

Parish report from your District Councillors

1st April 2025

Local Government reorganisation



SHDC, together with six other District Councils in Devon, has submitted its proposals for the shape of local Government in Devon, following the Government's announcement that it intends to bring in a Unitary system.

Executive Summary

This Interim Plan responds to the government's invitation for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) towards a single tier. Acknowledging the English Devolution White Paper's intent to replace existing councils with larger unitary authorities, this submission proposes a balanced two-unitary solution for Devon and Torbay, alongside Plymouth City as a retained unitary authority, aiming to meet LGR objectives while preserving local identity and ensuring sustainable service delivery. The proposed two-unitary model aligns with the six criteria for unitary government, using existing district areas as building blocks and aiming for populations near 500,000 for each authority.

The proposed model anticipates the creation of a;

- **Southern Devon Authority:** South Hams, Teignbridge, West Devon, and Torbay
- **Exeter and Northern Devon Authority:** East, Mid, North Devon, Torridge, and Exeter

This offers a comprehensive solution for the whole area, establishing a credible alternative to a single 'mega' Council whilst guarding against the creation of an urban/rural divide. The Interim Plan recognises that significant further work is required to develop these proposals. A programme is set out for how this will happen through to November 2025.

The proposals were accompanied by the following letter to the Local Government Minister Jim McMahon:

Dear Mr McMahon,

This letter accompanies the Interim Plan being submitted here from the Leaders of 7 of the 8 Devon District Councils. We have worked very hard across a wide geography and a range of political backgrounds to develop this plan.

However, we are deeply concerned with both the process and the timetable of Local Government Reorganisation being imposed on Devon, and we are aware that you and Baroness Taylor have been advised of this by many in

local government. Moreover, the specific recent context of the financial settlement, and the withdrawal of the Rural Services Delivery Grant does not instil confidence.

We heard at the Districts' conference that government has identified a "two-tier premium" and that, in its understandable need to solve the existential financial crisis in Adult and Children Social Care, you expect savings by driving LGR through to cover this. We have been unable to find any evidence to support that claimed projected savings will be delivered, and are concerned that abolition of Districts to plug the financial gap is not a reality. If there is such evidence, we would request sight of relevant real-life examples. We feel sure that you are aware of the extreme risk using theoretical data from consultants with limited local government experience.

In Devon, the opposite of cost-saving is probable in this 'cliff-edge' approach to reorganisation. We estimate the true costs to be in the region of £100 million. If government is so confident that savings will be delivered, then we suggest these costs are paid to us up front to be recouped from the supposed savings in future years. We would emphasise that efficiencies and savings can be delivered and that we are best placed to do that. Ironically, we were actively in the process of integrating services at a more strategic level particularly around waste and leisure centre provision. The inevitable upheaval of LGR has somewhat curtailed this constructive and positive action.

Given the chance, we can deliver a road map with tangible targets moving towards savings under a plan which will be less expensive to deliver and will deliver a much more resilient outcome. We share government aspirations around cost-saving but ask you that we are given the opportunity to achieve these outcomes. As a group, we would be pleased to have the chance to meet with you for further discussion.

Pre-election restrictions have started

Please be aware that we are now in the pre-election period for the Devon County Council elections until Thursday 1 May 2025. The Council must now comply with restrictions outlined in Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 and recommendations in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.



What this means: It is business as usual and the Council can carry on with its ordinary functions. However, it must not issue any publicity which seeks to influence voters. We must not:

X Publish any material or hold any promotional events which could directly, or be perceived to, influence public support for a political party or candidate. This includes press releases, consultations, leaflets, adverts, newsletters as well as social media and website content.

X Use council facilities or resources which could directly, or be perceived to, influence public support for a political party or candidate.

However, we can:

- ✓ Continue to promote and carry out normal council business which isn't related to the Devon County Council elections or candidates.
- ✓ Provide information relating to the poll e.g. how to register to vote, reminders to vote and opening times at polling stations etc.
- ✓ Publish factual information to counteract misleading, controversial or extreme coverage.

Advice on getting your vote

With Devon County Council elections coming up, it's important that our residents understand the different ways they can vote and the key dates to register to do these by. Please help us get these messages across by sharing our social media posts in your community groups and across your social media feeds.

Messages for residents:

- Register to vote by Friday 11 April
- Apply for voter ID by Wednesday 23 April
- Register for a postal vote by Monday 14 April

Register for a proxy vote by Monday 14 April

Help for residents with damp and mould

Please continue to help us get messages across to tenants and landlords to address damp and mould issues. Landlords of both social and private rental properties have a responsibility to make sure their properties are safe, habitable, and free from significant hazards. However we are aware that not all damp and mould issues are being dealt with by some landlords. There are also some measures tenants can take if they have any problems. Requested action:

- We have a useful leaflet on where residents can find help and information on what to do if they have damp or mould issues [download it here](#). Copies are also available in the Member's room.

Messages for residents:

- There are some simple things you can do to reduce or solve damp and mould problems. Information can be found at: www.southhams.gov.uk/rental-housing-standards
- Report any disrepair to your landlord in the first instance.
- If that is not possible or you are still having problems then you can report your housing issue online at www.southhams.gov.uk/report-disrepair or complete the paper part of the leaflet and return it to the Council.

- Have the confidence to speak up and raise concerns without the fear of losing your home.

Getting the most from recycling containers



Helping residents to use their recycling boxes correctly helps raise recycling rates and has many benefits to the Council.

You can help us by sharing the following messages and [our video](#) on your social media channels.

Box 1

- Mixed Paper on bottom
- Clean jars on top
- Metal and plastic lids and caps go in reusable sack
- Envelopes (no plastic) and junk mail
- Shredded paper (loosely tied in a bag)
- Brown paper goes with cardboard in box 2

Box 2

- Clean Cardboard boxes (e.g. cereal boxes, dishwasher tablet boxes)
- Corrugated cardboard
- Online delivery boxes and cardboard envelopes
- Greetings cards - no glitter
- Egg boxes
- Brown paper
- Food and drink cartons
- Printer cartridges and batteries (placed in a small bag)

Dirty or greasy cardboard (e.g. takeaway pizza boxes) go in grey bin.

Reusable white sack

- Clean and flattened plastics and metals
- No plastic films, bags or black plastics

Please put lids back on plastic bottles. Leave labels on packaging but any film lids, absorbent pads etc. go in black bin.

Residents Parking Discount Scheme



So far over 150 residents have signed up to the discount scheme. The scheme continues to be promoted on social media and with the Council Tax flyers hitting doormats we expect these numbers to rise.

