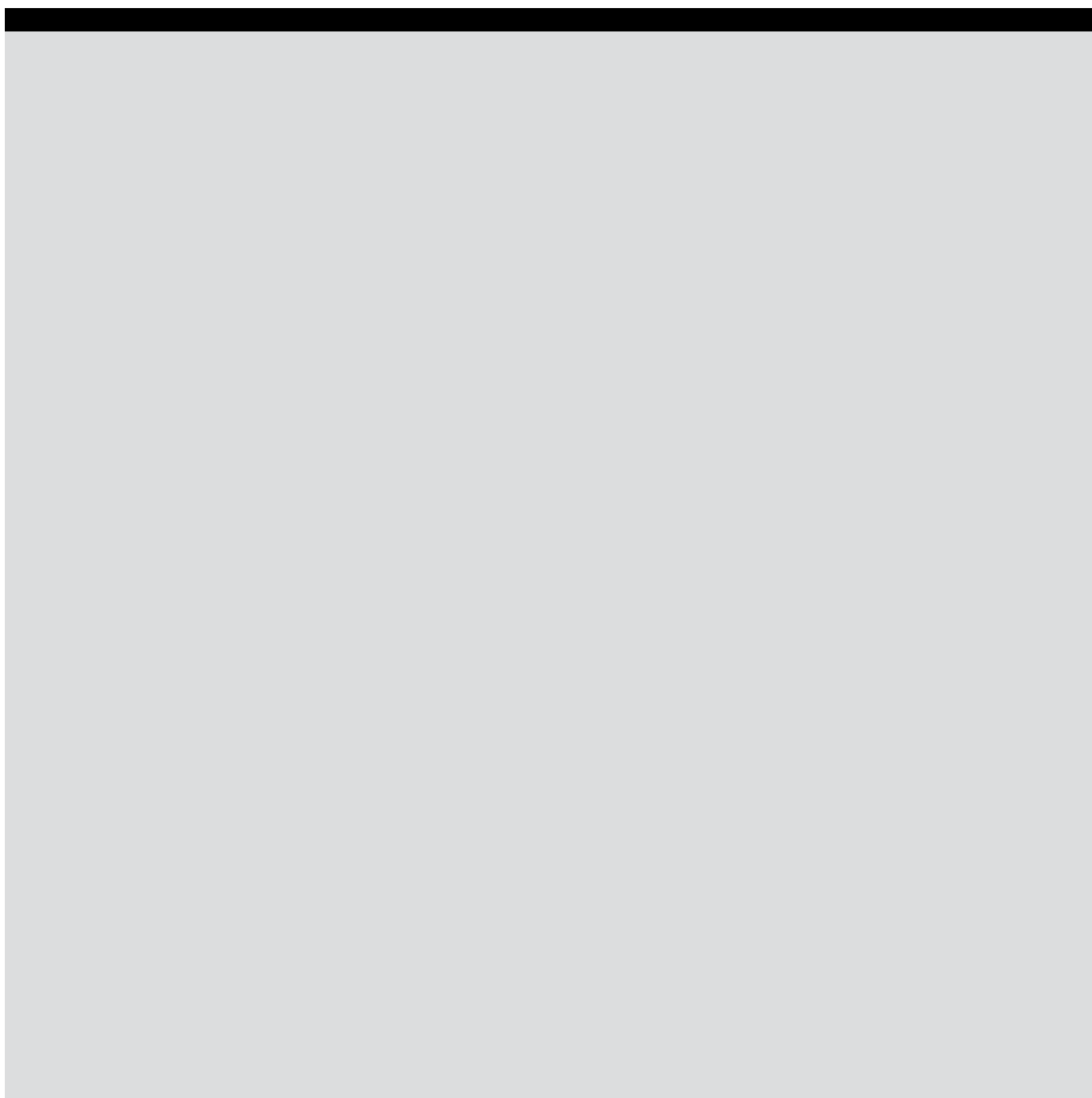




Proposals for Future Unitary Structures: Stakeholder Consultation

Summary of Responses



On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Summary of Responses

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Introduction

1. This document sets out a summary of the 55,000 responses received to the Government's stakeholder consultation on proposals for future unitary structures in England launched in March 2007. The Government announced to Parliament in July 2007 that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government was minded to implement nine unitary proposals if and when the then Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Bill was enacted.
2. Now that the Bill is enacted, the Secretary of State intends by early December to take, in accordance with that Act, her final decisions as to which unitary proposals are to be implemented. The Orders required to implement structural change under the Act will then be subject to Parliament's approval.

Policy background

3. The consultation was launched in accordance with the commitment to provide opportunities to create unitary government set out in the *Local Government White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities*, in October 2006. Alongside the White Paper, the Government issued to each principal council in England, outside of Greater London and the Metropolitan Counties, its Invitation to Councils to submit, if they so wished, a proposal for future unitary local government structures in their area.
4. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the Act') includes provisions for implementing such structural changes to local government, i.e. for moving from two-tier to unitary local government. These provisions allow new unitary structures to be created by Order subject to approval by both Houses of Parliament, following proposals by local authorities in response to an invitation (including an invitation issued prior to the commencement of the Act) from the Secretary of State.
5. The Invitation issued in October 2006 provided that all proposals should demonstrate how they met five essential criteria, namely:
 - a. provide strong and accountable strategic leadership;
 - b. deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment;
 - c. deliver value for money public services;
 - d. be supported by a broad cross-section of partners and stakeholders; and,
 - e. be affordable: restructuring must represent value for money and be self-financing.

