of best value.

We expect there will be occasions where we enter partnerships with other authorities, just as when we enter partnerships with other public and private sector bodies, in order to achieve greater purchasing power, access to specific skills or significantly less transaction costs. For example, we would expect to pool procurement expertise, resources and budgets to support children and young people with SEN who require specialist day or residential care and education. We will look at models of good practice including the northwest regional SEN partnership in terms of establishing protocols and we will work closely with Health to make the most of the Health Act flexibilities in terms of pooled funding with Education, Social Services and the voluntary sector.

None of these arrangements would lessen the case for the two unitaries in the north because the policy-making - i.e. the delivery of the services that local people want - would remain firmly with the new unitary. The more innovative approach to delivery will bring benefits both in terms of focusing services more directly upon need as well as value for money.

## 5 Social services

### 5.1 Introduction

Given the complexity of the task that social services departments have to undertake it is crucial that they have the appropriate *capability* and *capacity* to tackle these. We understand the concerns that the Boundary Committee may have regarding the new authorities to deliver on this important service area.

Here we describe the vision we have for improving the lives of the most vulnerable in our community through the commissioning and delivery of Social Services and to identify where and how risk will be managed. We believe that our new unitary authority can bring about real change and improved outcomes for those most at risk.

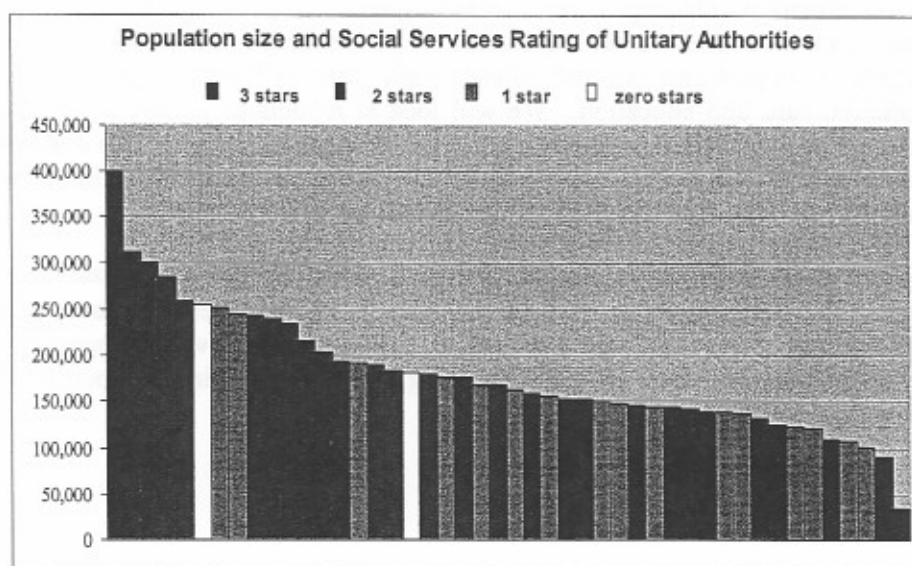
We will develop plans for transition and improvement which ensure that services are delivered professionally from day one while measurable improvement is made within 12 months and a more strategic shift in performance is achieved within 2-3 years.

### 5.2 Key principles

*Compact focused departments have a better chance of successfully managing services strategically*

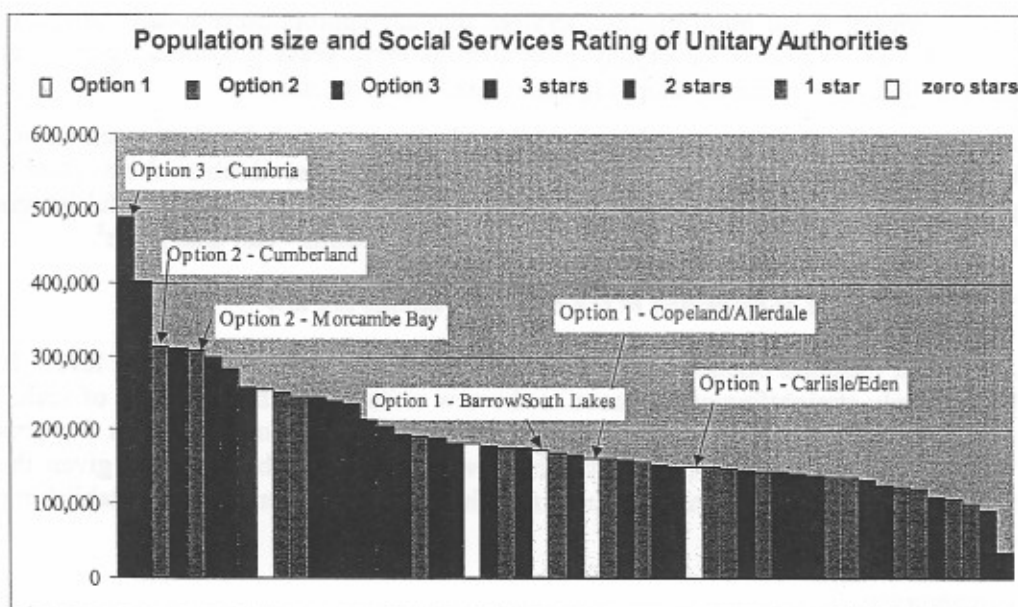
There is no evidence that larger means better as demonstrated by the performance of the current department which has received an SSI rating of zero stars. Being a large department can actually impede the ability to think strategically and manage change successfully. As our analysis of performance against population size shows, strategic capacity and capability is not simply a result of department size or budget.

