



**Agenda for Extraordinary Cabinet
Wednesday, 26th November, 2025, 4.00 pm**

Members of Cabinet

Councillors: P Arnott (Chair), S Hawkins, P Hayward,
N Hookway, S Jackson, G Jung, D Ledger, J Loudoun (Vice-
Chair), T Olive and R Jefferies

Venue: Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton

Contact: Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer;
01395 517543 email acoombes@eastdevon.gov.uk
(or group number 01395 517546)
Monday, 17 November 2025

East Devon District Council
Blackdown House
Border Road
Heathpark Industrial Estate
Honiton
EX14 1EJ

DX 48808 HONITON

Tel: 01404 515616

www.eastdevon.gov.uk

This meeting is being recorded for subsequent publication on the Council's website and will be streamed live to the [East Devon District Council Youtube Channel](#)

1 Apologies

2 Declarations of interest

Guidance is available online to Councillors and co-opted members on making [declarations of interest](#)

3 Public speaking

Information on [public speaking is available online](#)

4 Matters of urgency

Information on [matters of urgency](#) is available online

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the Press) have been excluded. There are no items which officers recommend should be dealt with in this way.

Key Matters for Decision

6 **Local Government Reorganisation - Full Proposal** (Pages 3 - 36)

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, any members of the public are now allowed to take photographs, film and audio record the proceedings and report on all public meetings (including on social media). No prior notification is needed but

it would be helpful if you could let the democratic services team know you plan to film or record so that any necessary arrangements can be made to provide reasonable facilities for you to report on meetings. This permission does not extend to private meetings or parts of meetings which are not open to the public. You should take all recording and photography equipment with you if a public meeting moves into a session which is not open to the public.

If you are recording the meeting, you are asked to act in a reasonable manner and not disrupt the conduct of meetings for example by using intrusive lighting, flash photography or asking people to repeat statements for the benefit of the recording. You may not make an oral commentary during the meeting. The Chair has the power to control public recording and/or reporting so it does not disrupt the meeting.

Members of the public exercising their right to speak during Public Speaking will be recorded.

[Decision making and equalities](#)

For a copy of this agenda in large print, please contact the Democratic Services Team on 01395 517546



Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting 26th November 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Local Government Reorganisation - Full Proposal

Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better

Report summary:

Cabinet and Council have received a series of reports over the course of this year on the topic of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution. These followed the publication of the English Devolution White paper in December 2024, which committed to ending the current two-tier system of District and County Councils, and the subsequent invitation from the Secretary of State to submit proposals for a single tier of government.

This report represents the culmination of the process that has been undertaken, in collaboration with the other District and Borough Councils across Devon, over the course of this year to respond to this invitation. Support is sought to submit the full proposal for the 4-5-1 model of local government reorganisation in conjunction with a proposed modification to extend the current boundary of Plymouth City Council. The full 'Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better' proposal is available through the background information links and key aspects of the case for change are summarised in this report.

The deadline for submission is the 28th November and a delegation is sought to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader to meet this timeline. Post submission attention will quickly switch to planning for implementation, initially on an option agnostic basis, and a further delegation is sought to enable this work to proceed.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Cabinet;

- Subject to Full Council endorsement, approves the submission to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government of the full proposal for the 4-5-1 model of local government reorganisation as set out in 'Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better' as the Council's response to the Secretary of State's invitation
- Supports proposing the 4-5-1 + option to the Secretary of State through a modification to extend the current boundary of Plymouth City Council to incorporate parts of four adjacent parishes in South Hams
- Invites Full Council to endorse the above proposals to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Delegates authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader to submit the proposals to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government by the deadline of 28th November 2025.
- Delegates authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader to progress initial preparatory work for the implementation of local government reorganisation

in collaboration with other Devon Councils in advance of a formal decision made as to the preferred option and to support associated consultation

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that the Council responds to the invitation to submit proposals for a single tier of local government and continues to influence future local government reorganisation in Devon.

Officer: Andy Wood, Director of Place, andy.wood@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Assets and Economy
- Communications and Democracy
- Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- Environment - Nature and Climate
- Environment - Operational
- Finance
- Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact High Impact

Whilst future local government reorganisation will have a significant impact, the current stage is the submission of potential options. The next stage is to both consult on the proposed options and to ultimately chose the preferred option will be led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared to support the 4-5-1 proposal and is available through the background links. Members must have regard to that Equality Impact Assessment when reaching their decision.

Climate change High Impact. Local Government Reorganisation provides an important opportunity for service delivery that integrates environmental stewardship, the protection of landscapes and assets and the promotion of key sectors such as clean energy. It therefore has the potential to address both climate and biodiversity objectives and the achievement of a zero carbon future.

Risk: High Risk; The future configuration of local government will have a substantial bearing on service delivery. There are currently a number of competing proposals being developed. The lack of a single preferred option at present necessarily creates uncertainty and ambiguity. The need to commit resources to developing the options and subsequently to focus on implementation of the preferred option creates a further risk of detracting from core service delivery.

Links to background information

[Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better Full Proposal](#)

[Equality Impact Assessment](#)

[LGR update report for Cabinet 3/09/2025 \(page 72\)](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- A supported and engaged community
- Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- Resilient economy that supports local business

1. Background and context

1.1 The English Devolution White Paper was published in December 2024 and set out the government's commitment to end the current two-tier structure of local government. Subsequently Cabinet and Council have received a series of reports in relation to local government reorganisation and devolution over the course of this year. This has been alongside briefings for both councillors and staff as well as wider public and stakeholder engagement.

1.2 The Secretary of State issued a formal invitation in February 2025 (see Appendix A) to submit proposals for a single tier of local government in Devon. This sets out six criteria against which proposals would be assessed as follows;

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

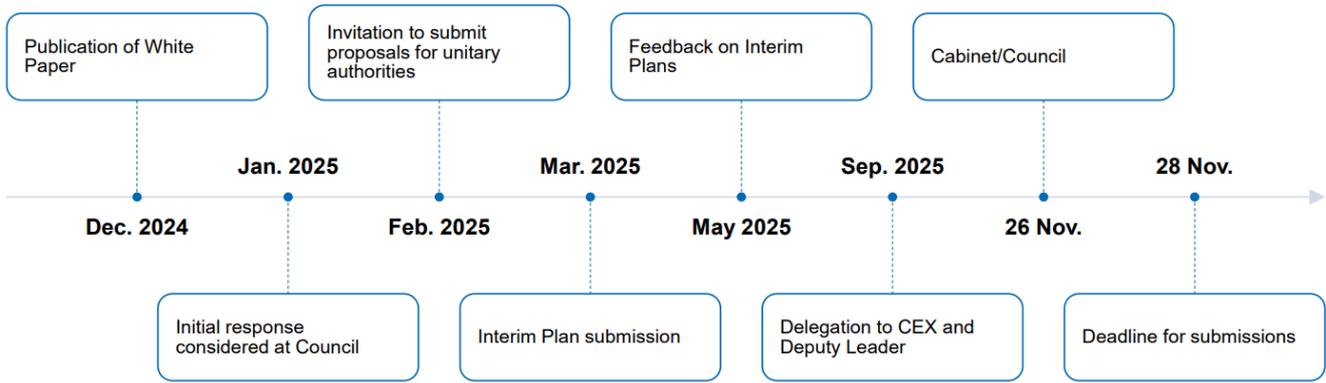
The guideline population for new principal authorities is 500k with strategic authorities having a guideline population of 1.5m

1.3 In response to the invitation Devon local authorities submitted their interim plans for local government reorganisation in March 2025. In total six interim plan submissions were made as follows;

- Interim Plan submitted by 7 of the 8 Devon district councils (East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council, North Devon District Council, South Hams District Council, Teignbridge District Council, Torridge District Council and West Devon Borough Council) and Torbay Council
- Devon County Council Interim Plan
- Exeter City Council Interim Plan
- North Devon District Council Interim Plan
- Plymouth City Council Interim Plan
- Torbay Council Interim Plan

1.4 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government provided collective feedback on all the of the Interim Plans in May. The next substantive deadline was then the submission of full proposals by the 28th November. Each Council can only support one option.

1.5 The timeline is summarised below;



2. The Full Proposal

2.1 This Council has, since March of this year and the submission of the Interim Plan, expressed its support for the 4-5-1 model of local government reorganisation. This anticipates the following;

- A new unitary covering Torbay and southern Devon comprising the existing administrative areas of South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon.
- A new unitary covering Exeter and northern Devon comprising the existing administrative areas of East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge.
- Plymouth City Council on its existing boundary

2.2 Over the course of the summer considerable time and effort has been invested in to developing this model into a complete full proposal. This has included securing input from over fifty officers drawn across the District and Borough Councils in Devon together with Torbay Council. Specialist support has also been commissioned in relation to finance matters (Pixel) and to develop the case more widely (KPMG). A key strength of this process has been the scope for both peer support, such as input from Torbay in relation to social care where the unitary council has expertise that does not exist in the District Councils, and challenge to ensure that the case has been developed in the most robust way possible.

2.3 Alongside the collaboration between this group of Councils there has been extensive consultation and engagement with external stakeholders. This engagement campaign received nearly 6,000 responses from residents, businesses, and community groups, helping to directly shape the final proposals. A series of briefings and engagement events have also been undertaken with statutory organisations, Members of Parliament, local businesses and parish and town councils.

2.4 The most recent Cabinet report in relation to local government reorganisation was considered in September. It was resolved to receive a further report detailing the full proposal for the 4-5-1 model of local government reorganisation. This report fulfils this resolution and the full 'Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better' proposal is available through the background links and the Executive Summary of this is included at Appendix B. It puts forward a vision to transform local government and secure a better, more prosperous future for all communities across Devon.

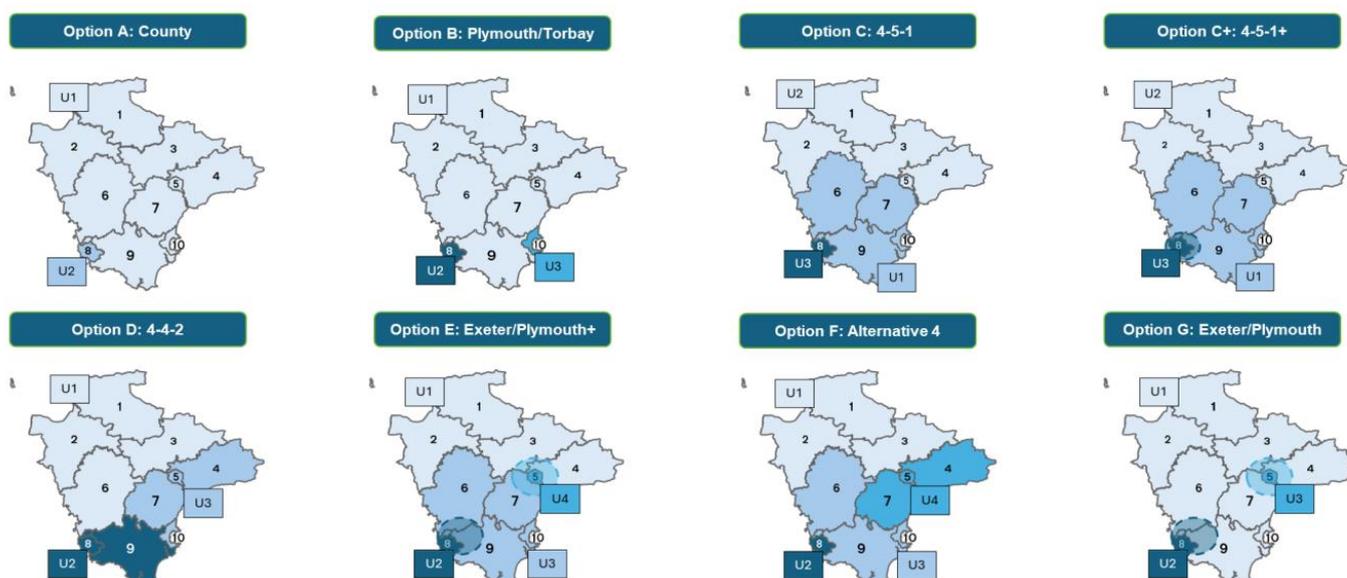
2.5 Throughout the development of the full proposal careful attention has been paid to each of the government's six criteria to ensure that these are responded to comprehensively. A watchword has been balance – ensuring that the proposed unitary authorities establish the basis for an enduring equilibrium that will best meet the needs of all Devon residents and businesses and provide a platform for successful devolution more widely.

