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Your ref: -
My ref: JP/PLD/KP
Date: 15 December 2016

Sent via email to
videoconferencingconsultation@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Mr Young

Connecting Town Halls Consultation

As Leader of Cornwall Council, I welcome the steps being taken by Government to explore enabling local authorities to hold meetings by video conference. This would be a positive measure which would have wide ranging benefits.

However, the sole focus of the consultation being upon joint committees and combined authorities is a missed opportunity to extend a modernised and cost effective approach across local government more generally.

I note that one of the key drivers for the consultation is the recognition that joint committees and combined authorities present particular geographical challenges when holding meetings. These challenges are not unique to joint committees and combined authorities, and there would be significant benefits in widening the proposed policy to large rural areas like Cornwall.

The following statistics demonstrate the point:

	Authority Area (square miles)
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	493
Tees Valley Combined Authority	304
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority	279
Cornwall Council	1,376

Travel for Cornwall Councillors from North, West and East Cornwall in attending meetings at County Hall, Truro

Lands End to Truro return	78 miles	2 hour 26 minutes
Bude to Truro return	106 miles	2 hour 40 minutes
Rame Peninsula to Truro return	106 miles	2 hour 42 minutes

During summer months, when Cornwall's population sees a significant increase, these journey times are further extended.

For Cornwall Council, enabling councillors to use local council offices' video conferencing facilities would result in:

- reduced costs to taxpayers through reduced travel expenditure (Councillors' travel expense claims in 2015/6 were in excess of £120,000)
- increased attendance rates
- Councillors able to spend more time supporting their local communities
- widening the pool of people able to stand as Cornwall Councillors beyond those who have access to a car
- increased public involvement through easier access to meetings
- greater opportunity to hold evening meetings (in turn, enabling working people to stand as councillors/attend public meetings)
- environmental benefits associated with reduced travel

Whilst supporting the principles behind the consultation, I would strongly urge the Government to recognise that the significant benefits that the policy will bring should be applied across local government as a whole.

I cannot overstate the enormous advantages this initiative would bring to democratic processes and full Member engagement within Cornwall.

Yours sincerely
Dhywgh hwi yn hwir



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