Social Services Departments are awarded star ratings by the Department of Health (the top performing departments are awarded 3 stars and the lowest are awarded zero). The ratings for all England unitary authorities for 2003 are shown below.



There is no significant correlation between the population size of the authority and the performance of the Social Services Department. The majority of authorities have one or two star rated Departments. However, the two authorities with the weakest performing Departments (with zero stars) are in the larger end of population size and the three authorities with the strongest performing Social Services Departments (three stars) are in the smaller end of the population spectrum.

The diagram below superimposes the options for Cumbria to show that the Eden/Carlisle and Allerdale/Copeland authorities would fit within the mid-range of these authorities.



### *Building upon performance improvement*

The existing service has not been successful but there is work in progress to 'turn-around' the performance of the Department. We understand that there is a performance improvement programme and a new Cumbria-wide Director of Social Services appointed. Significant additional resources have been planned for the Department to support this process. A performance improvement structure will already be in place when the two unitaries become operational.

The two new north Cumbria authorities are best placed to drive further change and continuous improvement, unencumbered by any inclination to protect the status quo.

In particular, we see a focus on:

- taking the commissioning strategies - currently being developed - and making them happen at the service delivery level and bringing about measurable change.
- implementing the recruitment and retention plans;
- ensuring that a performance driven culture is embedded through the new departments(s).

***Our authority can tackle the key local challenges and needs***

Even at the end of the 18-month period of intensive performance improvement, the north Cumbria or County-wide options may well continue to struggle to meet local needs, which vary considerably within the County. Our authority will bring greater focus on specific local needs and integration with the LSP structure. LSPs are the most appropriate forum for building a matrix of local services which link and interact with one another.

For example, our approach provides an opportunity to move away from 'departmentalism' to build modern services that are appropriately local - linked to the infrastructure of people's everyday lives such as early years providers, schools, health centres, hospitals, libraries, shopping centres and transport routes.

In addition, the size of partnerships in children's services is vital and research carried out by the Association of Directors of Social Services cast doubts about community partnership over 200,000<sup>1</sup>. Our proposal is also more likely that meaningful integration with PCTs - and therefore service improvement to the public - can take place<sup>2</sup>.

***The cost and risk of transition to the new departments are low***

At present Cumbria Social Services are already mainly organised at district level. It will be relatively straightforward to move to the new unitaries, with economies of scale from merging two districts compensating the cost of creating two north Cumbria departments. Therefore, the transition required by the new unitaries will be minimal, given the co-terminosity of management structures and the district's experience of establishing and operating LSPs.

***In summary***

Overall, we need to build our services around the vulnerable children and adults we serve and continuously consider the outcomes of our interventions. In this context, standard arguments about large size countywide departments being able to plan and deliver economies of scale are no longer valid. Our unitary will enable these services to be more joined-up so that strategic objectives - set out in national strategies and LSP community plans - can be met.

## **5.3 Current Position**

Social Services in the county are in a particularly challenging position. The department is one of only eight councils in England to receive zero stars in the November 2003 performance ratings. This external judgement provides an objective starting point for the new authority to plan for improvement.

There are a number of specific problems for our new department:

- Children's services perform more poorly than adults.

<sup>1</sup> See Page 19 Tomorrow's Children - a discussion paper on UK child care services in the coming decade. The Association of Directors of Social Services.

<sup>2</sup> Even if a single Cumbria PCT is created it is likely that local health groups will be established to reflect the existing LSP arrangements. Greater integration will not be possible through a countywide social services structure that must deal with three or four different areas with differing agendas.

- Adult services have made progress in developing whole system approaches to modernising services (through the change agent team process) but there is still too large a focus on residential care.
- There is a lack of real innovative partnership working or service delivery models

The existing approach needs changing and it requires both a new start and our local knowledge of the needs of our residents to solve them.

## 5.4 Issues and challenges

We are fully aware of the major challenges for social services and we have the will and competence to manage these.

In Eden/Carlisle the challenges are:

- Setting a new direction and outcomes for clients, rather than getting lost in the maze of inter-related initiatives available. For example, to make best use of the CYPSP (Children's and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership) as a subset of the LSP, requires a locally focused Social Services department. It also involves users in decision-making - at the moment there is no structure for getting the 'voice' of families and for that in turn to help shape the services.
- Ensuring that there is a wider range of local providers and appropriately skilled staff to provide the specialist services required, as well as managing the transition from a predominately provider focused organisation to a strategic commissioner.
- Identifying the options for innovative partnership working and choosing the most appropriate model for the different service areas of children's, adults, learning disabilities etc.
- Implementing the new strategies for social services on the ground e.g. changing the focus of service provision away from a traditional dependence service to one that promotes independence for service users.
- Changing the culture of the Department to a performance driven one, which supports the delivery of modern social services and tackling specific areas of non-performance such as the number of Looked After Children in Eden/Carlisle.
- Cultural diversity - a much larger issue than the census suggests which needs addressing within local communities and our workforce
- Recruitment and retention are problems for both Carlisle and Eden and both are significantly worse than the rest of Cumbria.
- Social Services in Eden/Carlisle are characterised by a lack of partnership with national voluntary organisations like NCH and Barnados compared with the rest of Cumbria. We recognise that this has to be developed with a commissioning strategy in place for family support.
- Rural issues - for example there is no Family Centre in Eden with a consequence of less developed services. This may also mask the demand for services.
- The need to further devolve service delivery e.g. around locality teams.

