

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 18 November 2025

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Torbay Council's proposal for Local Government Reorganisation.

When does the decision need to be implemented? Cabinet are making a recommendation to the Full Council meeting on 20 November 2025. Call-in does not apply

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. 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, we have maintained focus on the desire for Torbay to remain on its current footprint as a continuing authority.
- 1.4. 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.
- 1.5. 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.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1. The preferred option detailed in the LGR proposal will enable Torbay Council to continue to deliver the vision of a healthy, happy, and prosperous Torbay. As a continuing authority, Torbay will build on the achievements as an agile unitary council; successfully delivering adult and children's social care and meeting demands and challenges presented by some of the highest levels of need in the country.
- 2.2. Development of a proposal has been required because the Government's statutory invitation included Torbay. While we could opt not to submit a proposal, other areas will include Torbay within their proposal. To ensure that the needs and wishes of our residents, businesses and other stakeholders are represented it is important that the Council submit an LGR proposal to Government.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1. That Cabinet recommend to Full Council;
- 3.2. That the proposal for local government reorganisation in Devon as set out in Appendix 1 to this report be approved for submission to Government.
- 3.3. 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.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1: Together for Devon. Focused on place, growing with purpose. Torbay Council's proposal for Local Government Reorganisation.

Appendix 2: Torbay LGR proposal Appendices.

5. Background Documents

- English Devolution White Paper: Power and partnership: Foundations for growth - GOV.UK
- HMCLG Statutory Invitation: Letter: Devon, Plymouth and Torbay - GOV.UK

- HMCLG summary of feedback on interim plans: [Local government reorganisation: summary of feedback on interim plans - GOV.UK](#)
- Torbay LGR website: [Local Government Reorganisation - Torbay Council](#)

Supporting Information

6. Introduction

- 6.1. Torbay Council's LGR proposal sets out a vision for single tier local government in Devon – with unitary councils across Devon that focus on their place, enabling growth with purpose to build a better Devon for everyone.
- 6.2. It builds on what works well today – including the unitary councils of Torbay and Plymouth - and looks forward to what will be needed in the future to best protect, support and enhance communities, our built and our natural environments.
- 6.3. The proposal includes maintaining Torbay and Plymouth as continuing authorities; the creation of a new Greater Exeter authority, which as a unitary would bring drivers for growth and success to the region as a whole; and the creation of a new Rural Devon Coast and Countryside authority focused on service delivery within the vibrant market towns, dispersed communities and rural economy of Devon.
- 6.4. Together with the shared aspiration for a new Mayoral Strategic Authority for Devon, this proposal lays the foundations for giving the people of Devon much greater control over the outcomes that matter to them most.

7. Options under consideration

- 7.1. 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.

7.2. 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.

7.3. Option 3.1 received the strongest score:

Government Criteria	Two unitary councils	Three unitary councils		Four unitary councils	
	Option 1 Plymouth and Devon	Option 2.1 Plymouth, Southern Devon and North and East Devon (5-4-1 Model)	Option 2.2 Torbay, Plymouth and Devon	Option 3.1 Torbay, Expanded Plymouth, Greater Exeter and Rural Devon Coast and Countryside	Option 3.2 Expanded Torbay, Expanded Plymouth, Greater Exeter and Rural Devon Coast and Countryside
1. Single tier local government	Low	Medium	Low	High	High
2. Efficiency and capacity	Low	High	Medium	High	High
3. High quality public services	Low	High	High	High	High
4. Understanding local needs	Low	Medium	Medium	High	High
5. Supporting devolution	Low	High	Medium	High	High
6. Community empowerment	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Medium

7.4. The rationale for each of the scores in the table above are set out within the Options Appraisal in the draft proposal.

7.5. 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.

7.6. 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.

7.7. Should the Council ultimately approve a different proposal than that set out in appendix 1, given the time available before the 28 November 2025, it will not be possible to submit a full proposal document. The Council would have to submit a letter to the Government setting out the proposal approved by Full Council. The risk of such an approach is that Torbay's

ability to influence Government would be inferior to those submitting a full proposal, and that the Council's reputation would be diminished both locally and nationally. The proposal at appendix 1 aligns with proposals which Plymouth City Council and Exeter City Council have prepared. The district councils across Devon (excluding Exeter City Council) are preparing a proposal for a three unitary solution (4-5-1), and Devon County Council has set out its proposal for an alternative three unitary solution (which would see Torbay Council remain on its current boundaries). In the event that Full Council determines to support an alternative proposal than that set out at appendix 1, there would not be sufficient time to evaluate all of the evidence that sits behind the proposals of other authorities. Therefore, submission of a letter to Government is the only viable alternative in the event that the proposal at appendix 1 is not approved.

8. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 8.1. If Torbay were to stay on its existing boundaries, as per the proposal, there would be minimal direct financial implications for Torbay Council.
- 8.2. For the whole area, the proposal sets out a detailed and robust financial case for a four unitary model including:
 - £22M in initial organisational savings
 - £36M in service savings, achievable by year five.
 - £52.5M of transition costs, carefully managed and lower for Plymouth and Torbay, where there is minimal or no change.
 - Payback of transition costs by year 3 of implementation.
- 8.3. Identified efficiencies include:
 - Optimised leadership structures, reducing duplication
 - Rationalisation of service delivery based on benchmarking against authority-type and Devon-wide averages
 - Leveraging shared services using organisations such as SWISCO and existing transformation programme.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The proposal involves boundary changes in South Hams, Teignbridge, East Devon and Mid-Devon. As per the requirements of Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Council must put forward a base proposal on the basis of existing district boundaries. The proposal must then ask the Secretary of State to consider a modified proposal that includes boundary changes. Following Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government advice and the approach taken by other areas including those in the Devolution Priority Programme, Part 1 of the proposal sets out the base and modified proposals, with Part 2 describing how the modified proposal meets the Government's criteria for LGR.
- 9.2. LGR is likely to have an implication for the future of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority (DTCCA). These implications will depend on which proposal Government agrees as well as further legislative changes. However, the leaders of all councils in Devon

have previously written to the Secretary of State expressing their collective desire to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority for all of Devon.

10. Engagement and Consultation

- 10.1. Torbay's LGR programme has included an engagement and consultation workstream that ran from July to October 2025, building on the initial engagement which was undertaken ahead of the Interim Plan being submitted.
- 10.2. Full details of the engagement which has taken place, as well as the feedback received, is including in the appendix to the draft proposal. Details of how the feedback has been used to shape the proposal are set under Criteria 4.
- 10.3. Specifically, from Torbay's engagement survey, there is support for Torbay Council remaining as a continuing unitary authority on its existing boundaries with 64% of respondents to the survey in favour of this option.
- 10.4. The engagement survey demonstrated that people have confidence in Torbay Council, with the Council seen as functioning well, financially stable, responsive, and delivering regeneration to the area. People felt that Torbay Council was already delivering well against the Government's LGR criteria.

11. Procurement Implications

- 11.1. Not applicable

12. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 12.1. If chosen by Government, implementation of the four unitary model will not create new potential environmental impacts for Torbay.

13. Associated Risks

- 13.1. If Torbay Council opted not to submit an LGR proposal, there is a risk that proposals from other Devon authorities that could be accepted by Government will not adequately address Torbay's needs, wishes and interests.

14. Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	18 per cent of Torbay residents are under 18 years old. 55 per cent of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old. 27 per cent of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the services provided to children, adults and older people by Torbay Council. Torbay services will remain as they are under the current proposal. This includes support received by adults and older people via Adult Social Care and, support for children and families provided by Children's Services (and other Council departments where relevant).	Not applicable	Not applicable
Carers	At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these provided 50 hours or more of care.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the services provided to carers by Torbay Council. Torbay services will remain as they are.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Disability	In the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the services provided to people	Not applicable	Not applicable

	a physical or mental health condition or illness.	with disabilities. Torbay Council services will remain as they are. However, it is recognised that this may be an unsettling period for some service users.		
Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. This proportion is similar to the Southwest and is lower than England.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Pregnancy and maternity	Over the period 2010 to 2021, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 63.7 per 1,000) than England (60.2) and the South West (58.4). There has been a notable fall in the numbers of live births since the middle of the last decade across all geographical areas.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as white. This	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to	Not applicable	Not applicable

	is a higher proportion than the South West and England. Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.	affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.		
Religion and belief	64.8% of Torbay residents who stated that they have a religion in the 2021 census.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Sex	51.3% of Torbay's population are female and 48.7% are male	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, 3.4% of those in Torbay aged over 16 identified their sexuality as either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or, used another term to describe their sexual orientation.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Armed Forces Community	In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. In Torbay, 5.9 per cent of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Additional considerations				

Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation) Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay) Human Rights impacts		No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
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		No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Child Friendly	Torbay Council is a Child Friendly Council, and all staff and Councillors are Corporate Parents and have a responsibility towards cared for and care experienced children and young people.	No adverse impacts are anticipated. The current LGR proposal does not expect to affect the delivery of services by Torbay Council.	Not applicable	Not applicable

15. Cumulative Council Impact

- 15.1. The Council has an ambitious programme of delivery already underway alongside its “business as usual”. The proposal is to maintain Torbay Council on its existing boundaries which will ensure that focus can be maintained on our existing work programme.

16. Cumulative Community Impacts

- 16.1. Not applicable