

**Meeting:** Overview and Scrutiny Board

**Date:** 9 July 2025

**Wards affected:** All

**Report Title:** Local Government Reorganisation in Devon

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## 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on Torbay Council's progress towards developing a proposal for local government reorganisation in Devon, following the Secretary of State's invitation issued in February 2025.
- 1.2. The report asks that the Overview and Scrutiny Board use their meeting to give feedback on the options within the Council's interim plan which was submitted in March 2025, so as to enable this to be included within the overall options appraisal that has to be included within the final proposal.

## 2. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

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- 2.1. That the Board provide feedback on the options within the Council's interim plan for local government reorganisation in Devon as part of the ongoing engagement ahead of developing a final proposal.

## 3. Appendix

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Appendix 1: Interim Plan

Appendix 2: Project Initiation Document

## Supporting Information

### 4. Introduction

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- 4.1. The Government has invited all councils in Devon to work together to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, whereby the current system of district and county councils is replaced by unitary councils. Whilst Torbay Council and Plymouth City Council

are already unitary councils, reorganisation would see the creation of unitary councils covering all of Devon.

- 4.2. The Government has said in its English Devolution White Paper that they want to create unitary councils that serve at least 500,000 people. However, they have recognised that there may be exceptions to this figure to make sure the new system works well for each area. Each decision will be made on a case-by-case basis. Devon (including Plymouth and Torbay) has a population of around 1.2 million, meaning – based purely on the maths and the position set out in the White Paper - the most likely number is two or three unitary councils.
- 4.3. We are working to incredibly tight deadlines, with our proposal(s) needing to be submitted to the Government by 28 November 2025. In line with the Government's request we submitted our interim plan at the end of March 2025 (available online at: [www.torbay.gov.uk/lgr](http://www.torbay.gov.uk/lgr)) Interim plans were also submitted by Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Exeter City Council, and the district and borough councils (excluding Exeter City Council).
- 4.4. We have received feedback from the Government, who have made it clear that the submission of interim plans was not a decision-making point and that their feedback did not seek to approve or reject any option being considered. Within a detailed feedback letter, the Government's central message was to build on our initial work and ensure that the final proposal(s) address the criteria set down by the Government and are supported by data and evidence. The guidance criteria is available at: [Letter: Devon, Plymouth and Torbay - GOV.UK](#)
- 4.5. The Leader of the Council, together with the Members of Parliament representing Torbay, met with the Local Government Minister in June 2025. This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss how we are already a unitary authority and that we are delivering effective services to our residents whilst managing our finances well. The meeting did usefully confirm that there was no minimum size for unitary councils that had been set by Government and that reorganisation would be dependent upon what was right for each place. Therefore this is what we need to focus upon as our work progresses.

## 5. Progress Update

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- 5.1. We have established a project team who are working to develop the proposal for submission in November 2025.
- 5.2. The team are making good progress against the project plan. A foundation of the work to be undertaken is a single set of data about council provided services across the County. Torbay have gained agreement across all Devon authorities to share the necessary data from every council that will underpin the various analysis required to meet the Government's proposal requirements. This data is now being compiled whilst concurrent analysis of available data is underway to ensure project milestones will be met.
- 5.3. The other fundamental component to reaching an agreed proposal is the engagement and consultation that must be undertaken to ensure the project is inclusive of our residents and stakeholders. Part of this process is engaging with Overview and Scrutiny, and it is

important for the views of the Board on the options included in our interim plan to be formally obtained. Further detail on engagement is included below.

5.4. To ensure good governance, the project is being run in accordance with accredited project management methodology (PRINCE 2). As such, a suite of project documentation has been created and will be maintained along with the workstreams required to deliver the final submission. These are all governed by the project board, which consists of both statutory officers, directors and specialist resources. The senior responsible officer is the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service.