2.6 Four key aspects of the full proposal are outlined below;

1. Options appraisal

2.7 Devon is a large county covering over 6,000 sq km and with a population in excess of 1.2m people. Invariably there are a number of potential options as to how local government can be configured in relation to the government's criteria, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. In order to ensure an evidence-led approach a comprehensive options appraisal has been undertaken. The starting premise for this was not to ordain the 4-5-1 option but instead to rigorously test and verify its performance against the government's six criteria in conjunction with other potential options.

2.8 In total eight options have been considered including combinations of two, three and four unitaries across Devon as set out below. Whilst these were based on the building blocks of existing local government boundaries in the first instance, options that include boundary changes have also been considered and tested in order to take account of proposals being promoted by other Councils in Devon. This includes potential extensions to the current boundary of Plymouth City Council and the creation of a standalone Exeter unitary.



2.9 Each option was tested against the government's six criteria. The methodology employed by KPMG ensured that the assessment was mapped across to identifiable metrics and data sources to aid transparency and auditability. This includes considering relative population sizes both today and projected forward to 2040 to ensure that a lasting equilibrium is struck. Alongside both the quantitative and qualitative assessment, two strategic filters were also applied so as to respond to unique local circumstances in Devon including an understanding of place and the interplay between rural and urban areas. This helped to ensure alignment with Devon's unique geography and governance landscape.

2.10 The full options appraisal is set out in Appendix 3 to the full proposal. It can be seen from this that whilst the 4-5-1 proposal performs well against the six criteria, the option that achieves the most balanced outcome includes an extension to the existing Plymouth City area to incorporate parts of four adjacent parishes that are the focus for development as part of the Joint Local Plan. This is known as the Plymouth Policy Area and forms the basis for what is known as the 4-5-1 + option.

2.11 This report specifically recommends that the full proposal for the 4-5-1 model of local government reorganisation, as set out in the 'Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better' document, is submitted as the Council's response to the Secretary of State's invitation. It is further recommended that the 4-5-1 + option is proposed to the Secretary of State in the form of a modification to extend the current boundary of Plymouth City Council. This is set out at Appendix 1 to the full proposal.

2. Financial Case

2.12 Whilst the government's stated position is that each of the six assessment criteria carry equal weight, there is no doubt, given the challenges facing local government, that the financial case will be a vital component of the proposal and that this will be very influential in terms of informing the government's preferred choice of option. This has certainly been the case in the recent decision regarding Surrey which is in the vanguard of current LGR proposals.

2.13 The development of the financial case has benefited from input from seven s.151 officers and specialist input from both Pixel and KPMG. This triangulation has helped to ensure the development of a very robust financial case, including benchmarking against examples nationally. The headlines are that implementation costs are expected to be repaid in 2 years 9 months in the base case and 2 years 11 months for the stretch case (the difference being due to higher upfront costs for the latter) and that savings over 10 years will be between circa £500m and £800m for the base and the stretch case respectively. The figures are summarised in the table below;

Option 4-5-1	Base Case £'million	Stretch Case £'million
Recurring Saving from Year 6	77.1	124.5
Total Implementation Costs	(73.9)	(101.0)
Cumulative Benefit / (Cost) after 5 years	122.9	183.0
Cumulative Benefit / (Cost) by 10 years	508.3	805.3
Payback Period	2 Years and 9 Months	2 Years and 11 Months

3. Councillor numbers and local representation

2.14 Ensuring effective representation in the new unitaries has been a key concern in developing the case. The guidance from the Local Government Boundary Commission is that each authority should have representation that matches its unique characteristics. Whilst no fixed ratios are put forward, it is clear that more than 100 or less than 30 councillors to an authority would require 'an extremely strong and compelling case'.

2.15 With this in mind, analysis has been undertaken to consider different ratios that stay within these parameters. This is presented in the table below;

Councils	Current					Wards - Electorate/member					
	Members	Total wards	Multi wards	Population	Electorate	3000	3500	4000	4500	5000	
5	East Devon	60	30	18	150,800	126,436	42	36	32	28	25
	Mid Devon	42	22	15	82,800	65,778	22	19	16	15	13
	North Devon	42	25	12	98,600	79,672	27	23	20	18	16
	Torridge	36	16	15	68,100	54,073	18	15	14	12	11
	Exeter	39	13	13	130,800	91,121	30	26	23	20	18
	Total	219	106	73	531,100	417,080	139	119	105	93	83
4	South Hams	31	20	9	90,842	71,693	24	20	18	16	14
	Teignbridge	47	24	18	137,074	106,864	35	31	27	24	21
	Torbay	36	16	15	139,385	104,753	35	30	26	23	21
	West Devon	31	18	11	58,754	44,363	15	13	11	10	9
	Total	145	78	53	426,055	327,673	109	94	82	73	65
Grand Total	364	184	126	957,155	744,753	248	213	187	166	148	

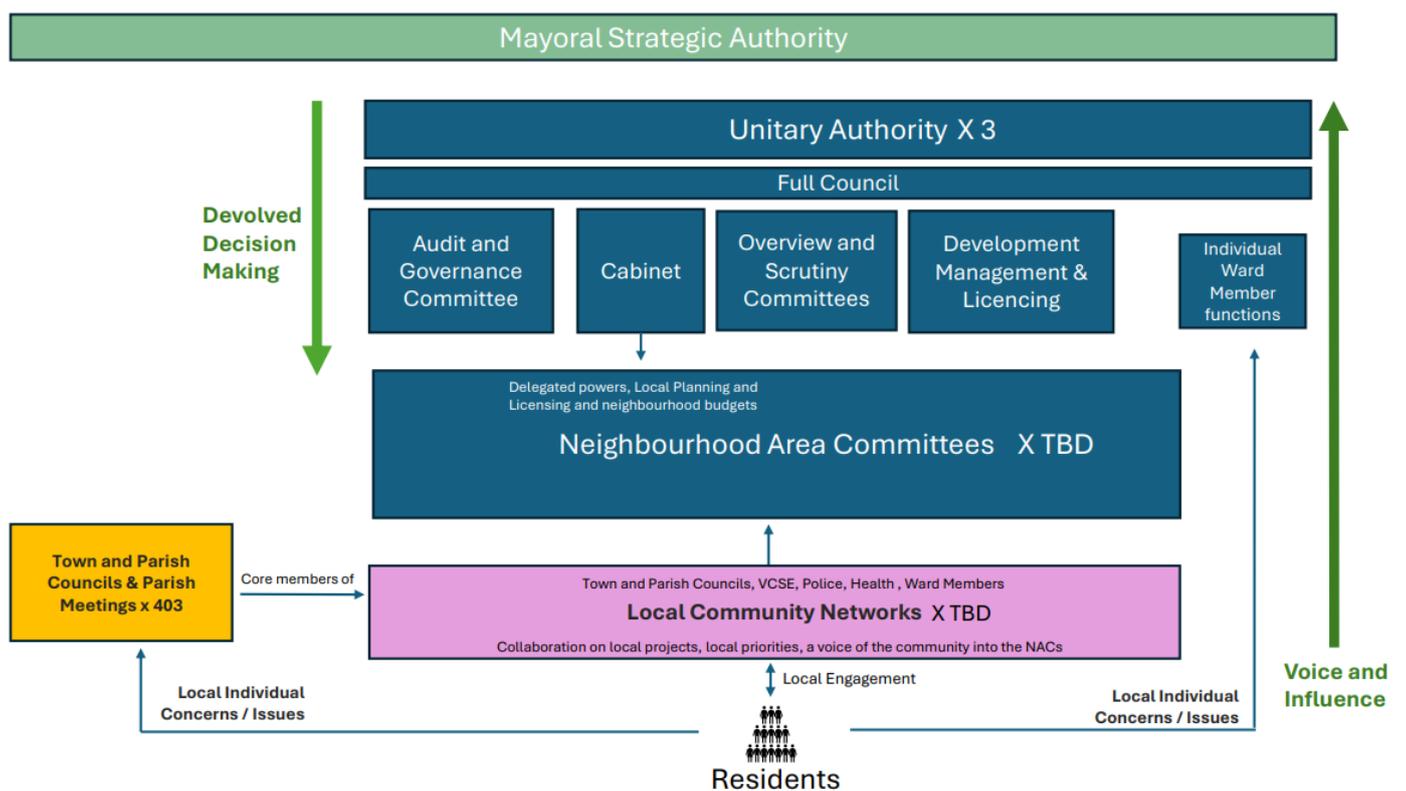
2.16 For the proposed unitary authority that includes the East Devon area the 4,500:1 ratio gives a total number of councillors of 93. This has been increased by one to reflect the current community governance review that is underway at Cranbrook and the substantial growth in population that is expected over the next five years. If the 4-5-1 option is selected, the proposed councillor numbers

will form the basis for elections to the shadow authority in May 2027 and for the first term of the new authority.

2.17 Alongside the question of councillor numbers, there is no doubting that any successor unitary authority will cover a larger population. In order to both maintain effective governance arrangements and enhance democratic participation within this elevated context, there is a need to consider ‘hyper-local’ arrangements. In the full proposal these are comprised of the following;

- Neighbourhood Area Committees – these include statutory function of the authority such as planning and licensing and which are organised on sub-geographies, potentially initially aligning to existing District boundaries in order to provide continuity. These can then be shaped by how local area would want it to work for them.
- Local Community Networks - these can focus on matters such as community governance, developing community action plans and local service delivery and spending issues.

2.18 The full proposal is careful not to put forward a template approach that would apply to all areas. Rather there is a commitment to co-create future arrangements, working with local parish and town councils, in order to respond effectively to local circumstances and ensure that these complement rather than usurp current arrangements. This is set out in the diagram below.

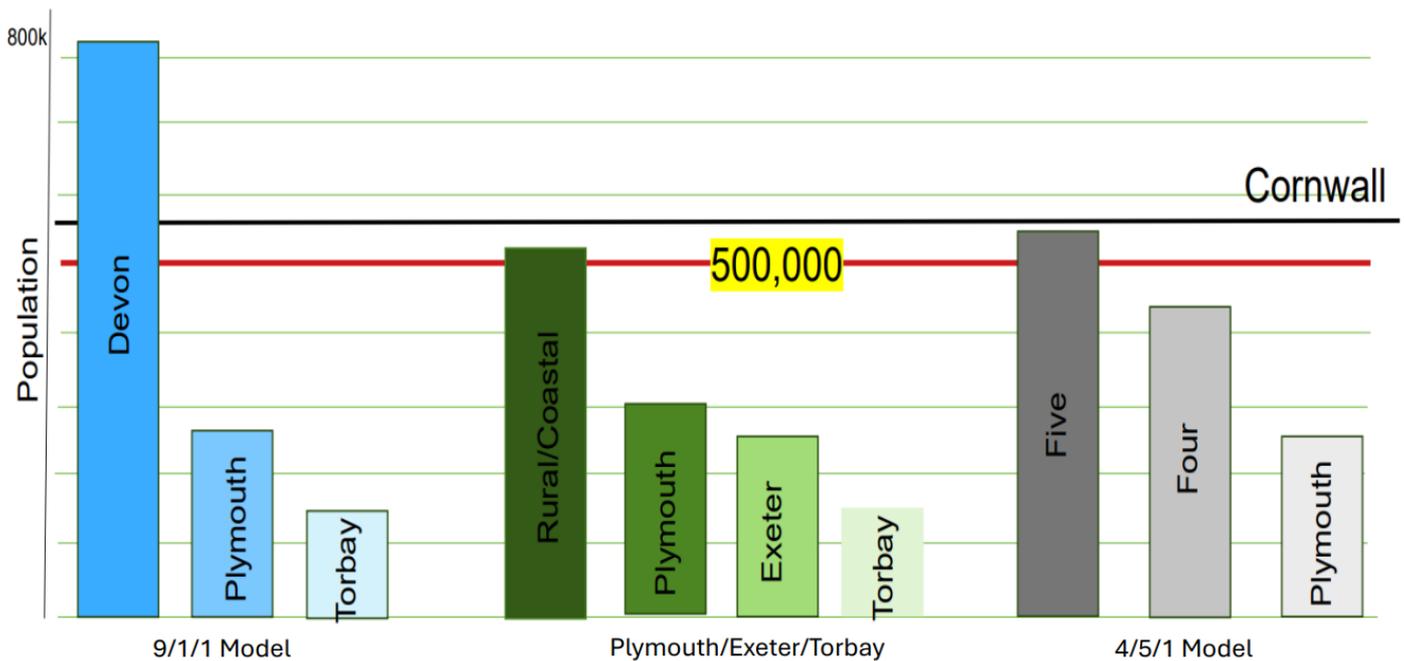


2.19 The intent of these proposals is to give local people a stronger voice in the decisions that affect them, empowering them to shape services that truly reflect their aspirations and priorities.