In the next few years there are also a number of challenges for all social services departments:

- Managing increasing expectations and demands from the public and central government for improved performance and measurable outcomes (e.g. seen through increased referrals rates and the Quality Protects programme).
- Retention and recruitment of key staff - there is a need to have an even stronger focus on developing and recruiting social care staff with the high level skills required to undertake modern social care.
- Developing a more professional approach to commissioning and procurement across in-house and independent sector provision.
- Closer and more strategic partnerships both internally (particularly with Education and Housing) and between different agencies - the NHS, private and voluntary sectors.

## **5.5 Our Plans for the future**

By the time we assume responsibility for the service, the performance improvement process will have started to lay the foundations for change by establishing a performance management system, tackling recruitment and retention, improving social work practice and supervision etc. Our priority will be to implement change at the front line rather than create new strategies and procedures. We will of course be involved at the earliest opportunity and take the impact of performance improvement into account in our plans.

Our approach will be to:

- get the basics correct - care and assessment processes, quality assurance and care planning - before further radical organisational change.
- build contact with other leading unitary Social Services Departments to share best practice, particularly where a more local dimension to care services has worked well.
- agree a people strategy which includes recruitment and retention, training and development, equality issues, management style, remuneration, work life balance etc
- establish an appropriate level of leadership through:
  - a member development programme focusing on the challenges of strategic and political leadership of social services.
  - reviewing the leadership of Social Services in light of changes in Education and health and the implications of the Green Paper
- introduce genuine preventative work, through working more closely with LSP partners, for example, all schools / early years providers in Carlisle and Eden.
- undertake an option appraisal of the future of Cumbria Care and a market development programme to attract new providers and staff e.g. with the national voluntary sector.
- review all major joint policies and working inherited from the old county-wide structure within the first 12 months of operation and amend them to reflect local need. New unitaries such as Blackburn and Darwen have no joint arrangements.

## 6 Education

### 6.1 Introduction

The new authority will have at its heart the need for children and young people to be successful and improve their life chances and achieve high standards. The approach will be to seek a step change focussed on improving how children and young people think about themselves, addressing their motivation to progress in education and training. Educational provision will be reviewed in partnership to address issues of participation, achievement, progression and inclusion. This will be undertaken within a strategic planning context, which addresses local needs, equality, access and choice in both urban and sparse rural communities.

The current disparity in size and recruitment in schools will be addressed, as the success of one school cannot be at the expense of others. The projections of surplus places will be managed and reform undertaken in close collaboration with leadership from schools themselves and clear strategies will be set out to show where schools need to be in 10 years time. The pattern of provision will ensure sensible location with respect to demand, choice for parents across sectors, curriculum choice and timetable. Future development will be undertaken in partnership to address the 14-19 agenda, which will include the development of learning centres which help to give young people clear progression routes to further and higher education, training and employment.

The new authority will seek to promote a closer relationship between providers in future and build on the links between schools, FE and HE institutions, training providers and employees. This collaborative approach is currently enthusiastically led by the Federation of Carlisle Schools and will be supported and new partnerships developed to raise standards and achievement. There is a strong commitment to developing our schools as centres of local communities, especially Primary Schools. We will support and develop further extended schools; breakfast clubs; Lifelong Learning programmes and progress for gifted and talented children.

The new Authority will also review, in collaboration with the LSC, the current provision for adults in terms of education and training. This will include addressing essential skills and widening the participation rates, particularly amongst the hard to reach groups.

### 6.2 Key principles

#### *Maintenance of the strengths of the current Department and focus on the areas for development*

We fully recognise the contribution of the existing Education Department and will build on them in a way which jeopardises none of the achievements. We also want to focus on those areas of improvement that are required, for example the interaction with the Children's and Young Persons Strategic Partnership (CYPSP).

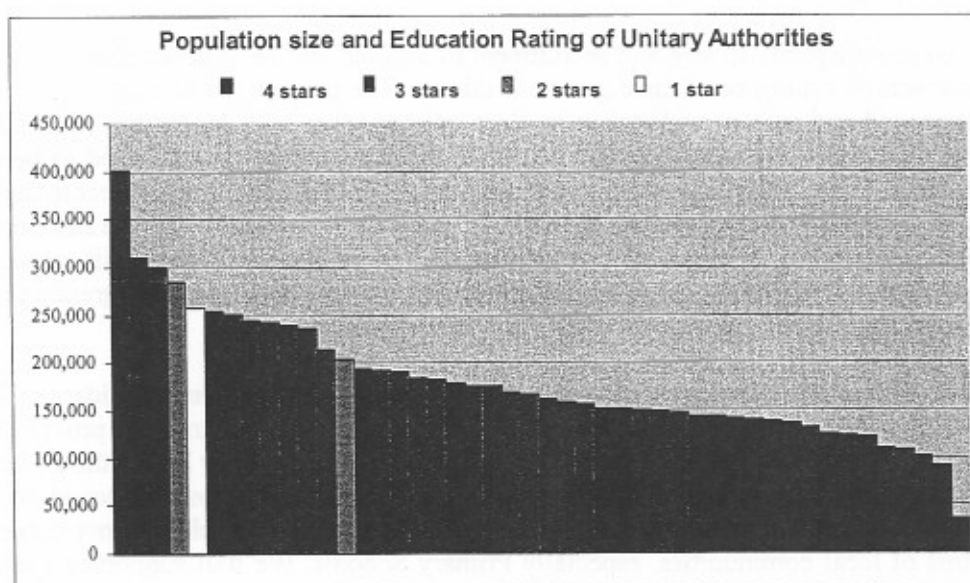
#### *Local need can best be met and managed locally*

Cumbria is a county of contrasts and the two northern unitaries will be able to use their greater local understanding of service need and current gaps to tackle issues such as planning school places and managing school catchment areas.

