

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES -
JOINT WORKSHOP**

TUESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2003 AT 9.30 AM

PRESENT: Councillors Bain, Boaden, Bowman C S, Bradley, Crookdake, Earp, Fisher, Glover, Guest, Im Thurn, Jefferson, Joscelyne, Mallinson E, Martlew, McDevitt, Morton, Parsons, Prest and Rutherford C.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Firth and Mitchelson (Executive Members) were also in attendance.

Members agreed that Councillor Jefferson should chair the Workshop.

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT – CENTRE FOR REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CRED) REPORT

With reference to Minute OSM.47/03, whereby the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had agreed that consideration of Regional Government by a joint meeting of all Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be workshop-style, Members gave consideration to Northumbria University's Centre for Regional Economic Development (CRED) Report entitled "Local Government in Cumbria: Evaluating the Three Unitary Authority Option". Copies had previously been circulated to Members.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive introduced Professor Frank Peck, CRED Director, Steven Connolly, Research Associate, and Flo Bell, Senior Researcher. Mr Connolly and Professor Peck then gave a presentation on the CRED Report "Local Government in Cumbria: Evaluating the Three Unitary Authority Option".

The Presentation detailed the findings of a research study carried out by CRED and commissioned by the Executive of Carlisle City Council on the feasibility of the Council's preferred option for Unitary Local Government in Cumbria, namely to create three Unitary Local Authorities as follows:

Allerdale–Copeland Unitary Authority

Carlisle–Eden Unitary Authority

Barrow–South Lakeland Unitary Authority

Mr Connolly commented that the Report was draft and may be changed having regard to information gained from this and any other meetings which are held. The Presentation focused on the following aspects:-

- a. Introduction
- (b) The Current Situation
- (c) Description of the Preferred Option
- (d) Effective and Convenient Local Government
- (e) Community and Identity
- (f) Relationships with Other Organisations/Partnerships
- (g) Summary and Conclusions

Following the presentation, Mr Connolly had to leave the meeting and his place was taken by Ms Bell.

The Chairman then commented that the report provided a robust picture but there was an inconclusive conclusion to the findings. He then invited Members' questions.

Members' questions and comments covered all aspects of the Research Study and Report and can be grouped under the following headings:-

Status of the Draft Report

A Member sought clarity as the CRED Report was being referred to as a Draft Report, a question was raised as to whether this Report was going to be changed, apart from typographical errors, before it is submitted to the Executive.

Officers suggested that any changes would be factual or in relation to spelling or grammatical errors. Professor Peck stated that the Draft Report was not as polished as he would like it to be and he wanted to make sure that it flowed and statements were made in an unambiguous way. He stated that if Members pointed out any factual errors, the draft could be changed.

The Member concerned stated that she would only be happy with typographical or factual changes as redrafting it in any way by rephrasing sentences could change the meaning to a significant degree.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive stated that he wished to ensure that the Report was truly objective and independent, and that it had not been influenced by individual Officers and Members.

Professor Peck commented that any changes CRED would wish to make would be in

relation to the style and typographical errors. CRED could also respond if new evidence was presented today by Members.

The Member then stated that she would not be happy if style changes were to be made as this was the only opportunity Overview and Scrutiny had to look at the Report. Changing style could imply a possible change in meaning. Comments of Members today are based on the Draft Report they have had circulated to them. She recognised that CRED had been under enormous time pressures which was not their fault but expressed concerns about commenting on a Draft Report which might be considerably changed before submission to the Executive.

Another Member supported the proposal that the Report should not be changed but suggested that any changes should be identified at the back as Appendices.

Professor Peck undertook that any further changes or additional information for inclusion in the Report would be done by way of Appendices. Members accepted this assurance.

Consultation Process

A Member referred to page 6, paragraph 1.4 of the CRED report which stated that "Due to the highly politicised nature of issues surrounding the Research Study, a number of potential consultees felt it was not appropriate for them to take part in the consultation process." The Member asked whether this lack of participation called into question the validity of research findings?

Professor Peck responded that there had been a balanced consultation carried out with a number of consultees across the County. Whilst it could be argued that those who had declined to respond had views which had not been communicated by others, he considered that this was unlikely in that the main issues had been raised time and again by those consultees who had co-operated with the consultation process.

