

Councillor report June 2015

Case for Cornwall

Each year public spending in Cornwall amounts to about £4.3 billion, however the majority of this spending is either undertaken by Central Government or controlled by those with no local choice over how it's spent.

We believe that organisations and communities in Cornwall have the greatest understanding of Cornwall's challenges and opportunities and are best placed to make the right decisions about Cornwall's future.

Background

Other parts of the Country have already benefited from greater powers to make decisions that affect areas like public transport, housing and healthcare. The Case for Cornwall sets out the new powers and freedoms we are seeking for Cornwall.

Discussions with senior Treasury and Department of Local Government officials have been progressing well for several months. We are hopeful for an announcement from George Osborne on 8th July during his summer budget.

A selection of Headline asks

- Exploring the introduction of a levy for second homes, up to the equivalent of their council tax. The additional funds will be used to build affordable housing for permanent residents 'displaced' by the homes used as second properties.
- Creating Cornwall specific planning practice guidance.
- Greater control of second homes by creation of separate use
- Creating a Heritage Kernow with the powers to comment on planning applications currently undertaken by English Heritage and devolution of heritage assets to local management i.e. Tintagel, Launceston Castle and Pendennis Castle.

Why Cornwall needs greater local powers

Cornwall is facing significant pressure on public service budgets - with powers to control more spending locally, we could make much more efficient use of the resources available.

Cornwall suffers long standing economic challenges - increased freedoms would enable us to invest in kick starting Cornwall's local economy.

House prices in Cornwall put home ownership beyond the reach of many people – local powers would allow investment to address the current shortage in affordable housing, high prices and high rents.

Our health and care system is facing growing demand and financial pressure – we need to be able to redesign our services to meet these challenges.

What new powers are we asking for?

Housing: build more affordable housing, taking control of Government land to provide social housing, finding ways to manage the number of second homes.

Transport: including greater control over bus services, developing a joined up public transport network, using a share of fuel duty to maintain our roads.

Planning, environment and infrastructure: greater local control of the planning system, more local control over flood defense and protecting historic buildings.

Employment and skills: local control to direct funding into training people in the right skills for Cornwall's industry.

Health and social care: to work with Government to join up health and social care services.

Energy: greater control over the development of electrical grid and unlocking potential for geothermal energy.

Public Sector efficiency: working with partners to get fairer funding, piloting greater freedoms over council tax; retaining and reinvesting a share of VAT from tourism.

Inspector publishes recommendations on way forward for Cornwall Local Plan

Following the first hearings to [examine the draft Cornwall Local Plan](#) by Secretary of State appointed inspector Simon Emerson, details of the additional work recommended and possible changes to the Plan to make it 'sound' before it can be adopted have been published.

We have welcomed Mr Emerson's letter which provides a clear and constructive way forward for the Plan. While he recommends changes and further work, he has not supported calls for significant increases in the housing targets and has also accepted the Council's key argument that Cornwall does not need significantly higher housing targets to achieve economic growth. Encouragingly, Mr Emerson is clear that he thinks the Plan can continue through his examination to adoption with further work."

The next set of hearings will be postponed to give the Council time to consider his recommendations.

The Inspector recommends that the housing target should be increased but also cautions against planning for too many more houses that simply would not be built. In addition, he recognises the Council's "very strong commitment to delivering affordable housing" which was demonstrated recently when we celebrated building the 1000th affordable home."

The Inspector's headline recommendations are to:

- re run the housing model and update the housing target (currently 47,500) using the Government's housing projections published this year.
- increase the Plan's housing target to reflect the pressure from existing second and holiday homes and consider if further increase is needed to meet affordable housing needs.
- be clearer about how the Plan's policies support the economic strategies and employment land, particularly how much and where.
- adjust Affordable Housing targets to a more achievable level .
- engage better with Gypsy and Traveler communities to get better evidence of their needs.

The Council has now agreed to suspend the examination to undertake the work requested. Any proposed changes to the Plan will go out to public consultation. This suspension should not delay communities from continuing their neighbourhood plan work.

Council tenants across Cornwall asked to update their details in readiness for Universal Credit and online services

All 10,300 Cornwall Council tenants will soon receive a census questionnaire to update their household details in preparation for the change to Housing Benefit and the introduction of new online services.

The census, named 'Everyone Matters' will be sent out from 15 June and will require all households to let the housing service know what help they need to be ready for changes ahead.

Universal Credit, the single monthly payment for people in or out of work which is being introduced by the Government, merges together some benefits and tax credits. Universal Credit will replace: Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; Income-related Employment and Support Allowance; Working Tax Credit; Child Tax Credit; Income Support; and Housing Benefit.

Tenants will be asked to update their personal details, indicate if they have access to the internet and inform Cornwall Housing of what help they need to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit.

All affected claimants will be gradually moved onto Universal Credit by the Department for Work and Pensions over the next few years. However, most people over 60 will not be moved onto the new benefit. Universal Credit will be a big change for some people, especially as the housing costs will not go directly to the landlord, but to the claimant with their other benefits. Tenants say that they want time to get ready and prepare: to manage their money monthly and to manage a claim online. If Cornwall Housing know tenants' current situation, we can inform them of when they'll be affected by the change to Universal Credit and offer support to get ready.