6. In January 2007, 26 proposals were received from authorities wishing to obtain unitary status. Having been assessed against the five criteria, 16 proposals were judged as at least likely to achieving the outcomes specified by the criteria, if they were to be implemented, and thus were put forward for consultation. These were:

Councils submitting proposals	Proposed unitary structure
Bedford Borough Council	Bedford unitary
Bedfordshire County Council	County unitary
Cheshire County Council	County unitary
Chester City, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Macclesfield and Vale Royal Councils	Two-unitary option
Cornwall County Council	County unitary
Cumbria County Council	County unitary
Durham County Council	County unitary
Exeter City Council	Exeter unitary
Ipswich Borough Council	Ipswich unitary
North Yorkshire County Council	County unitary
Northumberland County Council	County unitary
Northumberland Districts Councils	Two-unitary option
Norwich City Council	Norwich unitary
Shropshire County Council	County unitary
Somerset County Council	County unitary
Wiltshire County Council	County unitary

7. On 27 March 2007, the Government issued a 12-week consultation, *Proposals for Future Unitary Structures: Stakeholder Consultation*, seeking views on the likely outcomes of the 16 proposals if they were to be implemented. Responses were requested by 22 June 2007.

8. During the consultation period, local authorities were able to further develop their business cases in discussion with key partners and stakeholders and were asked to publicise any material changes on their websites.

Stakeholder consultation

9. This consultation exercise was aimed in the first instance at key partners and stakeholders with an interest in the areas affected by the proposals. However, it was open to anyone to make representations and affected local authorities were also asked to bring this consultation to the attention of local stakeholders (see Annex B). The Government had regard to all responses received, along with all other relevant material available to it, before decisions were taken.

10. Key stakeholders, both nationally and regionally, were identified. These were primarily partners and organisations with an interest in, or responsibility for, various matters or areas affected by the proposals and accordingly were invited to respond. A list of these consultees was posted on the Communities and Local Government website and can be found at Annex A.

11. Stakeholders were asked to consider the extent to which, in their view, proposals relevant to their geographic or functional area met the five criteria as set out in the Invitation and to provide evidence in support of their views. In particular, we welcomed views on the extent to which consultees considered the proposals would deliver the long-term outcomes specified by the strong leadership, neighbourhood empowerment, and value for money and equity on public services criteria. In areas where there was more than one proposal, i.e. Bedfordshire, Cheshire and Northumberland, we sought views on which of the alternative proposals would better achieve the outcomes specified in our Invitation. We did not, at any stage, ask for consultees to indicate a level of support for any proposals.

12. This summary covers representations received during the consultation period between 27 March and 22 June 2007. The Government has continued to receive a substantial number of representations since the end of the consultation period. All such representations will be included in the material to which the Secretary of State has regard before making her final decisions under the 2007 Act.

Overview of representations

13. The Government received over 55,000 responses to this consultation, with 1,700 being submitted by organisations and 4,900 individual representations from members of the public.

14. The 55,000 responses include some 49,000 campaign responses, where people had filled in a pro-forma distributed to them as part of an organised campaign. Total figures varied significantly across the areas concerned, with over 30,300 campaign responses received from the Bedfordshire area, and around 100 such responses received from the Exeter and Ipswich areas. In the interests of consistency, all responses in campaign format have been classified as such, even if submitted by a key stakeholder.

15. We are encouraged by the very strong response to this consultation, which has provided us with a range of evidence and views and has helped to inform and clarify the Government's considerations of the proposals. A wide range of organisations and individuals have also participated in public debates occurring on the issues in many of the local areas concerned.

16. As anticipated, there was a very strong response from local authorities in the areas affected by the proposals, with many producing detailed and lengthy representations on cases for and against the unitary proposals in their areas. Most councils made these submissions available on their websites.

17. Many MPs representing constituencies in the areas concerned made written representations, and also attended meetings with Local Government Ministers in which they put forward the views of their constituents towards the proposed reorganisations. Many have continued to put their case strongly in Parliament. Since this document is a summary of responses made during the consultation period, it does not seek to summarise MPs' views. MPs of course always have access to Ministers and since the end of the consultation continue to debate the matter in Parliament and make representations on behalf of their constituents.

18. All affected authorities were offered a meeting with a Communities and Local Government Minister and senior officials. At the request of local authorities, delegations met with Communities and Local Government Ministers and officials for the purpose of making representations regarding the proposals concerned. It must be noted that no comments were made to the delegations on the merits – or otherwise – of any proposals. A full list of meetings held may be found at Annex C.

National organisations

19. The Government recognised that where an organisation operates nationally, regionally, or across a number of areas affected by different proposals, it may wish to respond more generally, or with reference to its overall view of unitary government.

20. A number of organisations, particularly those in the public sector, were concerned with ensuring the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of any new arrangements. Co-terminosity of administrative boundaries was also an important issue.

21. Some national organisations chose to address proposals on a case-by-case basis in order to reflect their views on local issues. Where this was the case, issues of strengthening communities, place-shaping and cohesion were at the fore. Other matters of concern to national organisations included the enhancement of neighbourhood structures, empowerment and ensuring benefits reached all affected communities. The Government's requirement for robust evidence of the affordability of successful proposals was also echoed.

Summary of responses

22. A summary of responses for each affected follows below.

23. Given the large volume of responses, we have counted as a single representation where individuals or organisations have written several times to avoid double counting. Representations were also sorted into a broad range of groups as follows:

- Local government – councils, councillors and leaders of political groups in councils
- Town and parish councils – including associations of local councils
- Public sector – public organisations including housing, education sector and public sector unions
- Business sector – including chambers of commerce
- Voluntary and community sector – including lobby groups and church groups
- Public – including all other representation not accounted for above

Bedfordshire: *Proposals from Bedfordshire County Council and Bedford Borough Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	7
Town and parish councils	15
Public sector	18
Business sector	6
Voluntary and community sector	7
Public responses	41
Total	94
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>30,300</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

24. All councils in the current two-tier county area wrote jointly emphasising a need for unitary local government in Bedfordshire, and that no boundary changes should be considered. The Bedfordshire districts submitted further material in support of their case, including a revised complementary submission for a Central Bedfordshire unitary authority. Bedford Borough Council submitted a further critique highlighting their concerns that the County bid would threaten economic and housing growth in the borough and highlighting concerns about the County's track record in managing value for money services. The County also submitted a comparative analysis within their supplementary submission. Luton Borough Council raised concerns about the County's proposals for a single local delivery vehicle covering Bedfordshire and Luton.

