

Bodmin Town Council



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The Review Manager
Cornwall Unitary Authority Electoral Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
LONDON
SW10 2HW

Date: 18.04.08

Our Ref: POC/KP

Your Ref:

Dear Sir/Madam

Electoral Review for the new Cornwall Unitary Authority

Bodmin Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Electoral Review for the new Cornwall Unitary Authority. These comments are made from the perspective that Bodmin Town Council is one of the most proactive local councils in the County, providing a range of high quality services and facilities throughout the town and achieved Quality Town Council Status in November 2004.

This matter was considered by my Council at its meeting yesterday evening (17th April) and I have been instructed to respond making the following representation:

How many Councillors should represent Cornwall.

The logical first aspect of our response looks at the number of Councillors for the area of Cornwall.

It is felt that with the reduction of members across the districts and county from over 300, a fair representation figure would be needed to address this democratic deficit. The figure of 130 discussed at the County level would be supported by Bodmin Town Council.

Single or Multi Representation Divisions

The issue of multi or single area divisions was also discussed and it was felt that the accountability of single member divisions was preferable in an area such as Cornwall. In areas, like Bodmin, where there could be multi members in a division the financial balance and constraints when looking at local budgeting could be bias and the single member division would be answerable and accountable to their electorate.

Implications for Bodmin Town Council

The Council then reviewed the implications on the Town Council and considered that there are other potential options.

Option 1 – 4 Single Member Divisions for Bodmin on Existing Boundaries

This option is seen as the most beneficial option to the people of Bodmin, the administration and the clear service delivery of the new Council.

To ensure the effective representations for our town, members feel that we need 4 single member divisions to cover the existing boundaries of the town.

This would inevitably mean that our existing two wards would need to be split in half but the town council members recognise that this would be a clear message to the people of Bodmin that there is a cohesive approach from both tiers of local government. Having said that because we have 16 members the town council would favour continuing in their existing structure until the next set of elections (2103) when the four co-terminous areas could be embedded. This would ensure that there is stability of the members during the period of flux in local government.

The evidence the Council would like to submit for this option is wide ranging.

Bodmin, as the historic County Town of Cornwall (with noted history dating back to the 6th Century) has very clear boundaries with neighbouring communities. The urban nature of the town makes a significant difference to the surrounding rural parishes and would make any combining of such very difficult and would, when looking at potentially merged representation, appear to clearly marginalise the rural area. Members have undertaken sample community consultations on this aspect and overwhelmingly the town is seen as a separate area to adjacent parishes. Indeed the respective community identity between the more urban townspeople and the rural villages is evident.

It is appreciated that the town's representations are considered on the electorate figures, but the additional representational needs of the area are higher than most other parishes surrounding the town. Bodmin hosts a diverse range of businesses and industrial development supporting around 9,000 jobs. The area has also been highlighted as a growth area (Strategic Urban Centre) by the Government/South west Regional Development Agency.

However, Bodmin still has a population that is suffering from a range of problems including a low wage economy, low skills and this is reflected in the deprived wards under the convergence scheme. Many local amenities are being currently up-skilled and modernising to keep up with the growth of the town to rectify any imbalance – all of these enhancements need significant amounts of support and guidance of local government representation.

The Town of Bodmin has a history of effective working with our district council on projects such as the above and Members are currently involved in many multiple organisation partnerships and the distinctiveness of the town is echoed in these partnerships. Examples of these include:-

- Bodmin Inter Agency Locality Group
- Bodmin Community Partnership Panel
- Bodmin and Surrounding Area Forum

(further details on these partnership initiatives are available on the Town Council's website www.bodmin.gov.uk).

The Town Council is currently involved in discussion with the One Cornwall team to drive forward Bodmin as a pilot area for many aspects of the new service delivery, including the central location of a pilot Community Area Network. The success of such a pilot has wide reaching gain and benefit across the whole of Cornwall.

The allocation of four council seats to the area of Bodmin would undoubtedly support the unitary authority and assist in the success of the unitary council's objectives.

Option 2 - 3 Single Member Divisions for Bodmin on Existing Boundaries

The second option is one as above but with three single member divisions. This is a less favourable option of Bodmin Town Council as it is felt that this does not represent this area in a fair manner and would be a clear case of under representation. The Town Council would need to be re-warded for co-terminosity, as with the option above, and would like again to defer the re-structure until after the town and parish elections due in 2013 to stabilise at least town representations at a time of considerable upheaval in Local Government. At that time the membership of Bodmin Town Council could be seen to necessitate an increase from 16 members to 18 members to balance the wards and would also give greater representation and offset the perceived democratic deficit as referred to above.

Whilst considering this matter, members observed that the consultation process was in some ways flawed as any decision on electoral areas and warding is dependent on the proposed number of seats for the principal authority, particularly where co-

terminosity is considered important. Given that the draft proposals from the County Council were only received in the last few hours (and we understand will not be ratified until today) it is difficult for any Town or Parish Council to participate in meaningful consultation and/or make an informed representation.

I trust that you find these comments helpful and will be able to incorporate the Council's thoughts into proposals. However, please do not hesitate to contact my office, should you require further information or clarification on any of the points raised.

Yours sincerely,

P O'Callaghan
TOWN CLERK