Education Departments are inspected by OFSTED and their results form part of the Audit Commission's overall CPA assessment. LEAs are graded 1-4 (4 being the highest). The ratings for all England unitary authorities for 2003 are shown below.

There is a correlation between the population size of the authority and LEA performance. The majority of LEAs which score grade 4 are found in the smaller end of the population spectrum. Overall, the majority of LEAs received a grade 3 or above – only 3 authorities scored below this and these authorities are among the largest of all unitary authorities.

The proposed options for reorganisation in Cumbria would create unitary authorities which fall at the very top end of population.



#### ***Managing dis-aggregation to minimise the impact on schools***

We wish to work closely with the Carlisle and Eden community of schools and will build on the good relationships already developed within the Carlisle City Council's Post 14 group. Our approach will mean that schools will experience little disruption.

#### ***New models of education service delivery***

We expect a significant range of children's educational services to be established outside a traditional education department around new strategic service delivery partnerships. We have no pre-existing traditional service structures and vested interests to accommodate so we can focus exclusively on outcomes for children.

#### ***Best value decisions on the role of joint working***

Eden/Carlisle LEA will be independent and not require any formal joint boards. However, we do expect collaboration on best practice sharing and specialist education services where it offers better value to do so, in line with modernisation principles and similar to arrangements elsewhere in the educational sector.

### 6.3 Current Position

The core Local Education Authority functions comprise policy and development - including early years; quality and advisory services; governor support; SEN, the school psychological service and the learning support service; education welfare services; student awards; and adult and continuing education. The current Department has been identified as good, with OFSTED (2001) concluding that:

- Standards are rising in schools (although there are significant local variations), while attainment is better than national average at Key Stage 2.
- There are good partnerships with primary and special schools.
- GCSE and Key Stage 2 results have risen faster than the national average.

The Report stated that the LEA provides effective support services such as support for numeracy and literacy in primary schools, reducing exclusion, promoting social inclusion, improving attendance and financial management and personnel. The standard of school buildings is also high, even though there are surplus spaces.

The service has a good record for adapting schools to ensure that children with disabilities are mainstreamed. Ullswater Community College in Eden has an international reputation for its work on inclusion.

Areas for development include: support for early years, performance management, implementation of corporate plans, removal of surplus places, support for ethnic minorities and work on cultural diversity. We will also need to tackle specific areas such as the performance of Key Stage 4 and post 16 students in Carlisle which is below the national average. We will develop further work with partners to get the most from the CYPSP in Cumbria.

### 6.4 Current issues and challenges

Both locally and nationally there are a number of key challenges that will confront the new LEA. We seek to demonstrate that we understand these challenges and that they are much better managed by two more locally focused unitary authorities than either the County-wide or north Cumbria option.

#### *New ways of delivering education services and supporting children*

The Children's Green Paper 2003 'Every Child Matters' presents an opportunity to radically reconsider the existing management structures for children's services. This is in addition to the existing Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and work with the local Connexions and Sure Start programmes. We will move away from 'departmental' approaches to service delivery and draw local education, social services and health services more closely together.

#### *Special Educational Needs*

We need to review SEN resources to ensure consistency of provision across the LEA and the prioritisation of inclusion. In particular we will need to examine the provision for children with complex needs, how they are catered for at the moment e.g. through exporting to other facilities and whether these arrangements either provide best value or the best service to children.

We want to ensure that SEN provision gives children the opportunity for progression into mainstream education and training and that we build on current successes to ensure that mainstream schools have the training and resources they need to accommodate the widest range of needs.

#### ***Exclusion/Behaviour Support***

We acknowledge and support the work already taking place such as the Pastoral Support Programmes but more needs to be done to ensure the exclusion rate is reduced and there are more imaginative ways of supporting excluded pupils, e.g. using Youth Service, Connexions, YOT, Voluntary Sector, etc. We will also need to address attendance rates through support to individual schools.

#### ***Managing school facilities and numbers***

The management of school numbers and demand in rural areas is a sensitive issue which requires political leadership and sound management analysis at a local level. The planning of school places and admissions arrangements, together with cooperation between consortia of schools and colleges are essentially local rather than countywide issues. For example, the analysis completed in the Schools Organisation Plan is best undertaken at a more local level.

#### ***Extending community integration***

While the current Department has made real progress on the Extended Schools programme, we will use our more local political and management structures to accelerate this process. We plan to use them for multi-agency teams, especially in the most deprived areas, ensuring greater integration and inclusion. For example, we will link specialist children and family services to Education and extend Adult Community Learning programmes, support people with learning difficulties and or disabilities or mental health problems.

#### ***Review of Post 16 Education***

The LSC is currently consulting on the option of establishing a new sixth form college in Carlisle and our new LEA will need to ensure that GCSE/A level achievement rates are high though better support for post 16 students.

#### ***Adult Community Learning***

We will develop this area of work through a Learning Partnership and ensure it is a strong sub group of the Carlisle and Eden LSP.

### **6.5 Our plans for the future**

To improve local education attainment and overall performance we propose the following practical examples of what we intend to do include:

#### ***Reflecting and meeting local school need***

The Eden/Carlisle unitary will be in a better position to respond to local need and pursue individual policies in relation, for example, to rural schools. We will maximise access to

the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme as a means of targeting school building replacement. For example:

- In our area there is a real issue of surplus capacity in schools. We will revisit any existing arrangements for schools closure and make sure that future strategies balance local and environmental needs - minimising the movement of children between schools and home - with the requirement to deliver value for money.
- Eden /Carlisle unitary will be established on the basis of strong local consultation by designing and building schools for the future, maximising the funding streams available to us. We would wish to establish schools that support and add value to local communities beyond pure educational use, for example in working with Social services to support families. The lack of family support is a particular problem in our rural areas.