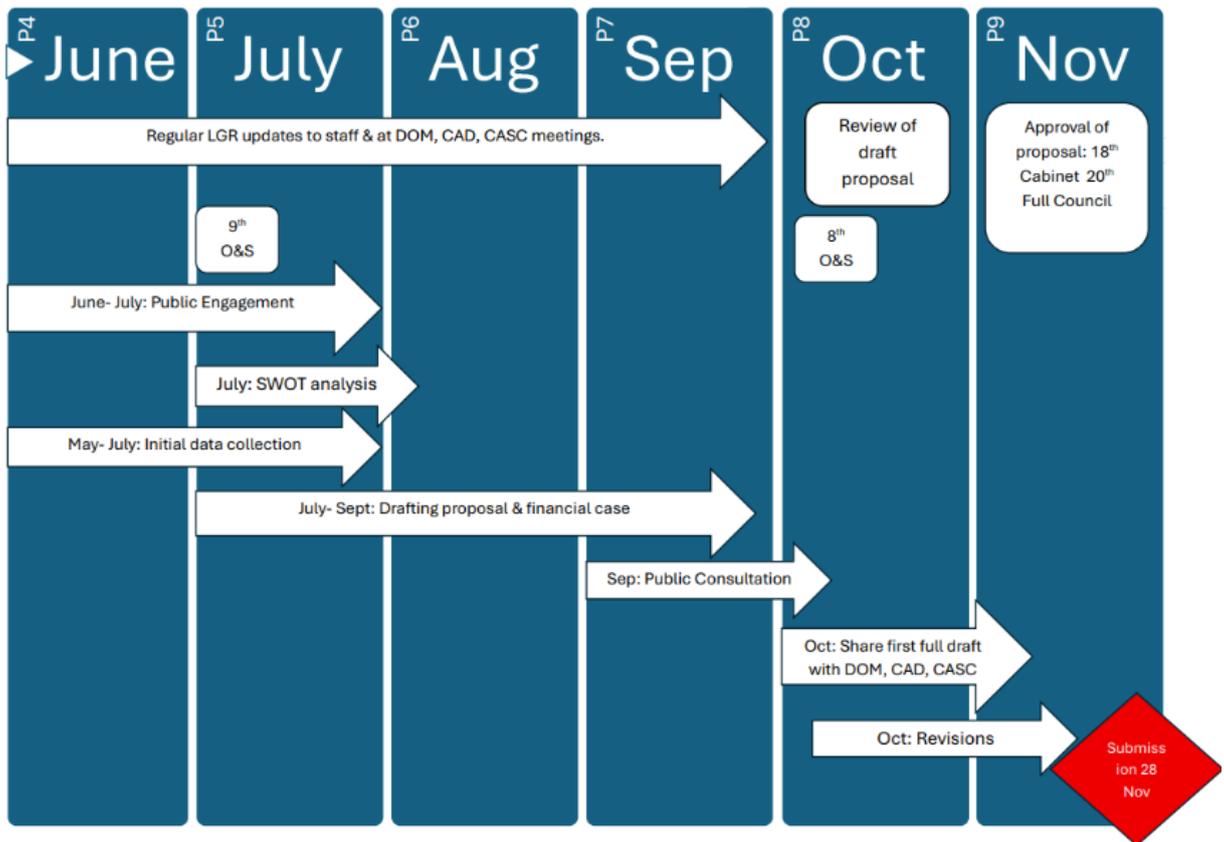
5.4.1. The top-level process we are following is set out by Government. This diagram shows recap to date from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as well as the phase we are in now, where our proposal is due in November.



It is expected, post Government's consultation, that the new arrangements for Devon will go live in April 2028.

5.4.2. Where any new authority is formed, a period of mobilisation will lead up to a vesting day where the legal status of a new authority comes into effect. This mobilisation period will need to ensure that the process is both safe and legal. This includes a shadow period, where any new authority's senior team would be appointed so that roles and relationships could be established in the transition period. Indicative timelines from Government suggest that shadow unitary elections for Devon would happen as soon as possible in the period May-December 2027.

5.4.3. The diagram below shows that the project is currently in the analysis, data collection, engagement and drafting stages. This also depicts the gateways that the proposal will pass through prior to submission to Government.



## 6. Engagement

- 6.1. To help build the evidence base, and in line with the Government's criteria for preparing our final proposal, Torbay Council is currently undertaking engagement with residents and stakeholders. This engagement is based around the outcomes that the Government expects us to consider when deciding on the proposal(s) we put forward, in response their invitation.
- 6.2. The engagement includes raising awareness of local government reorganisation and its expected impacts on Torbay residents, businesses and wider stakeholders. Views are being sought via an online engagement questionnaire and as well as via conversations with stakeholder groups across all of Torbay. The aim is to help understand how residents and stakeholders believe the options under consideration will impact, both positive and negative.
- 6.3. The engagement will run through to the start of August 2025, with an opportunity for further consultation in the Autumn of 2025, once a draft proposal is prepared.
- 6.4. Following submission of the proposals from Devon and other 2-tier areas, Government will run a statutory consultation between January and April 2026, with decisions expected in May to August 2026 prior to a period of legislative preparations in the same year.

## 7. Options under consideration

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7.1. In March 2025, we put together our interim plan, following engagement with stakeholders and the community via an engagement event attended by about 150 people. In the plan we set out three options, in order of preference:

- **Torbay Council remaining as it is,**
- A new unitary council covering Torbay, approximately half of South Hams and most of Teignbridge; and
- A new unitary council covering the areas of Torbay, South Hams, Teignbridge and West Devon.

A fourth option for a single unitary Devon Council, either with or without Plymouth City Council was discounted at this stage.

7.2. As part of the engagement outlined above, the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Board are sought on:

- What are the strengths of each option?
- What are the weaknesses of each option?
- What are the opportunities associated with each option?
- What are the threats from each option?

## 8. Procurement Implications

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8.1. Not applicable

## 9. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

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9.1. In developing a proposal, consideration will be given to the impact, if any, on the environment and tackling climate change.

## 10. Associated Risks

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10.1 The risk of not submitting a proposal is that other councils in Devon may submit proposals which impact upon Torbay. Therefore, it is imperative that Torbay Council puts forward its own proposal, sharing with the Government the potential impacts of local government reorganisation on Torbay.

## 11. Equality Impact Assessment

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11.1 It is not possible to fully understand the equality implications at present. A completed equality impact assessment will be prepared alongside the final proposal.

## 12. Cumulative Council Impact

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12.1 The Council has an ambitious programme of delivery already underway, alongside its “business as usual.” The resource implications of progressing the development of proposals for local government reorganisation will continue to be carefully managed.

## 13. Cumulative Community Impacts

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13.1 To be confirmed at a later date in the proposal's development.