
**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2004**

COS.7/04 REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

With reference to Executive Decision EX.310/03, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive submitted Report CE.28/03 enclosing the Draft Recommendations for Unitary Local Government in Cumbria recently published by the Boundary Committee for England. The Executive had considered the Draft Recommendations of the Boundary Committee and referred them for comment to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported that the Draft Recommendations of the Boundary Committee for Cumbria were either one Unitary Authority comprising the whole of the County of Cumbria or two Unitary Authorities, one for North Cumbria and one for South Cumbria and Lancaster. The Boundary Committee had not included the City Council's preferred option of a Carlisle and Eden Unitary Authority and had in a meeting with District Councils described this as somewhat of an uphill struggle, although they had stated that they were not dismissing outright those proposals on which they were not consulting.

Members were asked to give a view on what action should be taken now. To date, the Council had not changed its position regarding the preference for three Unitary Councils made up of two districts in each. Views were sought on whether to continue to work on this proposal and/or to start to work on the two options proposed by the Boundary Committee.

In response to Members' questions, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that four District Councils namely Carlisle, Eden, Allerdale and Copeland (and to a degree South Lakes) were continuing to work together collectively and collaboratively. The four northern authorities had jointly engaged consultants, KPMG, to assess if there was a case for pursuing two Unitary Authorities in the North Cumbria Area with pairings of Carlisle and Eden for one Authority and Allerdale and Copeland for the other. Decisions on the response to the Boundary Committee would be affected by the outcome of this report. In addition, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive asked Members whether work should be undertaken on an option or options proposed by the Boundary Committee and in particular, work on devolved structures.

In discussing the matter, the following points were raised by Members:-

- (a) There is past evidence of Carlisle and Eden Areas being able to provide services such as Education and Social Services as there was an Authority which did this prior to 1974.

(b) There was a recognition that there is a lot of work to do on the two options which have been put on the table by the Boundary Committee, particularly, a lot of work would need to be done on the devolution of functions and service provision.

(c) There needs to be clarification at some point of functions and responsibilities in relation to planning. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive suggested that the Head of Planning Services could give a presentation to all Overview and Scrutiny Committees on what was on the horizon for planning.

(d) Parish Councils would probably consider their formal responses at their first meetings of this New Year and it may be helpful to send an e-mail reminder to Parish Clerks regarding this.

(e) The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that Carlisle, Eden, Copeland and Allerdale have jointly commissioned KPMG to assess the case for two Unitary Authorities in the North Cumbria Area. This was funded from the money which had been set aside last year for work on Regional Government. Each District Council would contribute an equal share of the funding.

(f) Depending on the outcome of the KPMG Report, the four District Councils who had been meeting together could either continue to pursue the two Unitary Authorities in North Cumbria option, or could start to work on the two options being proposed by the Boundary Committee.

(g) Members were concerned that the State of the City debate would be focussing on Regional Government. Their concerns were of a legal, protocol and constitutional nature and although they welcomed the opportunity to debate Regional Government, they felt that to set a precedent of using the State of the City debate in this manner would be wrong.

RESOLVED – That the following comments be forwarded to the Executive:-

(i) There was a general consensus of the Committee of the importance of seeing the KPMG Report which had been commissioned by the four District Councils. However, due to the timescales involved, if the KPMG Report finds that the two Unitary Authorities within North Cumbria is not a viable option, then the Committee would not need to see this Report. It would then be this Committee's suggestion that the Council should focus on working on the two Boundary Committee options, looking in particular at the devolving of power to Area Committees, the provision of Planning, Education, Social Services and current District Council services. However, if the KPMG Report assessed the two Unitaries in North Cumbria option as viable, this Committee would need to see a copy of that Report and give it full and adequate consideration.

(ii) If the KPMG Report does need to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committees, this could be done at a joint meeting of all the Committees rather than holding separate meetings for each one.