Another Member referred to page 6, section 1.4, and to the statement that "A full list of individuals and organisations that responded to the consultation process is included in Appendix 1 to this Report". He questioned this, as Appendix 1 was headed up individuals and organisations who had been invited to respond. He enquired about the number and identity of those who had responded to the consultation process.

Professor Peck and Ms Bell advised that they had they had records of who had actually responded and could provide this information by way of an Appendix. They confirmed that the list currently attached to the Report comprised those who had been invited to comment and not those who had actually responded.

A Member asked whether there had been any consultation with community groups comprised of ordinary people in the Carlisle City area as there were no Parish Councils in the City area.

Professor Peck advised that the CRED research had not set out to do this. A MORI

Poll was going to be conducted to carry out public consultation on behalf of the Boundary Committee. Parish Councils in Carlisle had been sent questionnaires but none had been sent to Parish Councils in the Eden area. Public consultation could be carried out, but this was very resource intensive and would be difficult to undertake given the time restraints. Certain representatives of community groups, for example, Carlisle Council for Voluntary Services had, however, been consulted.

Validity of Journey to Work Patterns Data

A Member commented that the information contained in Section 3.5 on Travel to Work Areas in Cumbria had been based on the 1991 Census and revised data in 1998. She enquired whether this data was valid or whether patterns had changed over the past five years with the impact of Kingmoor Park, travel from south-west Scotland and the impact of any new housing developments.

Professor Peck explained that Journey to Work Tables were based on the most up to date Census data. He acknowledged that there may have been changes since 1998 strengthening Carlisle as a centre of employment but he had not been able to collect any evidence for this.

Relationship Between Performance Data and Population Size

A Member referred to the analysis of the relationship between performance data and population size in Section 4.4 of the Report, and she enquired whether Professor Peck would expect density, sparsity and remote rural areas to have an impact on the Council's ability to deliver services. She also asked if he had factored in other issues of importance in Cumbria?

Professor Peck responded that they had not performed this statistical analysis. However, he suspected that even if it was taken into account, density, sparsity and remoteness would be unlikely to have much influence on the Council's ability to deliver services.

Cumbria Voice

A Member enquired whether, unless Cumbria County Council became a Unitary Authority, Cumbria as a cohesive voice would cease under the proposed three Unitary Authority arrangements. She also questioned how other services provided countywide such as the Police Authority would fit under the three Unitary structure.

Professor Peck advised that if Cumbria County Council was abolished any new Unitary Authorities created would provide all services under a Regional Assembly. In relation to the three Unitary Authorities proposal, there were still common issues, for example Lake District National Park, and new partnership arrangements would need to be looked at to address these areas. The Boundary Commission Guidance had asked that submissions should state how proposed models would fit with Community Strategies. In relation to three Unitary Authorities model, it would be up to each Authority how they responded to this situation and made arrangements to engage with issues at a "Cumbrian" level.

Levels of Deprivation and Affluence

A Member referred to the data in relation to Ward level deprivation and the fact that the creation of a Unitary Authority in Allerdale – Copeland would have a relatively high level of deprivation with relative affluence in Carlisle – Eden. If a large Unitary Authority was established for North and West Cumbria, would Carlisle Council Taxpayers be effectively subsidising the improvement of services aimed at alleviating deprivation in West Cumbria.

Professor Peck advised that he did not know the answer to this question. It was clear that West Cumbria had different issues to Carlisle. In terms of tackling deprivation, Wards in deprived areas often qualified for specific targeted funding. It would be up to the Unitary Authority itself to identify how it wished to manage such uneven areas. It was a matter of opinion whether it was a good idea to create such an uneven Unitary Authority.

Another Member requested that information be provided on the impact of areas with relatively high levels of deprivation on other more affluent areas.

Professor Peck advised that he could provide more information in an Appendix on the matter of areas of affluence and areas of deprivation. He did state that the level of detail would be dependent on the timescale for the production of this information.