4. Devolution and the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority

2.20 Whilst there is a focus on how new principal authorities, in the form of unitary councils, will be configured, it is also important to consider how these will support future devolution arrangements. Indeed this is one of the government’s six criteria. All Devon authorities wrote to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution in July expressing a joint interest in future devolution opportunities. The letter proposed the creation of a South West Peninsula Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). The proposed MSA would encompass a population of in excess of 1.2 million people and a diverse economy worth over £25 billion annually. The Leaders stated their commitment to working at pace including a desire to discuss the proposals further at Ministerial level. It is also highlighted that whilst Cornwall Council had declined to participate at this time, the door would be left open for them to join in the future.

2.21 The full proposal for the 4-5-1 model has been mindful of the need to successfully facilitate future devolution. Again the watchword of balance comes to the fore. According to the 2021 census the population of Cornwall was just over 570,000 people. The two new unitary authorities would be broadly aligned with this figure and the chart below shows the balance relative to the three main options that are expected to be submitted.



3. Alternative options

3.1 It has been highlighted that the sheer scale of Devon, both in terms of population and land area, means that there are alternative ways of configuring future unitary authorities. It is expected that two main options will be submitted alongside the 4-5-1 model as follows;

- The 9-1-1 model – this is favoured by the County Council and would see Plymouth City and Torbay Councils remain as unitaries on their current boundaries with the rest of Devon forming one large unitary.
- Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay and the rest of Devon – Plymouth and Exeter City Councils along with Torbay Council have recently confirmed that they jointly support a four unitary model that will see the continuation of Torbay on its current boundaries, an expanded Plymouth City Council and a new Exeter unitary council with the rest of Devon also becoming a single unitary. A proposal to expand the current boundary of Torbay is also being promoted by Plymouth and Exeter City Councils.

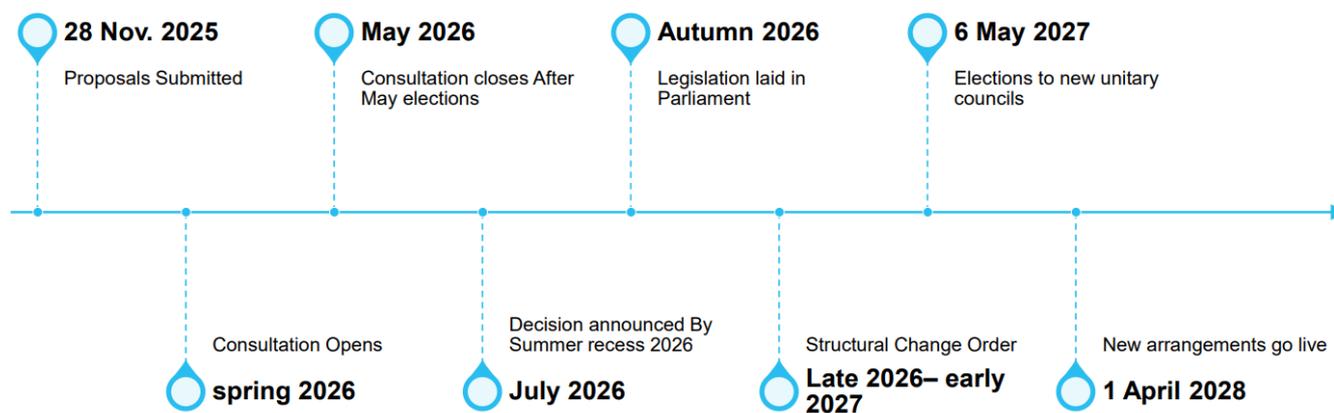
3.2 The options appraisal referred to above has sought to consider, as far as possible, the known alternative options that were likely to come forward. The four unitary model including Plymouth, Exeter and an expansion of Torbay has emerged at a relatively late stage and was not one of the specific options tested in the appraisal. Nevertheless the relative merits of a four unitary model compared to a three unitary model have been considered.

3.3 Ultimately both of these options will have merit in terms of how they perform against the six criteria. But there are also obvious concerns. For the 9-1-1 model these relate to sheer scale of a single unitary council covering all of the existing District areas. This would immediately place the authority at the largest unitary in terms of population served, comfortably exceeding the current largest (North Yorkshire at circa 635k) and only behind the metropolitan boroughs of Birmingham and Leeds (at circa 1.18m and 845k respectively). This raises wider concerns about councillor representation and associated ratios given the upper figure of 100 councillors from the Boundary Commission guidance. For the four unitary model there is a concern as to the viability of a large unitary council that is predominantly rural and coastal in its focus and shorn of any large urban areas which are the key economic drivers. It is unclear how this model performs against the first three criteria in particular.

4. Next steps

4.1 Each authority has the opportunity to respond to the invitation to submit proposals for a single tier of local government by the deadline of the 28th November. A nil response has been discounted as there is an imperative to influence the future configuration of local government in Devon.

4.2 After the point at which full proposals have been submitted the process will be led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Consultation on the submitted options is expected to take place early in 2026 with a final decision on the preferred option expected in July. Following this a Structural Change Order process will be instigated in order to provide the required legislative basis for the new unitary authorities. Elections to the shadow authorities are expected to take place in May 2027 with the vesting day for the new authorities expected to be 1st April 2028. The overall timeline is set out below;



4.3 Whilst following the submission of full proposals the process will then be led by MHCLG, and despite the likelihood of multiple different options, the focus will quickly shift to implementation. It will be important for all Councils to work together on an option agnostic basis to progress this work, ideally through the formation of a single Programme Management Office. This will help to lay the foundations for successful reorganisation irrespective of which option is chosen later in 2026.

5. Legal Compliance

5.1 The 4-5-1 proposal constitutes a compliant proposal prepared in accordance with Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (“the Act”) and the 5 February 2025 statutory invitation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation for Devon. The Proposal has been prepared having regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State relating to what the proposal should seek to achieve and the matters that should be considered in formulating it.

5.2 Under the Act a proposal may be one of the following types:

- **Type A:** a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- **Type B:** a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- **Type C:** a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- **Combined proposal:** a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

5.3 The Act only permits the Secretary of State to invite a local authority to make one proposal and does not permit a combined proposal if they are alternatives. A proposal may not specify an area as one for which there should be a single tier of local government unless the whole or any part of

that area is currently a two-tier area. These restrictions are reinforced by the terms of the February invitation which limits the authorities to whom it is addressed to one proposal.

5.4 As the invitation was addressed to all the local authorities comprising the historic county of Devon, the 4-5-1 Proposal is a Type A proposal.

5.5 Once a proposal has been submitted, the Secretary of State may decide to implement it, with or without modification or take no action. The Secretary of State's powers to make modifications is a wide one, although not so wide as to allow for extensive changes that transform a proposal so that it becomes a different animal. With that in mind, given that proposals are constrained to existing boundaries, some modifications to those boundaries are recommended, in the form of the 4-5-1 + option, were the Secretary of State minded to exercise his power of modification.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Local Government Reorganisation represents a seminal opportunity to reimagine and improve future public service delivery in Devon. The chosen option is likely to endure for many decades. Considerable time and effort has been invested in developing the full proposal for the 4-5-1 model in conjunction with the other District and Borough Councils across Devon. This is considered to represent a credible and persuasive option that responds to all six of the government's criteria for unitary authorities. It is focused on achieving tangible improvements to service delivery and provides the necessary strategic coherence, financial sustainability, and local accountability to unlock Devon's full potential.

6.2 In summary the 4-5-1 proposal considered to represent the best option for local government reorganisation in Devon for the following reasons;

- Enables every area of Devon to thrive and to retain local identities
- Puts communities at the heart of decision-making, ensuring services are designed and delivered in the most appropriate way
- Large enough to be sustainable, small enough to be responsive to community needs.
- Aligns governance with functional economic areas and local strengths
- Respects natural boundaries like Dartmoor National Park, National Landscapes and World Heritage sites
- Unlocks the ability for greater devolution of powers from government

6.3 Whichever option is ultimately progressed, it will be important for the local government family in Devon to pull together to ensure the best possible outcomes for Devon residents and businesses with the focus needing to quickly shift to preparatory work to support successful implementation. Further reports will come to Cabinet and Full Council as key milestones are reached.

Financial implications:

Although the report and the recommendations proposed have no direct financial implication at this stage, Government's decision and subsequent implementation have fundamental financial implications. The Council's adopted Medium Term Financial Strategy sets out the implications leading up to reorganisation, with an approach to budget setting and meeting key objectives in the remaining period. The proposed submission recommended in this report offers significant financial savings over the current local government structures in place. East Devon's Finance Team have been involved throughout the formation of the submission along with the other authorities involved, with additional support from Pixel and KPMG. As stated in the report option appraisal against the key criteria (including financial sustainability) was undertaken by KPMG.

Legal implications:

Local government reorganisation is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Council has submitted an interim proposal and feedback has been provided on this from MHCLG. A final proposal is required to be submitted by 28 November 2025.

Full council's views will be sought on the draft proposals at a special meeting of council but the final decision rests with the Cabinet as approval of this proposal is an executive function in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 Section 9D (2). Members are advised to consider all the information contained in the report and the Appendices in order to make an informed decision on the final proposal.

Following submission of the final proposal, the Secretary of State may implement a proposal, with or without modification, or decide to take no action. The Secretary of State may not make an order implementing a proposal unless he consults every authority affected by the proposal (except the authority or authorities which made it), and such other persons as he considers appropriate.

The best value duty is contained in S3 of the Local Government Act 1999 as a result of which the Council is under a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The report sets out the financial and other implications of the proposed model in the final proposal which members are advised to consider in full.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007

INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), hereby invites any principal authority in the area of the county of Devon, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government.

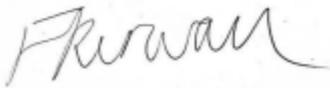
This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 to 3:

1. Any proposal must be made by **28 November 2025**.
2. In responding to this invitation an authority must have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to this invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to this invitation received from the Secretary of State..
3. An authority responding to this invitation may either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.



F KIRWAN

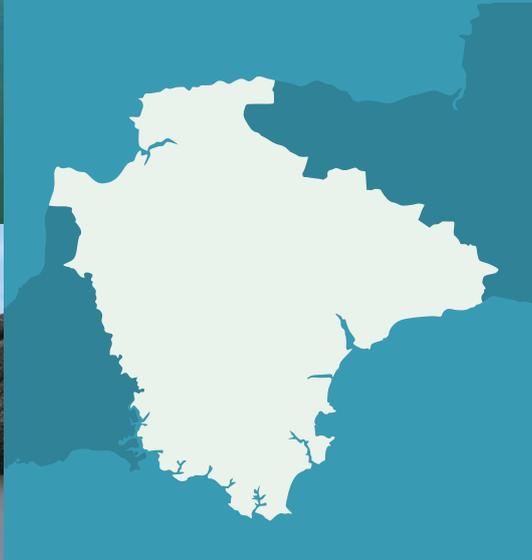
A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

5 February 2025



Reimagining Devon

Believe in Better



Our Plan for Local Government Reorganisation



Contents

Foreword	5
Executive summary	9
Council support	40



Foreword

The Minister's letter setting out the invitation to submit proposals for unitary authorities was clear; fewer councils in the name of 'simplification' with and an opportunity to participate in a process that would potentially make councils larger, more remote, less personal...

As councillors, we stood for election to deliver for local people. As leaders, portfolio holders, frontline councillors or those holding decision-makers to account, the aspect of our roles that bind us together, irrespective of political persuasion, is the commitment to our people, places and communities. However, another common feature is that of duty and with the challenge laid down, we did what councillors and councils do best – we collaborated, we coalesced around a sense of shared purpose, and we set about reimagining what local government across Devon could look like.

The responsibility has not been lost on us. Together as seven councils we represent over 97% of the whole area of Devon under consideration for reorganisation. Our communities feel incredibly strongly about their sense of place; it was one of many things that became clear once we started to talk about the concept of reorganisation with our people, partners, businesses and community groups. This reaffirmed what we knew at our core; that it would be vital to find a solution that delivered on the aspirations as encapsulated within the six assessment criteria, while also remaining true to a recognisable sense of place for generations to come.

We were also determined to ensure that changes were used not just as a bureaucratic simplification exercise, but as a real opportunity to accelerate improved outcomes in the areas Devon currently underperforms for its residents, businesses or young people. We have sought to use this as an opportunity to explore how services could be redesigned – using change as an enabler. We don't seek to weather the storm of change, or to 'protect' our organisations from it, but to harness its power and sail forward with commitment alongside genuine relationships with our system partners that will drive better outcomes for health, wealth and wellbeing, and our unique Devon environment.

