

Bodmin Town Council



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Ms A Hernandez
Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall &
the Isles of Scilly
Alderson Drive
Exeter
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Date: 28 August 2018

Our Ref: SMF/D&C/PM

Your Ref:

Dear Ms Hernandez

The Future of Policing in Cornwall, Devon and Dorset

Bodmin Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation into the future policing arrangements for Cornwall, Devon and Dorset. This matter was considered by Full Council when it met on 19 July 2018 and I have been instructed to respond making the following response.

These comments are made from the perspective that Bodmin Town Council is one of the largest and most proactive town councils in Cornwall. The Town Council provides a range of high quality services and facilities throughout the town and has a budgeted operational expenditure of £1.5 Million in the financial year 2018/19.

Bodmin is currently the fastest growing town in Cornwall and has an increased housing target figure within the Cornwall Local Plan of 3,000 additional homes over the plan period 2010 to 2030. The predicted growth is likely to see an increased demand on all public services including the police.

In terms of the proposed Police merger between Devon & Cornwall with Dorset Police, Bodmin Town Council has grave reservations that this would be a good deal for Cornwall. As a peninsula county, Cornwall only shares a border with Devon which sets it apart from other counties in the UK. This geographical land issue puts Cornwall at a disadvantage as it is not able to access multiple points of cross county resource sharing i.e. Cornwall can only pull on support from one direction and one neighbouring area (Devon) whereas other counties can pull on police support from more than one adjoining police force. Cornwall's permanent population figure (not including summer

seasonal fluctuation with tourism / visitor numbers) is around 540,000 compared to Devon at 1.1 Million and Dorset at around 740,000 which would suggest that Cornwall will be a lower priority, particularly if the resultant one Police and Crime Commissioner (post merger) is based in either Devon or Dorset.

Cornwall will also have very specific issues which require a different style and approach to policing, as the County enjoys over 420 miles of coastline with a number of fishing villages and extensive access to harbours, ports, coves and rivers and estuaries. Given this unique geographical, peninsula issue, it seems wholly unfair that Cornwall and Devon should harmonise council tax precepts to the Dorset level (increasing the Cornwall and Devon contribution) when there can be no guarantees that appropriate weighting will be given to Cornwall. The concern is that given Cornwall's rural geography and the seasonal variations with visitor numbers, policing in this part of the UK will become less of a priority and that Cornwall will lose out on its fair share of policing.

It should be noted that the Police Officers working in Cornwall's communities do a fantastic job and are highly regarded. However, the harsh reality is that there are simply not enough officers and there is too much paperwork and bureaucracy which ties up valuable officer time. Bodmin has the highest rate of recorded crime out of the main towns in Cornwall (as per the Safer Bodmin focus report (attached)) which shows that there have been increases in most crime types in the Bodmin area. Whilst this may be a universal crime trend across other communities, Bodmin is facing one of the largest projected housing growth figures in Cornwall as part of the Cornwall Local Plan and should be factored into future Devon & Cornwall Police's staff recruitment and deployment plans.

The 101 system continues to be a barrier to reporting with many local people not bothering to report crime given the delays with the 101 system. Rather than concentrating on a potential merger, effort should be focussed on addressing the issues with the 101 system and recruitment and retention of police staff. The 101 system seems to be an ongoing issue of concern as more and more people feel less inclined to report via 101. In turn this leads to a limited evidence base to justify police resources and ultimately an erosion of trust in the Police and the inevitable reduction in force numbers based on statistical evidence.

For Cornwall to be able to consider this merger to be a good concept that will deliver tangible and measurable benefits, it would need to see 'boots on the ground' and a commitment to giving Cornwall based Police Officers the resources, tools and personnel capable of policing the County. The cynical view is that this merger will enhance Dorset's resources to police their exclusive coastal resorts at the expense of Cornwall. Cornwall's contribution would be an increased demand on their council tax bill to equal the Dorset rate. It should however be borne in mind that Cornwall is predominantly an area with low wage employment and higher levels of deprivation when compared to Dorset. Any increased cost to the policing bill to Cornish residents (population 549,000) without there being a significant improvement to the service and / or a more visible police presence in the county will be seen as a tax hike for the benefit of raising cash for Dorset (with a population in excess of 744,000) and high profile communities such as Bournemouth and Poole.

It could be argued that there is already an ability to achieve back office savings, with human resources / personnel, IT and joint procurement etc as quick wins without the need for a merger. Accountability would also be a key question, particularly around the resulting role of the Police and Crime Commissioners as this would need to be factored into any merger with the anticipated outcome being the reduction in the number of PCC's given an amalgamation of areas (and their offices and teams) from two to one, as that would generate cash savings that could be redeployed into front line services, where it matters most. The question would then be around where this joint Cornwall, Devon, Dorset Commissioner would be based, as that might indicate or prejudice which area gets a slice of the funding cake or merely the crumbs from the plate.

The Chief Constable for Devon & Cornwall Police recently announced (via local radio / media in August) the issues facing local police when large scale events such as Boardmasters in Newquay requires a significant police presence to manage, given the risk that an event of that magnitude creates. This puts the wider community at enhanced risk as the police numbers are simply not able to cope with policing an event of this scale and to be able to respond to the community it serves in an emergency situation. This is an extremely unsatisfactory position and demonstrates that police resources were cut far too wide and deep in previous years. Any merger is likely to see Cornwall's already stretched police pulled to Devon and potentially Dorset to assist with large scale events leaving Cornwall's communities at risk during these periods which will undoubtedly give rise to increased levels of crime as the County will be a 'soft target' for criminality.

In summary, Bodmin Town Council strongly opposes the merger of Dorset with Devon and Cornwall Police. Collaborative working can still continue between Police forces without the need to merge Devon and Cornwall Police with Dorset, and ultimately not increase the Cornwall contribution to match policing costs with Dorset on the basis that efficiencies can then be generated 'in time.'

Your kind assistance in this matter is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.M. Facer', with a small dot at the end.

S M Facer
Town Clerk