

Record of Decisions

Torbay Council's Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation

Decision Taker

Cabinet on 18 November 2025.

Decision

That Cabinet recommend to Full Council;

1. that the proposal for local government reorganisation in Devon as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report be approved for submission to Government.
2. that the Chief Executive be authorised to make any further amendments deemed necessary to the proposal and submit the proposal to the Government by the deadline of 28 November 2025.

Reason for the Decision

Development of a proposal has been required because the Government's statutory invitation included Torbay. Whilst the Council could opt not to submit a proposal, other areas would include Torbay within their proposal. To ensure that the needs and wishes of Torbay's residents, businesses and other stakeholders were represented it was important that the Council submit an LGR proposal to Government.

Implementation

The recommendations of the Cabinet will be considered at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 20 November 2025.

Information

In December 2024 the Government published its English Devolution White Paper which, alongside setting out the Government's ambitions in relation to devolution, announced a programme of local government reorganisation (LGR) for two tier council areas and some existing unitary councils.

On 5 February 2025 the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to Leaders of two-tier councils and unitary councils in Devon, issuing a statutory invitation for proposals for a single tier of government in Devon.

Torbay Council submitted an interim plan to Government in March 2025 setting out three options in order of preference:

- 1) for Torbay to remain on its current boundaries as a continuing unitary authority;
- 2) to create a Torbay and South Devon Council based around the catchment areas of the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust; and
- 3) for Torbay to join with South Hams, West Devon and Teignbridge to create a new Southern Devon Council.

Government provided feedback on interim plans on 15 May 2025. Included within was a clear

reiteration that proposals must cover whole areas (i.e. the entirety of geographical Devon). Since March 2025, Officers have been working closely with officers from all other Devon councils to evaluate the unitary configurations for the county. Throughout, focus has been maintained on the desire for Torbay to remain on its current footprint as a continuing authority.

Careful appraisal has resulted in a proposal for a four unitary solution for Devon, comprising of:

- 1) Torbay as a continuing authority on its current footprint;
- 2) Plymouth as a continuing authority on an expanded footprint;
- 3) the creation of a new Greater Exeter Authority; and
- 4) the creation of a new Rural Devon Coast and Countryside Authority.

If chosen by Government, the outcome of this proposal would be that Torbay Council remains as a unitary authority, and the rest of the county would be configured into three unitary councils.

At the meeting Councillor David Thomas proposed and Councillor Chris Lewis seconded a motion that was agreed unanimously by the Cabinet, as set out above.

Alternative Options considered and rejected at the time of the decision

To reach the proposal, an options appraisal was conducted. A wide range of unitary configurations were explored in extensive dialogue with the other Devon authorities.

Ultimately for Torbay these were progressively focused down to the following options for full appraisal:

Option 1. Two unitary councils (Devon and Plymouth).

Option 2. Three unitary councils with two variants:

Option 2.1. Three unitary councils (the 4-5-1 Model)

Option 2.2. Three unitary councils (Devon, Plymouth and Torbay)

Option 3. Four unitary councils with two variants:

Option 3.1: Torbay on existing boundaries, an expanded Plymouth and new Greater Exeter and Rural Devon Coast and Countryside authorities.

Option 3.2. An expanded Torbay and an expanded Plymouth and new Greater Exeter and Rural Devon Coast and Countryside authorities.

Through both a financial appraisal and a qualitative assessment of strengths and weaknesses, each option was scored against the six LGR criteria that have been set by the Government to evaluate all of the options.

Option 3.1 received the strongest score. Having been considered in its early stages by the Overview and Scrutiny Board's task-and-finish group, the full appraisal was reviewed by the task-and-finish group on 27 October 2025 with a recommendation made to the Overview and Scrutiny Board to recommend approval of option 3.1. On 5 November 2025, the Overview and Scrutiny Board considered the report from the task-and-finish group. Whilst the Board noted the work of the task-and-finish Group, the Board resolved that as a result of continued

emerging information from neighbouring authorities, it would not make a recommendation through to Cabinet nor Council.

In the event that Full Council determined to support an alternative proposal than that set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report, there would not be sufficient time to evaluate all of the evidence that sat behind the proposals of other authorities. Therefore, submission of a letter to Government was the only viable alternative in the event that the proposal at Appendix 1 was not approved.

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Does the call-in procedure apply?

No

Declarations of interest (including details of any relevant dispensations issued by the Standards Committee)

None

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21 November 2025

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Leader of Torbay Council on behalf of the Cabinet