25. The Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils wanted to see further commitments that proposals for neighbourhood charters and delegation of services to parish and town councils would be honoured. They also took the view that both unitary proposals offered improved support to towns and parishes. Others wrote individually to express wider concerns about moving to unitary status.

26. The great majority of public sector stakeholders took the view that a move to unitary local government in the county area was essential to strengthen leadership and improve service delivery. Many were prepared to work with whatever unitary arrangements were put in place. Most highlighted that the single unitary option would be co-terminous with existing boundaries and that, in their view, a single unitary would reduce the complexity of existing partnership arrangements.
27. Any possible job losses and disruption to services was the main focus of responses from public sector unions, who also expressed concerns about the lack of detail in the neighbourhood empowerment arrangements and the uncertainty about transitional costs in both proposals.
28. Most businesses that responded commented that of the two proposals, the single county option had the greater propensity to simplify the local government structure in Bedfordshire and make it more effective.
29. Voluntary and community organisations' views were mixed. Some highlighted the opportunity for proposals to simplify working arrangements and to achieve economies of scale in service delivery. Others, notably environmental and rural issue based groups were particularly concerned that a Bedford Borough unitary would focus too heavily on urban issues.
30. There were around 40 individual responses from the public with the majority highlighting the benefits of unitary local government. Bedford Borough ran a campaign and around 30,300 people expressed their support for the Borough proposal either directly or through a petition.

Cheshire: *Proposals from Cheshire County Council and Chester City Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	27
Town and parish councils	64
Public sector	67
Business sector	35
Voluntary and community sector	33
Public responses	680
Total	906
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>200</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

31. The six district councils within the county responded with concerns about the proposal for a single unitary Cheshire authority. Chester City, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Macclesfield and Vale Royal Councils indicated their preference for a two unitary solution submitted originally from Chester City: they wished the proposal to be considered as a joint proposal from them all. These four districts argued that the two unitary option would be better able to align with the policies and programmes of nearby Manchester and Liverpool, and also with various regional and city-regional strategies. The remaining two district councils expressed concerns about both unitary proposals for the Cheshire area.

32. About a quarter of responses received from town and parish councils expressed a preference for the single unitary option, citing the County's work in developing a proposed network of area committees which would allow town and parish councils throughout Cheshire to play an enhanced role. A small number favoured the two unitary option, whilst many considered that improved two-tier working should have been an option.

33. The majority of responses from the public sector organisations expressed support for one of the proposals, although a small minority were eager to strengthen the existing two-tier system and wanted to focus on providing better services to local people rather than introducing new structures. Around half of these public sector responses commented that the County Council's proposal best met the outcomes specified in the Invitation criteria. Some highlighted the County Council's estimates that restructuring costs would be repaid in 2-3 years and the high levels of annual savings thereafter. Others did not express a preference but emphasised that effective

partnership working is more easily achieved through the less complicated relationships with unitary authorities. Some were concerned about the proposed high electorate to councillor ratio for both proposals and risks in the two unitary option associated with the appointment of a single director for children's services and health and social care.

34. All schools that submitted evidence expressed a preference for the Cheshire county option, arguing that a single authority would provide value for money. A unitary Cheshire council would, in their view, be able to make financial savings through its administration and running costs, and would provide a more transparent and accountable system for schools to operate within.

35. The majority of responses received from voluntary and community organisations expressed a preference for the County unitary proposal. Many such organisations already work across the county and a unitary would lead to more joined-up services making access for small voluntary bodies easier. However, a sizeable minority were concerned about any move to unitary local government as, in their view, the savings envisaged in each bid could adversely affect the overall support and funding of the third sector.

36. Representations from a range of businesses argued that a single unitary authority for Cheshire would best serve the interests of residents and businesses. The business sector was keen for the "brand image" of Cheshire to be retained.

37. Although some members of the public wrote to express support for the two unitary proposal, the great majority of representations received from members of the public expressed support for the County's proposal. Many felt that having a single council for Cheshire would raise the standard of service provision for all county residents. Others expressed their concern at a perceived lack of accountability within the district councils, an issue they felt would be ameliorated by a single authority. Others considered that Cheshire County's proposals would make local government in Cheshire more consistent with other parts of the country.

Cornwall: *Proposal from Cornwall County Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	15
Town and parish councils	59
Public sector	25
Business sector	11
Voluntary and community sector	19
Public responses	422
Total	551
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>1,750</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

38. Responses to the consultation were received from five of the six Cornish district councils, all five of which expressed concerns about a countywide unitary authority. Issues raised included the level of public support, and what districts saw as a risk that public services could suffer, and what they saw as inaccuracies in the business case.

39. Some larger town councils supported the proposal and were prepared to assume additional responsibilities to deliver services locally. The Cornwall Association of Local Councils stated that it looked forward to working effectively with any new structure created. However, the majority of Cornwall’s town and parish councils which responded expressed concerns. Many considered they would be unable to effectively manage the planned devolution of powers, or deliver the intended services without considerable funding. Other concerns were around the loss of localisation and confusion about the proposed Community Networks.

40. Many, including the health sector, took the view that the rationalisation of local authorities would provide a significant opportunity to improve service delivery via simplified partnership engagement. Others noted that the new unitary would be co-terminous with their administrative structures. Support for the proposal was sometimes on the basis of it being a way for real and meaningful devolution of powers to Cornwall. Concern was raised, however, about a possible democratic deficit and the viability of the link between councillors and their electorates. Others were concerned that there was the potential for disruption to funding streams and local area agreements.

41. Universities and colleges highlighted the potential for a coordinated and strategic approach. This proposal was considered likely to deliver the economic development and regeneration needed throughout the county.
42. Strong support was received from across various business communities – notably the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. It was felt that a combined voice for the county would be stronger and more consistent than current structures when attracting grants to the region and in relation to convergence funding and lobbying for its interests. This aspect had particular resonance in the maritime sector.
43. The voluntary and community sector showed general support for the principle of a unitary authority and recognition of its potential benefit to Cornwall, especially given the funding challenges of regional issues such as climate and demographic changes. However, there was some unease about any change which could jeopardise the close partnership working and relationships between all sectors. There was a feeling about the form of the Community Networks was needed before firmer decisions could be made.
44. There was mixed opinion from the Cornish public. It was evident from many of the representations that a strong sense of county identity exists. However, the majority of representations received from the public during the consultation period expressed concerns about the proposal, along with two petitions of around 1,750 signatures. Many were concerned about the perceived potential centralisation of a mainly rural county and loss of democratic representation. Reference was made to the results of polls conducted by certain districts which showed a majority of those who voted being opposed to the proposal.