(iii) There is concern about the proposed State of the City debate being used to consider the future shape of Local Government in the Carlisle Area. The concerns were that the Constitution required this to be a debate on the health and wellbeing of the City and of a more budgetary nature, and that using it to discuss Regional Government could set a precedent for its use in the future.

**EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE
CORPORATE RESOURCES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2004**

**CROS.8/04 REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REVIEW**

There was submitted report of the Town Clerk and Chief Executive (CE.28/03) enclosing the draft recommendations for Unitary Local Government in Cumbria recently published by the Boundary Committee for England i.e. one Unitary Authority comprising the whole of the County of Cumbria, or two Unitary Authorities based on the northern and southern areas of Cumbria incorporating Lancaster City from Lancashire.

The Boundary Committee had not included the City Council's preferred option of a Carlisle and Eden Unitary Authority, although they had emphasised that they had not finalised their recommendations for Cumbria and Lancashire, and were not dismissing outright those proposals on which they were not consulting. Rather they were recommending options which they considered, based upon the evidence received so far, to be most likely to meet the objectives of the review.

There was now a period of consultation until 23 February 2004 during which time comments, information and further evidence was invited.

RESOLVED – That the report be received, it being noted that a further report on the matter would be submitted to the special meeting of this Committee scheduled to be held on 11 February 2004.

INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING

THURSDAY 15 JANUARY 2004 AT 11.30AM

PRESENT: Councillors Rutherford C (Chairman), Bowman S, Crookdake, Dodd, Earp, Martlew and Im Thurn.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Firth attended the meeting, as Portfolio holder and Councillor Glover attended as an observer.

IOS.04/04 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Ms Mooney (Executive Director)

IOS.05/04 REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

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The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reported that the Draft Recommendations of the Boundary Committee for Cumbria were either one Unitary Authority comprising the whole of the County of Cumbria or two Unitary Authorities, one for North Cumbria and one for South Cumbria and Lancaster. The Boundary Committee had not included the City Council's preferred option of a Carlisle and Eden Unitary Authority and had in a meeting with District Councils described this as somewhat of an uphill struggle, although they had stated that they were not dismissing outright those proposals on which they were not consulting.

Members were asked to give a view on what action should be taken now. The Council had not changed its position regarding its preference for three Unitary Councils made up of two districts in each.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that four District Councils namely Carlisle, Eden, Allerdale and Copeland (and to a degree South Lakes) were continuing to work together collectively and collaboratively. The four northern authorities had jointly engaged consultants, KPMG, to assess if there was a case for pursuing two Unitary Authorities in the North Cumbria Area, with pairings of Carlisle and Eden for one Authority and Allerdale and Copeland for the other. Decisions on the response to the Boundary

Committee would be affected by the outcome of this report. Once completed, the KPMG report could be presented to a joint meeting of all three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

In considering the report, the following matters were discussed:

(a) The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that the Boundary Committee had stated that they would leaflet all residents in the affected areas, presenting the options. However, there had not been any evidence of any households in the Carlisle area having received leaflets from the Boundary Committee outlining the options for Cumbria. Members were concerned that local people needed this information in order to have a say.

(b) In relation to the external consultation which had been carried out by this Council, Members noted that there had been consultation with the Parish Councils, the NNDR Group and City Vision partners, but Members suggested that there should be consultation within the urban area e.g. with Neighbourhood Forums, Tenants Federations, Residents Associations, voluntary organisations etc. There was discussion on how these type of bodies could be consulted and a recognition that many of them will not have meetings scheduled between now and 23 February 2004, when the response to the Boundary Committee was due. There was a suggestion that the Neighbourhood Forum mailing lists could be a useful tool in consultation

(c) The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that he believed the Leader no longer intended to use the State of the City Debate to discuss Regional Government. Members stated that their concerns had been that the State of the City debate was being used for the wrong purpose, but they suggested that a separate debate on Regional Government would be a worthwhile exercise. Members suggested that a debate could be held by the Council, to which representatives of interested agencies and organisations could be invited and that this could be open to the public to observe. In considering how this debate could be arranged within the tight timescale, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive stated that if both this Committee and the Executive were in agreement with this proposal, he could make a decision to hold it and the arrangements could therefore be made quickly.