#### *Joint working and service delivery partnerships*

We would expect to establish some consortia with other local unitaries in the north west to provide greater critical mass and support to the schools. This is a common approach across LEAs at present for functions such as some specialist residential care provision. This would not involve the creation of joint boards but build flexibly on our significant experience of joint working and collaborative resource sharing. In parallel we intend to use existing County-wide polices for the transitional stages but add greater levels of localism for early years, SEN and the integration of children's care services such as schools and learning services. In practical terms we will review - according to best value principles:

- provision and the assets the LEA currently has - for example, special school/places in Cumbria where integration into mainstream schooling is high;
- we will build service level agreements for transport, contract meals etc.

#### *Post 14*

We will address the concerns identified in the 14-19 Agenda and the forthcoming Thompson Report, especially those items relating to the vocational needs of young people in Eden/Carlisle who are disengaged and excluded from educational provision.

We will build on our strong relationships with secondary and special schools, Connexions, the voluntary sector, Youth Offending Team, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to establish a range of innovative educational and training provision which accord with the needs of the local community and the future socio-economic climate.

The current Post 16 review of provision in the Carlisle area and its outcomes will provide the new unitary authority with the capacity to further develop progression routes to further and higher education, training and development. It will also enable the authority to address the concerns relating to surplus places in secondary schools by developing learning and training opportunities which support young people in the post 14 age group.

#### *A more holistic view of public services through a community focus for schools*

Working with our local community partners through the LSP, we will support schools to be a community focal point and provide links with our cross cutting objectives such as children's services, the crime and disorder strategy, ethnic minority achievement plan etc. We intend to strengthen the government's initiatives on 'extended schools' principles into

practice. This will enhance service delivery in the more rural areas of our unitaries, as we will seek to design future facilities that offer community functions, including improved customer access points. For example, we will build on our strong relationships with the Connexions, the Youth Service, YOT, voluntary sector services in order to, for example, reduce the exclusion rate and create more imaginative ways of supporting excluded pupils. Post 14 provision is weak in Cumbria and we want to combine this approach alongside the 'extended schools' principles to develop future schools around a more integrated and community focus.

#### *Review the development of the LEA*

Once the new department has established the basics of effective educational services we will consider the future development of the LEA. The key themes of such a strategy review are:

- the emergence of two distinct functions from the existing county educational service:
  - an early years, schools and adult/continuing education service; and
  - a combined children's service that begins to join-up existing specialist educational services such as SEN with social services/health services relating to children and families.
- maintaining the level of delegation to schools and establishing effective consultation mechanisms with schools to agree the degree of delegation and flexibility to head teachers and schools governors.
- closer working with PCTs to strengthen jointly delivered initiatives such as Sure Start and Children's Centres.

## 6.6 Conclusions

In conclusion we believe that the new unitary will be well placed to manage to transition from county department structure into a modern service based around:

- maintaining high quality education, where this exists;
- effective integration within the Councils' and partner structures,
- providing strong parent, pupil and community support with capacity to plan and deliver ongoing improvement.

We believe that the Eden/Carlisle unitary - rather than a single county or north Cumbria authority - will be better disposed to manage the transformation around children's services. Whilst structural arrangements at this stage would still need to be agreed, we would expect each unitary to create new Integrated Children's Services functions that break down the traditional Social Services and Education divide.

## 7 Regeneration

### 7.1 Introduction

Regeneration has proved more difficult for us recently because it is one from which the County Council has sought to disengage over the last two years. Since rightly receiving some praise for its role in the foot and mouth crisis - although the districts played at least as big a role - the county has sought to withdraw from or transfer much of its regeneration activity. The districts have been active in filling this gap and have built a range of cross-boundary partnerships which seek to co-ordinate activity and attract the funding that is available from external sources - regional, national and European Union.

While the regeneration challenges of Eden/Carlisle may not receive the national attention of those in west Cumbria, they are nonetheless an important priority for us. In particular we are seeking to address:

- pockets of real urban deprivation in Carlisle
- rural diversification and the low wage economy, poor representation of growth sectors in the local economy
- the need for population growth in Carlisle, population ageing and the loss of young people
- low business formation rates
- development of the higher education sector
- weak industrial and office property markets.

### 7.2 Current initiatives

Eden/Carlisle councils are working together to:

- market the M6 corridor and
- developing an Employment Alternatives initiative that offers support and advice to people when facing economic change or a change in career
- the New Deal programme which covers both the Eden and Carlisle areas.

Carlisle City Council has led on the development of Carlisle Airport:

- working with the owners to get stakeholder support for development of the airport
- working with the agencies north and south of the border to develop plans, establish links with the business community and introduce the development to the Rural Regeneration Company who have taken it on as a project
- responding to the White paper titled 'future of air transport' on regional air transport and succeeded in securing the co-ordinated view to government on the air transport

needs of the area from Scottish local government, local businesses, Cumbria agencies and other interests

The Carlisle Eden LSP is developing a Carlisle economic action plan at the invitation of the RDA.

Carlisle City Council has developed a Rural Strategy in response to the rural white and the implications of foot and mouth, which was published in July 2003.

Eden DC has a strong track record in supporting and investing in rural community sustainability projects such as the nationally acclaimed Cyber Moor Project which brings integrated IT to homes and businesses in Alston.

Eden Business Park, developed by the DC in conjunction with the NWDA has attracted inward investment to Penrith helping to raise the wage level for the area.

Eden's rural workspace programme and Eden integrated start-up scheme encourages business start ups in rural areas and market towns.