Cumbria: *Proposal from Cumbria County Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	11
Town and parish councils	40
Public sector	25
Business sector	21
Voluntary and community sector	13
Public responses	310
Total	420
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>1,700</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

45. The district councils within the county submitted an alternative prospectus for improved two tier working. They considered that a single council would be too large and unwieldy; would reduce services to residents and hinder the democratic process.

46. A number of town and parish councils wrote to express support for the proposal. However, a large majority of the town and parish councils that responded remained sceptical, highlighting their belief that a single unitary would direct services away from their areas. Concerns were also raised that the new structure would move councillors away from frontline duties.

47. The health sector expressed support for Cumbria’s proposal, although representations from other key public sector stakeholders reflected a number of concerns. Many were concerned that the remit of the proposed structures were unclear. Primary concerns regarded the affordability of the proposals and included questioning of the accuracy of expected savings, the implementation arrangement for the proposal and the cost of redundancies. The plan to disband five second tier local strategic partnerships (LSPs) was opposed by many of the LSPs that made representations.

48. Around a quarter of business sector responses believed that the proposal would lead to significant opportunities to improve customer service for the citizens and businesses in Cumbria and to create shared services capable of supporting local government in the wider local public sector. Concerns raised by the business sector centred on the need for businesses to maintain a strong and constructive dialogue with local communities, and in particular local politicians who can make informed policy decisions in the best interest of their community. Some were concerned that if the new council is based in Carlisle, attending meetings would require lengthy round trips. They also tended to have strong ties with the areas in which they had developed their business and so were reluctant to lose these authorities.

49. Many voluntary and community sector representations considered that unitary status, once implemented, would be likely to be well-received since Cumbria was currently viewed as being disunited. Clarity and the visibility of decision-making would need to be underpinned in a new authority in order to ensure it is easily comprehensible and accessible to the public and stakeholders. Some drew attention to the fact that voluntary and community organisations generally maintain relationships either at a very local level or with the county, with relatively few having much working contact with districts. It was accepted that amalgamation of back office functions would improve value for money, whilst a single unitary authority would also offer the potential for greater equity of services. Attention was also drawn to a perceived lack of clarity in the proposal.

50. Although some members of the public wrote to express support for the proposal, the great majority of representations received from members of the public expressed concerns about the county's proposal. Concerns focussed on the perceived lack of accountability of a remote authority and a potential for service provision to suffer.

Durham: *Proposal from Durham County Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	10
Town and parish councils	21
Public sector	39
Business sector	24
Voluntary and community sector	21
Public responses	149
Total	264
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	325

Summary of views expressed by respondents

51. All the district councils in County Durham were opposed to the unitary proposal, questioning in particular the robustness of the proposal’s financial case.

52. Representations from town and parish councils were mixed. Those expressing support saw the potential to increase strategic leadership created by a unitary authority, whilst others expressed concerns that if a large unitary authority were to be implemented this may weaken the role and status of the parish sector.

53. Representations received from the public sector indicated broad support for the County Council’s proposals. Comments highlighted the benefits of being able to interact with one partner rather than several for most functions, thereby improving efficiency and allowing them to better serve the local community. Key stakeholders also highlighted cost savings through the alignment of services and functions in one authority. Others wrote to say that although they had no difficulties with the existing arrangements, they could see how a unitary authority would have the potential to simplify arrangements. An issue of concern was that rural issues might lose out to the larger demands of the urban areas.

54. Representations received from the university sector expressed support for the County's unitary bid, whilst local schools provided a mixed response. Comments included that a unitary authority would provide a single voice for the County, would have a more strategic perspective, and be well attuned to national issues. Others accepted the merits of the bid, especially in terms of affordability following the initial set up period, but highlighted the need to consider the views and concerns of the district councils in order to produce the best model of local governance.

55. Representations from public sector unions expressed broad support, recognising the desire to improve front line services, but highlighted some issues around potential job losses, especially at the senior level and the impact this may have on services.

56. All of the business sector who responded to the consultation expressed broad support for the County proposal, including regional business representative organisations. They considered that the proposal provided an affordable way forward and had the potential to deliver savings both in the short and long term to re-invest in services.

57. Representations received from the voluntary and community sector were mixed. Reservations were expressed as to the effect on working relationships between the County and District Councils, and the effect this could have on the voluntary sector. Voluntary and community organisations wished to maintain their close working relationships and links with local authorities.

58. Whilst reference was made to the results of polls conducted by district councils, which showed a majority of those who voted being opposed to the proposal, the responses received from the public during the consultation were fairly evenly split between those expressing concerns and those highlighting the benefits of the proposal.

Exeter: *Proposal from Exeter City Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	21
Town and parish councils	84
Public sector	51
Business sector	14
Voluntary and community sector	20
Public responses	352
Total	542
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>180</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

59. There was cross-party support within the City Council from the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties for the unitary proposal although the Liberal Democrats opposed. Neighbouring district councils that expressed a view were generally concerned about the bid on the basis of the impact on the remaining county. Whilst not all opposed the aspirations of Exeter, they had reservations concerning the possible socio-economic impact of the unitary proposal on surrounding authorities. Devon County Council questioned the business case and ability of Exeter to deliver on its promises.

60. The Devon Association of Local Councils expressed concerns about the proposal due to its impact on the residual county area. These views were echoed by a large number of town and parish councils who wrote to object to the process, arguing the loss of Exeter would “rip the heart” out of Devon, and place an extra financial burden on the remaining rural communities.

