



Reimagining Devon

Believe in Better



Our Plan for Local Government Reorganisation



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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.



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

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.



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



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.

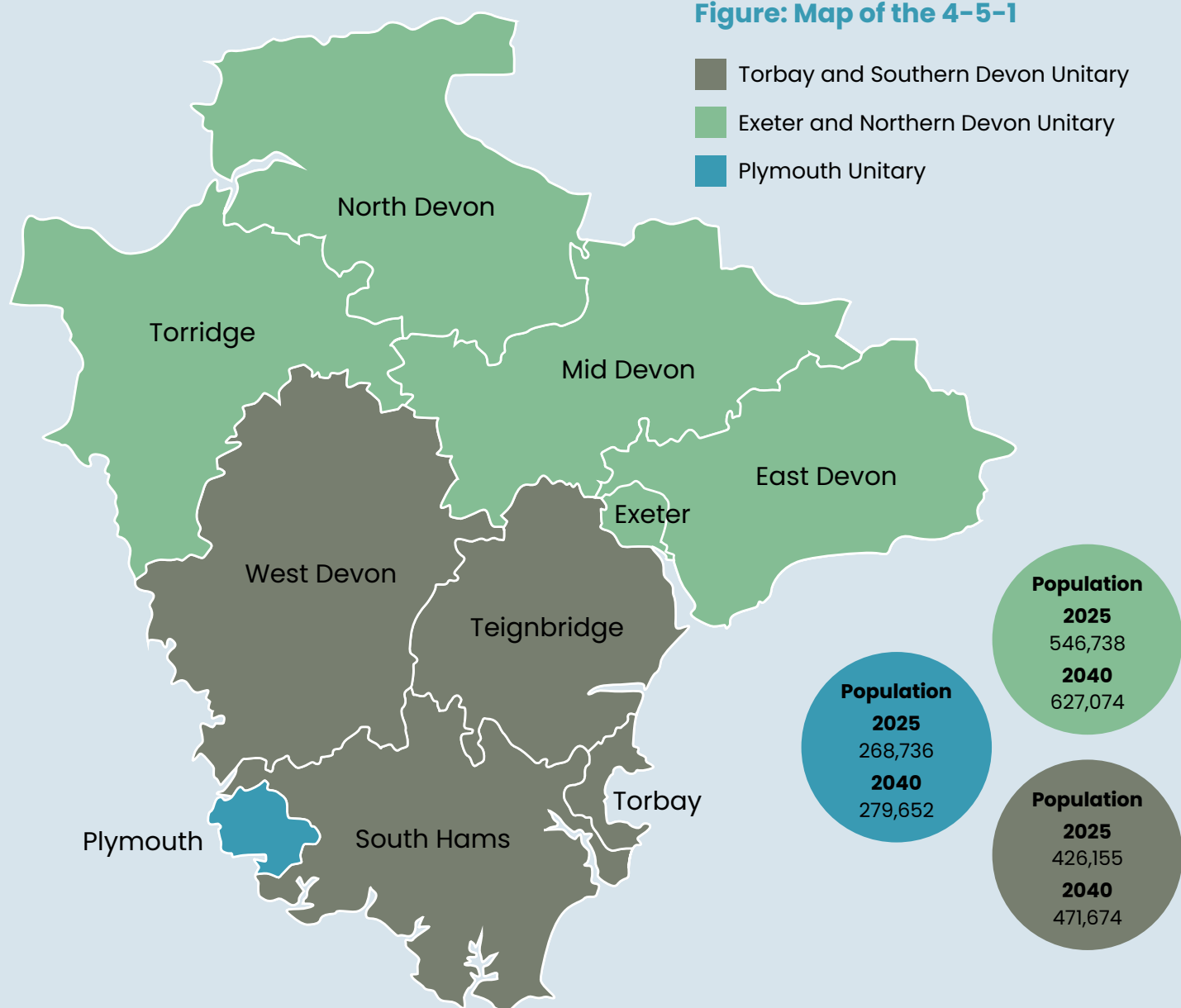
Our proposal

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



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

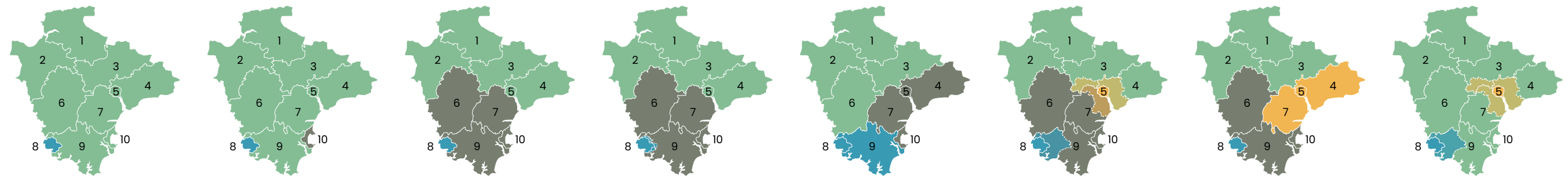
Devon's scale, diversity, and complexity demanded a rigorous, evidence-led approach to reorganisation. Over the past year, councils across Devon have collaborated to evaluate eight potential models for local government reform. Our shared ambition was clear: find a solution that delivers better outcomes, 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.