“Together as seven councils we represent over 97% of the whole area of Devon.”

Saunton Beach, North Devon

There is no little irony in the journey towards unification and unitarisation beginning with a test of our ‘Team Devon’ partnership. While some did not feel they could make the journey with us, we understand their obligations to their own councils in trying to do what’s best for them. However, we believe the task at hand must be to focus on what’s best for the whole of Devon, not for one area over another. Inevitably with a land area of over 6,000 km² and a population in excess of 1.25 million people, there are a variety of potential options as to how future local government could be configured. It is in this context that we undertook a robust options appraisal to help guide and inform our thinking.

Throughout the process of developing this proposal our watchword has been balance – to put in place the right arrangements that meet all of the criteria and that will create the best possible outcomes for residents across Devon, both now and into the future, alongside establishing a platform for successful devolution. We are confident that we are putting forward the basis for an enduring equilibrium.

We had almost 6,000 responses when we sought public input and opinion to inform this proposal. We held numerous workshops and engagement sessions, we discussed it with our towns and parish councils, our community groups, our voluntary sector partners and our statutory providers. Yes, there is nervousness and apprehension about change but, like us, they look forward with hope and optimism.

We respond to the government’s invitation to submit reorganisation proposals with energy and determination; it is an opportunity to structurally embrace the need for more efficient and effective councils. For the good of the most vulnerable in Devon we must cast off the shackles of inadequacy, and of trying to salami-slice a path to financial rectitude. It is clear that our communities have no ambition for any ‘least-worst’ outcome. They share no dream of a mass-commissioned, remote homogeneity, where impersonal unit cost becomes the permeating feature of a new operational paradigm. They want their councils to be custodians and guardians of their place, to be stewards of public service pride and ethos, to be personal and authentic, to be bold, be effective, and ultimately to be better.

Our submission demonstrates why this proposal is the best solution for reorganisation, delivering savings, sustainability and simplicity, while creating the foundations for future success. In response to the Minister’s letter, we have reimagined the councils in Devon with a view to unlocking our collective potential; we believe in better.

page 18



Cllr John Loudoun,
Deputy Leader of
East Devon
District Council



Cllr Luke Taylor,
Leader of
Mid Devon
District Council



Cllr David Clayton,
Leader of
North Devon
Council



Cllr Dan Thomas,
Leader of
South Hams
District Council



“We respond with energy and determination; it is an opportunity to structurally embrace the need for more efficient and effective councils.”



Cllr Charles Nuttall,
Executive Member for
Local Government
Reorganisation,
Teignbridge
District Council



Cllr Ken James,
Leader of
Torridge
District Council



Cllr Mandy Ewings,
Leader of
West Devon
Borough Council

Executive summary

Reimagining Devon: Believe in Better represents a bold vision to transform local government and secure a brighter, more prosperous future for all of our communities.

We have the opportunity to fully embrace the exciting change that reorganisation unlocks. As public authorities, we have a responsibility to develop a case for change that does not simply put words on paper, but evidences a robust process with tangible outcomes. We must showcase how we have identified the right option for Devon, and how this will deliver better outcomes for the residents and communities we serve. Our ambition is to unlock Devon's full potential, address long-standing challenges and provide a solid platform for meaningful transformation.

Crucially, our approach is designed to preserve the unique identities and character of our local communities, ensuring that every area retains its sense of place and belonging. By enhancing democratic participation, we are committed to giving local people a stronger voice in the decisions that affect them, empowering them to shape services that truly reflect their aspirations and priorities. At the same time, our model avoids the risk of over-centralisation, maintaining accessible, responsive councils that remain rooted in the distinct communities they serve. Above all, Reimagining Devon is about delivering the local services our residents want, tailored to their needs and delivered close to home, while ensuring our councils are future-proof and resilient for generations to come.

Our proposal has not been developed in isolation – it is the result of successful ongoing collaboration over the past year between the majority (8 of 11) of Devon's councils, including:

- East Devon District Council
- Mid Devon District Council
- North Devon Council
- South Hams District Council
- Teignbridge District Council
- Torbay Council
(Torbay has collaborated with the development of this case, but they are pursuing their own option which would see Torbay remaining as a unitary)
- Torridge District Council
- West Devon Borough Council.

Stoke Gabriel, on the River Dart, South Hams

Our leaders, chief executives and senior officers from across the region have worked together with input from our partners, residents and businesses to develop a shared vision for the future. We thank the communities of Devon for the part they have played informing the development of this proposal.

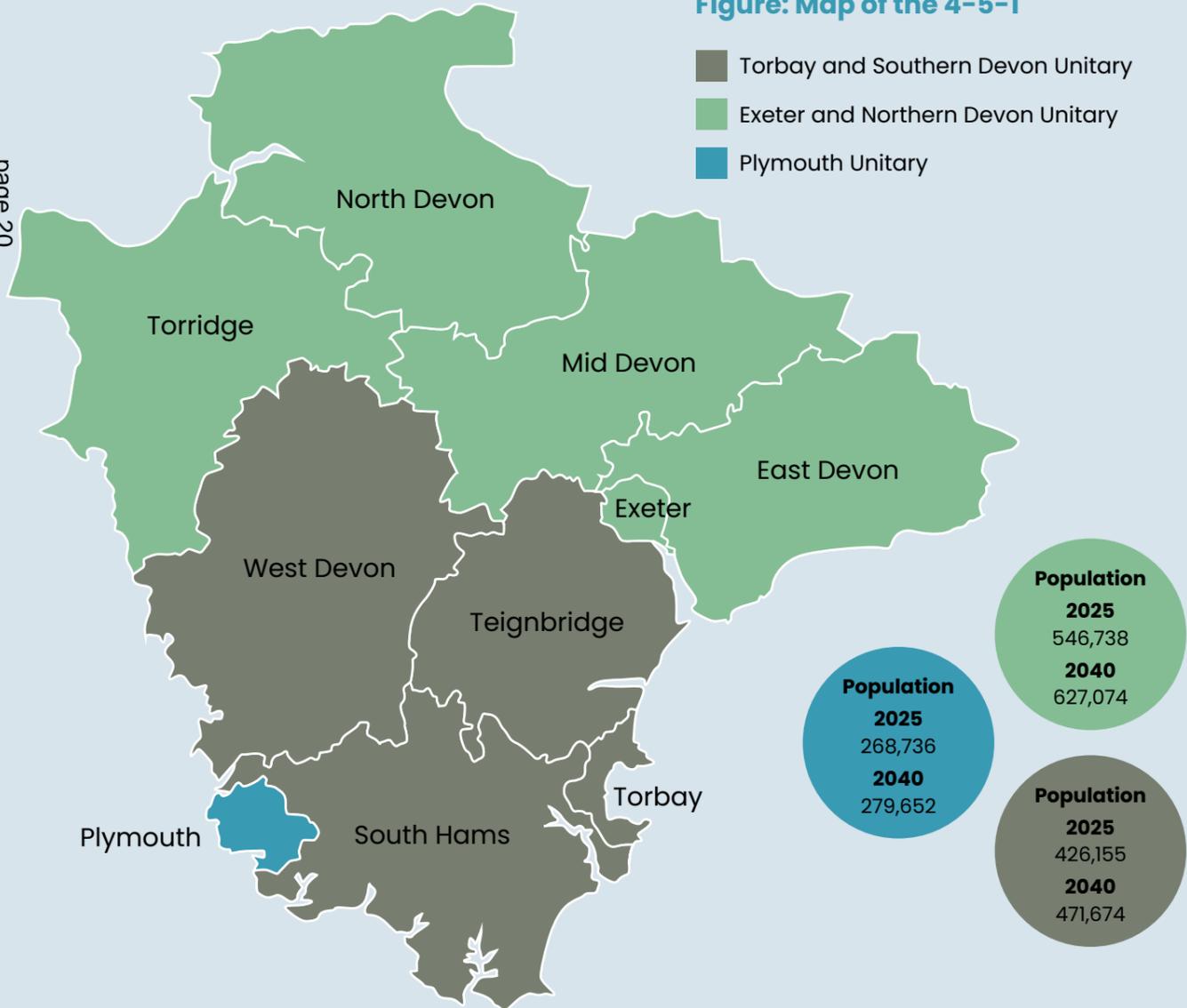
Our proposal

There is broad consensus across 7 of the 8 Devon district and borough councils (making up 97% of the geography of the whole of Devon) that our **4-5-1, Torbay and Southern Devon (4), Exeter and Northern Devon (5) and Plymouth (1) model** represents the best way forward.

4-5-1 balances the need for local responsiveness with the scale required for efficiency and resilience. It is supported by the majority of councils across Devon.

Figure: Map of the 4-5-1

- Torbay and Southern Devon Unitary
- Exeter and Northern Devon Unitary
- Plymouth Unitary



page 20

Approach

Our proposal is underpinned by a rigorous, evidence-led process, combining quantitative analysis, qualitative assessment, and extensive engagement with residents, businesses, partners, and community groups.

Nearly 6,000 responses were received through public surveys, alongside targeted workshops, forums, and meetings with stakeholders from every part of Devon. This inclusive approach has ensured that the voices of local people, service users, and partners have directly shaped the options appraisal and final recommendations. The analysis has drawn on the latest data, independent financial modelling, and best practice from comparable reorganisations, ensuring that the case for change is robust, transparent, and grounded in local realities.





Context: Why change, why now?

Devon is a vast and varied county in South West England, spanning over 6,000 km² and it is home to more than 1.25 million residents. Its geography is shaped by two stunning coastlines, the two national parks of Dartmoor and Exmoor, and a wealth of protected landscapes and UNESCO sites. Devon's communities range from vibrant cities and market towns to remote rural villages and coastal settlements, each contributing to a rich and distinctive local character. With a county-wide GVA of £31.4 billion and GVA per capita of £25,311, the county's economic strengths lie in sectors such as tourism, agri-food, advanced manufacturing, marine industries, and a burgeoning digital and creative sector. Innovation corridors like the South West Innovation Spine, as well as clusters in photonics, clean energy, and pharmaceuticals, further underpin Devon's economic diversity and growth prospects. However, challenges persist, particularly in rural areas, where access to services, transport infrastructure, and digital connectivity can lag behind urban centres, and where access to services and an ageing population create additional pressures.

Devon's current local government structure is no longer fit for purpose. It is fragmented, inefficient, and increasingly unable to meet the needs of our communities or the expectations of government. The invitation to reorganise is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape how we serve, how we lead, and how we grow.

4-5-1 is our response. It is not a compromise or a workaround. It is a real, balanced solution designed to tackle issues such as rural isolation, hidden deprivation, service pressures, housing affordability, quality of care, and financial sustainability, while enabling coordinated planning for economic growth and environmental stewardship. 4-5-1 reflects the lived realities of our places, the ambitions of our people, and the challenges we must overcome.



The sense of urgency

- **Financial pressures are intensifying.** Councils across Devon face rising demand, constrained budgets, and structural deficits. The current two-tier system duplicates effort, fragments services, and diverts resources away from the frontline.
- **Service challenges are growing.** From adult social care to housing, from children's services to waste and transport, the system struggles to deliver consistently high-quality outcomes. Fragmentation undermines integration, innovation, and responsiveness.
- **Communities are being left behind.** Rural isolation, hidden deprivation, and uneven access to services persist. The current structure cannot adapt quickly enough to meet changing needs or unlock local potential.
- **The government has set clear expectations.** The six criteria for reorganisation demand scale, sustainability, and strategic coherence. Our 4-5-1 model is the only option that meets these criteria while preserving local identity and accountability.

The opportunity ahead

- **To deliver better outcomes.** Reorganisation is not just about structure. It is about organisational transformation, redefining system leadership and cultural agility, and delivering wider public sector reform. It enables us to redesign services, integrate delivery, and focus on prevention and place.
- **To unlock economic growth.** By aligning governance with our places and strategic assets such as the Freeport or Science Park, we can attract investment, create jobs, and drive inclusive prosperity which aligns with the government's growth mission.
- **To empower communities.** Our model embeds subsidiarity, with co-designed Neighbourhood Area Committees and Local Community Networks giving residents real influence over decisions and services.
- **To prepare for devolution.** Our 4-5-1 model creates a credible platform for a future Mayoral Strategic Authority, ensuring fair representation, strategic balance and coordination, and a strong regional voice.

This is not about doing more with less. It is about doing better with what we have and building a system that is ready for what comes next.