## **8 Other Services**

### **8.1 Provision of cultural services**

Carlisle is identified as a 'City of Influence' in The Cultural Consortium: England northwest strategy action plan 2002-2003. It brings together all the public and private sector organisations involved both in developing and delivering cultural activities and driving regional economic and social regeneration across the region.

Its influence as a regional centre has also been acknowledged by the inclusion of the City Council's museum, Tullie House, as a member of the Northwest hub. These Hubs are now being developed in each of the English regions as centres of excellence to promote the best possible standards among regional museums, working alongside organisations such as national museums and the Regional Agencies for museums, archives and libraries in order to do so.

This means that the Eden/Carlisle unitary will be ideally placed to bring together former county and district services into an integrated 'cultural services' organisation that will co-ordinate the work of other departments and partners to enhance the quality of life for our own residents and those of the wider region.

#### **8.1.1 Arts**

The County Council involvement in the arts is minimal and focuses on grant distribution policy and strategy - there is no direct service provision. There are a few county wide arts organisations. The county budget can easily be disaggregated between the new authorities in accordance with the location of supported organisations and this would be a clear benefit as we seek to restructure and co-ordinate cultural services with a more local focus, while at the same time acknowledging our regional role.

#### **8.1.2 Archives**

Archives are a specialist form of museum collection and in Cumbria there are three archives - at Carlisle, Kendal and Workington. A museum and archives service for each northern unitary is a practical option and will dovetail well with other cultural services to bring real improvement. In Eden/Carlisle we will manage the archive alongside Tullie House which will bring great benefits to access.

#### **8.1.3 Libraries**

We would seek to build on the existing service which aims to be a community service that adds value to the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds through access to knowledge, information, imagination, culture and heritage. One of our main concerns will be to link essential skills for adults to specialist literacy and numeracy provision within the Library service. Moreover the links with Early Years, local schools, specialist Education and Social Services need to be strengthened.

The current County library service cites 'widespread geographical limits' as a constraint on development. We can provide an appropriate locally tailored approach that will build on e-government and lifelong learning principles. Disadvantage, lack of opportunity and lack of access to services could be tackled by the implementation of wider electronic

services in homes, workplaces and schools and by the provision of services geared to local need through much closer working with community organisations.

#### **8.1.4 Sports**

Cumbria Sport is a body, jointly funded by the 6 districts, the County and Sport England. Its responsibilities are for the promotion of specific Sport England development programmes, particularly for schools and clubs. Sport England's priorities have changed recently so that the need for a county-wide sport body is doubtful. We will develop a sports strategy for the new unitary focused more on encouraging greater participation using existing services and facilities at a local level.

Carlisle is identified in the National Athletics Development Strategy as a regional centre for athletics. One of the objectives of this is to develop a facility capable of hosting regional athletics finals. The current Council has driven this forward by drawing in funding from both Sports England and the Football Foundation (Carlisle is a sub-regional centre for football development), providing capital funding, land and project management to develop an existing facility at The Sheepmount in Carlisle.

Eden DC has recently invested heavily in new sports facilities. It also supports community sports activities, for example, provides in conjunction with Newcastle FC football coaching across the district.

#### **8.1.5 Youth Service and Connexions**

The current service provided by the County Council through Connexions is essentially a limited advice service for vulnerable and at-risk young people. The provision of opportunities at an earlier age is considered to be a more beneficial approach.

The new unitary authority would undertake an audit of existing services and provision in conjunction with groups such as the local Youth Work Partnerships and seek to design a new Youth Service based on an assessment of local need. We would seek to work with the Connexions service and local partners such as community centres, parish councils, schools, sports and leisure providers to provide a different and more comprehensively planned approach to the needs of young people. As we have already noted there would be close links to Education and a new Children's Service.

### **8.2 Summary**

Because there are clear synergies between these services, the new unitary authority would manage them as part of an integrated service. It is a logical grouping around the delivery of cultural and leisure provision and make use of our detailed knowledge of local communities and their organisations, underpinned by existing cultural strategies and their re-invigoration for the new unitaries.

## 9 Comparative analysis

### 9.1 Other regions

The decision not to recommend our proposed two north Cumbria unitary option for inclusion in the ballot paper is particularly strange in the light of proposals made by the Boundary Committee in other areas of the north of England.

For example, in County Durham, the North Durham option has a population of only 138,800, while the proposed East and South Durham unitaries are not much larger. In North Yorkshire, option 2 includes Hambleton and Richmondshire with a population of 131,000 and Ryedale and Scarborough with a population of 157,000. In Northumberland the non-county option is for two unitaries of 164,800 and 142,000.

In the light of these recommendations, the decision to exclude two northern unitaries for Cumbria on the basis of their size, despite them being of a similar scale or larger than the examples quoted above, seems to lack logic.

