

WHPC Meeting 2nd September 2025

Agenda Item 25/292

Local Government Reform and Devolution – Update August 2025

1. Purpose:

2. Background

In December 2024 the Government signalled its intent for local government reorganisation (LGR): to replace the current system of District and County Councils. Instead, fewer smaller unitary Councils will cover much larger areas, with a guideline minimum population of 500,000 people. The Government aims to create a simpler structure consisting of more accountable and sustainable authority, with a focus on delivering high-quality social care services.

The Government also aims to devolve more powers and funding from national to local government – this is known as devolution.

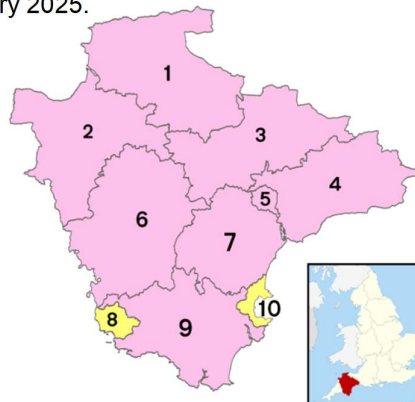
Areas currently operating a two-tier system, such as Devon have been asked to submit their proposals for LGR by **28th November 2025**. The Government will make final decisions on reorganisation on a case-by-case basis in July 2026 and the new arrangements to go live on 1st April 2028.

Devon has a population of approximately 1.2m.

3. Current System of Local Government in Devon

Several tiers of local government operate within Devon:

1. **Parish and town councils:** The first tier is that of parish and town councils.
2. **District/city and borough councils:** these deliver services such as housing, environmental health, planning, waste collection, licensing and elections. Devon has 8 such councils: Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council, East Devon District Council, North Devon District Council, Torridge District Council, Teignbridge District Council, West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council
3. **County councils:** Devon County Council is responsible for services such as adults and children's services, highways and transport, waste disposal, libraries, public health and trading standards.
4. **Unitary authorities:** Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council operate within their boundaries within the county of Devon.
5. **Combined and strategic authorities:** Combined authorities are new institutions established to oversee and deliver devolved powers and functions transferred from central and local Government. The Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (CCA) came into being in February 2025.



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|----------------|----------------|
| 1. North Devon | 6. West Devon |
| 2. Torridge | 7. Teignbridge |
| 3. Mid Devon | 8. Plymouth |
| 4. East Devon | 9. South Hams |
| 5. Exeter | 10. Torbay |

4. Proposed System of Local Government for Devon

Several proposals have been put forward as Local Authorities in Devon have been unable to agree a single proposal.

The proposals:

- a. Devon County Council (DCC) has set out 5 options. [Further information is available on the DCC website.](#)



Option 1

A two unitary model for Plymouth and Devon



Option 2

A two unitary model based on North and South areas of Devon



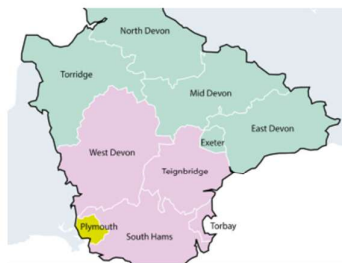
Option 3

A two unitary model based on South West Devon and North East Devon



Option 4

A three unitary model of Plymouth, Greater Exeter and the rest of Devon



Option 5

A three unitary model of Plymouth, North East Devon and South West Devon



Baseline scenario

A unitary Devon authority – combining Devon County Council, Torbay Council and Plymouth City Councils' administrative areas

Devon County Council will be on the road visiting towns and locations across Devon to gather residents' views on the proposed changes. Events scheduled for the West Hill area include:

September

Sidmouth Library, Sidmouth - Wednesday 3 September, 12 - 2pm

Exmouth Library, Exmouth - Thursday 4 September, 12 - 2pm

Honiton Library, Honiton - Friday 12 September, 9:30 - 11:30am

In addition, [DCC has launched an online survey](#) which closes on 14th October 2025.

- b. Devon's District Councils have submitted a joint outline proposal known as the 1-4-5 Plan

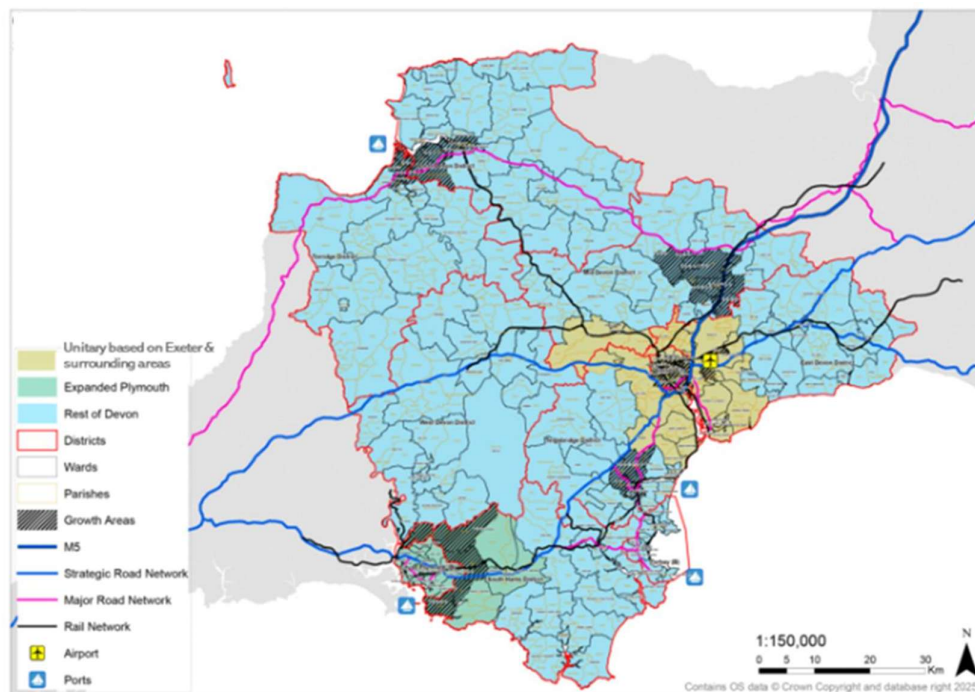
Three Unitaries are proposed:

- 1 separate unitary for Plymouth.
- A unitary authority merging 4 current districts the South Hams, Teignbridge, West Devon, and Torbay areas.
- A large unitary authority covering 5 current districts: East, Mid, North Devon, Torridge, and Exeter.

[EDDC are currently inviting feedback via their online survey.](#) This closes on 31st August 2025.

- c. Exeter City Council decided at an Extraordinary Meeting held on 14th August 2025 to propose a three unitary model for local government reorganisation in Devon:

- An expanded Plymouth unitary
- An expanded Exter unitary
- Rest of Devon



During August Exeter City Council wrote to WHPC to advise that their proposed Exter Unitary included the parish of West Hill (see table below). Also, members of the Council were invited to attend a series of webinars outlining the proposal.

[Further information is available on the Exeter City Council website.](#) Exeter City Council have invited feedback via their [online survey](#) which closes on 26th September.

15 Parishes from within Teignbridge District Council	28 Parishes from within East Devon District Council		6 Parishes from within Mid Devon District Council
Dawlish Town Ashcombe Mamhead Starcross Kenton Chudleigh Town Powderham Exminster Kenn Dunchideock Shillingford St George Ide Holcombe Burnell Whitestone Tedburn St Mary	Exmouth Woodbury Lypstone Otterton East Budleigh Budleigh Salterton Colaton Raleigh Bicton Upton Pyne Bramford Speke Stoke Cannon Nether Exe Rewe Huxham	Poltimore Broadclyst Clyst Hydon Clyst St Lawrence Whimble Cranbrook Rockbeare West Hill Aylesbeare Farringdon Clyst Honiton Sowton Clyst St Mary Clyst St George	Cheriton Bishop Hittisleigh Colebrook Crediton Town Crediton Hamlets Newton St Cyres

5. A Mayor for the South West?

In an aim to deliver major economic benefits across the region, a proposal championing the creation of a powerful South West Peninsula Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) has been put forward.

The proposed MSA would replace the existing Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority.

6. How are Parish + Town Councils affected?

The current local government reform focuses on unitarisation and devolution, with parish and town councils expected to strengthen their role, not be created anew. The government wants to see existing parish and town councils take on more power and responsibility, potentially through enhanced local control and devolution deals.

The National Association of Local Councils wants to ensure that Parish and Town Councils are fully engaged in the design and delivery of new arrangements.

Appendix 1 Local Government Association: Devolution and local government reorganisation FAQs provides further information.

7. For Consideration: Does WHPC wish to decide a response to the surveys listed above?

Anne Oliver, Parish Clerk

27th August 2025

Local Government Association: Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation FAQs

The Local Government Association (LGA) has sought the Government's response to frequently asked questions. The questions are wide ranging and include a section on Town/Parish Councils. A selection of questions and answers are shown below.

Further information is available on the LGA website: [Devolution and local government reorganisation FAQs and glossary | Local Government Association](#)

Q: What's government's view on the role of town and parishes in unitaries? Should areas set up more?

A: We recognise the value that town and parish councils offer to their local communities, but they are independent institutions and are not a substitute for meaningful community engagement and neighbourhood working by a local authority. The decision to set up Town and parish councils is a local one. Areas considering new town or parish councils should think carefully about how they might be funded, to avoid putting further pressure on local authority finances and/or new burdens on the taxpayer.

We want to see every local authority hardwiring local community engagement into their own structures, through approaches like neighbourhood Area Committees. As such, we have asked councils to outline in final proposals their plans for neighbourhood-based governance, the impact on parish councils, and the role of formal neighbourhood partnerships and neighbourhood Area Committees.

Q: When will there be further clarity on 're-wiring' the role of parishes?

A: We will not be introducing any changes to the role of Town and Parish councils as part of local government reorganisation. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and provide genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment, as explained in the criteria. Proposals should demonstrate how councils in the area have collaborated to meet local needs and incorporate local views. It is up to councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way. We have advised in a previous MHCLG webinar that the views of other public sector providers, including Town and Parish councils and voluntary and community sector organisations, will be crucial.

Q: What is the role of town councils where new unitaries are established? My own authority has already transferred many facilities and services to town and parishes, prior to reorganisation. How will this role be reinforced and supported in new structures?

A: Local authorities may wish to collaborate with town and parish councils to determine how they can most effectively contribute to service delivery under future arrangements. In doing so, they should consider the financial and administrative support required by town and parish councils and should seek to minimise the potential impact of new responsibilities on local taxpayers through increases to parish precepts.