Options appraisal

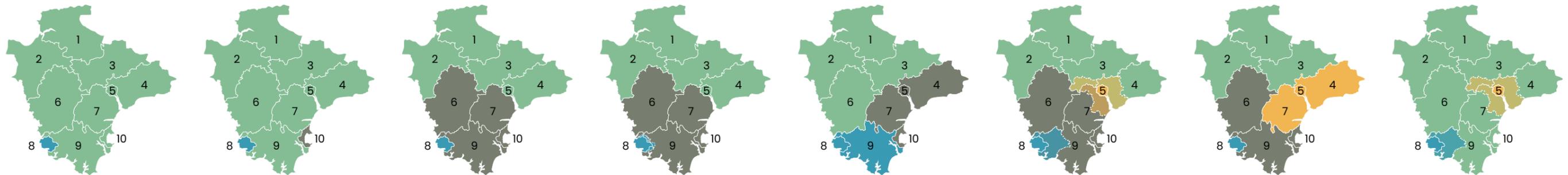
Devon’s scale, diversity, and complexity demanded a rigorous, evidence-led approach to reorganisation. Over the past year, councils across Devon have collaborated to evaluate eight potential models for local government reform. Our shared ambition was clear: find a solution that delivers better outcomes, meets government criteria, and reflects the lived realities of our communities, building a solution for the whole of Devon.

A structured, balanced evaluation

We applied a dual framework, quantitative and qualitative, to assess each option against the six government criteria. This included:

- **Quantitative analysis** of population size, financial resilience, service delivery, and geographic coherence.
- **Qualitative assessment** of community identity, alignment with NHS and emergency service boundaries, and capacity for neighbourhood empowerment.

Each option was scored using a balance-based ranking system, ensuring no authority would be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged. This focus on equity and sustainability was central to our approach and assessment, as the reorganisation process must deliver for the whole of Devon, not reinforce today’s imbalances.



page 22

Option A: County

Summary of 2 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon, East Devon, Exeter, West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10)
- Unitary 2: Retain Plymouth unitary authority (8)

Option B: Plymouth / Torbay

Summary of 3 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon, East Devon, Teignbridge and South Hams (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9)
- Unitary 2: Retain Plymouth unitary authority (8)
- Unitary 3: Retain Torbay unitary authority (10)

Option C: 4-5-1

Summary of 3 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay (6, 7, 9, 10)
- Unitary 2: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Unitary 3: Retain Plymouth unitary authority (8)

Option C+: 4-5-1+

Summary of 3 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay (6, 7, 9, 10)
- Unitary 2: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including an expanded Plymouth area (8) (+ Plymouth Policy Area (PPA))

Option D: 4-4-2

Summary of 3 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon and West Devon (1, 2, 3, 6)
- Unitary 2: A unitary authority including Plymouth and South Hams (8, 9)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including East Devon, Exeter, Teignbridge and Torbay (4, 5, 7, 10)

Option E: Exeter / Plymouth+

Summary of 4 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon and East Devon (1, 2, 3, 4)
- Unitary 2: A unitary authority including an expanded Plymouth area (8) (+13 parishes in South Hams)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay (6, 7, 9, 10)
- Unitary 4: A unitary authority including an expanded Exeter area (5) (+49 parishes in East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge)

Option F: Alternative 4

Summary of 4 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge and Mid Devon (1, 2, 3)
- Unitary 2: Retain Plymouth unitary authority (8)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including West Devon, South Hams and Torbay (6, 9, 10)
- Unitary 4: A unitary authority including East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge (4, 5, 7)

Option G: Exeter / Plymouth

Summary of 3 unitary model:

- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge, Mid Devon, East Devon, West Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams and Torbay (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10)
- Unitary 2: A unitary authority including an expanded Plymouth Area (8) (+13 parishes in South Hams)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including an expanded Exeter Area (5) (+49 parishes in East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge)

Figure: Options assessed as part of our options appraisal process



Filtering for fit

Following the initial scoring, **options A, B, and G were eliminated** due to poor performance across multiple criteria. These options were not taken forward as they exhibited:

- **Wide disparities in population and economic indicators**, creating imbalances in service demand and financial sustainability.
- **Fragmented geographies** that failed to reflect natural communities or travel-to-work areas.
- **Limited alignment with existing service footprints**, including NHS and emergency services.
- **Weak engagement mechanisms**, with little evidence of community support or viable neighbourhood empowerment structures.

These options failed to meet the basics of the government criteria, were deemed unworkable and unsustainable and were removed from further consideration.

Strategic filters

With the remaining options, we applied a second stage of strategic filtering to ensure alignment with Devon's unique geography and governance landscape. This included:

- **Avoiding the grouping of Plymouth, Exeter, and Torbay into a single unitary**, which would create an oversized and unbalanced authority.
- **Limiting boundary changes to Plymouth's immediate neighbouring parishes**, in line with the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA), to preserve community identity and avoid disruption.
- **Protecting national park areas**, particularly Dartmoor, from administrative complexity and fragmentation.

These strategic filters narrowed the shortlist to three final options: **C, C+, and F**. Each was then subject to further comparative analysis and scoring to support informed discussion among council leaders and chief executives.



Choosing 4-5-1

After careful deliberation, Option C, our 4-5-1 model, emerged as the strongest and most balanced solution. It proposes:

1. A **Torbay and Southern Devon unitary**: South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon.
2. A **Exeter and Northern Devon unitary**: East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge.
3. **Plymouth** retained on its existing unitary status.

This configuration reflects natural communities, travel-to-work areas, and strategic infrastructure corridors. It balances population, economic output, and service demand, while preserving local identity and enabling transformation. In short, it provides the best option for Devon.

The 4-5-1+ variant

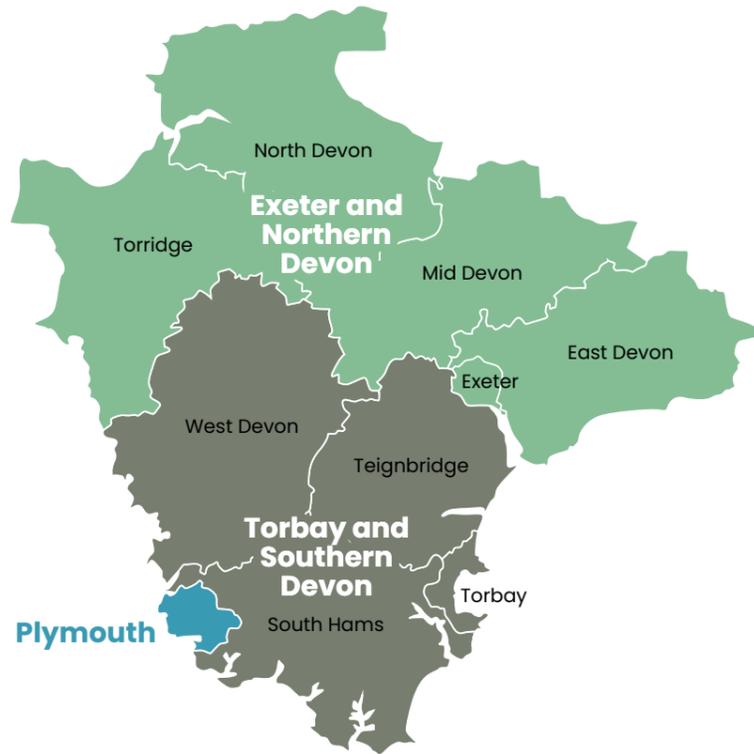
4-5-1 is the model without boundary changes that achieved the highest scoring as part of the options appraisal process, with all councils in our submission agreeing it is the best solution using existing district building blocks. However, in reviewing the options, it was also determined that a further variant with modest boundary changes, the 4-5-1+ option, further builds on the strengths of the 4-5-1 model by reflecting Plymouth's existing Policy Area outside of existing local authority boundaries and enables more administrative simplicity with National Park alignment. Based on legal advice received, some councils are proposing this option as a variation on the base 4-5-1 model. This is explained in further detail in the 4-5-1+ section of this executive summary and in **Appendix 1**.



Why unitarisation around Torbay and Southern Devon, Exeter and Northern Devon, and Plymouth makes sense

Not only does it make sense, our 4-5-1 proposal reflects the lived realities of our communities and provides the best opportunities to maximise future growth.

Aligning our future authorities to the distinct communities they serve is a must – we must respect our communities by demonstrating we have listened to them and allow them to flourish.



page 24

Torbay and Southern Devon

(South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay and West Devon)

- Brings together economies based on tourism, agriculture, marine industries, and environmental technologies.
- Dartmoor National Park will be wholly contained in this area.
- Utilises shared assets like the English Riviera UNESCO Geopark and a strong marine sector.
- Key part of the South West Innovation Spine, connecting Exeter, Torbay, and Plymouth, supporting growth sectors such as photonics, clean energy, and digital technologies.
- Established partnerships, including shared service models and collaborative initiatives, deliver operational efficiencies.
- Health and community services integrated via the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust and local hubs.
- Joint housing and infrastructure planning addresses population ageing and housing affordability.
- Strong digital and physical infrastructure, with coordinated improvements to address inclusion and rural gaps.
- Coherent management of the environment, supporting both conservation and sustainable economic growth.

Exeter and Northern Devon

(East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, Torridge)

- Combines rural districts with Exeter, mixing traditional sectors (agriculture, food, tourism) and new industries (clean energy, digital, climate science, advanced engineering, pharmaceuticals).
- Addresses challenges of low population density and reliance on seasonal employment with joined-up governance.
- Exeter serves as the economic, cultural, and educational centre for the region, facilitating regeneration and skills development.
- Health, education, and social care services are already aligned; a single authority would improve coordination, especially for rural areas. The proposed merger of Exeter College and Petroc with its sites in Barnstaple and Tiverton, demonstrate the wider alignment of service provision on this geography.
- Proven collaboration between districts, such as North Devon+ and joint local plans, can be expanded, and existing city administration can be better aligned with those of its surrounding symbiotic communities and assets, such as the Science Park, Airport, and road/rail corridors.
- Unified authority can target investment to improve broadband, mobile coverage, and transport, including projects like the Devon Metro.
- Streamlined planning would help align housing, jobs, and infrastructure, unlock development, and ensure access to affordable homes.
- Coherent stewardship of landscapes like Exmoor National Park and the North Devon Biosphere supports sustainability and biodiversity goals.
- Grouping reflects local identities, enabling tailored policies for both rural and urban communities.

Plymouth

(Retained on its existing unitary status)

- Plymouth is Devon's largest city, with 268,736 residents and a distinct urban character, setting it apart from rural and market towns.
- The city's economy is valued at £6.97 billion, driven by defence, marine industries, advanced manufacturing, and public services that require specific policies and investment.
- Plymouth hosts Devonport Dockyard, the UK's main submarine maintenance site, alongside strategic infrastructure and partnerships like Peninsula Transport.
- As a unitary authority, Plymouth provides integrated services in education, highways, social care, housing, planning, and community, tailored to its urban needs.
- The city faces challenges such as high economic inactivity and deprivation in several wards, requiring targeted, city-specific interventions.
- Plymouth's housing policies, regeneration plans, and urban expansion need a city-led approach due to their scale and complexity.
- The city leads in innovation and sustainability, including the UK's first National Marine Park and advanced marine initiatives, supported by focused leadership and long-term vision.

Unlike proposals that would leave a single large unitary authority covering most of Devon, our 4-5-1 model **preserves local identities, enhances democratic participation, and avoids the risks of over-centralisation.**

It ensures that reforms are ambitious yet rooted in the strengths of Devon’s communities, with balanced representation, tailored service delivery, and a clear focus on place-based outcomes. Our model avoids the inefficiencies and loss of local accountability that can arise from mega-unitary structures and is better aligned with government guidance on population size, geography, and community identity. 4-5-1 recognises the opportunity that comes from creating new unitary councils, but respects the concern that communities rightly have about megalithic models far above the government’s guide range in size.