61. A number of public sector organisations saw the proposal as contradictory to the recently agreed strategic direction for health and social care in Devon, and highlighted its implications for rural areas e.g. the ability of Devon to continue to support national park service delivery. Some stakeholders within this sector confirmed that they were prepared to work with whichever structure emerged from this process. Representations from

public sector unions raised the issue of the potential imbalance of service provision between the City and County authorities, were the proposal to be implemented.

62. The University of Exeter highlighted the potential benefits of the unitary proposal such as clearer accountability and raising of aspirations and achievement within one coherent structure. However, there was a strong campaign against the unitary proposal from governing bodies of local schools, colleges and from teaching associations.

63. The Exeter Chamber of Commerce highlighted the potential for an urban-focused single tier authority to aid the success of the city and its sub-region. Other representations from this sector highlighted the need for stability to enable longer term planning and investment decisions for regeneration. There were some concerns raised by the Devon business sector, however, that the proposal would result in unnecessary duplication, and further fragmentation of council services would reduce the county's capacity to undertake larger projects.

64. Some voluntary and community organisations were concerned that there are already funding pressures on their work, and that the move to a unitary Exeter would increase the likelihood of cuts and disruption to ongoing projects or agreements.

65. Whilst many of the city's residents wished to see (as demonstrated through opinion polls undertaken by both the City and County councils) a return to city self-government and hence favoured the unitary proposal, the great majority of public responses received by the Department during the consultation expressed concerns about the proposal. Issues raised included the loss of Devon's last major urban area and county town and the revenues it generates; the close economic and demographic relationship between Exeter and its hinterland; and that other unitaries within Devon were said to have struggled since gaining unitary status. Of those respondents who supported the bid, most were from within Exeter itself.

Ipswich: *Proposal from Ipswich Borough Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	10
Town and parish councils	80
Public sector	40
Business sector	7
Voluntary and community sector	18
Public responses	288
Total	443
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	125

Summary of views expressed by respondents

66. Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk district councils, other than Ipswich, had concerns about the unitary proposal, raising issues about the transition costs involved; the potential for inequity in service provision, and the loss of economies of scale to the residual county. In their view, Ipswich lacked the capacity to forge shared service agreements in order to maintain current levels of service provision. They saw Ipswich very much as Suffolk's county town and economic driver, and did not want it to distance or differentiate itself from the wider area. They refuted Ipswich's claim to suffer from an urban-rural divide. The County Council also argued that Ipswich could implement most of its neighbourhood empowerment proposals without unitary status.

67. Many town and parish councils had concerns about the possible effect a unitary authority could have on their areas' economies and access to services: many residents rely on facilities, such as schools or hospitals, within the city itself. A significant minority were fearful of potential applications to expand Ipswich's administrative boundaries. Most expressed concerns at the cost of transition and additional bureaucracy. Many were doubtful that the transition could be undertaken without an adverse impact on council tax rates.

68. Public sector bodies stressed their determination to continue their productive working with whatever local government structure was introduced to Ipswich. However, they had concerns relating to structural issues, such as the co-terminosity of various boundaries and resource issues, commenting on the possible duplication of structures and duties. Public sector unions expressed concerns on the status and working conditions of their members if employed by a new unitary authority. The great majority of representations from the education sector raised concerns about the proposal's effects on children's services and difficulty of managing cross-border admissions.

69. Most of the business representations received expressed broad support for the unitary proposal, arguing that it would reduce duplication and confusion within the city, whilst strengthening Ipswich's unique identity.

70. Views expressed amongst the voluntary and community sector were mixed. Those who expressed support cited an increased focus of resources from a unitary Ipswich, whilst others pointed to the cost of transition and need to re-determine county-wide relationships between local government and the third sector.

71. A number of responses from the public highlighted the ability of a unitary authority to address the needs of Ipswich's disadvantaged communities and to strengthen the city's identity. However, the majority of responses from the public expressed concerns about Ipswich's proposals, citing Suffolk County Council's higher-rated services, the high transition costs involved and boundary issues.

North Yorkshire: *Proposal from North Yorkshire County Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	15
Town and parish councils	78
Public sector	25
Business sector	25
Voluntary and community sector	50
Public responses	706
Total	899
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>130</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

72. North Yorkshire's six district councils submitted a joint critique of the proposal. They were concerned that costs were understated and cuts in services and, in certain areas, a rise in council tax would be necessitated. In their view, if the proposal were implemented local issues would be crowded out by high-level strategic considerations; there would be insufficient flexibility to deal with local needs and the county area is simply too vast for a single authority and leader to be viable. They queried the proposal's value for money, and believed that many of the identified improvements are being achieved through current two-tier working.

73. A number of town and parish councils argued that the proposed area committees, local forums and delegations to town and parish councils, would forge a closer working relationship with local people. However a significant majority of town and parish councils had concerns, arguing that the unitary council would be too large and too remote, and lose contact with local people and their specific needs (in part because of the reduction in councillor numbers in certain areas). They also considered that costs had been underestimated and that it would be unrealistic for parishes to take on extra responsibilities devolved from a unitary body.

74. Most public sector organisations who responded expressed support. They believed that improved service delivery and efficiencies would come about from greater economies of scale, that there would be stronger strategic leadership and a more consistent joint-working approach. Key organisations welcomed the fact that the amalgamation of smaller predecessor organisations would result in co-terminosity of various boundaries. Some argued that a unitary system would reduce the layers of bureaucracy and streamline the decision-making process. However, concerns were expressed that the area covered was too large to be responsive to local needs, and that a bigger authority would not necessarily be more efficient and that predicted transition costs were high.

75. A majority of the education sector, from primary through to university level, supported the proposal believing it would improve partnership working and provide clear, effective leadership.

76. The majority of representations received from the voluntary and community sector raised a number of concerns, primarily that such a large geographical area would result in a loss of local knowledge and a county government remote from the people. There was also some concern that costs were underestimated and value for money over-stated.

77. Some representations from the business sector expressed broad support for the proposal, arguing that a unitary authority would be more efficient and avoid duplication. However, the majority of businesses questioned whether the proposal was viable on the basis that the single unitary would be too remote, resulting in a loss of local knowledge.