(d) The importance of raising public awareness of the proposals was highlighted. There was also concern that the public need to be made aware of all the options and not just the ones favoured and promoted by the media. The public did not seem to be clear about the proposals for Regional Assemblies and unitary authorities.

(e) The Communications Manager reported that she had met with Communications officers from Eden, Allerdale and Copeland Councils and they had decided to work together to raise awareness of unitary status issues and link this to the North West Regional Assembly vote. As a result of this meeting:

- a Communications Adviser had been appointed to draw together a Communications Strategy
- a short term plan has been developed to issue weekly press releases in the lead up to 23 February 2004, urging people to get involved in the debate
- information included within the Council's website
- the possible production of a leaflet/fact sheet based on the impact of the proposals on the people of the 4 District Councils. It would include an indicative timetable, the Boundary Committee options and the City Council's preferred option, where to get further information and how to get involved. Members welcomed the production of this leaflet as long as it clearly sets out all the options involved. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that he could issue the draft leaflet to all members of the Committee in advance of publication.
- Local newspapers and Radio Cumbria could be approached to get them involved in organising local debates on all of the options.

(f) In response to a Member's question, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that the costs of the KPMG report, the appointment of a Communications Adviser and the production of the fact sheet, would be met jointly from the four District Councils and that the City Council's share would be funded from the budget which was agreed in the past by the Executive for work on Regional Government.

(g) The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that the Manchester Evening News were holding a Region wide debate in the Manchester Arena on 22 January 2004, at which the Deputy Prime Minister would be present. The details would be forwarded to Group Leaders and he urged anyone interested to attend and/or submit questions.

(h) In response to a Member's questions, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that the Government's stated position is that if the public vote against a Regional Assembly, then the consequential changes in the County and District tiers of Local Government will not happen.

(i) There was a recognition that in any votes on Regional Government and consequential unitary authorities, the large urban conurbations of Manchester and Liverpool would influence any vote and could determine the future of Cumbria, as they had greater populations than Cumbria.

(j) In response to a Member's questions, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive clarified the timetable for Regional Government, confirming that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's decision on the options to go on the ballot paper would be made in June or July 2004.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Town Clerk and Chief be asked to write to the Boundary Committee expressing concern that the leaflet which they had stated would go to all residents in the affected areas in the north, did not appear to have been received by any households in the Carlisle area.

(2) That the Town Clerk and Chief Executive issue to all Members of the Committee, a copy of any draft leaflet to be produced by the 4 District Councils.

(3) That the following be recommended to the Executive:

(a) The Executive and the Town Clerk and Chief Executive are asked to look at further consultation with the urban area of Carlisle, which may take the form of:

(i) asking Neighbourhood Forums, Tenants Federations and others to have Regional Government as an agenda item at their next meetings, with City Council officers attending meetings as necessary; and/or

(ii) inviting representatives of the relevant groups and agencies within the City to a debate on the Boundary Committee's options and the City Council's preferred option. If representatives could not attend the debate, they should be offered the opportunity to submit comments or questions in writing. The meeting could be open to the public to observe.

(b) If the Executive support the idea of a debate, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive could make the decision to hold such a debate under his delegated powers and could then make the necessary arrangements.

(c) The Committee supports the Executive's decision that no additional resources be made in respect of the Regional Government debate.

(d) The Committee does not support any particular option at this stage.

(e) The Committee's view is that as the public's main concern is that they get good services, the prime concern of this Council should be what is best for the people of Carlisle and to ensure that the people of Carlisle have a voice in any future regional Assembly.

(The meeting ended at 12.55)