Community and Identity – Urban Areas and Remote Rural Areas

A Member commented that the brief for the CRED Report had been limited to look at the three Unitary Authorities option, and that CRED had not been asked to examine any other options. There had, therefore, not been any examination of shared interests with other areas, for example the West of the County, areas of East Cumbria and areas to the North of Carlisle, including South West Scotland. He stated that currently 70% of Carlisle City Council was urban with 30% rural, deprived wards were within the urban area of Carlisle and he found it difficult to make comparisons between these deprived Wards within Carlisle and the large rural areas of Eden. He commented that the Report provided a list of employers in West Cumbria but did not provide the same information for Carlisle and Eden. He enquired as to whether the differing costs of providing services in the rural area as opposed to the urban area had been explored in any way.

Professor Peck agreed to provide a list of the major employers in Carlisle and Eden in an Appendix to the report. Whilst he acknowledged that services in rural areas may be more costly to provide, CRED had not done any specific research in this area as part of their brief.

Professor Peck undertook to provide data on population density in an Appendix to the report. He stated that in relation to shared interests, there was a commonality, particularly in terms of agriculture and rural tourism for Carlisle and Eden. Whilst there were robust journey to work patterns from Wigton and Southern Scotland into Carlisle there were also strong functional links between Carlisle and Eden.

Ability to Deliver Services

A Member enquired as to how Carlisle could assess its ability, as part of a Unitary Authority, to provide services currently operated by other Local Authorities in an efficient manner.

Professor Peck responded that an assessment of this nature was a whole new task and had not been included in their Brief.

North Cumbria Option

A Member referred to page 39 of the Report which stated that "this research study has focused on the preferred option of the three Unitary Authority proposal, and cannot therefore provide a clear analysis of the feasibility of the North Cumbria option in terms of effective and convenient Local Government, it is accepted that such an option may be feasible. However, this North Cumbria option will potentially be less able to reflect the local preferences and needs of the area than the three Unitary Authority option is able to".

The Member asked how the statement could be made that the North Cumbria option would be less able to reflect local preferences and needs of the area if the option had not been fully examined.

Professor Peck commented that in terms of geographic scale, the bigger the Authority the more issues it would face regarding keeping in touch with local communities. He accepted that the basis of that argument may not be clear from the way the report was written.

The Member accepted Professor Peck's comments but reinforced the earlier decision that the wording of the report should not be changed at this stage.

Further Options for Unitary Authorities

A Member referred to page 41 of the Report and the Statement "therefore, whilst one possible solution to the delivery of services may be to create a large size of unitary Local Government, this does not guarantee success." She enquired as to whether Professor Peck believed that Carlisle and Eden as a Unitary Authority would guarantee success.

Professor Peck advised that any option must be made to work. He pointed out that some Authorities serving large urban areas and some Authorities serving predominantly rural areas had been rated as excellent by the CPA. Useful information could be gleaned from these Authorities on their achievements. It was clear that different forms of Unitary Authority could achieve excellence.

A Member commented that the CRED Report had been prepared in line with the brief given, but that this brief did not include looking at other options for Unitary Authorities. As information was not available examining other options, it is difficult for Members to come to an informed decision. He asked whether Professor Peck felt that the information Members had was as comprehensive as could have been provided with a

wider brief and more time.

Professor Peck commented that the time to undertake the Study had been short, and that the brief was to evaluate the three Unitary Authority option. The answer from the research study had been that the three Unitary Option was viable. The report did make reference to other options although he acknowledged they had not been examined in detail.

Councillor Firth, Policy, Performance Management, Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder commented that he felt there was little if any correlation set between size of Authorities and their ability to provide services and perform effectively. He referred to the arguments about size and population density stating that authorities like Blackburn had been excellent under the CPA process, but equally Cornwall and Dorset had also received excellent reports, and there was not much more dispersed population than Cornwall. He stated that size and density of population had nothing to do with the ability of an Authority to deliver good services.

Councillor Firth advised that CRED had been given a brief to ascertain if a Unitary Authority based on Carlisle and Eden was feasible, viable, robust and if it would work. He disagreed with the Chairman's comments at the start of the meeting that the conclusions had been inconclusive. He said that the CRED Report had revealed that there may be other alternatives but also that Carlisle and Eden was viable, feasible and would work.

Professor Peck agreed that this was the conclusion in the report.

Provision of Further Information by Way of Appendices to the CRED Report

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive sought clarification from Professor Peck on the ability of CRED to produce appendices on the following as requested by Members throughout the workshop.