78. A majority of the public raised concerns, arguing that a unitary authority could be too large and too remote. Those in favour believed it would incur less duplication and greater savings.

Northumberland: *Proposals from Northumberland County Council and Northumberland District Councils*

Number of representations received

Local government	9
Town and parish councils	26
Public sector	22
Business sector	24
Voluntary and community sector	16
Public responses	93
Total	190
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>3,400</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

79. The districts in the county area submitted a joint critique of the County proposal. They argued that there were two very different parts of the County: a large rural area and an urban south east. In their view there was a wide and growing cross-section of support for the two-unitary option. Northumberland County Council considered that the two unitary model would fail to deliver due to an over-reliance on joint arrangements and loss of critical mass.

80. Most representations received from public sector bodies welcomed a county-wide unitary proposal on the basis that it offered the opportunity to work more closely with local government and would result in greater co-terminosity of boundaries. Some highlighted that a single unitary could offer a more coherent solution to partnership working, although considering it might lead to less local empowerment in rural areas. A two-unitary option would rely on a large degree of cooperation between the two new authorities. Overall, the county-wide option was considered more affordable than the two-unitary option. There were concerns regarding the viability of the two-unitary option's proposal in relation to the sustainability of high cost per capita rural services.

81. Northumberland Association of Local Councils, representing parish councils, expressed a preference for a single county unitary. They commented in particular that the two-unitary option was not capable of delivering existing county-wide education services without detriment. Some individual town and parish councils favoured a two-unitary solution, as they believed service delivery should be geographically close to the communities served.

82. Most across the business sector, including the North East Chamber of Commerce thought that the single county proposal would best provide a strong, independent voice for the North East and streamline the way in which businesses work with local government. Some of the responses highlighted that the three devolved area committees would more accurately reflect the geography of Northumberland than the two-unitary option. The removal of the duplication of management and administration which the single unitary option could achieve would free up resources. Businesses also commented that the shared services plan in the two-unitary proposals appeared to be an admission that many services cannot be effectively provided by such small unitaries. Indeed, businesses believed that two separate councils would lead to inward-looking competition between the two halves of the County which would ultimately leave both worse off.

83. Concerns were expressed by voluntary and community sector about the validity of a two-unitary option, whilst a consortium of Northumberland organisations did not express a preference for either of the two proposals.

84. Some responses claimed that the two-unitary option could not exist without substantial subsidies from central Government and that the two councils would still have to share many services. Others supported the two unitary option, with many arguing that a single unitary would not reflect the County's diversity. Reference was made to the 2004 referendum in which 44% supported a single unitary option and 56% supported a two-unitary solution. Overall, although a significant amount of campaign correspondence was also received expressing a preference for a single county option, a majority of public responses expressed a preference for the two-unitary option.

Norwich: *Proposal from Norwich City Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	15
Town and parish councils	64
Public sector	28
Business sector	15
Voluntary and community sector	15
Public responses	1,496
Total	1,633
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>2,000</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

85. Norfolk councils, other than Norwich, had a number of concerns about the robustness of the business case for this unitary proposal. They were also of the view that Norwich City Council lacked a satisfactory track record on service delivery and cost, citing a number of highly critical Audit Commission reports. They also expressed concern about what they saw as Norwich's poor history of partnership working, and that transition costs may result in council tax increases or service reductions. They argued that strong and widespread opposition to the proposal would cause lasting and intractable harm to county-wide working relationships. Certain authorities had raised issues about the possibility of an extension to Norwich's boundaries, and the effect this may have on neighbouring authorities.

86. A substantial number of responses received from town and parish councils expressed concerns about the proposal. Concerns included the cost and disruption to services of structural changes and Norwich's recent history of financial management— especially when compared to Norfolk County Council. Of particular concern was the potential for Norwich to extend its boundaries to support a unitary authority.

87. Representations received from public sector organisations showed a mixture of views. Some highlighted the potential for a unitary authority to provide greater clarity and thus effectiveness via the integration of services, and improvements to partnership working. Others noted that changes would be too disruptive, straining already limited resources, adversely affecting service delivery and partnership working. Many pointed to the service delivery performance of Norfolk County Council in comparison to Norwich and raised concerns over possible duplication of services and effects on the co-terminosity of boundaries. Any possible job losses and disruption to services was the main focus of responses from public sector unions. Representations from educational institutions expressed a number of doubts about the viability of the proposal. Primary concerns focused upon additional administrative challenges and the effect on children of cross-border admissions policies.

88. Around a third of the voluntary organisations responding to this consultation expressed support for a unitary authority, arguing that it would bring greater cohesion and accountability. Of those broadly critical of the proposals, the primary reasons cited were: high set-up costs; disruption to services; duplication of working structures county-wide and loss of economies of scale. Norwich's ability to sustain a unitary authority with its current small population was also a concern.

89. Representations expressing support were received from the business sector. However, the majority of responses from business expressed concerns about the City's record of financial management and history of working with other authorities and organisations.

90. Representations received from the public during consultation expressed concerns about the unitary proposal, primarily due to concerns about high transition costs involved and Norwich's history of financial management. Service delivery was also an area of concern, as was any potential move for Norwich to extend its boundaries into neighbouring authorities.

Shropshire: *Proposal from Shropshire County Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	16
Town and parish councils	18
Public sector	24
Business sector	15
Voluntary and community sector	21
Public responses	138
Total	232
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>0</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

91. This proposal was originally supported by two district councils, Oswestry and South Shropshire, although following the local elections of May 2007, the latter withdrew its support. Of the remaining district councils, two expressed their opposition to the bid, whilst the third did not participate formally in the consultation. Their main concerns were their perception that the cost of change had increased compared to the original predictions, that the unitary structure had potential to disenfranchise local communities, and that rural areas would be under-represented.

92. Some town and parish councils wrote to highlight what were, in their view, strengths with the proposal, with primary arguments being that such an arrangement would eliminate duplication and create some very substantial annual savings. A slight majority wrote expressing concerns, commenting that area committees could increase confusion, add further bureaucracy, undermine local councils, or reduce transparency.

