

# British Counties Campaign



## The Counties Act – Draft Bill for 2017-22 Government

Prepared by British Counties Campaign, [britishcounties.org](http://britishcounties.org)

### Preamble

THE 92 historic or traditional counties - “the counties” - are an important part of the culture, geography and heritage of the United Kingdom (UK), often dating back more than 1,000 years. They stem from history, are recognised by the public and form the basis of community and identity. They must be re-established as the standard geographical frame of reference in Britain and used for cultural, social, sporting and tourism purposes, among others.

*Huge confusion has been caused in relation to county identity through England, Scotland and Wales since the 1960s, and especially since 1974, against the wishes and despite the protests of ordinary people, as a result of successive pieces of legislation. This confusion has been aided and abetted by the media, and has come despite apparent assurances from the government that nothing had changed. People were forced into living in new areas against their will, despite such “assurances”. This was – and remains - grossly unfair.*

When modern local government was first created in 1888, the areas of its “administrative counties” were based on the counties. The cumulative effect of the numerous reforms since 1965, including the local government act 1972, which came into force in 1974, mean few local authorities now have an area anything like a county. However, the words “county” and “county council” are still used in local government terminology, even where the local authorities concerned have a different area from the county.

More recently, newly created “ceremonial counties” added to the confusion. The “metropolitan county councils” created in 1974 were abolished in 1986 but some retained “ceremonial county” status from 1997. They too are at odds with the counties. Some local government reorganisation restored some non-metropolitan areas to their county for ceremonial purposes, but not according to the ancient boundaries.

The situation has been further confused by separate postal “counties”, areas for services such as police, fire and ambulance clashing with county names, or government regions distorting and ignoring county areas.

The link must if necessary be broken between local government, which can have its boundaries changed to suit population changes, and the traditional counties whose boundaries are static. *NB, some success along these lines has been achieved in Northern Ireland, where even though the six counties may serve no administrative role they remain a frame of reference. While administrative areas may evolve, there have been no adverse consequences on local identity.*

### Statements and References

As mentioned, there is a huge disconnect between what people have been told and what has been taking place. Despite being told from the 1970s onwards that the local government reorganisations were purely for administrative purposes the counties are totally disregarded and areas at odds with them – for example “ceremonial counties” - are constantly referred to by the media. The public is still led to believe that cherished counties have been altered or abolished and they must live in new areas, despite their protests. Young people know nothing of the forced nature of the changes, or the history of the confusion.



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A bill is needed now to remove the confusion and re-establish the counties appropriately.

## Aims and objectives of the bill\*

### County Definitions, Areas, Names and Powers

- The word “county” to only refer the 92 counties of the UK, areas as defined by the Historic Counties Trust. To aid in this, local authority areas to be termed “council areas”, with no confusion caused between their location or names and those of the counties. Care may be needed over council areas crossing county boundaries, perhaps avoiding this altogether.
- The current “ceremonial counties” and all attendant posts to be abolished. A lord lieutenant to represent and appropriate sheriff to lead every county. These officers could be appointed or elected, and would have the power to represent and/or speak for the county at public or council meetings. The sheriff could have potential power to raise a (limited) precept from council tax, and run a county office.
- The removal of any confusing service area names, for example for emergency services. Such services areas to be aligned as closely as possible with the counties.
- The names and areas of “regions” used for statistical purposes to cause no confusion with county identity, with no crossing of county boundaries.
- A Counties Commission (CC) or other appropriate body could advise on names and all other aspects of implementation of the bill.
- *NB, the prime objective of the bill is to remove all confusion over the names of counties and other types of area (the counties could if so desired be used as a template for administration areas and/or regions, for example if there was a nationwide system of unitary authorities).*

### Marking and References

- The boundaries of the counties to be marked on maps (including by OS and other public bodies) and appropriately signed on county borders, perhaps with a new nation-wide county sign standard. Counties could also be indicated on all new place and street names, for example High Street, London Borough of Hackney, Middlesex.
- The appropriate county to be used in all UK postal addresses.
- All media and online references to comply with the counties. Similarly, local authorities and public bodies to promote the official counties, for example in letterheads, websites and official communications. Some historic sub-divisions, for example the ridings of Yorkshire or parts of Lincolnshire, should also be noted.



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- The government to monitor local geography referencing for a period of time, perhaps 20-30 years until the confusion has died away.

## Tourism, Education, Archives

- An official tourist centre for the county to be set up in the county town to promote it. The county offices would work with local authorities, whose basic powers would remain unchanged, to encourage promotion and participation in county-based tourism, sporting and cultural activities, as well as acknowledging the existence of the counties where they provide public services.
- Museums, public buildings and public information centres to refer to the counties, in terms of their own location addresses and in the information they provide.
- Children to be taught in schools about the counties; this education would include references to how county names and areas came into being, and the extent and history of them.
- Every county office to be responsible for county archives, with a mandate to preserve historical records concerning the county for the future and to educate and communicate to residents and children about the county.

## Costs

We anticipate the cost of the bill to be an absolute minimum. A full assessment can be made in due course. However we note at this stage:

- *By requiring for example only new signs to refer to official counties initially and providing a lengthy implementation period of two decades for existing signs, the cost of changing is likely to be de minimis as most signage will need to be replaced or maintained in that period in any case. It is imperative however that the current stock of signage is assessed and monitored on a national basis as new signs go up, to a potential new national design.*
- *The bill could provide for a small and limited budget to be provided to the official counties through local authority precepts.*
- *Any costs we argue are likely to be more than offset by the additional economic contribution that will arise from reviving the lives of the counties, for example from tourism and the economic multiplier effect of new or revived cultural, social or sporting activities based in or on them.*

Ultimately, the bill also communicates to the nation the fact that our geographic, historic and cultural traditions are not to be discarded willy-nilly, but instead will be treasured going forward, giving people the confidence of a renewed cultural, emotional and psychological stake in the country's past, present and future, with attendant economic benefits.

*\*As necessary, relevant sections of earlier legislation will need to be developed or repealed, including in relation to the London government act 1963, the local government act 1972 and the lieutenancies act 1997.*

