

# News from West Devon



Tuesday January 19, 2010

## DEVON DELEGATION MEETS LOCAL GOVERNMENT MINISTER

A delegation of Devon council leaders and MPs has taken a protest against proposals to impose unitary local government in the county to Westminster.

The group, which included West Devon Borough Council Leader James McInnes, met Local Government Minister Rosie Winterton and urged her to drop the initiative which would cause major upheaval for residents and cost millions of pounds to implement.

As the six week public consultation into the proposals closed on Tuesday (Jan 19<sup>th</sup>), Secretary of State John Denham is expected to make a decision shortly on whether to replace Devon's borough, district and county councils with a single unitary authority as recommended by the Boundary Committee. But Mr Denham could also impose other unitary authorities on the county – one for Exeter alone or a two-unitary for Exeter and for the rest of Devon – or he could take no action.

The long-running local government review of Devon – now into its third year – has met with major opposition from many Devon local authorities. Devon County Council warned the Government last week that it's not the right time for unitary change in Devon.

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The delegation also warned Ms Winterton that there was no appetite for change from the public who were overwhelmingly against the proposals. She was told that the initial costs of any change would be more than £70 million and the upheaval to council services would be too risky in the current economic climate.

Cllr McInnes explained to Ms Winterton that if a single Devon unitary was allowed to go ahead, residents would end up with the lowest level of councillor representation per elector in England.

He also told the Minister that more than £1-million had already been saved over three years through shared working arrangements with South Hams District Council and West Devon.

He reminded the Minister that costs for implementing the unitary change in Cornwall have trebled to more than £60 million.

The MPs and councillors said that following collaboration between all Devon districts in the last three years around £23 million had been saved and working together this way would be a better way of moving forward.

Following the visit, Cllr McInnes said: "The Minister certainly listened to us but we came away with the impression that a decision has already been made.

"On the positive side I was really pleased to read this week that the shadow local government minister Bob Neill said the Tories would give a manifesto commitment to overturn any unitary plans made by the government."

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## **NOTE TO EDITORS**

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