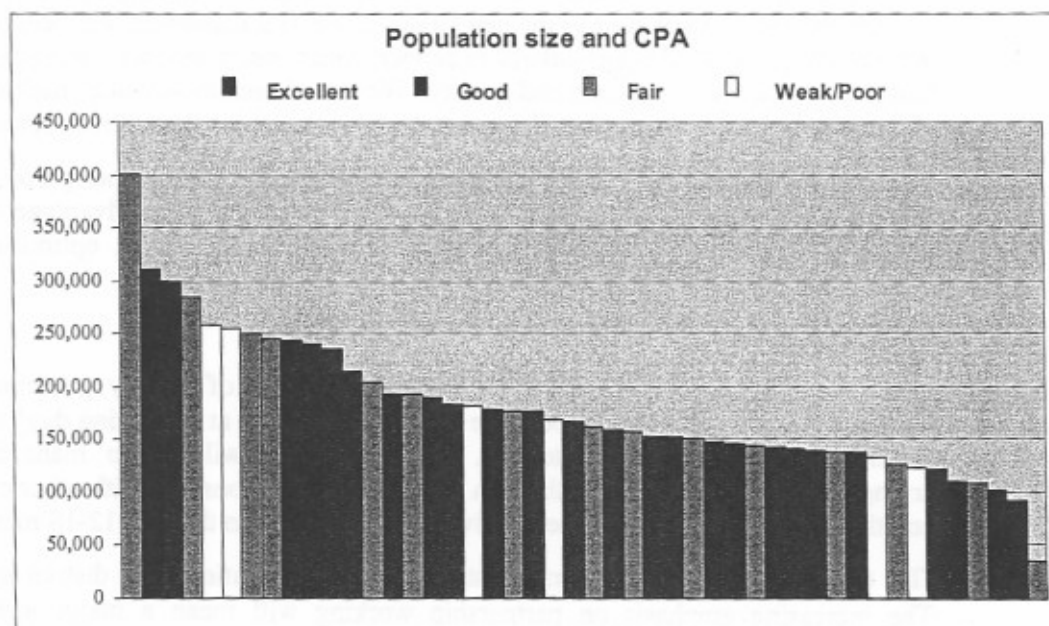
### 9.2 Reassurance over the size of proposed authorities

#### 9.2.1 Population

The two-unitary authority proposal will not result in particularly small unitary authorities. In terms of population, the Allerdale/Copeland and Eden/Carlisle authorities are within the mid range of existing unitary authorities (34<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> respectively out of 52 authorities). Therefore, we believe - in simple population terms - the 'two authorities for the north' approach is both viable and sustainable.

#### 9.2.2 Size and Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The graph below shows the lack of any clear relationship between corporate capacity and population as indicated by CPA score.



## 10 Transitional Arrangements

### 10.1 Programme and Project Management

Based on good practice and lessons from other similar authorities, we would see the management of the overall process through an overall project management board and a series of distinct robustly-managed projects for the individual items such as HR, property, IT, political arrangements etc.

### 10.2 Key Areas identified

Key features of the transition will be:

- Dis-aggregation of county budgets - an exercise which we see as relatively straightforward given the high degree of co-operation which exists between the districts, the fact that many county services are already delivered along district lines and the lack of a major urban conurbation to skew the budgets. We would take the same approach to a division of the county assets between the new unitaries
- The creation of new political structures which will create strong political leadership for the new authorities. All of our research with those unitaries created in the last decade tells us that a critical factor for success is the role that members can play in articulating the agenda for the new authority. We will therefore put in place an effective briefing programme for the elected members of the new authority to ensure that they have a very clear picture of:
  - the service agenda for county services and how these integrate with current local priorities
  - the executive and scrutiny roles, particularly members' role in representing local neighbourhoods, monitoring service performance and driving improvement within the unitary context.
  - effective member/officer relationships
- Human resources - early discussions with the representatives of employees to ensure the smooth transition of staff to the new organisation and managing the medium term rationalisation of people, particularly in support functions, where we would expect to find improvements in both cost and quality. We would seek to recruit a small number of experienced senior managers to key posts to drive the new organisation forward.
- Partnerships - the strength of these is one of the reasons we feel that our proposals are the best unitary solution for Cumbria, but in order to maintain this advantage we will have to involve our partners very early in discussions about optimising the contribution of the new organisation.
- Performance management - see chapter 4.
- Joint arrangements - it is inevitable, whatever system of unitary government is chosen, that there will need to be some joint arrangements at 'transition day' in order to maintain services for customers. Our approach will be to manage these arrangements in the short term through our excellent relationships with other councils and then to move smoothly to new delivery arrangements in the first 12-18 months.
- IT - the disaggregation of county systems and amalgamation with district systems. The increasing emphasis on partnership working will mean a major agenda of

integrating systems e.g. between the PCT and Social Services/Housing which will be best managed locally.

- Early engagement with existing county functions and services to learn from current providers, plan effectively and reassure transferring employees.

## 11 Summary – an assessment of risk

In conclusion, we would wish to acknowledge that there is no solution to unitary government in Cumbria which is without risk. For us, the critical question is whether the Boundary Committee has made a balanced assessment of the risks of each of the major options.

In our view there is significant risk attached to the County option because:

- the current organisation has not performed well and has not showed significant signs of improvement
- their approaches to community engagement have been ineffective
- polls show that residents have less sense of identity with the county and that they would prefer to have local government at a district level
- the area is too large to manage effectively in terms of catering for the disparate needs of the separate areas within the county
- the current organisation has done little to address the transition issues in taking over district services
- there is lack of experience or commitment to developing the kind of modernised approach to customer access and service that an effective unitary council needs.

Similarly we see a single unitary for North Cumbria as carrying equal if not more risk, in that it:

- would replicate the problems of geographical remoteness that have been experienced by the County
- will have real problems in engaging local people in consultation about how they want their services to be run without trying to re-run arrangements that have already failed within the County
- will damage the impact of what have been two very successful LSPs
- has no support from any of the district councils covered by the proposal
- has no current organisational infrastructure
- seeks to combine two areas which have virtually no transport links and little in common in terms of community identity
- will dissipate the effort required in each of the main areas to tackle real but very different regeneration issues
- may be perceived as a solution imposed from outside which will in turn increase electoral alienation and decrease turn-out.