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:

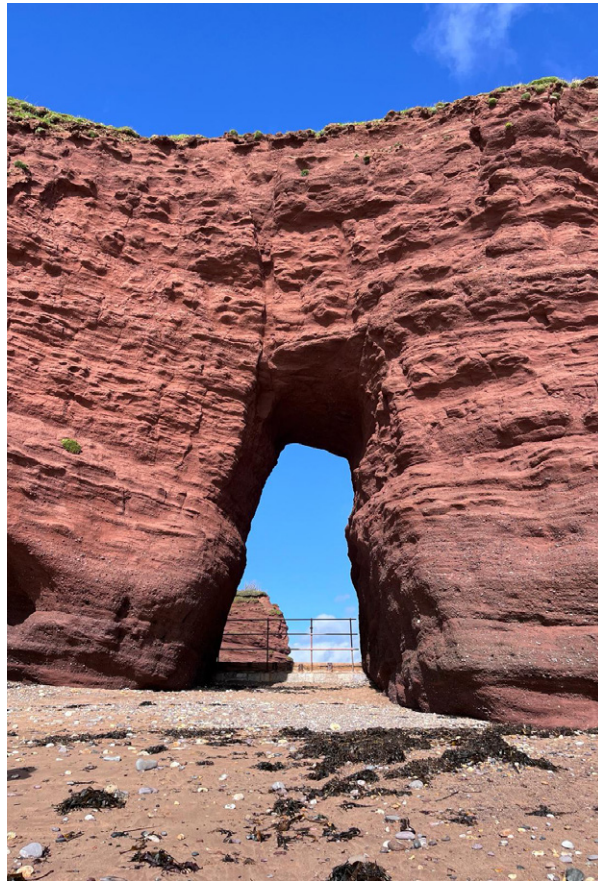
- Unitary 1: A unitary authority including North Devon, Torridge and Mid Devon (1, 2, 3)
- Unitary 2: Retain Plymouth unitary authority (8)
- Unitary 3: A unitary authority including West Devon, South Hams and Torbay (6, 9, 10)
- Unitary 4: A unitary authority including East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge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



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.

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.



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.



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	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. By aligning governance with functional geographies, our model ensures services are delivered closer to communities, with fewer silos and more joined-up support.
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	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. 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. 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. In waste, recycling, and planning, our model enables strategic coordination and investment, reducing risk and improving outcomes.



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.



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

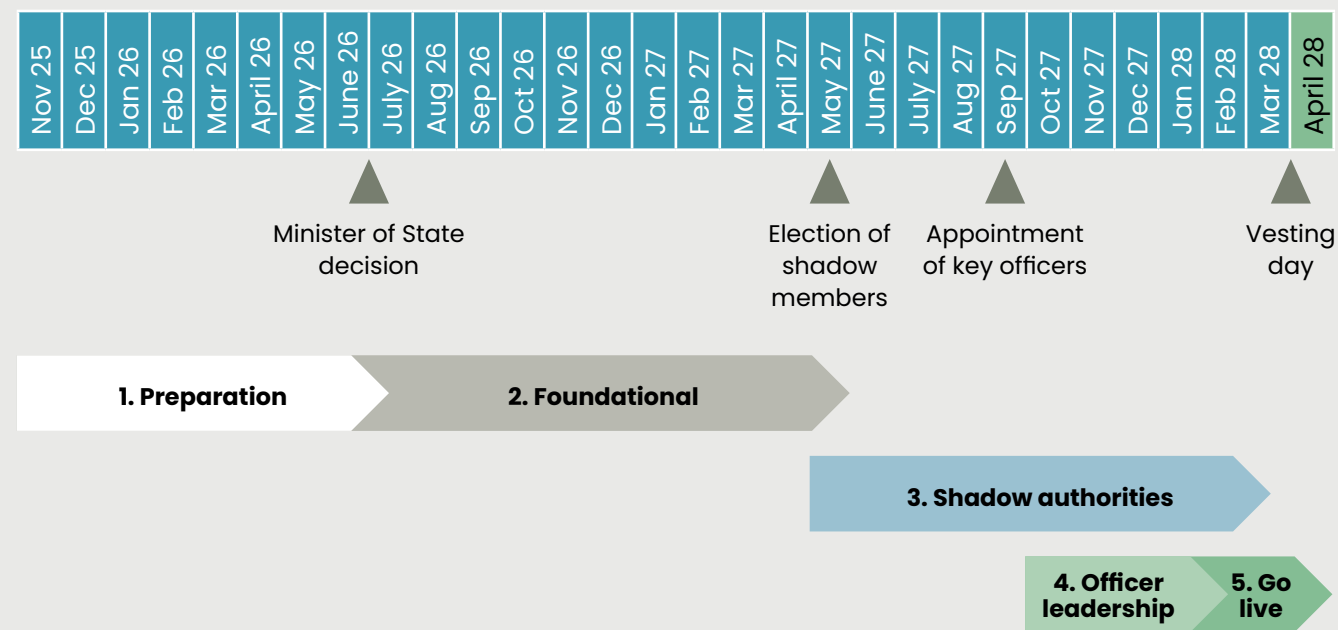


Figure: Implementation phases with key milestones

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.