Cornwall Housing is also looking to develop more online services so that tenants can undertake simple transactions at any time of day or night. We have a wide range of tenants across Cornwall with very different circumstances and needs. Whilst some tenants have no interest in being online, others are saying that it would be helpful to them if we modernised this area of our service. By understanding what our tenants' situation, needs, and wants are we can make better decisions about

how we can improve the service.

The census is called Everyone Matters, because we do want to hear from everyone. We have asked local company PFA Research Ltd to help us collect the information. They are providing a free phone and a local number to support people to fill in the census. Because it is important that we hear from every single tenant, we will be following up with the people we don't hear from to ensure that we understand their situation and whether or not they need support.

Mixed Plastics

The Council is soon to launch a roll out of mixed plastics collections across Cornwall.

1. This will be a phased roll out to more accurately forecast the implementation and running costs of the collection of mixed plastics.
2. That the geographical area for the trial is identified by officers in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environment based on operational practicalities and data analysis.
3. That the size of the area should be at least the size of a former district.
4. That the results of the trial are reported back to the Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee and Cabinet after six months of operation.

There is provision in the waste contract with Cory to introduce mixed plastics recycling at any time. Recycling mixed plastics rather than sending them to landfill would result in a reduction of carbon emissions. Plastic packaging was the most requested item to be recycled in a residents' survey conducted in 2011. PricewaterhouseCoopers had modeled the economic impact to the Council over five years (with the Cory contract expiring in 2020) in respect of various scenarios.

Building our own Council Homes

The Council is developing a Housing Development Programme – to enable the Council to take a proactive role in delivering new homes via mixed tenure schemes that meet housing need whilst also providing a commercial return to the Council.

The ambition is for the Council to deliver 500 properties per annum by 2020/21, increasing the quality, increasing supply and meeting community needs through an ambitious delivery programme.

- Meet affordable housing demand by increasing supply and balance housing markets
- Provide quality private rented homes that are thermally efficient improving health and wellbeing as well as being affordable
- The need for security of tenure in the private rented market so people can create roots with that community

In order to develop the programme there is significant preparatory work to be undertaken. To achieve this key work streams have been established, namely

- Sites and land assembly - exploring the availability of land
- Business development appraisal and project funding - exploring the available funding options and testing economic viability
- Procurement and product specifications – ensuring the quality of the product meets our aspirations; exploring the local supply chain; and considering how to procure the works, supplies and services that maximises local benefits
- Establishing a trading and management company - finding the right model to allow the commercial venture to be lawful

Rather than implement the whole programme at once, the first phase is to establish the proof of concept. The concept needs to be tested on real opportunities, using pilot sites schemes will be progressed to test viability; deliverability, marketability and community buy in. This will inform the full business case. It is anticipated that this proof of concept work will be completed by Autumn 2015. To reach this stage initial seed funding is required. Requests for funding have been made to the Investment Programme Board.

Changes to planning processes – non-material amendments

I recently agreed to change the way in which we process so-called Non Material Amendments. Currently there is no input from town and parish councils when an amendment is submitted. Out of

14k applications only 450 are for non material amendment, however I think Town and Parish Councils should have a say as some applicants make multiple NMA's which may have a culminate effect. Therefore there will be a 2 weeks consultation with T&P's on submitted NMA's. Government Planning Guidance says there is no statutory definition of 'non-material' and we do not need to consult unless we choose to do so. Because it will be dependent on the context of the overall scheme – an amendment that is non-material in one context may be material in another. These changes could be because of unforeseen circumstances eg cabling or piping is in a different location to that anticipated so the design and layout of a development needs to change, for geographical reasons or to improve the design.

An application seeking a non-material amendment to a planning permission can be made using the standard application form. The procedure cannot be used to make non-material amendments to listed building consents. It only applies to planning permissions.

As by definition the changes sought will be non-material, consultation or publicity are unlikely to be necessary, and there are unlikely to be effects which would need to be addressed under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2011. As an application for a non-material amendment is not an application for planning permission, the normal provisions relating to notification do not apply.

Instead, before the application is made, the applicant must notify anyone who is an owner of the land which would be affected by the non-material amendment or, where the land comprises an agricultural holding, the tenant of that holding. The applicant must also record who has been notified on the application form. Anyone notified must be told where the application can be viewed, and that they have 14 days to make representations to the local planning authority. There is no prescribed form for this and no requirement for an ownership certificate or an agricultural holdings certificate to be provided.

Supply of hard copies of planning applications

In the 15/16 budget a saving of £100k was identified that represents the printing and posting to T&P's of plans. We are not introducing this until August to give T&P's time to amend their working practices. Some councils have been projecting or looking at applications online for some time. The delay until August will give councils time to adjust and maybe purchase projection equipment. For smaller authorities they are being encouraged to share equipment.

Planning training conferences

The dates have been set for the autumn conferences. Officers are asking for topics you would like covered.