On the other hand, we recognise that our proposal for two unitary authorities in the north has some risks, but on balance these are less than those above and can be more easily managed because:

- they seek to build on structures which have emerged as the best way to tackle our issues - the LSPs and their sub partnerships are real and successful organisations
- there is a very high level of commitment from those that will have to deliver unitary local government to making these unitaries work
- our Local Public Service agreement will focus specifically on our issues and challenges in Eden/Carlisle and it will necessarily look very different from that for Allerdale/Copland. The LPSA will be a significant framework for driving improvement and it will link closely to our priority setting process within the LSP
- the assertion that other options will deliver economies of scale are not substantiated by evidence - indeed we believe that our organisations, by being more agile, better able to engage partners and more focused on our residents' priorities will deliver better value for money
- we are best placed to develop our existing access points into an effective process for modern customer service, based on the principles of choice and getting the right answer at the first point of call
- we are well placed to undertake the changes because we have conducted the necessary research to understand what the new unitary will have to do and can manage the transition
- we have the community networks that give the best opportunity for increasing local engagement and involvement in local decision-making.

We hope that the Boundary Committee will reconsider its original recommendations in the light of these arguments and give the people of north Cumbria a real choice about the structure of local government in their area by including the Eden/Carlisle and Allerdale/Copeland options on the ballot paper.



### Three unitary authorities

Table 11: Three unitary authorities

Unitary authority	Constituent parts	Population (2001)
West Cumbria	Allerdale and Copeland	162,800
East Cumbria	Carlisle and Eden	150,500
South Cumbria	Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland	174,300

76 Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland district councils jointly proposed three unitary authorities for Cumbria.

77 This proposal received some degree of local support, particularly from parish and town councils. Of the 13 parish and town councils that wrote in support of the proposal, 11 expressed a preference for their local pairing of districts without commenting on the other areas. The Cumbria Police Authority, Eden Valley PCT, one Member of Parliament and the national Conservative Party also supported the proposal. We also note that a significant degree of consensus among the district councils for this proposal, notwithstanding Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council's alternative preference.

78 We have given careful consideration to the submissions received and have identified a number of advantages with this proposal. Allerdale and Copeland, situated to the west of the Cumbria Mountains, are linked by, and share concerns about, the A595. Carlisle and Eden are linked via the M6. Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland are linked by the A590 and appear to share a common 'South Cumbria' identity that distinguishes them from other areas in the county. Both districts also share similar interests in the Morecambe Bay area, particularly regarding environmental issues.

79 The geography of the county to a large extent dictates the transport and communication links. In the context of Cumbria each proposed pair of districts are reasonably well linked, although it should be noted that road links in Cumbria in general are quite poor on the minor roads. Carlisle and Eden are linked by the M6 Motorway and also by the Settle-Carlisle railway and the West Coast Main Line. The A590, A5902 and the A595 roads link Barrow-in-Furness and South Lakeland. They are also linked by rail. Allerdale and Copeland are linked by the A595 road and by rail.

80 We note that there is already a history of joint district working between Allerdale and Copeland, and between Carlisle and Eden, although Barrow and South Lakeland appear to have limited partnerships in comparison with the other two pairs of districts.

81 We have also considered the common industrial heritage that is shared by Allerdale and Copeland. Several submissions noted that they both have an extensive shared industrial history founded on coal extraction, iron and steel engineering and the nuclear industry, with manufacturing being a main employer in these areas, including the British Nuclear Fuels Plc (BNFL) centre in Sellafield. The close connection between the two districts is reinforced by the travel-to-work patterns in Allerdale and Copeland, which indicates significant commuting between the districts.

82 We note that the MORI public opinion research also offers some support to the contention that these three proposed unitary authorities would generally reflect local community identities and interests. For example, it found that in Eden, Carlisle is a focal point for services and shopping in particular. South Lakeland was found to have affinity with south Cumbria. In west Cumbria, some residents in Copeland look to Workington (in Allerdale) as well as Whitehaven in Copeland borough for services such as shopping.

83 However, we have a number of concerns about this proposal. In our guidance we stressed the point that proposals, particularly those for smaller authorities, should address the issue of how it is envisaged that services that are currently being carried out by the County Council would be delivered, particularly in relation to larger services such as education and social services.

84 We have some concerns about the ability of these proposed unitary authorities to deliver services effectively and efficiently to their local communities. In particular we are concerned about the ability of the proposed West Cumbria unitary authority to effectively perform all local government functions, without resorting to large numbers of joint arrangements. Based on the evidence received we consider that such an authority would face major obstacles in seeking to become high performing, particularly given the challenging socio-economic conditions of the area, with a heavy reliance on what may be a declining nuclear industry. The resource base capacity available to this authority in confronting significant economic restructuring requirements would be severely tested.

85 We note that the proposed South Cumbria unitary authority would not reflect existing partnerships in the area. If established, new partnership arrangements would need to be established for the south Cumbria area. Furthermore, the MORI research indicates few links between the residents of the two districts, although it should be noted that a general affinity for 'south Cumbria' is felt, particularly in the southern Lakes area. Some Barrow-in-Furness residents who were interviewed stated that their affinity stretched further afield, towards Lancaster, and felt a notable affinity with Lancashire, probably stemming from the fact that Barrow-in-Furness was formerly

part of that county. Residents in South Lakeland tended to associate most with the areas within the district. There are also socio-economic differences between the two districts, with the economy of Barrow-in-Furness being dominated by industry, and South Lakeland a more varied economy including agriculture and tourism. While the diversity of the economies is not seen as a major obstacle in combining these two districts within the same authority, it may be that an alternative configuration for the districts in southern Cumbria could provide more effective synergies for local government services to be delivered.