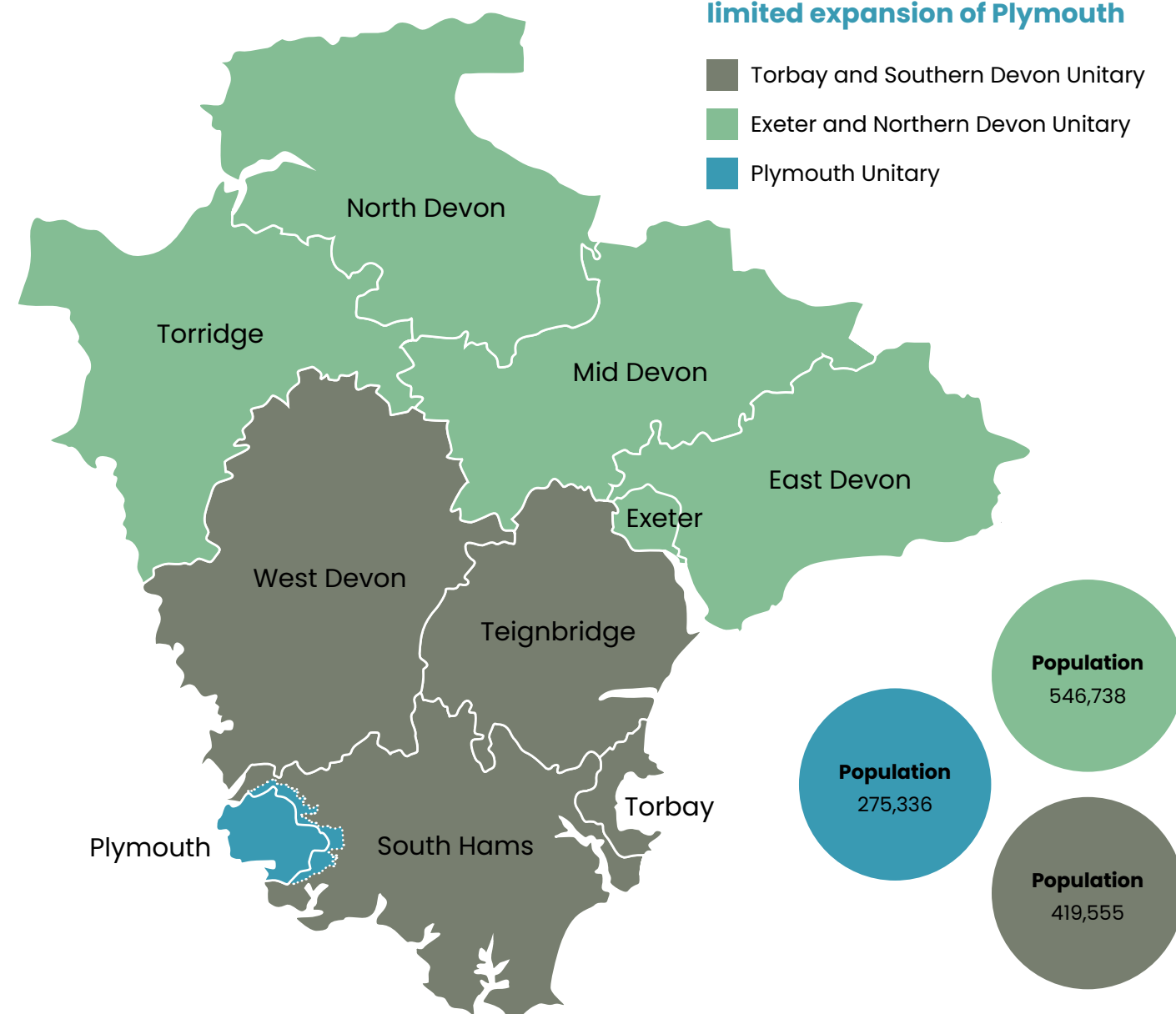
A central feature of the 4-5-1+ proposal is its respect for the Dartmoor National Park boundary. By avoiding expansion across this protected area, our model maintains clarity in planning responsibilities, prevents administrative complexity, and safeguards the park's environmental and cultural qualities. 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.

Council support



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

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