Models with more than 3 authorities

Key Challenges	Why 4-5-1 is Preferable
These models scored poorly in balance-based assessments, with wide disparities in population, economic output, and service demand.	Our model avoids the dominance of a single authority, ensuring balanced representation and a more credible platform for future devolution.
These models introduce fragmentation and complexity, with multiple smaller authorities lacking the scale to deliver strategic services effectively.	4-5-1 preserves the benefits of localism through embedded neighbourhood governance structures, ensuring decisions are made close to communities, while acknowledging the government’s criteria for population size. Our model creates strong and balanced building blocks for further devolution and a Mayoral Strategic Authority.
Higher transition and implementation costs due to duplicated systems, governance structures, and leadership teams.	4-5-1 avoids the inefficiencies and sustainability risks of underpowered authorities by creating three robust, balanced unitaries with the scale to deliver transformation, withstand financial shocks, and lead public service reform.
Risk of inconsistent service standards and reduced resilience, particularly in high-cost, demand-led areas like adult and children’s social care.	Our model supports dynamic, place-based innovation and integrated service delivery, while maintaining the authenticity and responsiveness that residents value.
Smaller footprints limit the ability to attract investment, manage risk, and deliver transformation at scale.	4-5-1 offers a comprehensive Devon-wide solution that is both credible and ambitious, designed not just to manage change, but to harness it.

page 25

Models with larger ‘mega’ authorities

Key Challenges	Why 4-5-1 is Preferable
These models typically propose two or more unitary authorities, but with one significantly larger than the others, often exceeding government guidance on population thresholds (e.g. >800,000) and covering vast geographies. This creates structural imbalance, with one dominant authority overshadowing others in terms of scale, resources, and influence.	4-5-1 retains the strategic coherence of larger models by aligning governance with functional economic areas and infrastructure corridors, while avoiding the democratic and operational risks of over-centralisation.
Over-centralisation risks detaching governance from communities, weakening local identity and accountability.	Local interventions, tailored to individual or community needs delivers better outcomes at lower cost than a mass-commissioning model with limited commissioning expertise. This is evidenced in the current Devon system, where smaller authorities already deliver better value and outcomes than larger ones. The 4-5-1 delivers a model more conducive to realising success and effective delivery, with comparable financial efficiencies (£77 million – £124 million annual savings) and a pay back period 2 years and 9 months in the base case and 2 years and 11 months stretch case.
Service delivery becomes silo-based, less responsive and more generic, with limited ability to tailor to local needs. Cultural agility is more likely to remain challenging, with nimbleness and responsiveness absent from many large councils.	Cultural change is one of the most significant prerequisites for success in any reorganisation process. Organisational reconfiguration is likely to unlock change where it has previously been resisted. Our model sets the foundations for the ‘learn, test, grow’ approach for rapid awareness and authentic improvement. It embeds hyper-localism and co-designed subsidiarity through Neighbourhood Area Committees and Local Community Networks, ensuring services remain personal, place-based, and responsive.



What will 4-5-1 enable?

The 4-5-1 model represents a dynamic and forward-looking approach, driving the organisational and cultural changes needed to power local government reorganisation. 4-5-1 is designed to drive positive change across Devon while aligning closely with key government priorities.

Our adaptive and local model seeks to deliver a transformative agenda that advances public sector reform, accelerates economic growth, widens opportunity and prepares the NHS and local services for the future. In doing so, we will create the conditions for a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable Devon that is fit for the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades.

Localised, high-performing services: Hyper-localism and accountability

At the heart of our 4-5-1 model is a commitment to hyper-localism, ensuring that services are designed and delivered at the most appropriate local level, with a clear focus on the distinct needs of neighbourhoods, towns, and city wards. Our approach brings decision-making closer to communities, creating greater accountability, responsiveness, and innovation in public services. Our model supports the government's ambition to create high-performing, citizen-centred services that are tailored to local priorities and deliver tangible outcomes for residents.

Comprehensive Devon solution: Balancing urban, rural, and coastal opportunity

4-5-1 provides a comprehensive solution for Devon, recognising the county's unique blend of urban centres, rural landscapes, and coastal communities. By retaining the strengths of existing local identities and ensuring balanced representation, our 4-5-1 model promotes opportunity for all, addressing disparities and enabling every part of Devon to thrive. This ensures that policies and investments are sensitive to the diverse needs of different areas, supporting inclusive growth and social mobility across the county.

Transformative and integrated public services: Driving reform and a fit-for-future NHS

Our 4-5-1 model is designed to facilitate the transformation of public services, breaking down silos and promoting integrated delivery across health, social care, education, housing, and community services. Our integrated approach is central to the government's public sector reform agenda and the ambition for a fit-for-future NHS, enabling more joined-up care, preventative interventions, and efficient use of resources. These new authorities will be designed at the outset to embed public health data, information and capacity, so that councils are once again configured around the health and wellbeing of their communities. Housing and health are critical foundations for educational attainment, social mobility, wealth generation, and life chances. We know from reports such as the Social Mobility in the South West (Exeter University, 2022) that Devon has the second worst upward occupational mobility in the country, and from the Devon Housing Commission (2024) that our housing challenges could be more effectively addressed by joining up care services, educational outcomes and housing provision and support. By leveraging our existing strong local partnerships and digital innovation, we create a platform for better outcomes for all communities.

Economic growth and identity: Place-based prosperity and innovation

By aligning governance structures with functional economic areas, 4-5-1 unlocks place-based economic growth supporting the government's mission for growth and increasing productivity. Exeter's leadership in digital innovation, education, and sustainable urban development demonstrates how local strengths can be harnessed for wider benefit. 4-5-1's emphasis on local identity and partnership enables each area to build on its unique assets, promoting innovation, job creation, and inclusive prosperity that leaves no community behind.

Natural capital and sustainable development: Environmental stewardship

Our model prioritises change and improvement but not to the detriment of sustainability. We support the government's target of clean power by 2030 and the wider net zero agenda. Our model's respect for natural boundaries, such as Dartmoor National Park, and its focus on responsible growth ensure that development is environmentally sustainable, protecting Devon's natural assets for future generations. Local leadership enables community-led climate action, investment in green infrastructure, and the stewardship of the county's rich environmental heritage.

Devolution and voice: Empowering communities and influencing at scale

Our model strengthens local democracy by providing clear, accountable governance structures that empower communities and give them a stronger voice in regional and national decision-making. Our 4-5-1 model establishes unitary councils that promote fair and effective representation within the future MSA. The three authorities represent populations of 268,736 to 546,738, distributed at 34%, 44%, and 22%. This structure maintains balanced population sizes among unitaries, preventing any one authority from becoming disproportionately large, which is a risk present in other proposals with 'mega-unitaries'. By aligning with the government's devolution agenda, 4-5-1 enables Devon to negotiate more effectively for funding, powers, and investment through the future MSA, ensuring that local priorities are reflected in wider policy frameworks. It establishes balanced board of community leaders to support a future mayoral model and delivers a robust platform for future devolution, giving residents real influence over the issues that matter most to them.

page 27



Balanced scale and locality: Efficiency, resilience, and focus

A key advantage of our 4-5-1 approach is its ability to balance the benefits of scale, such as efficiency, resilience, and strategic capacity, with the need for local focus and accountability. We avoid the pitfalls of over-centralisation and mega-unitary structures while preserving local distinctiveness and ensuring robust service delivery and financial sustainability. This balanced configuration helps Devon withstand economic shocks and adapt to changing circumstances, supporting long-term prosperity and stability.

Financial sustainability and payback: Savings, investment, and value

Financial sustainability is central to our 4-5-1 model, which is designed to deliver robust savings, unlock investment, and maximise value for money. By streamlining governance, reducing duplication, and targeting resources more effectively, 4-5-1 generates efficiencies that can be reinvested in frontline services and community priorities. 4-5-1 pays back within 2 years and 9 months while providing annual savings of £77m, reaching £124m in a stretch case scenario.

Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment: Subsidiarity and participation

Finally, 4-5-1 places a strong emphasis on subsidiarity, ensuring that decisions are made at the most local level possible, and participatory governance. By creating structures that support meaningful community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment, we enable residents to shape the future of their places. This ensures that reforms are not just top-down but driven by the aspirations and creativity of Devon's communities.



Exeter



Government criteria

Our model has been rigorously assessed against the six criteria set out by the UK Government for local government reorganisation.

Our 4-5-1 configuration, Torbay and Southern Devon, Exeter and Northern Devon, and Plymouth, demonstrates strong alignment across all areas, supported by robust evidence, stakeholder engagement, and independent analysis.

page 28



Verity at Ilfracombe, North Devon

Criterion 1: Establishing a single tier of local government

Our model replaces the current two-tier system with three coherent unitary authorities. Each reflects sensible economic areas, coherent geography, and appropriate population size. It avoids over-centralisation and preserves local identity while enabling strategic planning and service integration.



Sub-Criteria	How Our 4-5-1 Model Meets This
1a. Sensible economic areas which do not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area	Our model groups areas with shared economic ties, ensuring balanced opportunity and resilience. Southern Devon links Torbay’s marine and photonics industries with South Hams’ and West Devon’s rural economies. Northern Devon unites Exeter’s innovation economy with surrounding districts’ agricultural and clean energy sectors. Plymouth, by remaining a standalone unitary authority, reflects its status as a major urban centre with a distinct economic profile and unique service needs, allowing them to focus on growth opportunities. As a result, this configuration supports inclusive growth and avoids dominance by any single area.
1b. Sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs	Our proposed boundaries reflect real housing markets and travel-to-work areas. Southern Devon includes areas with joint local plans and shared infrastructure, while Northern Devon aligns with strategic housing corridors around Exeter. Plymouth’s boundary ensures the city can address its distinct urban housing needs and infrastructure requirements independently, supporting tailored solutions for its residents. This enables coordinated planning and delivery of housing, transport, and services tailored to local needs.
1c. Robust evidence and analysis, including explanation of expected outcomes and local engagement	Our model is underpinned by extensive public engagement (5,900+ responses), detailed options appraisal, and financial modelling. It reflects what communities have told us they value: local identity, accessible services, and meaningful representation. Our proposal is shaped by lived experience and tested through collaborative design.
1d. Effective structures which can deliver positive outcomes	Our 4-5-1 model builds on existing partnerships and shared services. South Hams and West Devon’s integrated workforce and digital systems have delivered significant savings and service improvements. Teignbridge’s Modern 25 programme shows how transformation can be driven locally. Our model scales these successes, creating agile, responsive councils with the capacity to lead and innovate.

This approach builds on existing strengths. South Hams and West Devon’s integrated services partnership has delivered not only financial savings but also a modern, agile operating model. Their cloud-based infrastructure and award-winning transformation team show how streamlined governance can unlock smarter, faster, and more responsive services.

Criterion 2: Efficiency, capacity, and withstanding financial shocks

Our model delivers significant financial benefits and resilience. Independent modelling confirms:

- £77.1 million in annual savings (base case)
- £124.5 million in annual savings (stretch case)
- Payback period within 2 years and 9 months (base case) and 2 years and 11 months (stretch case).

Each authority is of sufficient scale to manage demand, invest in transformation, and remain financially sustainable. Our model enables strategic commissioning, shared procurement, and streamlined management, creating the conditions for long-term financial health.



Sub-Criteria	How Our 4-5-1 Model Meets This
2a. The right population size for the area	Each of our proposed unitary authorities serve a population between 268,000 and 547,000, which would mean all would be in the top quartile of today's councils nationally by population. This is large enough to deliver strategic services efficiently, yet small enough to remain locally responsive. This balance supports operational resilience, workforce capacity, and effective service commissioning.
2b. Improving council finances through efficiencies	Our model enables end-to-end budget management, centralised procurement, and streamlined leadership. It delivers £77.1m in annual savings (base case) and £124.5m (stretch case), with a payback period of 2 years and 9 months (base case) and 2 years and 11 months (stretch case).
2c. Managing transition costs and enabling transformation	Transition costs have been carefully modelled and phased, covering workforce development, systems consolidation, estates reconfiguration, and cultural change. Our model builds on existing shared services and transformation teams, ensuring readiness and minimising disruption.
2d. Managing council debt	Our model supports financial sustainability through rationalised asset portfolios, improved capital planning, and balanced revenue streams. It avoids the risks of over-centralisation and ensures each authority has the capacity to manage debt and invest in future priorities.

In Teignbridge, the Modern 25 programme is redesigning services around residents' needs, closing a £2.6 million budget gap while improving customer experience and digital access. This example demonstrates how our model will scale up proven local innovation to deliver better outcomes across Devon.

Our proposal builds on the significant transformational savings that have been achieved by empowering staff through digital tools and proactive, people-centred service design and reform. Section 151 officers from across the county have worked with external financial experts and secured national references and benchmarking to test the robustness of assumptions, ensuring absolute confidence in financial sustainability and delivery of efficiencies across the entire system.

Criterion 3: High-quality and sustainable public services

Our model enables integrated, place-based service delivery across housing, health, education, and care. It removes duplication, simplifies governance, and supports innovation. Services will be designed around communities, with co-located hubs, shared data systems, and digital transformation driving better outcomes.