93. The majority of representations received from public sector stakeholders expressed support for the proposal. Generally it was considered that a unitary model would improve joint commissioning arrangements for the benefit of county-wide strategic direction and policy. In particular, the health sector argued that there would be benefits from single points of access to services. Against the proposal, however, it was argued that the geographical area covered would be too large and remote from the population, and that area committees would not have the capacity to exert real influence. A number of statutory organisations commented that the boundaries of the new unitary authority would be co-terminous with their own. A clear majority of the education sector supported the proposal. Primary reasons included that one authority would be better placed to

develop a coherent plan for the 14-19 education strategy. It was also argued that there would be improved collaboration and unified goals between higher and further education and the business sector.

94. Almost all representations received from businesses in Shropshire expressed support for the proposal. A key argument was that the current planning system was confusing for business and that the business-driven system outlined in the proposal would be favourable. Businesses also drew attention to the benefits of a unified policy for economic development and greater consistency across the county. However, concerns were expressed that the financial estimates had been revised several times.

95. Almost all voluntary and community sector organisations that made representations expressed support for the proposal. The key argument here related to consistency: it was felt that the proposal would result in stronger strategic leadership, equity of service delivery and financial support across the county.

96. Whilst reference was made to polls undertaken by certain district councils in which a majority of those who voted opposed the unitary proposals, the majority of consultation responses received supported the proposal, with around one third opposing. Those in favour argued that the proposal would deliver services more effectively, save money and reduce bureaucracy. A common opposing argument was that a new single unitary would be too large and remote, with some respondents believing that this could disenfranchise residents at the remote perimeters of the county.

Somerset: Proposal from Somerset County Council

Number of representations received

Local government	7
Town and parish councils	13
Public sector	14
Business sector	8
Voluntary and community sector	12
Public responses	57
Total	111
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>1,700</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

97. The five district councils within the county were opposed to the unitary proposal, and submitted their own proposals for improved two-tier working. Reasons for opposition included the cost of transition and the realism of projected savings which, it was argued, could be achieved without a unitary council; the large size, geographical and social diversity of the county and the proposed unitary's high electorate to councillor ratio. The district councils considered that the unitary proposal if implemented would have an adverse effect on the place-shaping agenda as it failed to allow for the differing circumstances across the county between rural areas and market towns.

98. Around two thirds of the town and parish councils who responded to this consultation expressed concerns about the proposal. Primary concerns centred upon the reduction in councillor numbers and the perceived remoteness to residents of a single county authority. This latter point was especially raised in relation to Taunton, which is at present un-parished, and the remote parishes in areas such as Exmoor.

99. Public sector organisations stressed their determination to continue their productive working with whatever local government structure was introduced. However, they were particularly concerned at the lack of public support for the proposal within the county and its effects on service delivery and infrastructure. Public sector unions broadly supported the principle of unitary local government but had concerns about the implications for the local workforce and the delivery of services.

100. Most business responses expressed concerns about the viability of the proposal including the loss of democratic representation caused by the reduction in councillors and the ability of business organisations to participate in and influence local political processes. Some had concerns that a unitary council would not have sufficient regard to locally differing service priorities across such a large and socio-economically diverse area. A few highlighted the potential of the proposal to reduce duplication of work between councils.

101. Most respondents in the voluntary and community sector wrote with a number of issues including concerns at the loss of their close working arrangements with district councils and the potential for increased bureaucracy of a unitary county authority. There was also concern that, in their view, the proposals for devolution down to the community level were not clear and ignored current successful working practices with the districts.

102. The great majority of responses from the public during the consultation expressed concerns. Many considered that the county area was simply too large or remote for a unitary authority to be effective, and were worried by the reduction in the number of councillors. A number of such responses, however, saw the proposal as an opportunity to increase value for money and coherence across the county. Reference was also made to polls undertaken by district councils in which the majority who voted, opposed the proposal.

Wiltshire: *Proposal by Wiltshire County Council*

Number of representations received

Local government	14
Town and parish councils	73
Public sector	16
Business sector	18
Voluntary and community sector	16
Public responses	201
Total	338
<i>Campaign responses received</i>	<i>6,500</i>

Summary of views expressed by respondents

103. North Wiltshire District Council supported the original proposal but withdrew support following discussions with constituents during the May elections. All other district councils expressed concerns about the proposal, particularly in relation to the affordability and broad cross-section of support criteria, and submitted their own prospectus for improved two-tier working. Swindon Borough Council expressed concerns that, in their view, the disproportionate size of the Wiltshire unitary compared to Swindon would put pressure on Swindon's resources.

104. Wiltshire Association of Local Councils consulted its membership via a questionnaire. The Association expressed a willingness to work with whichever structure prevailed. Many town and parish councils wrote to register their concerns about the size and sparse population and the fundamental differences between the communities north and south of Salisbury Plain. Others welcomed the scope for a single point of contact and highlighted aspects of the proposal that lessen confusion surrounding roles and responsibilities. However, many requested further clarity on the status of the proposed area boards and the balance between elected and appointed members. The opportunity to play an enhanced role was also broadly welcomed, although not all councils felt they had the capacity or expertise to carry this out. Many expressed the view that any additional activity undertaken should be properly financed.

105. Many public sector stakeholders who responded cited the benefits of a single unitary for Wiltshire such as co-terminosity between the boundaries of the new unitary and their own boundaries, and benefits through rationalised partnership working. Many of the current local strategic

partnerships submitted a joint response in which they welcomed the proposals for area boards, commenting that these offered the potential for bringing together all local public sector partners.

106. Some voluntary and community sector respondents commented that a move to a single authority in Wiltshire would eliminate confusion over roles and responsibilities, but the majority commented that the authority would be too large and too remote to respond to local needs. In particular, many cited the reduction in the number of councillors as, in their view, detracting from local representation.

107. The Wessex Association of Chamber of Commerce, which represents 13 Wiltshire business chambers, commented that most of the chambers supported the proposal for a single unitary in Wiltshire. Many respondents mention the 'Vision for Salisbury' and hoped this work continues to be progressed under any new arrangements.