- a. Further information and comment on population density issues.
- b. A list of organisations and people who had responded to the consultation process.
- c. A list of major employers within the Carlisle and Eden area.
- d. Further comments on levels of deprivation as against levels of affluence in certain areas.

Professor Peck commented that he could provide work on each of the above matters and include them as Appendices to the CRED Report. He anticipated that this information could be available by Friday 29 August, but stated that the level of detail would be dependent on the tight timescale.

Future process for consideration of the CRED Report by the Executive and City Council

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive commented that this workshop had been called

to receive a presentation on the CRED Report and to consider the draft submission on Regional Government which had been circulated to Members with a covering report from Dr Gooding, Executive Director. Comments from this workshop were being recorded and would be forwarded to the Executive on 28 August 2003 and the City Council on 4 September 2003.

He referred to some Members' concerns that meetings of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees had not been arranged in order to put forward formal views from Overview and Scrutiny. He advised that there was an opportunity to hold special meetings of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 September 2003, in order to give consideration to the Executive's comments on the CRED Report and any revised draft submission. Members did not take up this offer to hold additional special meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive and the Chairman thanked Professor Peck and his team for their presentation and for answering Members' questions on their report.

The workshop then adjourned at 11.22am for ten minutes.

Regional Government – Draft Submission

Dr Gooding, Executive Director, submitted Report CE.15/03 setting out the first Draft Submission to the Boundary Committee. Mr Gooding commented that the Report was in a very draft format and was a working document. It had been issued to Members before receipt of the CRED Report and lacked a great deal of information which was now available from the CRED Report. He advised that the Report had been prepared in consultation with other Authorities but accepted that its draft status meant that it read aspirationally rather than objectively at this stage.

Mr Gooding then outlined the contents of the Report and responded to Members' questions and comments on specific typographical, grammatical or factual errors within the Report.

The Chairman then invited Members' comments on the Draft Report.

In response to a Member's question, Mr Gooding confirmed that as the CRED Report was now available, amendments would be made to his Draft Report with an amended version being tabled at the Executive on Thursday, 28 August 2003. The Executive's comments on this Report would then be circulated to the full City Council.

The Labour Group Leader then raised some concerns about the draft status of this Report. She stated that it was difficult to comment on the draft submission as it was in such a draft state. She felt that Members were not able to make adequate contributions on the basis of the information which was in front of them at this time. She was concerned that Overview and Scrutiny had not been able to play a full role in scrutinising the submission to be considered by the City Council. The Report would

have little input from Overview and Scrutiny Committees before it is issued to the City Council and the only scrutiny of the matter would be at the City Council meeting.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive again advised that each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees could have a special meeting on Wednesday, 3 September 2003 at which they could comment on the final documentation to be considered by the City Council on 4 September 2003.

The Chairman asked the Chairman of each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to give consideration to whether they wanted to hold special meetings of their respective Committee. He advised that the meetings would have to be called by the end of the day and that, if they did wish to hold special meetings, they should advise the Committee Services Section in order that the meetings could be called. None of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen indicated at the Workshop that they wished to have a special meeting of their Committee.

A Member then raised a concern that the Draft Submission would be from Carlisle City Council but the Executive had agreed that there would be a Joint Submission with Eden District Council. He enquired how Carlisle and Eden would approve a Joint Submission.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that the Draft Submission was Carlisle City Council's document. The Executive Decision to have a joint submission with Eden had been called in and one of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees had referred the decision back to the Executive for reconsideration. He advised that in preparation of the Draft Submission, Officers had held discussions with Officers of Eden District Council. In addition, Officers from all the District Councils in Cumbria had met to discuss a common format for the Submissions.

He advised that the content of the final submission would be decided by the City Council on 4 September 2003. Whilst it may be that the preferred option of Carlisle City Council and Eden District Council would be the same, the detail of the submission may well vary.

After discussion, it was RESOLVED –

That the Executive Director's Report containing the draft submission be noted.

(The workshop ended at 12.05 pm)

gh Committee Minutes Vol 302 OS Mgt Cttee Community OS Cttee Corp Res OS Cttee
and Infrac OS Cttee Joint Workshop 26 07 03