Sub-Criteria	How Our 4-5-1 Model Meets This
3a. Improving service delivery and avoiding fragmentation	<p>Our model consolidates fragmented services into coherent, place-based structures. It builds on successful shared service arrangements, such as South Hams and West Devon's integrated workforce, which has redesigned services around residents' needs and delivered significant savings. Torbay's Family Hubs demonstrate how early years services can be streamlined and improved through integration.</p> <p>By aligning governance with functional geographies, our model ensures services are delivered closer to communities, with fewer silos and more joined-up support.</p>
3b. Opportunities to deliver public service reform	Our model creates the conditions for transformation by enabling integrated commissioning, digital innovation, and co-located service hubs. Torbay's integrated health and care system demonstrates the benefits of this approach, having successfully brought together NHS and social care teams to deliver seamless, person-centred support and improved outcomes for residents. The Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission shows how lived experience can shape compassionate, effective service design. These examples illustrate how our model will foster a culture of collaboration, responsiveness, and continuous improvement.



Sub-Criteria	How Our 4-5-1 Model Meets This
3c. Minimising impact on crucial services	<p>Our model is designed to protect and enhance critical services during transition. It builds on existing locality-based delivery models and avoids unnecessary disruption by retaining Plymouth and realigning services across familiar footprints. Importantly, it provides a generational opportunity to shift the dial on support for young people across Devon, taking the aspects of high-quality provision in parts of the country and resetting these as a cultural starting point in a reconfigured system.</p> <p>After 10 years of poor outcomes, the LGR process must be the catalyst for wider structural improvement, with evidence from previous reorganisation processes demonstrating what a reconfiguring of services can do for new organisational pride, purpose and outcomes for vulnerable people. This transition for children's and adult services is both safe and seamless, as it simply realigns the existing three upper-tier services to the three new unitary authorities; with three directors of children's services and three directors of adult social services already in place, there is no disruption to service provision, instead an opportunity for change and improvement.</p> <p>In housing, our model supports continuity and improvement, as seen in East Devon's transformation of its Housing Revenue Account and Mid Devon's modular housing programme; it also brings together all existing Housing Revenue Accounts within one future council, providing significant scope for efficiencies, better outcomes for tenants, and greater social housing delivery.</p> <p>In waste, recycling, and planning, our model enables strategic coordination and investment, reducing risk and improving outcomes.</p>



Torbay's Family Hubs are a powerful example of a high-quality sustainable service. These centres integrate maternity, health visiting, and speech and language services, reducing duplication and improving early years outcomes. Breastfeeding rates and school readiness have both improved, and families report feeling supported at the right time by services that understand their needs.

In North Devon, the Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission has redefined how services are designed, placing lived experience at the heart of decision-making and co-producing solutions that are compassionate, inclusive, and effective. These initiatives show how our model will foster a culture of collaboration, responsiveness, and continuous improvement.

Criterion 4: working together to understand and meet local needs

Our model is the product of extensive collaboration and engagement. Eight councils (Torbay has collaborated with the development of this case but are pursuing their own option which leaves Torbay remaining as a unitary) have worked together to develop a shared vision, supported by over 5,900 responses to public surveys, alongside workshops, forums, and meetings with stakeholders.

We are embedding co-designed Neighbourhood Area Committees and Local Community Networks into our governance design, ensuring that decisions reflect the priorities of each community. This has been the subject of early discussion with town, parish and community groups alongside the Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) to ensure that this partnership approach is authentic and sufficiently represented within our 4-5-1 proposal. The East Devon place-based pilot demonstrates this ethos, bringing together public and voluntary sector partners to address rural poverty through tailored, community-driven solutions.



Sub-Criteria	How Our 4-5-1 Model Meets This
4a. Meaningful and constructive local engagement	Our model is shaped by extensive engagement with over 5,900 residents, councillors, MPs, and community groups. This included surveys, forums, almost 50 roadshows, and targeted meetings. The feedback directly informed our governance design, ensuring that the proposed authorities reflect the lived experience and aspirations of Devon's communities. Initiatives like One Ilfracombe and the Bideford Regeneration Board show how locally led partnerships can drive service reform and community renewal.
4b. Considering local identity and cultural and historic importance	Our model preserves and strengthens local identity by aligning governance with natural communities and historic boundaries. Residents consistently expressed a deep emotional connection to their towns and villages, from the coastal character of Brixham to the rural ambience of Tavistock. We also recognise the specific civic and historic ceremonial functions of Exeter by proposing charter trustees as advocated by the cathedral cities grouping, with the potential for 'city quarter' boards so that hyper-local governance can effectively differentiate between village and town clusters, and that of the city. By embedding appropriate neighbourhood governance and protecting civic traditions, our model ensures that local culture and heritage remain central to decision-making. The form of local government has changed many times over the history of our cities, towns and significant settlements, and our model will continue to preserve their identity and cherish their unique cultural and historic importance.
4c. Addressing local concerns	Our model responds directly to concerns raised during consultation, including concerns of over-centralisation and loss of local voice. We propose co-designed hyper-local arrangements, using Neighbourhood Area Committees and Local Community Networks to ensure decisions are made close to communities.

In Mid Devon, the Zed Pods initiative, transforming garage plots into zero-carbon modular homes, demonstrates how local input can shape innovative, place-based solutions. Our model enables this kind of responsiveness at scale, ensuring services are tailored to local needs and priorities.

In South Hams, the Ivybridge Community Economic Plan has enabled nearly £1 million in targeted investment, supporting sports clubs, foodbanks, and local businesses. These examples show how our model will empower communities to shape their future and ensure that services are rooted in local identity and need.

Criterion 5: supporting devolution arrangements

Our model provides a credible platform for a future Mayoral Strategic Authority. It ensures balanced representation, strategic coordination, and a unified voice for Devon, with a future ambition for a cross Devon and Cornwall MSA. It avoids the risks of over-centralisation and supports meaningful devolution, unlocking powers and resources to drive regional growth and reform.



Sub-Criteria	How Our 4-5-1 Model Meets This
5a. The existing County Combined Authority and the route to a Mayoral Strategic Authority	Our model builds directly on the Devon and Torbay County Combined Authority (DTCCA), which has already begun aligning strategic priorities across housing, transport, and skills. Our model provides the optimal foundation for a future Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), with three balanced unitary authorities that preserve local identities and support unified strategic leadership. This structure enables Devon to speak with a clear and credible voice in national policy discussions.
5b. Unlocking devolution	Our 4-5-1 model enables place-based leadership and strategic coordination across the county. It removes the limitations of two-tier governance and embeds housing, planning, and economic development powers within a single framework. Initiatives like the Devon Housing Commission and the DTCCA Housing Advisory Group show how collaborative governance can unlock investment and accelerate delivery. Our model ensures that devolved powers are used effectively to meet local needs and drive inclusive growth.
5c. Equal representation under a Combined Authority	Our model ensures fair and proportional representation across the three authorities, avoiding dominance by any single area. This balance supports democratic legitimacy and equitable resource distribution. It replaces the current arrangement, where councils representing vastly different populations have equal voting rights, with a structure that reflects the scale and diversity of Devon's communities. This enables strategic decisions to be made collaboratively and transparently, with all voices heard.

page 31



The Northern Devon Futures Partnership exemplifies the kind of joined-up leadership our model will enable, aligning health, housing, education, and climate strategies across multiple agencies. In South Devon, the Freeport initiative has already attracted over £300 million in investment, demonstrating the power of collaborative governance to unlock economic opportunity.

Our model will formalise and scale these successes, positioning Devon to lead on regional priorities and national policy agendas.

Criterion 6: stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Our model places subsidiarity at its core. Neighbourhood governance structures will devolve decision-making, empower communities, and promote participatory budgeting. This strengthens local democracy, enhances accountability, and ensures services are tailored to local needs.



Sub-Criteria	How Our 4-5-1 Model Meets This
6a. Creating strong community engagement	Our model places community voice at the centre of governance. Through Neighbourhood Area Committees and Local Community Networks, we embed participatory decision-making and subsidiarity into each new authority. These structures empower residents to shape services, influence investment, and lead change. Initiatives like One Ilfracombe and the Bideford Regeneration Board show how locally led partnerships can rewire public services around people, not bureaucracy. Our model scales this ethos across Devon.
6b. Building on existing community engagement	Our model builds on successful local innovations and strengthens them through coherent governance. In South Hams, the Community Economic Plans programme has empowered towns like Ivybridge to align funding with local aspirations, unlocking nearly £1 million for sports clubs, foodbanks, and local businesses. In Mid Devon, the Zed Pods initiative transformed underused land into zero-carbon homes designed with community input. These examples demonstrate how our model enables communities to take ownership of their future and ensures services are designed with, by, and for the people they serve.

In Torbay, the "Hotels to Homes" initiative has transformed vacant buildings into high-quality affordable housing through rapid, collaborative delivery. In North Devon, the Bicclescombe Nursery site is being redeveloped by a Community Land Trust, ensuring long-term affordability and community ownership. These initiatives show how our model will support local leadership, unlock community potential, and build councils that are trusted, responsive, and rooted in place.

More information can be found in **Section 4: Government Criteria**.



Financial Case

Our plan presents a robust and balanced financial case for local government reorganisation in Devon, designed to address rising service pressures and long-term fiscal challenges and ensuring the future financial viability of the three unitary council model.

Drawing on a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis, our proposal carefully weighs the upfront investment required to reconfigure services against the substantial, recurring savings and efficiency gains that can be unlocked through transformation. The financial modelling considers two scenarios of a prudent base case and a more ambitious stretched case, providing a realistic range of outcomes and supporting a resilient, future-proof approach.

Under 4-5-1, our analysis demonstrates that the reorganisation will achieve:

- **Break even in 2 years and 9 months** in the base scenario and 2 years and 11 months in stretch (due to additional upfront investment).
- **Annual gross recurring savings of £77.1 million per year in the base scenario and £124.5 million per year in the stretched scenario.**
- Cumulative **net financial benefit is projected to reach £508.3 million (base) to £805.3 million (stretched)** over a 10-year period.

These savings are underpinned by organisational efficiencies, streamlined governance, and targeted service transformation, particularly within social care, where harmonising best practice and costs and fees across the new unitary authorities will drive significant value.



Implementation costs are proportionate and phased over five years, totalling £73.9 million (base) to £101.0 million (stretched), with the majority allocated to right sizing the organisation and optimising leadership structures. Importantly, the financial analysis adopts a prudent 7.5% discount factor on total savings to reflect potential delivery challenges and avoid over-optimism, ensuring our model remains realistic and credible.

Council Tax harmonisation has been analysed separately, and future shadow authorities will determine the most appropriate alignment, ensuring that resident interests and medium-term financial strategies are protected.

4-5-1 is not only financially sustainable in the near term but also creates a resilient platform for local government to deliver resilient services

into the future. By reducing duplication, integrating service delivery, and leveraging economies of scale, our future authorities will be better equipped to manage rising demand, particularly in complex areas like social care and housing. Working in close partnership with key stakeholders, our model supports preventative approaches and demand management, unlocking further savings and enabling reinvestment in priority services.

Crucially, our proposal avoids short-termism or unrealistic savings targets that could undermine long-term outcomes. Instead, it prioritises financial resilience, organisational capacity, and continuous improvement, ensuring that Devon's new councils are not only fit for today's challenges but can adapt and thrive in the face of future uncertainty.