108. There was a substantial response from the members of the public, the vast majority of it in campaign form, with over a third supporting the proposal and the remainder opposing. Many individuals wrote to express support for the proposals. Overall the majority expressed concerns about the proposal, and in particular expressed doubts that the proposal met the affordability criterion.

Consultation on prioritisation

109. As explained in the Government's announcement of 27 March 2007, prioritisation would be necessary if more proposals were judged to have met the Invitation criteria than could be afforded in macro-economic terms. Implementation of any proposals involving transitional costs financed by the use of reserves will have an impact upon planned public expenditure totals. We made clear that any use of reserves must, therefore, be within the envelope available.

110. On 7 June, a consultation was launched on the proposed means of prioritising proposals, and of selecting which of two alternative proposals for the same area should proceed towards implementation. This consultation ended on 18 July.

111. In reaching its decision on which bids should proceed towards implementation, the Government took the view that prioritisation was not necessary.

Post consultation decisions

112. On 25 July the Minister for Local Government announced to the House of Commons that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government was minded to implement the following proposals once the then Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill was enacted:

Councils submitting proposals	Proposed unitary structure
Bedford Borough Council	Bedford Unitary
Chester City Council	Two Unitary Cheshire
Cornwall County Council	County Unitary
Durham County Council	County Unitary
Exeter City Council	Exeter Unitary
Ipswich Borough Council	Ipswich Unitary
Northumberland County Council	County Unitary
Shropshire County Council	County Unitary
Wiltshire County Council	County Unitary

113. He also announced that whilst the Secretary of State considered that, on the basis of the information available, Norwich City Council's proposal did not meet the criteria. She was, however, minded to seek the advice of the Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission on the most appropriate local government structure for Norwich and Norfolk, if and when the then Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill was enacted. In addition, he announced that the Secretary of State was not minded to implement the remaining six proposals which were consulted upon.

114. The Secretary of State intends to take her final decision by early December 2007 as to which unitary proposals will be implemented. The Orders required to implement structural change under the Act will then be subject to Parliament's approval under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

Annex A

Proposals for future unitary structures: stakeholder consultation

List of Key Stakeholders

Arts Council England
Association of Chief Police Officers
Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors
Association of County Chief Executives
Association of Electoral Administrators
Association of Larger Local Councils
Association of Local Authority Chief Executives
Association of Police Authorities
Audit Commission
Broads Authority
CBI and other significant business organisations in the area.
Chambers of Commerce
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association
Chief Constables
Chief Fire Officers
County Associations of Local Councils
Electoral Commission
English Heritage
Environment Agency
Fire and Rescue Authorities
Health and Safety Executive
Highways Agency
Jobcentre Plus
Local Government Association
Local Probation Boards
Local Strategic Partnerships
Metropolitan Passenger Transport Authorities
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
National Association of Local Councils

National Federation of Arm's-Length Management Organisations
National Park Authorities
Natural England
New Local Government Network
NHS Foundation Trusts
NHS Health Trusts
Police Authorities
Primary Care Trusts
Principal Local Authorities in affected areas
Public Sector People Managers Association
Public Sector Unions
Regional Assemblies
Regional Development Agencies
Society of County Treasurers
Society of District Council Treasurers
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Society of Local Council Clerks
Sport England
Strategic Health Authority
The Learning And Skills Council In England
Universities and Colleges
Voluntary Sector Organisations
Youth Justice Boards

ANNEX B



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community, opportunity, prosperity

27 March 2007

Chief Executive

BY EMAIL

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

Dear Chief Executive,

PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE UNITARY STRUCTURES

I am writing to inform you that we are today announcing which councils bidding for unitary status have been shortlisted to go forward to consultation and to notify you of the consultation.

You can read the consultation paper online at the DCLG website, www.communities.gsi.gov.uk/index.asp?id?1017165. Hard copies are on their way to you by post.

A list of consultees that we are approaching in the first instance is also available from the same web address. We are in particular seeking views from key partners and stakeholders that have an interest in the areas affected by the proposals. I would, therefore, be grateful if you could bring this consultation to the attention of your key stakeholders.

It is for each local authority to determine how best to respond to any announcement of this type. The Government considers that it is open to all authorities to respond to the announcement, but reminds them that in doing so they must have regard to the *Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity*.

The Code makes it clear that local authorities should not at any time use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade public to hold a particular view on a question of policy, and that authorities must take particular care when publicity is issued immediately prior to an election. However, the Code also states that it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and

legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Of course, candidates are free to make whatever statements they wish when campaigning."

I am writing in similar terms to all principal authorities in an area affected by proposals on which we are consulting.

Yours sincerely,

P Rowsell

ANNEX C

Ministerial meeting with delegations as part of the consultation process

Authority/Authorities	Date of Meeting
Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council (Delegation accompanied MP)	23 May
Shropshire Councils	30 May
Wiltshire County Council	30 May
Bedford District Councils	30 May
Ipswich Borough Council	30 May
Norwich City Council	30 May
Cornwall County Council	30 May
Devon County Council	30 May
Wiltshire County Council	30 May
North Shropshire District Council	30 May
Easington District Council (Delegation accompanied MPs)	7 June
Norfolk County Council	12 June
Northumberland District Councils	12 June
Cumbria District Councils	12 June
Northumberland County Council	13 June
Durham County Council	14 June
Exeter City Council (Delegation accompanied MP)	18 June
Broadland District Council	19 June
Shropshire Councils (Delegation accompanied MPs)	19 June
Suffolk County Council	19 June
Salisbury District Council	19 June
Cumbria County Council	18 June
Durham District Councils	19 June
North Yorkshire District Councils (Delegation accompanied MPs)	19 June,
Cheshire County Council	20 June
North Yorkshire County Council	20 June
Cheshire District Councils	20 June
Cumbria District Councils	21 June
Carrick District Council	26 June*

* Meeting arranged before end of consultation on 22 June, but held shortly after due to diary pressures.

