

Rt Hon John Denham MP  
Secretary of State for Communities and  
Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU

7 December 2009

Dear Secretary of State

#### REQUEST TO THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE TO ADVISE

On 6 February 2008, the Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government requested the Boundary Committee under section 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the 2007 Act) to advise on certain matters respectively relating to the unitary proposals made by Exeter City Council, Ipswich Borough Council and Norwich City Council.

The Committee was originally requested to provide its advice by 31 December 2008. However, that date was changed on a number of occasions and in a letter dated 2 December 2009 the Committee was requested to provide advice by 8 December 2009.

The Committee is now in a position to provide its advice under section 5(2) of the 2007 Act on the matters requested. The judgements and assessments we have made in reaching our conclusions on our advice are detailed in the enclosed reports on each of the three county areas, copies of which are available on our website at [www.boundarycommittee.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommittee.org.uk).

In response to the February 2008 request, the Committee's view is that there could be an alternative proposal, or proposals, for a single tier of local government for Exeter, Ipswich and Norwich and the whole or part of their respective county areas which would in aggregate have the capacity, if implemented, to deliver the outcomes specified by the five criteria set out in Annex A to the February 2008 request.

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In respect of each county area the Committee makes the following alternative proposal(s), each being an alternative proposal made under section 5(3)(c) and in accordance with the procedure set out in section 6(4) and (5) of the 2007 Act.

#### Exeter City Council

In relation to paragraphs 8 and 9 of the request the Committee makes the following alternative proposal to you:

- a unitary county comprising the whole of the existing two-tier area of Devon, on the basis of the arrangements set out in the enclosed report on our review of Devon

We do not consider any boundary changes to the existing councils of Plymouth and Torbay to be essential to the making of this alternative proposal.

We also recommend, under section 5(3)(b) of the 2007 Act, that the original proposal for unitary status from Exeter City Council is not implemented. This recommendation is made on the basis of the Secretary of State's previous concerns about such an authority's ability to meet the affordability criterion, which was not displaced by any evidence received by us during this review, all of which we took into account.

#### Ipswich Borough Council

In relation to paragraph 10 of the request, the Committee makes the following alternative proposals to you:

- a unitary county comprising the whole of the existing two-tier area of Suffolk (this is our preferred alternative proposal for Suffolk)
- a two-unitary pattern comprising an Ipswich & Felixstowe authority and a Rural Suffolk authority

In our opinion, the whole-county proposition performs more strongly against each of the five criteria set out in Annex A to the request and, for that reason, would deliver the outcomes specified in the request more effectively. The County unitary authority is, therefore, our preferred alternative proposal, on the basis of the arrangements set out in the enclosed report.

In response to paragraph 10b of the request for advice, the Committee does not consider that there could be an alternative proposal for a single tier of local government

for Ipswich and the whole or part of the surrounding Suffolk county area, together with the whole or part of the borough of Great Yarmouth, which would in aggregate have the capacity, if it were to be implemented, to deliver the outcomes specified by the five criteria.

We also recommend, under section 5(3)(b) of the 2007 Act, that the original proposal for unitary status from Ipswich Borough Council is not implemented. This recommendation is made on the basis of the Secretary of State's previous concerns about such an authority's ability to meet the affordability criterion, which was not displaced by any evidence received by us during this review, all of which we took into account.

#### Norwich City Council

In relation to paragraph 11 of the request for advice, the Committee makes the following alternative proposal to you:

- a unitary county comprising the whole of the existing two-tier area of Norfolk, on the basis of the arrangements set out in the enclosed report on our review of Norfolk

In response to paragraph 11b of the request, the Committee considers that there could be a single tier of local government, comprising the whole of the county of Norfolk and part of the district of Waveney (that area around Lowestoft, identified previously), that would in aggregate have the capacity, if it were to be implemented, to deliver the outcomes specified by the five criteria. However, as requested under paragraph 11c of the request, we consider that a unitary county Norfolk would better deliver the outcomes specified by the five criteria. Accordingly, we make no alternative proposal for a unitary pattern comprising the county of Norfolk and part of the district of Waveney under section 5(3)(c) of the 2007 Act.

We also recommend, under section 5(3)(b) of the 2007 Act, that the original proposal for unitary status from Norwich City Council is not implemented. This recommendation is made on the basis of the Secretary of State's previous concerns about such an authority's ability to meet the affordability criterion, which was not displaced by any evidence received by us during this review, all of which we took into account.

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In conducting our work we have had regard to the guidance provided to us in February and December 2008. We have also taken account of all representations received and evidence brought to our attention throughout the review process, all of which is available on our website at [www.boundarycommittee.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommittee.org.uk). Also available on our website are the reports of our independent financial consultants, on the basis of whose work we reached conclusions on whether the draft proposals on which we consulted were reasonably likely to meet the affordability criterion.

We are grateful to all who have taken the time to contribute to our work over the last 22 months. We understand entirely the tensions that our task generated in each of the areas under review and understand why they arose. To avoid further uncertainty on the part of local authorities, their staff and service users, we are strongly of the view that decisions should now be taken quickly on whether or not our advice should be followed.

I am copying this letter to the Rt Hon Rosie Winterton MP.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Max Caller*

Max Caller CBE  
Chair