



Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
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Sent by email

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Date: 9 December 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Delivering Unitary Local Government for The Bay and North Cumbria

We are pleased to submit our full proposal for unitary local government in response to your invitation of 9 October. The proposal has been prepared jointly by Barrow Borough Council, Lancaster City Council and South Lakeland District Council. It asks you to agree to take forward a Type C proposal to create 'The Bay Council', consolidating our districts with the relevant geographies of Cumbria and Lancashire County Councils, and proposes a parallel Type B arrangement for North Cumbria. This full proposal was overwhelmingly approved at extraordinary full council meetings in each of the proposing authorities on 8 December, with resounding cross-party support. This reflects the strength of local public opinion.

Before your invitation, our desire was best articulated by our Prosperity and Resilience Strategy published in the summer. This set out the unique identity and opportunity of The Bay as a credible economic geography where over 95% of local people live and work. This laid the foundations for us working at considerable pace to create a compliant and comprehensive proposal. Our proposal meets your guidance, is acceptable locally and has demonstrable local support.

We have shown strong public support for a unitary authority for The Bay but also a lack of support for a county unitary. Most partners recognise there is a distinction between the north of Cumbria and The Bay area. Some organisations already organise on our proposed footprint, most notably the health system. Others, while aligned to the Cumbria geography have operational separation between the 'south' and the 'north'. Some county services like adult social care want to develop a consistent county-wide pathway but have to integrate across two different health systems.

We welcome your explicit invitation to put forward Type C proposals and not to be limited by the boundaries of previous reorganisations. By going beyond the boundary of Cumbria, as established by the 1972 Act, there are additional considerations particularly for police and fire services that you asked us to consider. In the time available we have started engagement with both police and fire service colleagues in both Cumbria and Lancashire. We recognise that it is



just the start of that process, and there will be more detailed consultation required to firm up any proposals in both the short and longer term. However, initial conversations did not identify any legislative or fundamental barrier to The Bay Council. There are several potential options that could be explored together. We have asked your officials to organise a joint meeting with representatives from the department, the Home Office and relevant authorities in Cumbria and Lancashire as part of our on-going commitment to developing the proposal collaboratively.

Arrangements for both police and fire authorities will no doubt be an important element of your inter-governmental discussions with the Home Office. We would ask that this is considered in the context of the wider opportunity for devolution and future combined working, building on their respective duties to consider collaboration. No-one wants administrative boundaries for these authorities to be a barrier to implementing the right arrangements for unitary local government to realise its potential.

We have made a conservative and prudent assessment of the benefits of reorganisation, linked to a reform and recovery agenda to level up this part of the North. The economic case shows that The Bay and North Cumbria would deliver comparable benefits to reorganisation to a county unitary in the short term and be more resilient in the longer term.

We are not convinced by the more optimistic scenarios that have been suggested by Cumbria County Council for large savings on top of reorganisation benefits. As you will be aware, Covid-19 has placed additional pressures on local authorities, who have played a crucial role in enabling an effective response to the pandemic. We need the capacity and capability to drive a recovery that builds back better for communities. Our priority, like yours, is to deliver public value through a sustainable and resilient local council that delivers priority services and empowers communities.

Our proposal is a bold vision for local government reform, focusing on the major agendas of community power, community wealth, health and well-being and the climate emergency. Ensuring seamless continuity and improvement of council services, such as Children's Services and Adult Services, and blue light services is obviously of importance to us and our residents. We are keen to ensure that this happens in a way that enhances and enables the significant improvement that The Bay Council would bring.

We have demonstrated why a new unitary for The Bay area is right not just for Barrow, Lancaster and South Lakeland, but for the wider region, through reciprocal arrangements that complement unitary authorities to the north, west and south of The Bay. In contrast, a single unitary on County boundaries would risk destroying effective and well-established joint working arrangements between Lancaster and South Cumbria.

Our attached proposal sets out how we want to come together. We ask that you now consider the opportunity to accelerate our potential through endorsing an approach that delivers a sustainable and resilient local government solution which empowers local communities.

Further to your letter acknowledging receipt of our Outline Proposal, we do not seek any postponement of local elections planned for May 2021 on account of this process.



We very much look forward to engaging with you, your colleagues and officials in the evaluation and subsequent implementation of this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

M A Thomson

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Barrow Borough Council

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