4-5-1 summary financial position

Option 4-5-1	Base Case £'million	Stretch Case £'million
Recurring Saving from Year 6	77.1	124.5
Total Implementation Costs	(73.9)	(101.0)
Cumulative Benefit / (Cost) after 5 years	122.9	183.0
Cumulative Benefit / (Cost) by 10 years	508.3	805.3
Payback Period	2 Years and 9 Months	2 Years and 11 Months

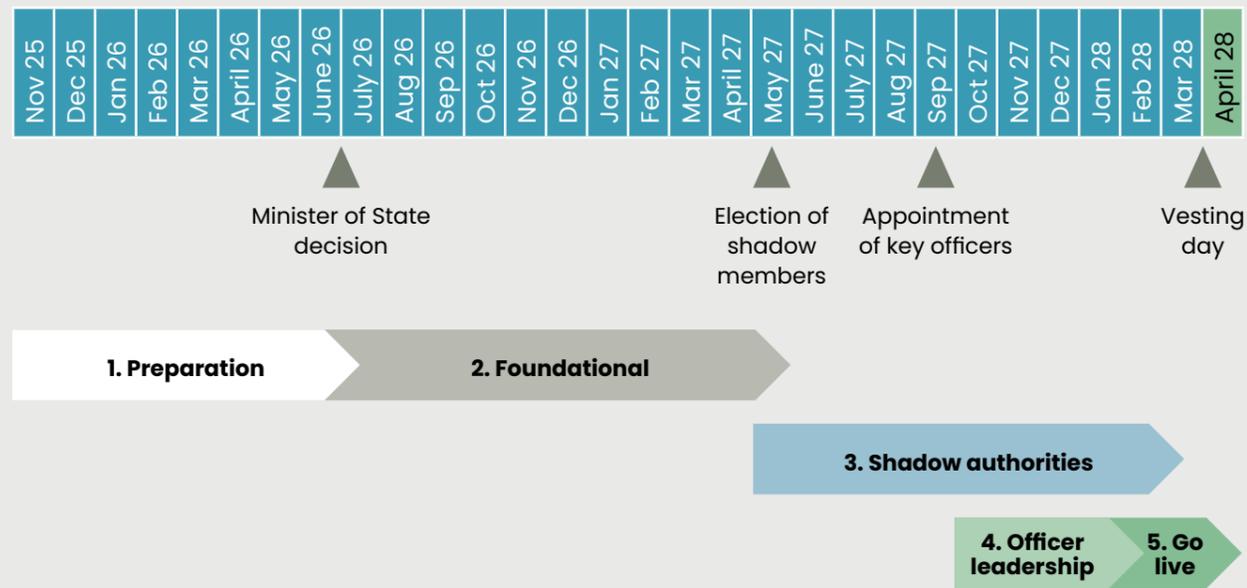
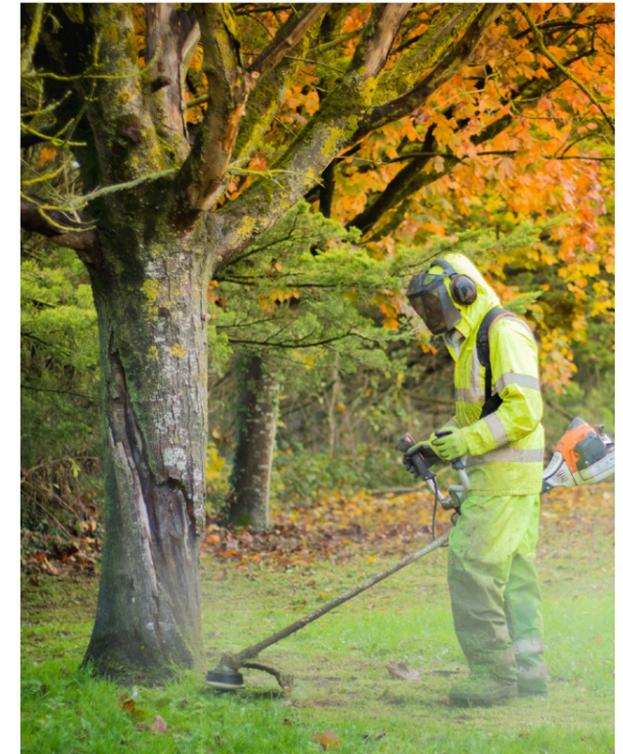


Figure: Implementation phases with key milestones



Implementation

A structured implementation plan is essential to ensure a seamless transition, maintain service quality, and deliver improved outcomes for all residents.

Drawing on established regional best practice and the 4-5-1 councils' proven service delivery track record, our plan sets out a clear pathway for change while embedding robust governance, risk management, and continuous improvement throughout the process.

The 4-5-1 implementation is structured around five distinct phases, each designed to ensure clarity, accountability, and minimal disruption. The phases of implementation are:

- 1. Preparation (Nov 2025 – June/July 2026):** Establish governance, define responsibilities, and lay the groundwork for implementation through planning, service design, data review, and initial engagement.
- 2. Foundational (June/July 2026 – May 2027):** The establishment of joint committees with equal political representation will define and advance core programme activities, align and transform services, manage contracts, and prepare election and legal compliance arrangements.
- 3. Shadow Authorities (May 2027 – Mar 2028):** Recruit key executive roles and deliver induction and briefings to support new authority leadership.
- 4. Officer Leadership (Oct 2027 – Mar 2028):** Appoint senior leaders, finalise service and financial planning, and complete policy, strategy, staffing, and organisational readiness for Day 1.
- 5. Go Live (Apr 2028):** Ensure operational stability, monitor performance, and embed transformation priorities and new governance from the first day of the new authority.

The programme is supported by a robust governance framework that ensures strong leadership, transparent decision-making, and clear accountability throughout the process. Central to this structure is the programme board, which brings together senior leaders from all participating councils and key partners to provide strategic direction and oversight. Alongside this, specialised delivery groups focus on vital areas such as people, finance, ICT, and community engagement, ensuring that each critical workstream receives dedicated attention. During the transition, Shadow Authorities take responsibility for managing the transfer of statutory powers and aligning policies in preparation for the official 'go-live' date. Underpinning the entire programme, multi-disciplinary project teams which will be organised into workstreams to drive operational delivery, manage risks, and coordinate communications with stakeholders to maintain clarity and momentum at every stage.

Our approach is informed by Cumbria's recent reorganisation, with key lessons applied to strengthen delivery:

- Early and transparent engagement with staff, communities, and partners to build trust and minimise uncertainty.
- Clear definition of roles, responsibilities, and decision rights within the programme structure.
- Robust risk management, with escalation routes and contingency planning to address emerging challenges.
- Investment in change management and workforce support to maintain morale and service continuity.
- Delivering a unified, community-centred model that balances local identity with strategic capacity.
- Safeguarding service quality and improving outcomes through evidence-based decision-making and regional best practice.
- Embedding subsidiarity and resident voice at every stage to ensure services are designed with, by, and for communities.
- Mitigating risks through proactive planning, real-time monitoring, and flexible adaptation to emerging needs.

Option 4-5-1+

Option 4-5-1+ is a slight variation of the 4-5-1 model, offering some additional benefits by slightly expanding the boundary of Plymouth.

This model is designed to align service delivery with the distinct needs of Plymouth and its immediate hinterland, as defined by the Plymouth Policy Area (PPA), while respecting the unique character of surrounding rural districts. The intention is to strengthen the city's capacity to deliver services, particularly in the "urban fringe," and ensure that planning policies reflect the realities and aspirations of both urban and rural communities.

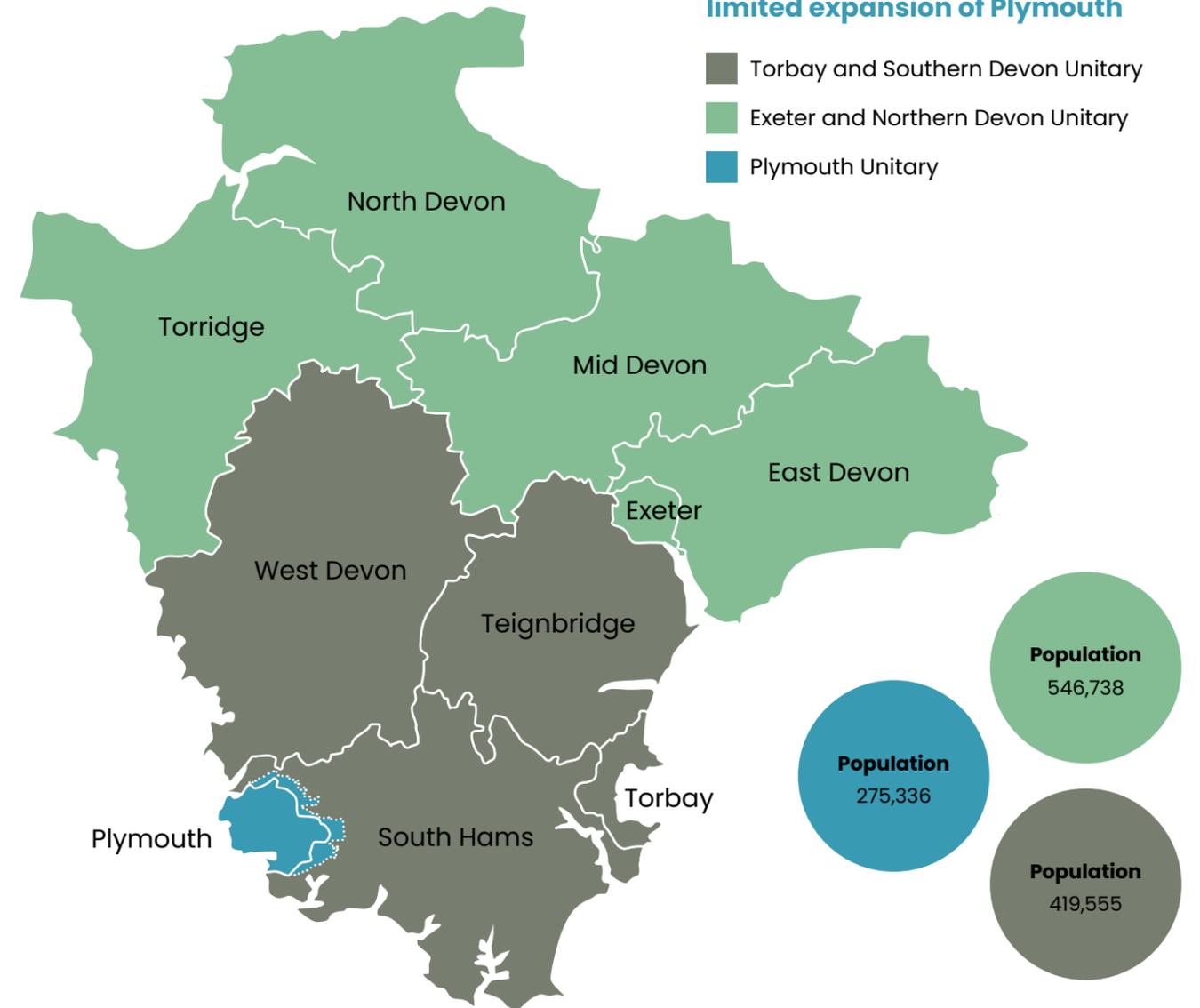
A central feature of the 4-5-1+ proposal is its respect for the Dartmoor National Park boundary. By avoiding expansion across this protected area, our model maintains clarity in planning responsibilities, prevents administrative complexity, and safeguards the park's environmental and cultural qualities. This approach ensures that residents and stakeholders benefit from clear lines of accountability and policies that reflect the identity of their communities.

The expansion of Plymouth into neighbouring areas of South Hams is both modest and strategic, limited to those parts of the parishes that more naturally align with the city's economic and community footprint. This prevents the dilution of resources and competitiveness in neighbouring authorities, supporting balanced growth and preserving the viability of all new unitary authorities. The 4-5-1+ proposal also suggests a minor council boundary adjustment at the northern edge of Dartmoor to further simplify administration, ensuring the national park is wholly contained within a single council area.

Option 4-5-1+ is distinct in its use of the district building blocks of the original 4-5-1 model but incorporates targeted boundary changes. The expansion is contained within parts of Bickleigh, Shaugh Prior, Sparkwell, and Brixton parishes but limited to those parts that fall within the Plymouth Policy Area, primarily affecting areas such as Sherford and Woolwell, ensuring the city's growth does not encroach upon the National Park or disrupt established rural communities. This approach is seen as the most logical and practical means of supporting planned urban growth while respecting existing local identities.

This proposal results in three unitary authorities: one comprising South Hams, Teignbridge, Torbay, and West Devon; a second including East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, and Torridge; and a third focused on an expanded Plymouth area. This configuration achieves greater financial, economic, and demographic balance, as evidenced by improved distribution of population, council tax base, and economic output. Our model is rated highly for its resilience, capacity to withstand economic shocks, and its ability to maintain high standards of local accountability and service quality.

Figure: Map of 4-5-1+ showing a limited expansion of Plymouth



The 4-5-1+ option also enhances alignment with functional economic areas and supports coherent spatial planning, infrastructure investment, and service delivery. It creates a robust platform for future devolution, ensuring fair representation and influence within regional governance structures. By preserving distinct local identities and enabling meaningful community engagement, the proposal meets key government criteria for reorganisation and neighbourhood empowerment.

In summary, the 4-5-1+ model builds on the strengths of the original 4-5-1 proposal, introducing modest changes that deliver greater balance, resilience, and alignment with community needs. It offers a compelling case for local government reform in Devon, supporting sustainable growth and effective governance without sacrificing local accountability or service quality.

page 34



Council support

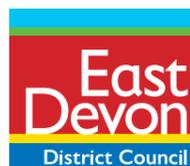


page 35

This proposal is submitted on behalf of the following councils:

- East Devon District Council
- Mid Devon District Council
- North Devon District Council
- South Hams District Council
- Teignbridge District Council
- Torridge District Council
- West Devon Borough Council

www.reimaginingdevon.org



Reimagining Devon

Believe in Better

www.reimaginingdevon.org

Designed by South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council

page 36